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Kane hat-trick sends Bayern Munich top past Leipzig

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MOTORSPORT

Martin extends championship lead with Australian MotoGP sprint win

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QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Olunga's header lifts Duhail past Ahli to extend lead

Al Wakrah slip to fifth place after losing to Qatar SC; Shamal rout Arabi thanks to Bounedjah hat-trick

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Michael Olunga's 42nd minute diving header gave Al Duhail a 1-0 victory over Al Ahli and extended their lead at the top of Qatar Stars League at the Al Thumama Stadium yesterday. The Red Knights bounced back from their surprise loss to Al Shahania in the previous round, as they opened up a four-point lead over Ahli and six points gap over arch rivals and defending champions Al Sadd.

Duhail's goalkeeper Salah Zakaria was forced to make some fantastic saves in the early minutes, prominent among which was his seventh minute parrying of Oumar Sekou's thunderbolt of a shot from the centre of the box.

Ten minutes into the game, the Olunga missed what should have been the opening goal with his header from the right side of the box going narrowly wide.

Duhail's Frenchman Benjamin Bourigeaud forced a corner kick after stunning the palms of goalkeeper Marwan Badreldin with fierce shot in the 38th minute, but the eventual deadball situation did not produce the desired result.

While it seemed the match was heading towards a goalless half-time, Olunga produced a brilliant diving header in the 42nd minute from a cross by Edmilson Junior to put Duhail ahead.

A stunned Ahli put in desperate efforts to restore parity before halftime, but their attempts notwithstanding, Duhail took their lead into the break. Al Duhail came out of the dugout virtually on fire, and they could have added to their tally within five minutes of the second half if not for some poor finishing upfront.

The Brigadiers missed a chance of levelling up in the 65th minute, with Idrissa Doumbin's final touch going narrowly wide after Sekou had brilliantly done most of the legwork in Duhail's final third.

Despite Ahli's attempt at getting the desperately needed equaliser, Duhail remained unyielding as they maintained



Al Duhail's Michael Olunga (right) celebrates with Edmilson Junior after scoring against Al Ahli at the Al Thumama Stadium yesterday. PICTURE: Noushad Thekkayil

their sole lead till the last kick of the thrilling match.

Earlier, Qatar SC scored a goal in each half to stun 10-man Al Wakrah 2-1 at the Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium. Eisa Palangi (41st minute), and Khaled Mahmoudi (87th minute) scored for Qatar SC while Ricardo Gomes got Al Wakrah's only goal in the 24th minute.

Al Wakrah's Almahdi Ali Mukhtar was

shown the red card in the 25th minute after he dangerously tackled Qatar SC's Ahmed Mohamed Radwan from behind when the latter was running away with the ball down the left.

Wakrah slip from third to fifth with 11 points, while Qatar SC's second win of the campaign took them out of relegation zone and into 10th place with seven points.

The first big action of the match came



Baghdad Bounedjah (left) scored a hat-trick as Al Shamal thrashed Al Arabi 5-2.

when Wakrah's Abdelkarim Hassan made a high kick from the left for the ball to find Gomes, who stationed himself perfectly on right in front of the goal, to make a perfect header and provide his team the lead.

The very next minute, however, Wakrah suffered a jolt with Mukhtar receiving the marching orders. Fifteen minutes later, Qatar SC got the equaliser in equally spectacular style as Palangi grabbed a clearance long ball about 25 yards away left of the box to first make a run-in and strike a powerful kick which with its force beat Al Wakrah goalkeeper Mohammed Albakri in the right corner.

With the two sides locked 1-1, the second half saw more exciting action as first a Ben Malango header found the crossbar and later in the 68th minute the Wakrah goalkeeper made a good save. In the 84th minute Albakri again stopped a good kick from Gomes, and three minutes later the custodian held off a curling kick from Carlos Vinicius.

Qatar SC's persistent efforts eventually paid off as Mahmoudi headed-in a fine corner kick from the right and the ball bounced before through the goalkeeper's legs after he was unsuspected by substitute Sebastian Soria, who was trying to get his foot to the ball.

There was more action in stoppage time as Carlos Vinicius cut off a defence cross to run in and make a strike but the ball found the bottom of the left goal post.

In the other match of the day, Baghdad Bounedjah scored a hat-trick as Al Shamal thrashed Al Arabi 5-2 at the Al Khor Stadium. Bounedjah scored in the 1st, 2nd +45 and 82nd minutes, while Mohamed Omar added a brace with strikes in the 20th and 31st minutes. Alaa Aldeen and Yazan al-Naimat scored for Al Arabi in the 7th and 16th minutes respectively.

Shamal regained its winning streak, moving up to sixth place with 10 points, while Al Arabi suffered its second loss and are ninth with seven points.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Bournemouth stun Arsenal, United ease pressure on Ten Hag

AFP
London

Arsenal suffered their first Premier League defeat since April as William Saliba's red card triggered a shock 2-0 loss at Bournemouth yesterday, while Manchester United eased the pressure on Erik ten Hag as they fought back to beat Brentford 2-1.

Mikel Arteta's side had started the campaign with a 10-match unbeaten run in all competitions, but that streak was shattered in controversial circumstances on the south coast. Arsenal defender Saliba was sent off after half-an-hour for a professional foul on Evanilson that was initially punished with a booking before being upgraded to a red card after a VAR review.

The Gunners finally cracked in the closing stages as Ryan Christie put Bournemouth ahead. Justin Kluivert's penalty ensured Arsenal would lose for the first time in the league since their 2-0 defeat against Aston Villa in April. It was a bitter blow for Arsenal, who would have gone top with a victory but now have to face title rivals Liverpool next weekend without the suspended Saliba.

Third-placed Arsenal will be four points behind Liverpool by then if the leaders defeat Chelsea at Anfield today. "It's very difficult to win in the Premier League with 10 men for 60 minutes, it's just an accident waiting to happen," Arteta said. "We have had to go through it in three games and that cost us the game."

United manager Ten Hag had defiantly slammed "fairy tales and lies" about his future at the club on Friday as the belea-



Bournemouth's Ryan Christie (right) celebrates with Evanilson after scoring against Arsenal in the Premier League. (Reuters)

guered boss insisted he was not in danger of the sack. But the 54-year-old is widely believed to be fighting to save his job after presiding over United's worst start to a top-flight season since 1989-90.

Ten Hag was surely teetering on the brink of being dismissed after Brentford pounced to take the lead in first-half stoppage time when Ethan Pinnock met

a corner with a powerful header. The goal sparked a furious reaction from Ten Hag, who was booked for protesting about Matthijs de Ligt's enforced absence to have treatment on a bloodied head wound.

But Alejandro Garnacho started United's revival in the 47th minute as the Argentinian met Marcus Rashford's angled pass with a superb volley into the top cor-

ner. Rasmus Hojlund bagged the decisive second goal in the 62nd minute, taking Bruno Fernandes' clever flick and clipping a composed finish.

"Pressure? Pressure is always there," Ten Hag said. "We have to win every game, so when we are 1-0 down we have to see how we turn this around. We felt some injustice and we use this as fuel for the sec-

ond half. We scored two great goals!"

United's first win in six games in all competitions was only their third victory in eight league matches this term as they moved up to 11th place.

Tottenham got back on track with a 4-1 rout of West Ham, easing the pain of their recent collapse in a 3-2 loss at Brighton. Mohammed Kudus' opener for West Ham was cancelled out before the break by Dejan Kulusevski. Spurs ran riot after the interval thanks to Yves Bissouma's strike, an own goal from West Ham goalkeeper Alphonse Areola and a fourth from Son Heung-min.

Brighton moved up to fifth place with a 1-0 victory at Newcastle on a day of mixed emotions for Danny Welbeck, who scored the 35th-minute winner but was later stretchered off with a back injury that left him needing an oxygen mask.

Leicester staged a fightback from two goals down to snatch 3-2 victory at winless Southampton. Cameron Archer and Joe Aribo scored for the bottom-of-the-table hosts in the first half but Facundo Buonanotte got one back and Jamie Vardy equalised with a penalty after Ryan Fraser was sent off before Jordan Ayew struck in the eighth minute of stoppage-time.

Fourth-placed Aston Villa have made their best start for 26 years after a 3-1 win at Fulham. Raul Jimenez netted in the fifth minute, but Villa hit back through Morgan Rogers, Ollie Watkins and Issa Diop's own goal. Andreas Pereira had a penalty saved by Villa 'keeper Emiliano Martinez, while Fulham's Joachim Andersen and Villa's Jaden Philogene were sent off.

Everton clinched their first away win in 16 games in all competitions with a 2-0 victory against Ipswich.

FOCUS

New Zealand need 107 to win after Sarfaraz, Pant heroics

NEW ZEALAND WILL ATTEMPT TODAY TO WRAP UP THEIR FIRST VICTORY OVER INDIA SINCE 1988



New Zealand's players celebrate after the dismissal of India's K L Rahul during the fourth day of the first Test at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Bengaluru, India

New Zealand hit back after smashing knocks by India's Sarfaraz Khan and Rishabh Pant on a rain-hit day four of the first Test yesterday, with the tourists needing 107 for victory.

Fast bowlers Matt Henry and William O'Rourke took three wickets each to bowl out India for 462 in the final session in Bengaluru.

New Zealand skipper Tom Latham and Devon Conway came out to bat but only four balls were bowled and no runs were scored before bad light forced the players off, a heavy downpour began and stumps were called.

"I wouldn't say it's an easy wicket here. Obviously we've got a world-class team going up against us," O'Rourke said.

"I think we've got to be confident going out there tomorrow and hopefully for the crowd's sake the rain stays away and we get the chance to have a crack at the total."

New Zealand will attempt today - the final day - to wrap up their first victory over India since 1988. The Black Caps have won just two Tests in India, including one in 1969.

The lowest target ever defended successfully in a Test by India was 107 against Australia at Mumbai's Wankhede Stadium in 2004.

Rain also interrupted play towards the end of the first session, with around two hours lost on an action-packed day.

Sarfaraz, who struck 150, and the left-handed Pant, who hit 99, put on 177 runs for the fourth wicket to overhaul India's big deficit of 356 before the second new ball did the trick for the Black Caps.

Sarfaraz, who hit his first ton in four Test appearances, fell soon after reaching 150 when he was caught at cover off Tim Southee.



India's Sarfaraz Khan (left) celebrates with his teammate Rishabh Pant after scoring a century yesterday. (AFP)

"Since I started playing cricket, it was my dream to play for India and score a 100 for India. I am happy," the 26-year-old Sarfaraz told reporters.

"It is not an easy wicket and I feel the game has not slipped out of our hands. If we can take out two or three quick wickets then they will suffer the same fate."

O'Rourke denied Pant his century with a delivery from around the wicket that took the edge of the bat and rattled the stumps and then got K L Rahul out for 12 on the stroke of tea.

Pant came in to bat after resting on Friday with a knee injury.

It was the same knee he hurt in a serious car crash in December 2022 that forced him out of action for more than a year.

Wickets kept tumbling and Henry wrapped up the innings with two in one over.

India, who resumed on 231-3, lost seven wickets for 54 runs after

New Zealand took the second new ball in the 81st over.

Rookie O'Rourke sent down three successive maiden overs with a wicket in each to finish with 7-114 from India's two innings.

Before lunch, Sarfaraz punched a boundary off the back foot through cover off Southee to reach his ton, earning a hug from Pant and a standing ovation from fans and teammates. India were bowled out for 46 in the first innings, their third-lowest Test total and their lowest at home.

New Zealand's Rachin Ravindra then put the tourists ahead with 134, steering them to 402 all out.

The opening day's play was washed out due to rain.

BRIEF SCORES: Stumps New Zealand 402 and 0 for 0 need 107 runs to beat India 46 and 462 (Sarfaraz 150, Pant 99, Kohli 70, Rohit 52, O'Rourke 3-92, Henry 3-102, Ajaz 2-100)



India's Sarfaraz Khan celebrates after scoring a century in Bengaluru yesterday. (AFP)

'Cheeky' Sarfaraz living India dream with Test century

India's Sarfaraz Khan yesterday said his first Test century was a "dream come true" as he enthralled the crowd and pundits with his 150 against New Zealand. Sarfaraz, a domestic run-machine who was playing just his fourth Test since his debut earlier this year, smashed 150 and put on a key 177-run fourth-wicket stand with Rishabh Pant on a rain-curtailed day four in Bengaluru.

"Since I started playing cricket, it was my dream to play for India and score a 100 for India. I am happy," the 26-year-old told reporters. India's cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar wrote on X, formerly Twitter: "Sarfaraz Khan, what an occasion to score your first Test century, when India needed it most!"

He punched a boundary off the back foot through cover off Tim Southee to raise his ton as he celebrated with a mini-sprint and acknowledged the standing ovation from fans and teammates.

The middle-order batter took the attack to the opposition with his late cuts and chops behind the wicket to blunt the New Zealand quicks, who hit back after his and Pant's departure.

"I like playing the balls that rise high. I have a bouncy wicket back at home, and I play regularly there," said the Mumbai-born Sarfaraz.

"The bounce easily allows me to cut it. They (opposition quicks) were trying to ball short at me, and I simply played accordingly. It was fun."

Veteran commentator Harsha Bhogle, on 'X', said: "I simply focus on that is straight out of his dreams. He is cheeky, he is impish but he is very smart and this is a century for Sarfaraz that is the outcome of an extraordinary life while still so young. Absolutely enjoyed watching it."

Not always the first pick in the team, Sarfaraz made the XI for this opener of a three-match series after Shubman Gill was ruled out due to a stiff neck.

"I simply focus on the things under my control, do well in the practise and try to overcome the shortcomings," said Sarfaraz. "Also, I talk to my father quite often since he keeps me motivated all the time."

The knock was Sarfaraz's 16th first-class ton - and 10 of the previous 15 have been 150-plus scores, including four double hundreds. (AFP)

PREVIEW

Sri Lanka aim to cement spin dominance in West Indies ODIs

AFP
Pallekele, Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka are fine-tuning their spin attack as they look to extend their winning streak at home in a three-match ODI series against the West Indies, skipper Charith Asalanka said yesterday.

The island nation has won 10 of their 13 bilateral series this year, including eight from nine at home. Spinners have been Sri Lanka's trump card, helping them end a 27-year drought against top-ranked India in a July ODI series.

"Spin is our bread and butter and we're going to play to our strengths," Asalanka told reporters ahead of today's opener.

"We're looking at three spin options. We've got leg-spinners Wanindu Hasaranga and Jeffrey Vandersay, plus Dumith Wellalage... A couple of our batters can roll their arm over for some spin as well."



Sri Lanka's captain Charith Asalanka (left) and West Indies' captain Shai Hope pose with the ODI series trophy yesterday. (AFP)

All three ODIs are being played on the slow surface in Pallekele and spin is expected to play the same role it did in Sri Lanka's 2-1 T20 series win earlier in the tour.

"The spinners were exceptional there and I'm confident they'll be a handful again here," Asalanka said.

Both teams are smarting from

their failure to qualify for the Champions Trophy to be held in Pakistan next February.

Both will be laser-focused on climbing the rankings to steer clear of the elimination zone.

"We've got to make sure we're playing good cricket and keeping ourselves in the top half so we don't find ourselves scrambling to qualify again," said West Indies skipper Shai Hope.

Hope, who doubles as wicket-keeper, acknowledged that spin would be a major factor but said his side was up for the challenge.

"We'll take what the pitch offers, and while it's good to have a plan, you've got to play what's in front of you," he said.

All eyes will be on prodigious West Indian talent Jewel Andrew of Antigua, who will become the team's youngest debutant aged 17 years and 318 days.

"He's a really exciting prospect for us, no doubt about it," Hope said.

SPOTLIGHT

New Zealand and South Africa face off in Women's T20 World Cup final

AFP
Dubai

Whatever the result in Dubai today, there will be a new name on the trophy when New Zealand line up against South Africa in the final of the Women's T20 World Cup.

Australia's dominance over the years, winning six of the eight previous tournaments has restricted the opportunities for anyone else.

Only England, in the inaugural tournament in 2009, and West Indies in 2016 have seen them off.

It promises to be a fitting finale to a competition that has produced some excellent - and some middling - cricket after it was switched at short notice to the United Arab Emirates following political unrest in Bangladesh where it was due to take place.

Apart from bringing new interest to the women's game, Sun-

day's final will also pit the two sides that have played the canniest and most courageous cricket over the competition.

Unlike others they have also largely held their catches, although the White Ferns did make life more awkward for themselves in their semi-final win over the West Indies by dropping Deandra Dottin twice. Not many teams get away with that.

After making just 128-9, which even on a slow Sharjah pitch felt 10 to 15 runs short, the Kiwis defended that total superbly against a batting line-up which, as England found to their discomfort in their winner-takes-all group match, that takes no prisoners.

Amelia Kerr, the leading wicket-taker for the tournament with 12, and Eden Carson bowled superbly, leading skipper Sophie Devine to look optimistically towards the final.

"We are really excited about the final. We have nothing to lose and that is a great space to be,"

said Devine who was in the team that lost to Australia by three runs in the 2010 final, the latter of New Zealand's two previous finals. "We are going to win this thing now."

She is more than aware, however, of the dangers presented by a South African side which went close last year, losing to Australia by 19 runs in the final in Cape Town.

"They are an incredible side," said Devine, picking out captain Laura Wolvaardt, the evergreen all-rounder Marizanne Kapp and number three batter Anneke Bosch whose stunning 74 not out led South Africa to their eight-wicket win over the Australians in Thursday's semi-final.

"Laura leads them from the front," she said. "Kapp is one of the best players in the world (and) Bosch in the game against Australia was superb."

"But we have to focus on ourselves, and hope the cricketing gods are on our side as well."

MOTORSPORT

Martin claims Australian MotoGP sprint

AFP
Phillip Island, Australia

Spain's Jorge Martin extended his championship lead to 16 points over title rival Francesco Bagnaia yesterday after leading from start to finish in a windswept Australian MotoGP sprint race.

Italy's defending world champion Bagnaia could only come fourth, with Spaniard Marc Marquez second and another Italian, Enea Bastianini, completing the podium in third.

Fabio di Giannantonio was fifth and Franco Morbidelli sixth on a day marred by a huge crash between Aprilia rider Maverick Vinales and Marco Bezzecchi on his Ducati-VR46. Vinales appeared to get caught in Bezzecchi's slipstream late in the race, making contact that sent the riders and bikes barreling into the gravel.

They both appeared to be OK, although battered and bruised.

Several other riders hit the deck in the gusty conditions, with just 15 of the 22 starters finishing the 13-lap race.

"I saw it was increasing a lot, the gap, so I was trying to keep a really fast pace," said Martin, who

started from pole on his Pramac for the third straight time in Australia and clocked his first win at Phillip Island. "When I saw I had a big gap already then I managed a bit to make it until the end.

"It wasn't easy," he added. "The wind was a lot and it wasn't constant, it was like coming and going out.

"So finally winning again, I am super happy and we have to be focused on tomorrow, it's going to be a really long race."

Ducati star Bagnaia won the sprint and main event in Japan two weeks ago to close the championship gap with Martin to just 10 points. But Martin proved unstoppable on an overcast and cool Australian day. The win earned him 12 points to pile more pressure on Bagnaia ahead of the grand prix on Sunday, with just three race weekends left after Australia.

Six-time world champion Marquez moved up to joint third in the standings, 84 points behind Martin, alongside Ducati's Bastianini.

Martin had the perfect start, unlike Marquez who went wide on his Gresini at the first corner and slipped from second to eighth as Bagnaia moved up to fourth.

Marquez stormed back past Bagnaia and into contention but

Prima Pramac Racing's Spanish rider Jorge Martin celebrates on the podium after winning the sprint race of the MotoGP Australian Grand Prix on Phillip Island yesterday. (AFP)



could not catch Martin, who streaked away to open a 2.6sec lead at the halfway mark and cross the line 1.520sec clear.

"With the wind and everything I went wide (at turn one), but the pace was there," Marquez said.

"Let's see if tomorrow I can avoid the mistake of that first corner. But the feeling of the bike was good and the pace was very similar to Jorge, so let's see if tomorrow

we can fight with him." It was the first sprint race at Phillip Island after last year's planned race was cancelled because of bad weather.

RESULTS:

1. Jorge Martin (ESP/Ducati Pramac) 19min 13.301sec, 2. Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) at 1.520, 3. Enea Bastianini (ITA/Ducati) 4.368, 4. Francesco

Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati) 6.879, 5. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 7.905, 6. Franco Morbidelli (ITA/Ducati-Pramac) 9.623, 7. Raul Fernandez (ESP/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 15.249, 8. Aleix Espargaro (ESP/Aprilia) 19.280, 9. Augusto Fernandez (ESP/GasGas-Tech3) 21.126, 10. Luca Marini (ITA/Honda) 21.194, 11. Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) 21.379, 12. Alex Rins (ESP/Yamaha) 21.483, 13. Joan Mir

(ESP/Honda) 23.528, 14. Takaaki Nakagami (JPN/Honda-LCR) 34.055, 15. Lorenzo Savadori (ITA/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 38.324

World championship standings:

1. Jorge Martin (ESP/Ducati-Pramac) 404 pts, 2. Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati) 388, 3. Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 320, 4. Enea Bastianini (ITA/Ducati) 320, 5. Brad Binder (RSA/KTM) 183, 6. Pedro Acosta (ESP/GasGas-Tech3) 181, 7. Maverick Vinales (ESP/Aprilia) 163, 8. Franco Morbidelli (ITA/Ducati-Pramac) 140, 9. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 139, 10. Aleix Espargaro (ESP/Aprilia) 136, 11. Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 134, 12. Alex Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 124, 13. Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) 86, 14. Miguel Oliveira (POR/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 71, 15. Jack Miller (AUS/KTM) 66, 16. Raul Fernandez (ESP/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 59, 17. Johann Zarco (FRA/Honda-LCR) 36, 18. Takaaki Nakagami (JPN/Honda-LCR) 28, 19. Augusto Fernandez (ESP/GasGas-Tech3) 21, 20. Alex Rins (ESP/Yamaha) 20, 21. Joan Mir (ESP/Honda) 20, 22. Pol Espargaro (ESP/KTM) 12, 23. Luca Marini (ITA/Honda) 7, 24. Dani Pedrosa (ESP/KTM) 7, 25. Stefan Bradl (GER/Team HRC) 2

FORMULA 1

Verstappen wins sprint race at United States GP

Red Bull driver stretched his lead over title rival Norris by two points

AFP
Austin

Max Verstappen claimed a comfortable victory for Red Bull ahead of Ferrari's Carlos Sainz and title rival Lando Norris of McLaren in a frantic sprint race yesterday at the United States Grand Prix.

The three-time world champion and series leader came home 3.8 seconds clear of Sainz, who drove with great determination and speed, and Norris, who was second until a last lap lock-up saw him drop to third.

"That's not too bad," said Verstappen, having claimed his first win since the sprint at the Austrian Grand Prix at the end of June to enlarge his title race lead by two points to 54 ahead of Norris.

"It's a bit like the old times and is a good way to start things. As usual, it was all a bit frantic."

It was Verstappen's 11th win from 16 sprint races, a format he claims he dislikes. He has won three sprints in Austin as well as three Grands Prix and on Sunday will seek to secure his first Grand Prix victory in nine races since the Spanish Grand Prix.

Sainz said: "That was a good race with some very good battles and it had a lot going on! I was struggling with my tyres, but I saw Lando was too. And I made



Left to right: McLaren's British driver Lando Norris, Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen and Ferrari's Spanish driver Carlos Sainz Jr. pose with their trophies with British singer Sting after the United States Formula One Sprint at the Circuit of the Americas in Austin, Texas, yesterday. (AFP)

it stick. It was fun." Norris said he was satisfied to collect six points.

"A good race, pretty happy," he said. "I had so much tyre wear and Carlos did a great job."

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc finished fourth ahead of Mercedes' George Russell and seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton with Kevin Magnussen taking seventh for Haas ahead of teammate Nico Hulkenberg. Sergio Perez and Oscar Piastri of Red Bull and McLaren were outside the points in ninth and 10th places. Verstappen made a clean start to lead as Norris swept from fourth to second, passing both Leclerc and Russell.

All the cars were on mediums

and it was a close contest among the top six, notably as Sainz fought Leclerc for fourth, with Hamilton, sixth, in close attention while, at the front, Russell battled to stay in touch with the two title rivals.

By lap five, Verstappen was 1.3 seconds clear and out of Drag Reduction System (DRS) range of Norris while Russell closed to within six-tenths and, finally, Sainz muscled his way past Leclerc. The Dutchman pulled clear by 2.1 seconds by lap eight, but with Norris closing again after resisting Russell that advantage was trimmed again to 1.3 before Sainz, in boisterous mood, seized third by passing inside Russell at

Turn 15. Hamilton, sixth, appeared to struggle to stay with the top five and was 4.5 seconds adrift while his Mercedes teammate, who started second, descended to fifth on lap 11 when Leclerc repeated Sainz's move. Further back, Piastri, who started 16th progressed to 11th and a scrap with RB's Yuki Tsunoda for 10th behind Perez, the trio chasing Hulkenberg in the final point-scoring place.

Tsunoda ran off on lap 15 and was accused of gaining an advantage before the Australian finally passed him on lap 16 to take 10th, albeit with a five-second penalty for an early incident with Pierre Gasly's Alpine.

FOCUS

Don't leave tennis, Djokovic tells Nadal after Saudi showdown



Serbia's Novak Djokovic and Spain's Rafael Nadal pose after their third-place match at the 6 Kings Slam in Riyadh yesterday. (Reuters)

AFP
Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Novak Djokovic explored longtime rival Rafael Nadal to put off his planned retirement after defeating the Spaniard yesterday in what was likely to be the final chapter of their storied rivalry.

"Don't leave tennis, man," Djokovic said in an on-court interview after beating Nadal in straight sets 6-2, 7-6 (7/5) at the "Six Kings Slam" exhibition in Saudi Arabia.

Nadal, 38, announced on October 10 that he would retire from tennis after the Davis Cup Finals in Malaga next month.

Organisers of the Saudi event billed yesterday's match as perhaps Nadal's last singles contest as a professional. Nadal said Thursday he was unsure whether he would be fit enough to play singles in Malaga.

Djokovic and Nadal - two of the sport's famed "Big Three" along with Roger Federer - had faced each other 60 times on the main tour prior to yesterday's exhibition match, with Djokovic holding a narrow 31-29 edge.

Their last encounter came during the Paris Olympics on the same Roland Garros courts where Nadal won 14 French

Open titles, though Djokovic triumphed easily 6-1, 6-4. Djokovic, 37, said yesterday the rivalry had been "very intense" and told Nadal he hoped they could one day "sit on a beach somewhere" and enjoy.

Nadal, who was presented with a golden tennis racket after defeating the Spaniard yesterday, in turn thanked Djokovic for the "amazing rivalry" and "for all the moments that we shared on court".

After losing to Carlos Alcaraz in straight sets during his first match at the Saudi exhibition on Thursday, Nadal acknowledged his fitness level was well off the tour's top players.

French Open and Wimbledon champion Alcaraz was set to take on Australian Open and US Open winner Jannik Sinner in the "Six Kings Slam" final later.

Saudi Arabia's push into tennis took off last year with its first ATP Tour event - the Next Gen ATP Finals in Jeddah - and exhibition matches pitting Djokovic against Alcaraz and Aryna Sabalenka against Ons Jabeur.

The Women's Tennis Association (WTA) announced in April that Riyadh would host the next three editions of the Tour Finals featuring the top eight singles players and doubles teams.

The 2024 edition will be staged from November 2-9.

Cherif wins Big Tour class, al-Amri shines in Open Class at Hathab



Cyrene Cherif continued her blistering form as the Frenchwoman won the Big Tour class at the third round of the Longines Qatar Equestrian Tour yesterday. At the indoor arena of the Qatar Equestrian Federation, Cherif riding Van Gallettana Z stormed to victory with a winning time of 42.98 seconds. Sheikh Khalifa al-Thani was second on Emiro Delle Sementarecce despite having registered the fastest time of 35.94 seconds as he incurred eight penalties. Ghanim Nasser al-Qadi was third with 56.48 seconds and four penalties on his stallion Morocco. The Open Class was won by Jaber Rashid al-Amri astride Canavaro De Muze (E.T.) in 51.13 seconds. Ghanim Nasser al-Qadi (Chanel D'Altenbach) and Hamad Towaim al-Marri (Baron Z H) shared the second place as they both clocked 51.27 seconds. In the Dressage Medium Level 1, Jassim Mohammed al-Fahd al-Kuwari took the top spot, ahead of Jassim al-Jaham al-Kuwari and Jessica Waldon. In the Dressage Prelim Level 2, Abdulla Khalid al-Julandani emerged triumphant, while Jassim Mohammed al-Fahd al-Kuwari was second and Hamyan Khalifa al-Kowari finished third.

HORSE RACING

Wathnan Racing's Kind Of Blue wins Qipco British Champions Sprint Stakes

Wathnan Racing's Kind Of Blue triumphed in the Qipco British Champions Sprint Stakes (Group 1) at Ascot yesterday. The three-year-old colt, trained by James Fanshawe, delivered a career-best performance in the six-furlong dash, securing a decisive victory under jockey James Doyle.

After finishing second in the Gr1 Haydock Sprint Cup, Kind Of Blue was purchased by Wathnan Racing and repaid their faith with this emphatic win. He showed great determination, holding off a strong challenge from Swingalong to win by a head, with Flora of Bermuda finishing third.

Twenty of the leading sprinters lined up in this end-of-season showdown. Under Doyle, Kind Of Blue sat towards the centre of track around mid-way down the back. As they approached the half-way point, Doyle let his mount ease wide to get space and let the colt use his big action to the best of his ability. He hit the front line with just under two furlongs to run, still travelling strongly under a confident Doyle. There was still all to race for in the final furlong, but Kind Of Blue showed great determination to hold on to his lead to the line, winning by a head in front of Swingalong, with Flora of Bermuda a next further back in third.

Jockey Doyle praised the colt's improve-



James Doyle rides Wathnan Racing's Kind Of Blue to victory in the Qipco British Champions Sprint Stakes (Group 1) at Ascot yesterday.

ment, crediting trainer Fanshawe and the Wathnan Racing team for their efforts. "He's improved with every race and there's no better man than James Fanshawe to prepare a Champion Sprint winner here! There is a superb team at Wathnan Racing, including Richard Brown who has sourced these horses. We've

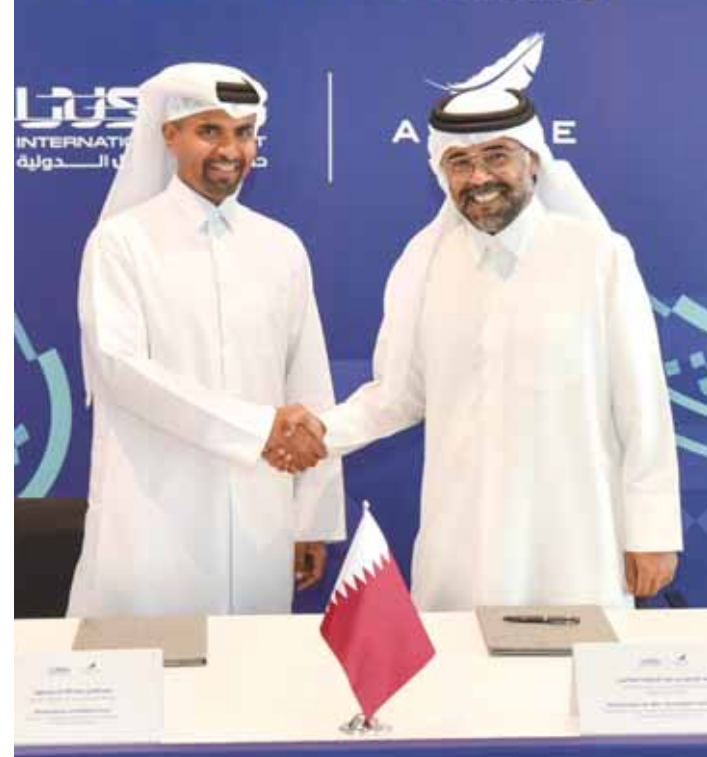
had a few near misses in big races this season, so to win an important Group 1 like this is fantastic," he said.

Kind Of Blue, bred by Michelle Morris and Jan & Peter Hopper, comes from a strong pedigree, being a half-brother to The Tin Man, who also won this race in 2016.

SPOTLIGHT

Lusail International Circuit signs MoU with Aspire Zone

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emorandum of Understanding



Abdulrahman bin Abdullatif al-Mannai, the president of the Qatar Motor & Motorcycle Federation and Lusail International Circuit with Abdulaziz Abdullah al-Mahmoud, Deputy President and Director General of Sports Facilities Management at Aspire Zone Foundation.

Lusail International Circuit (LIC), the Middle East's premier destination for motorsport, has signed a memorandum of understanding with Aspire Zone Foundation to deliver a seamless experience for fans and teams at the upcoming Formula 1 Grand Prix. This strategic collaboration will amplify LIC's logistical and infrastructural capabilities for high-profile motorsport events.

LIC, home to prestigious international motorsport events like Formula 1, MotoGP, and the World Endurance Championship, as well as key national championships, continues to solidify its position as a world-class venue. The new collaboration with Aspire Zone Foundation is set to further elevate the Circuit's capabilities, ensuring an even higher standard of thrilling experiences for motorsport enthusiasts from around the globe.

Aspire Zone Foundation, known for its expertise in managing large-scale events, will bring a wealth of knowledge to the partnership. As a key player behind the successful delivery of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, Aspire Zone Foundation will play a pivotal role in enhancing LIC's already world-class skill set.

Abdulrahman bin Abdullatif al-Mannai, the president of the Qatar Motor & Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) and LIC stated: "Our partnership with Aspire Zone Foundation aligns with our broader strategy of building a robust network of stakeholders across the country, fostering opportunities for cross-promotion, shared knowledge, and mutual growth. On behalf of LIC, I would like to use this opportunity to extend our gratitude to Aspire Zone Foundation as we look ahead to more successes. We are committed to delivering world-class, unforgettable experiences for all of our fans and spectators at LIC's state-of-the-art facilities. As part of this commitment, we continually seek partnerships that can help us elevate the experience for both fans and teams. This collaboration is

just one step of many as we continue to partner with leading organisations to ensure that the Qatar GP becomes an experience fans will want to relive year after year."

Abdulaziz Abdullah al-Mahmoud, Deputy President and Director General of Sports Facilities Management at Aspire Zone Foundation, stated: "We are proud to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the Lusail International Circuit, which opens new horizons for enhancing co-operation between the two parties. Through this agreement, we will oversee all routine and emergency maintenance operations, in addition to ensuring that all facilities meet the highest standards of performance and quality to guarantee their readiness to host events and sports activities efficiently."

He added: "Aspire Zone Foundation will provide support and technical consultations, prepare operational designs, and design works for the Lusail International Circuit through the Sports Facilities Management at Aspire Zone Foundation."

Al-Mahmoud emphasised the commitment to setting high standards, saying: "At Aspire Zone Foundation, we are dedicated to continuing innovation and excellence in various sports and administrative fields to ensure that sports facilities operate according to the highest quality standards in the Qatar. We also strive to prepare the facilities to host sports events efficiently and professionally by supervising maintenance and operation processes, developing innovative technological solutions, and enhancing environmental sustainability, which is one of the pillars of Qatar National Vision 2030."

On 28th November to 1st December 2024, LIC will take centre stage as it hosts the Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix 2024, the penultimate round of this season. With Aspire Zone's support, the event promises to be a truly world-class showcase of speed, precision and entertainment.

BUNDESLIGA

Kane hat-trick sends Bayern top

Leipzig beat Mainz thanks to goals from Simons and Orban

AFP

Leverkusen, Germany

A second-half Harry Kane hat-trick took Bayern Munich back to the top of the Bundesliga, ahead of RB Leipzig, with a 4-0 home win over Stuttgart yesterday.

Leipzig's earlier 2-0 win at Mainz had allowed them to leapfrog Bayern into top spot, while Kane came into the match without a goal for club or country in four games - his longest drought since moving to Germany.

Stuttgart, who surprisingly finished one spot ahead of Bayern in second place last season, held the hosts at bay but the dam eventually broke in the 57th minute, when Kane's long-range effort dribbled past goalkeeper Alexander Nuebel. Kane added a second just three minutes later, clipping the ball through a crowded penalty box and past Nuebel to double Bayern's lead.

The England captain pounced on a loose ball on the 80-minute mark to bring up his third, chalking up his sixth hat-trick in Bayern colours and his 57th goal for the German giants in all competitions. Kingsley Coman scored in the final minute to complete the win.

Earlier, goals from Xavi Simons and captain Willi Orban took Leipzig past Mainz, just days out from their home Champions League clash with Liverpool. Still unbeaten this season in Germany alongside Bayern, Leipzig took the lead after 20 minutes thanks to an excellent Simons solo goal. Leipzig captain Orban tapped in a rebound from a Lois Openda cross to put his side 2-0 ahead.

Victor Boniface's 72nd-minute goal was the difference as Bayer Leverkusen beat Eintracht Frankfurt 2-1 at home. Leverkusen were given an early chance when Amine Adli was felled in the box, sending Boniface to the spot after a long VAR review. The Nigerian's shot, too soft and central, was gobbled up by Frankfurt goalkeeper Kevin Trapp.

Just five minutes later, the referee was sent to the video screen again, this time finding a penalty for Frankfurt, with Robert Andrich lightly touching Omar Marmoush's foot. Marmoush showed Boniface how it is done, blasting a low shot left to give the visitors the lead on 16 minutes. The Egyptian now has an in-



Bayern Munich's Harry Kane celebrates after scoring against Stuttgart in Munich. (Reuters)

credible nine goals and five assists in just seven league games this season.

Andrich made good on his error soon afterwards, combining with Adli and Martin Terrier to flit through the penalty area for a superb one-touch goal in the 25th minute. Boniface would also redeem himself, giving Leverkusen the lead inside the final 20 minutes, heading in a deflected cross from substitute Florian Wirtz to put the hosts on course for victory.

Elsewhere, Freiburg continued their impressive start to the season with a 3-1 home win over Augsburg to go into outright third.

Freiburg were three goals up at half-time, with Vincenzo Grifo, Philipp Lienhart and Christian Guenter scoring, before Augsburg's Phillip Tietz pulled one back in the second period.

Borussia Moenchengladbach striker Tim Kleindienst scored a double, days after making his Germany debut, in a 3-2 home win over former club Heidenheim. Hoffenheim won their first game since their season opener, with Andrej Kramaric, Marius Buelter and Haris Tabakovic scoring in a 3-1 win over lowly Bochum, who sit last with just one point from seven games.

SERIE A

Ten-man AC Milan hold on to beat Udinese

AFP

Milan, Italy

AC Milan overcame having to play with 10 men for over an hour to beat Udinese 1-0 yesterday, a dramatic win which moved the seven-time European champions two points behind Serie A leaders Napoli.

Paulo Fonseca's side are third and level on 14 points with second-placed Inter Milan after surviving two offside scares, including one deep in stoppage time, to claim a hard-fought win at the San Siro. Samuel Chukwueze's 13th-minute strike looked like being the first of a comfortable win but ended up being the winning goal as Milan held on for the points.

Their task was made difficult by Tijjani Reijnders being sent off in the 29th minute for a clumsy foul on Sandi Lovric who would have been clean through on goal had the Netherlands midfielder not clipped his heels. Tammy Abraham should have sealed the points for



AC Milan's Samuel Chukwueze scores during the Serie A match against Udinese. (AFP)

Milan with 15 minutes remaining when he somehow managed, moments after replacing Alvaro Morata, to both fluff a golden chance on the rebound and injure his shoulder at the same time.

The hosts looked to have been sucker-punched when Christian Kabasele bundled home for Udinese in the fifth minute of stop-

page time, but a huge roar rang around the ground when, after a long VAR check, the goal was ruled out for Jurgen Ekkelenkamp's toes straying offside.

Milan's win came in front of a flat San Siro following the decision of Milan's hardcore "ultras" supporters to stand in silence for most of the match in protest at what they claim is a law enforcement and Italian media campaign against them.

Leading ultras from both Milan and local rivals Inter - at Roma on Sunday night - were arrested last month and are accused of a variety of crimes raging from criminal conspiracy and extortion to assault.

Earlier this week Milan's ultras groups refuted allegations by investigators of any involvement in ticket touting, control of parking and sales from concession stands near the San Siro. In the meantime police banned the ultras' large "Curva Sud Milano" from being hung out in that section, leading to supporters around the whole stadium, not just ultras, from leaving their own banners and flags at home.

Pogba's Juve career in doubt after director says squad 'complete'

Turin, Italy: Paul Pogba's career at Juventus looked over yesterday after the Serie A club's sporting director Cristiano Giuntoli said their squad was complete ahead of the France midfielder's return from a doping ban.

France's Pogba can play again in March as his four-year suspension was slashed to 18 months by the Court of Arbitration for Sport a fortnight ago.

But Giuntoli all-but confirmed Pogba had no future in Turin by saying there was no room for the 31-year-old in the current squad. "Our position is very clear. Paul was a great player but he's been out of action for a long time," Giuntoli said. "Last year and this year we were forced to invest in other players, and right now the squad is complete."

Pogba said during a round of interviews - apparently not authorised by Juve - on Wednesday he wants to stay even at the cost of cutting his weighty salary. Since being provisionally suspended in September last year Pogba has been stuck on a minimum wage of just over 2,000 euros (\$2,166) a month.

But his contract, which expires in June 2026, is reportedly worth eight million euros a year plus a potential further two million euros in bonuses. Italian press have reported Juventus are seeking to terminate Pogba's contract after revamping the squad for new coach Thiago Motta.

Juve, who posted losses of nearly 200mn euros for last season, kicked off against Lazio fourth in Serie A, three points behind league leaders Napoli.