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AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ELITE

Al Wasl stun Al Gharafa with late comeback victory

By Sports Reporter
Al Khor

UAE's Al Wasl FC came from behind to defeat Al Gharafa SC of Qatar 2-1 in their AFC Champions League Elite tie at the Al Bayt Stadium yesterday. The sensational win took Al Wasl to six points as they stayed on track for a place in the knockout stage while Al Gharafa stayed rooted on three.

Al Wasl fared better in the opening exchanges, Siaka Sidibe with a long range drive that Sergio Rico had to deal with, with the Malian midfielder then producing a delicate chip for Ali Saleh who nodded it wide. Al Gharafa were limited to shots from distance through attempts from Fabricio Diaz and Jose, with neither troubling Al Wasl goalkeeper Khaled Alsenani.

With 10 minutes left to play in the first half, Joselu found space just inside the Al Wasl box but just when the 2023/24 UEFA Champions League winner was about to pull the trigger, Salem Alazizi slid in to make a crucial block.

Building on that, Al Gharafa opened the scoring in the 44th minute when a short corner saw Florinel Coman drilling in a cross that hit Haris Seferovic and bounced kindly for Ferjani Sassi to guide home past Alsenani.

Al Wasl had a good chance to equalise nine minutes into the second half after Nicolas Gimenez surged on the left before

finding Fabio Lima in the box, only for the UAE international to send his header wide. Next to go close were Al Gharafa - Coman embarked on a mazy run before cutting the ball back to Joselu, only for the Spaniard to send his shot into the wrong side of the post before Sassi headed wide from close range.

Al Wasl were given a lifeline in the 84th minute when Abdallah Yousif is penalised for using his hand to block Lima's shot, with the latter stepping to convert the spot-kick. The turnaround for Al Wasl was completed two minutes into added time when Alexis Fontanilla's cross from the left was turned in by Isaac Success for the winner.

Gharafa coach Pedro Martins said the match was balanced until a decisive penalty shifted the momentum. "We scored first before halftime and started the second half strongly," Martins said. "We created several chances but couldn't convert them before the penalty was awarded."

He acknowledged that the penalty changed the game. "After scoring from the spot, Al Wasl took control and scored again to secure the win."

Martins added, "The penalty had a big impact on the result. Our goal was to win, but it didn't happen. We're still in the competition and need to focus on earning more points in the remaining matches."

Al Gharafa will meet Iran's Persepolis FC on November 4 with Al Wasl hosting Al Sadd SC of Qatar in Dubai on the same day.



Al Wasl's Fabio Lima celebrates after scoring a penalty against Al Gharafa in the AFC Champions League Elite match yesterday.

FOOTBALL / CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Vinicius treble helps Real rally to beat Dortmund 5-2

PSG concede home draw against PSV, Arsenal grind out win over Shakhtar

AFP
Madrid

Vinicius Junior scored a sublime hat-trick as Champions League holders Real Madrid came back from two goals down to hammer Borussia Dortmund 5-2 yesterday.

After a shock stumble at Lille in their previous European match, Madrid crushed Dortmund, in a repeat of last season's final, with a superb second half display.

Carlo Ancelotti's side claimed a record-extending 15th Champions League crown at Wembley and, as in that match, struggled in the first half against the Bundesliga side, who went two goals up through Donyell Malen and Jamie Gittens.

However Antonio Rudiger and Vinicius pulled Madrid level with two goals in two minutes and Lucas Vazquez fired home the third after 83 minutes.

Vinicius produced a brilliant solo goal for Madrid's fourth and slammed in the fifth as Los Blancos ended Dortmund's 100 per cent start to the competition.

Madrid coach Ancelotti brought Rodrigo into the attack alongside Kylian Mbappe and Vinicius, reverting to a 4-3-3 formation after a brief experiment with three at the back in the narrow La Liga win over Celta Vigo on Saturday.

After midfield maestro Toni Kroos' retirement and while trying to bed Mbappe into the team, Madrid have struggled to find balance and consistency this season.

They were frustrated for the first half an hour of the game by the visitors, unable to create clear



Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior celebrates scoring a goal during the Champions League match against Borussia Dortmund in Madrid yesterday. (AFP)

cut openings before the game burst open. Malen opened the scoring with a cool finish after Julian Brandt won the ball back on the edge of the area and Serhou Guirassy squeezed a pass through a tight gap to find the Dutch winger.

Four minutes later Malen created the second, using his explosive pace to escape Ferland Mendy and crossing for Gittens to gleefully finish. Madrid responded by carving open Dortmund before the break but without finding a killer finish.

Bellingham, without a goal in 10 games this season, headed straight at Gregor Kobel when he ran onto a scooped pass into the area.

The England international, facing his former club, then struck

the crossbar from close range on the rebound after team-mate Rodrygo had also hit the woodwork, with Madrid fans barely able to believe they had not scored.

Madrid goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois made a fine save to thwart Brandt before the break when the midfielder let fly from outside the area.

The hosts turned the screw in the second half and Kobel saved well at the near post from Lucas Vazquez but could not keep out Rudiger's powerful header from Mbappe's cross after an hour.

Two minutes later Madrid were level when Mbappe was tackled in the area but the ball fell invitingly for Vinicius to stroke home with ease.

Madrid's comeback was com-

pleted by Vazquez after Rodrygo did well to keep the ball from going out of play, and Vinicius added shine with his fine fourth.

The Brazilian, expected to claim a first Ballon d'Or on Monday in Paris, carried the ball forward without support and produced a lethal low finish.

Vinicius then added a fifth by bursting into the area and rifling past Kobel, also issuing a warning to La Liga leaders Barcelona who visit the Bernabeu on Saturday in La Liga.

Meanwhile PSG's weaknesses on the biggest stage were once again exposed when they were held 1-1 at home by PSV Eindhoven yesterday. The Ligue 1 leaders salvaged a point when Achraf Hakimi's second-half strike cancelled out Noa Lang's opener, leaving Luis Enrique's side on four points after three games. Eredivisie leaders PSV, who made the most of PSG's mediocre midfield, are still winless with two points in the new format of Europe's premier club competition, which features a single table of 36 teams.

Arsenal needed an own goal to seal a scrappy 1-0 win over Shakhtar Donetsk yesterday to make it two wins out of three in the Champions League and soften the blow of their first domestic league defeat of season at the weekend.

RESULTS: AC Milan 3 bt Club Brugge 1, Monaco 5 bt Red Star Belgrade 1, Arsenal 1 bt Shakhtar Donetsk 0, Aston Villa 2 bt Bologna 0, Girona 2 bt Slovan Bratislava 0, Stuttgart 1 bt Juventus 0, PSG 1 drew PSV Eindhoven 1, Real Madrid 5 bt Dortmund 2, Sporting Lisbon 2 bt Sturm Graz 0.

SPOTLIGHT

Arabi to face Qadsia in Gulf Club Champions League opener today

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Arabi will kick off their Gulf Club Champions League campaign with a Group B match against Qadsia of Kuwait today at Al Thumama Stadium. The match is set to start at 6:15pm. Group B also includes Saudi Arabia's Al Ettifaq and Bahrain's Al Riffa.

Al Arabi aims to put in a strong performance and start the tournament on a positive note, with hopes of reaching the later stages and competing for the title. Coach Anthony Hudson is determined to rectify mistakes from their recent 2-5 defeat to Al Shamal in the Qatar Stars League and help the team bounce back with a win.

Speaking at a press conference yesterday, Hudson stressed the importance of a good start. "We've worked hard to prepare despite the short time between this game and our last league match. We focused on fixing the mistakes from the previous game and aim to perform at our best to get the victory," he said.

The coach added that a win today will be crucial for building momentum. "It's important to get the three points, especially

since we are playing at home, with our fans behind us. Their support will motivate the players to give everything on the pitch," Hudson said.

On the other side, Qadsia coach Zeljko Petrovic acknowledged the challenge his team faces against Al Arabi. "It's a tough match to begin our campaign, but we are focused on putting in a good performance and getting a positive result," Petrovic said during his press conference.

He praised Al Arabi's quality, saying: "They are a strong team with talented players, so we expect a competitive game. We must stay focused and perform at a high level to secure a good start in the tournament."

The Gulf Club Champions League returns this year after a nine-year break. The last edition was held in 2015, when Al Shabab of the UAE won the title. This season, eight teams are competing, divided into two groups. The group-stage matches will be played on a home-and-away basis, with the top two teams from each group advancing to the semi-finals.

The second round of matches will take place on November 5 and 6, with the final group-stage games scheduled for February 2025.



Al Arabi players at a training session yesterday.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Glasgow to host the 2026 Commonwealth Games

Among the sports missing out compared to 2022 Games are triathlon, diving, hockey, T20 cricket, squash



AFP
London

Glasgow has been confirmed as the host city for the troubled 2026 Commonwealth Games, which will be a slimmed-down version of the multi-sport event.

The future of the 2026 Games was thrown into doubt when the Australian state of Victoria, the original hosts, withdrew last year, citing rising costs.

But the Scottish government effectively gave the green light to Glasgow last month and the Commonwealth Games Federation (CGF) announced yesterday that the 2014 hosts will stage the next Games, from July 23-August 2, 2026.

The Games will feature just 10 sports compared with the 19 on show at the 2022 edition in the English city of Birmingham.

Para sport will once again be fully integrated as "a key priority and point of difference for the Games",

with six para sports included on the programme.

The schedule will feature athletics and para athletics, swimming and para swimming, artistic gymnastics, track cycling and para track cycling, netball, weightlifting and para powerlifting, boxing, judo, bowls and para bowls, as well as 3x3 basketball and 3x3 wheelchair basketball.

Among the sports missing out compared to the 2022 Games are triathlon, diving, hockey, T20 cricket, squash, badminton and rugby sevens.

Around 3,000 athletes are expected to compete from up to 74 Commonwealth nations and territories. The CGF said Glasgow 2026 would deliver more than £100mn (\$130mn) of inward investment into the city, with no need for public funding.

Australia will provide part of the finance after Victoria pulled out, citing a projected cost of more than A\$6bn (\$4bn).

"On behalf of the entire Commonwealth sport movement, we

are delighted to officially confirm that the 2026 Commonwealth Games will take place in the host city of Glasgow," said CGF chief executive Katie Sadleir.

'Sustainable model'

Britain and Australia have staged five of the past six editions between them, but Sadleir believes a slimmed-down model will increase the potential pool of future hosts.

"The 2026 Games will be a bridge to the Commonwealth Games of tomorrow," said Sadleir, adding Glasgow's "sustainable model" would increase "the scope of countries capable of hosting".

Commonwealth Games Scotland chairman Ian Reid said it had not been easy to decide which sports to include.

"I think everybody recognises that these events need to be more affordable, lighter and we would have loved to have all of our sports and all of our athletes competing but unfortunately it's just not deliverable or affordable for this

timeframe," he told the BBC. But Sadleir, speaking at an event in Glasgow yesterday, insisted sports dropped from the Glasgow schedule could return at subsequent Commonwealth Games.

"It's always a very difficult decision when you have to decide which sports are in the programme and which sports are not," she said.

"Every time we run a Games, we only have two compulsory sports, athletics and swimming, and the rest are all up for that discussion and negotiation between the host and the Commonwealth Games Federation.

"To the sports (missing out) it must be incredibly disappointing, but what I must say to you is that because you're not in the programme for 2026 does not mean that you're not a key sport for us in the future."

The Commonwealth Games, held every four years, evolved out of the British Empire Games and is still made up mainly of countries and territories once subject to British imperial rule.

SPOTLIGHT

Austria's Thiem bows out of tennis with home loss

Agencies
Vienna

Dominic Thiem's tennis career concluded with a first-round defeat to Luciano Darderi at the Vienna Open yesterday. The former world number three, who had won the Vienna title in 2019, fell to Italy's Darderi 7-6 (8-6) 6-2.

Thiem, an Austrian and former US Open champion, had announced his retirement plans the previous week, coinciding with his home tournament.

After his loss to world number 42 Darderi, the crowd expressed their appreciation with Austrian flags and signs reading "Danke Dominic" ("Thank you Dominic").

Thiem, a former world number three and 17-time tour-level champion, was cheered on by his home fans as he made one final, emotional appearance at his home ATP 500 tournament.

"He means a lot," Thiem fan Petra Höllerl told *ATPTour.com* when asked what the 2020 US Open champion has done for Austrian tennis.

"He was one of the best, and along with Thomas Muster he is our hero. For our kids and for us, so we are a little bit lost now... It



Austria's Dominic Thiem waves after playing his final match at the Vienna Open at the Stadthalle in Vienna, Austria, yesterday. (AFP)

was his last match, so we supported him and trusted him. We wish him all the best."

Thiem enjoyed significant success on home soil throughout his career.

In 2019, he clinched victories at both the clay-court ATP 250 tournament in Kitzbuhel and the Vienna Open.

The 31-year-old attributes much of his success to the unwavering support of his home fans.

Thiem's impressive career included victories over all three members of the "Big Three" - Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, and Novak Djokovic.

Unfortunately, less than a year after his US Open triumph, Thiem

suffered a wrist injury that sidelined him for 10 months, causing his ranking to plummet to outside the top 350.

Thiem made a comeback to the top 100 last year, but struggled to regain his top form.

In May of this year, he announced that the current season would be his last.

COMMENT

Fritz unhappy with ITF decision to allow off-court coaching

Reuters
New York

World number six Taylor Fritz said the International Tennis Federation (ITF)'s decision to allow off-court coaching from 2025 would ruin the one v one strategic and mental elements of the game.

The ITF announced on Monday that off-court coaching will be allowed from Jan 1 following a decision made at the governing body's annual general meeting this month.

It said the change would make tennis "fairer and, potentially, more entertaining".

Off-court coaching had already been implemented on a trial basis in all four Grand Slams as well as the ATP and WTA tours since 2023.

US Open finalist Fritz had previously been critical of off-court coaching and expressed his displeasure with the rule change in a post on X on Monday, writing: "Can we stop ruining the 1v1 mental/strategic aspect of the sport PLEASE."

Former world number 10 Denis Shapovalov said the decision to allow off-court coaching was "sad to see" as a fan of the sport.

"Tennis is special because you are out there alone. Why are you trying to change the beauty of this

game," the Canadian posted on X. ITF senior Executive Director Stuart Miller said the decision had been made after consulting with key stakeholders including players, coaches and umpires.

"Players felt it was a positive development and makes tournaments more interesting for them. Coaches have said it helps player development and helps to improve the standing of their profession," Miller added.

"Chair umpires have said it improves their ability to focus on monitoring the game and making the right decisions, rather than whether or not a coach is coaching against the rules."

Swiatek announces return at Billie Jean King Cup Finals

Poland's Iga Swiatek will play in the Billie Jean King Cup Finals in Malaga in November, where they face hosts Spain in the opening match, the world number two said yesterday.

Swiatek has not played since her US Open quarter-final defeat by Jessica Pegula in September and, after deciding to miss the WTA tour's Asian swing due to fatigue, the 23-year-old lost her number one position to Belarusian Aryna Sabalenka.

"See you in Malaga! I'm happy to announce that I will play in the BJKC Finals," Swiatek posted on social media.

Khalifa Open Squash Championship ends



The Khalifa Open Squash Championship concluded its fourth edition with great success at the Khalifa International Squash Complex in Doha. The tournament featured 60 players across various age groups. During the closing ceremony, the winners were awarded by Tariq Zainal, the Secretary-General of the Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel and Badminton Federation.

FOCUS

United Cup is here to stay, says tournament director Farrow

Reuters
Sydney

United Cup tournament director Stephen Farrow is confident the future of the event is rock solid despite the debate over the crowded tennis calendar and Saudi Arabia's interest in launching an ATP Masters event early in the season.

The \$10mn mixed team tournament, the result of a partnership between Tennis Australia and the ATP and WTA tours, kicks off its third edition in Perth on Dec 27, just 33 days after the Davis Cup finals conclude in Spain.

Farrow has sympathy with players like Carlos Alcaraz who have warned of an increase in injuries and burnout because of the long season but said the field attracted by the United Cup suggested the late December start was not a major issue.

"I think we'd all agree that a longer off-season is a good thing for professional athletes," he told Reuters at the draw for the tournament.

"(But) the players are desperate to come here as soon as they can and start their season. In the back of my mind I thought starting on Dec 27, maybe that would be a challenge for us, but it hasn't proven to be.

"They want to get here to acclimatise to play these big events before the Australian Open."

Another potential driver to change in the landscape of the game is Saudi Arabia's Public Invest-



Tournament Director Stephen Farrow, former tennis player Casey Dellacqua, Australia team captain Lleyton Hewitt, host Todd Woodbridge, and Sydney General Manager Paul Daly pose with the trophy at the draw for the United Cup in Sydney, Australia. (Reuters)

ment Fund (PIF), which is widely reported to have ambitions of owning a 10th ATP Masters tournament to be played before the Australian Open.

That would clearly play havoc with Tennis Australia's lead-in tournaments to the year's first Grand Slam, which include the United Cup and WTA-ATP tournaments in Brisbane and Adelaide.

Farrow, though, is confident that the current agreements with the professional tours are built on extremely solid foundations.

Woods not part of initial Hero World Challenge field

New York: Tournament host Tiger Woods was not listed in the initial player field released yesterday for the Dec 5-8 Hero World Challenge in Albany, Bahamas but could still be added as one of the three exemption spots.

The 15-times major champion, who has not competed since he missed the British Open cut in July, had microdecompression surgery for nerve impingement on his lower back in September and has not offered an update on his recovery.

In five events this year the 48-year-old Woods

dropped out of February's Genesis Invitational, another event he hosts, due to illness, finished 60th at the Masters and missed the cut at the next three majors. After missing the British Open cut, Woods said he would take a break and did not plan to play an official tournament the rest of the year and would instead target the Hero World Challenge, which is a limited-field, unofficial event.

At last year's Hero World Challenge, in what was his first tournament in nearly eight months after recovering from ankle surgery, Woods finished 18th.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

De Bruyne won't be rushed back, says City's Guardiola

The 33-year-old was injured against Inter Milan last month

Reuters
Manchester

Manchester City's Kevin de Bruyne needs to be eased back into action after his lay-off with a muscle injury, manager Pep Guardiola said, adding that the midfielder is a doubt for today's Champions League match at home to Sparta Prague.

The 33-year-old De Bruyne was injured against Inter Milan in the Champions League last month and has missed the English champions' last six fixtures. City are already without midfielders Rodri and Oscar Bobb due to long-term injuries but Guardiola said he would resist the temptation to call on De Bruyne until the Belgian was comfortable.

"Well, except for Rodri and Oscar, the other ones are in training and getting better, but guys like Kevin for example are not exactly fit," the Spaniard told reporters. "It's not a new issue but he doesn't feel completely fine. Kevin is not 22 years old, he has to be fit for his football. He doesn't feel comfortable that he can express his incredible potential at his best. He is training better but he doesn't feel good. He said he doesn't feel good. If you don't feel good, take your time."

Guardiola had a more positive outlook on England midfielder Phil Foden, who last season scored 28 goals for club and country in all competitions and was named PFA Player of the Year but has had a stop-start campaign this time around due to illness. The 24-year-old was instrumental in City's 2-1 Premier League victory at Wolverhampton Wanderers on Sunday, delivering the corner which led to John Stones' stoppage-time winner.

"He feels much better. The minutes he played last game, for example," Guardiola said. "With Phil, you realise immediately when he is happy and fit and mentally in the right moment. You realise he's getting better and better."

Today, City face Czech champions Sparta, who are level with them on four points after beating RB Salzburg 3-0 in their opener and drawing 1-1 with VfB Stuttgart. "They created a lot of problems (for Stuttgart). I didn't know Sparta until the last two days when I started to watch them and I have a good impression," Guardiola added.

Guardiola also praised the spirit and desire of his players after their last-gasp win against Wolves. City, unbeaten this season, go into the game against Sparta buoyed by John Stones'



Manchester City's Erling Haaland (right) and Kevin De Bruyne during a training session. (Reuters)

95th-minute winner at Molineux on Sunday, which kept them on the shoulders of Premier League leaders Liverpool.

City, who have won four consecutive Premier League titles, are playing in European football's elite club competition for the 14th straight season. Guardiola said the manner of the win at Wolves and the way his men celebrated showed their enduring hunger.

"How we celebrate when a team now is in the position in the bottom (Wolves), how we celebrate in October, not in May or April like it's happened, I feel the team still have the passion," he said. "How we celebrate in the locker room, I still feel 'OK, they still want it, still we are there' and that means a lot to me, a lot. They know, the team, how difficult it is to be consistent for six, seven years. You can be consistent for a month, for a season, but six, seven

years and still now we are there. All the teams go down, still we are in that position."

Guardiola said he was "more than happy" with how his team were coping in the absence of key midfielder Rodri, who has been ruled out of the rest of the season with a knee injury. The City boss said it was important to make home advantage count against their Czech opponents, with tough away trips to come to Sporting Lisbon, Juventus and Paris Saint-Germain. The new-look league format for this season's competition means only the top eight teams out of 36 automatically qualify for the knockout stages after the initial eight-match schedule.

"It is not easy," said Guardiola. "The games we have at home we have to close it, otherwise it'll be difficult to finish in the first eight and that's the target we want to achieve."

FOOTBALL

Qatar begin U-17 Asian Cup Qualifiers against Mongolia

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar will open their campaign in the AFC U-17 Asian Cup Qualifiers as they take on Mongolia in their opening Group F match at Aspire Academy Pitch 7 today. As many as 43 teams divided into 10 groups – seven groups of four teams and three groups of five – are featuring in the Qualifiers, targeting berths in the finals scheduled to take place from April 3 to 20, 2025 in Saudi Arabia.

The top team from each group, along with the five best runners-up, will advance to the tournament. Al Annabi will also face defending champions Japan and Nepal in Group F.

Qatar U-17 coach Ahmed Madouni said the team is focused on the opening match, aiming to start the mission on a winning note. Our preparations have been good for the competition. We respect all the teams in the group and we will do our best to secure victory against Mongolia," Madouni said yesterday.

Qatar will play their second match against Nepal on Friday before meeting Japan on Sunday in their last match. "All the teams in this group are tough but we are confident of getting the desired results and securing a berth in the finals," said the Qatar coach.

Also today, Japan will take on



Qatar U-17 coach Ahmed Madouni.

Nepal in other match of the group at Hamad Bin Khalifa Stadium. Meanwhile, Qatar's squad features talent drawn from several top domestic clubs, including Al Duhail, Al Sadd, Al Arabi, Al Gharafa, Qatar SC, Al Rayyan, Umm Salal, Al Ahli, and Al Markhiya.

QATAR U-17 SQUAD

Adam Riyad, Saud Khamis, Mohammed Akram, Muhannad Jameel, Malik Majed, and Yazan Hani (all Al Duhail), Sheikh Ndaw, Sultan Majed, Omar Abdulaziz, Faisal Saeed, Karam Hadi, Mohammed Jihad, Ward Osama, and Tamim al-Qadi (all Al Sadd), Ahmed Saber (Al Arabi), Emmanuel Francis and Zaid Faisal (Al Gharafa), Saif El-Din Ahmed (Qatar SC), Abdulrahman Khaled and Bakri Mohammed (Al Rayyan), Salman Anwar (Umm Salal), Abdul Aziz Younes (Al Ahli), and Youssef Salman (Al Markhiya).



Qatar's U-17 players train at Aspire Academy yesterday.

FOCUS

Flick calm despite Barcelona's dire record against Bayern

AFP
Barcelona

Barcelona coach Hansi Flick said yesterday he is not worried by the club's recent struggles against Champions League opponents Bayern Munich. The German giants have beaten Barcelona in each of their last six meetings and the Catalans have failed to score in the last four of those.

When Flick was coach of Bayern they thrashed Barcelona 8-2 in the 2020 Champions League quarter-finals. "The past doesn't matter, the present is what's important," Flick told reporters before today's league phase clash against Vincent Kompany's visiting side. "Whatever happened in the past we can't change, we can only influence what happens tomorrow. Of course we want to try and beat Bayern Munich."

Barcelona last won the Champions League in 2015 and last reached the semi-finals in 2019. Flick won a remarkable six titles with the Bundesliga leaders in 2020 and has quickly improved revived Barcelona after arriving in Spain this summer. Barca are top of the Spanish league and face their biggest tests of the season this week against Bayern and then at rivals Real Madrid on Saturday in La Liga.

"Bayern are a team in good form with a lot of confidence, they're a top, top team with great players," said Flick. "We want to test ourselves against the best – it's a Champions League game against Bayern Munich, it's going to be great. (I had) a great time there, with great memories, but I'm living a new chapter now at Barca."

Bayern coach Kompany said Flick's time at the club was still spo-



Barcelona's German coach Hans-Dieter Flick (right) looks on during a training session in Sant Joan Despi, near Barcelona. (AFP)

ken about with reverence. "Hansi was not just a coach at Bayern but a very successful coach, a person who represented the club in a way that is still spoken about today," he told a news conference. "(However) the duel is between the two teams, the 11 players on the pitch. Hansi's idea is very clear, I hope that our ideas are clear as well, but tomorrow we will have to see which team is able to win this game."

Kompany said Bayern's 8-2 thrashing of Barcelona was in the past and he was only focussing on the match at the Olympic stadium. "I actually just want to talk about the match tomorrow, that's the only important thing," insisted the Belgian coach. "I do understand the surroundings, all that is around the match, increases the drama of the match tomorrow, but it's just about the 90 minutes and (the

match) will have its own history."

Kompany praised Barcelona for being able to replace departed great Lionel Messi so quickly with teenage Spain star Lamine Yamal. The youngster, 17, won Euro 2024 with his country this summer and is already vital for Barca on the right flank.

"Honestly, it's already exceptional for Barca as a club, so shortly after the departure of Messi, who for all the players of my generation, was a key figure in our football era, to so quickly have a player who could potentially replace him, it's unique," said Kompany.

"Full credit to (Barca's youth academy) La Masia, to trust these type of players and give them a chance. We have to try and win a game of football against Barcelona, not just one player, although he is an exceptional player."

SPOTLIGHT

Record attendance expected at the 85th FIG Congress in Doha

A record number of national governing bodies and a record number of delegates are registered to attend the 85th FIG Congress, which will be held from tomorrow until October 26 in Doha. Over 500 attendees including delegates from over 150 out of a total of 159 affiliated member federations will be present.

On October 25 the delegates will vote to renew all of the FIG's governing bodies: the President, three Vice-Presidents, seven elected Executive Committee members and 21 Council members (with quotas for continental representation). They will also elect the President and six members of the Gymnastics for All Committee and the President and six members of the Technical Committees for all seven FIG disciplines, with Parkour set to be represented by a new Technical Committee for the first time. Two auditors will also be elected. All elected officials will commence their terms of office on 1 January 2025 for a term of four years.

The FIG is set to welcome five new affiliated national gymnastics federations during the Congress: Antigua and Barbuda, Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea, Kenya, and Zambia. If the Congress approves these affiliations, it will increase the total number of FIG affiliated federations to 164.

The approval of the quadrennial plan for 2025-2028 is one of the main responsibilities of the Congress. Approval of this budget will allow the FIG to operate and achieve its objectives, which include managing World Championships in each of its sev-



en disciplines as well as Gymnastics for All events, managing other international events and competitions and supporting the federation's global education and development programmes.

The Congress will hear reports from the independent Gymnastics Ethics Foundation, the FIG Foundation for Solidarity as well as updates on safeguarding, the ASOIF Good Governance report and the results of the new NF-Insights project to gain a better understanding of the FIG's global membership.

Furthermore, proposed changes to the FIG Statutes include the addition of Para-gymnastics as a new competitive discipline within the FIG, along with provisions that will help to pave the way for a new, consumer-facing brand for the FIG.

Frustrated Glasner waits for Crystal Palace luck to turn

Nottingham, England: Crystal Palace manager Oliver Glasner blamed poor decision-making and a lack of confidence for his side's 1-0 Premier League defeat at Nottingham Forest on Monday but praised his side's fighting spirit even though they remain winless this season.

Chris Wood scored the only goal of the game as he profited from a Dean Henderson error when the Palace keeper allowed a shot from 25-yards to squirm past him, summing up what was

another unsuccessful outing for Glasner's team.

"We are all frustrated and disappointed as always one or two situations decide the game. At the moment, it goes against us, but we have to get through it together," Glasner said.

"I saw the team fighting from the first to the last second, we created chances, hit the post twice.

"At the moment we don't score goals and we have to be honest. No goal today, no goal v

Liverpool, no goal v (Manchester) United, and if you play like this it is difficult to win. We make one mistake and we get punished. That is the situation we are in."

Palace struck the woodwork twice and created a few other chances but most shots ended wide of goal, were blocked or too close to the keeper.

Winless Palace are in 18th place in the league with three points from a possible 24 and a home game against Tottenham Hotspur next up on Sunday.