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CRICKET

Spin duo Noman and Sajid dismantle England, Pakistan win series 2-1

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QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Guedes brace helps Rayyan fight back to hold Ahli

Al Ahli stay second with 15 points, five behind leaders Al Duhail, who face Al Gharafa today

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Ahli missed a crucial opportunity to close the gap on leaders Al Duhail after a thrilling 2-2 draw with Al Rayyan in the Qatar Stars League at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium yesterday.

Oumar Sekou (4th minute) and Erik Exposito (37th minute) scored for The Brigadiers, but Roger Guedes' brace in the 28th and 65th minutes for Rayyan ensured that both teams took a point from the encounter. The result leaves Ahli on 15 points, five behind Duhail, who face Al Gharafa today. Al Rayyan are eighth with 10 points and will take heart from a spirited performance as they look to climb the table.

Ahli got off to a flying start, exploiting a defensive lapse from the hosts. Sekou intercepted a weak back pass intended for goalkeeper Fahad Younes, before coolly finishing from the centre of the box to give the visitors a 1-0 lead.

Rayyan came close to equalising in the 15th minute when Guedes connected with a header from Gabriel Pereira's cross, but goalkeeper Marwan Badreldin pulled off a superb save. The Lions eventually found their equaliser in the 28th minute as Guedes drilled a low shot from outside the box, assisted by Abdelaziz Hatem.

However, Ahli reclaimed the lead in the 37th minute with a stunning 25-yard strike from Exposito. Assisted by Matej Mitrovic, his right-footed shot beat Younes despite the goalkeeper's full-stretch dive.

Early in the second half, Rayyan thought they had a penalty when a foul was initially awarded, but VAR overturned the call, to the frustration of the home side.

The Lions refused to back down and were rewarded in the 65th minute. Guedes tapped home from close range following an inch-perfect pass from Pereira, bringing the score level at 2-2. Minutes later, Hazem Shehata almost completed the comeback for Rayyan, but his shot rattled



Al Rayyan's Roger Guedes celebrates after scoring against Al Ahli in the Qatar Stars League at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium.



Umm Salal were held to a goalless draw by bottom-placed Al Khor at the Grand Hamad Stadium. PICTURES: Noushad Thekkayil

the woodwork.

In the dying moments of the match, Rayyan squandered a golden chance to snatch victory. Achraf Bencharki found himself unmarked in the box, but his left-footed shot sailed over the bar, ensuring both teams settled for a draw.

Earlier, Al Shahania scored a valuable

2-0 win over Al Shamal at the Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium. Pelle van Amersfoort (22nd minute-penalty) and substitute Abdulrahman Masoud (83rd minute) got the goals for the winners in a fast-paced clash.

Shamal were reduced to 10 men in the 59th minute after Mohamed Naceur Manai was sent off following a rough tackle against Lotfi Majder. Their second win of the campaign took Shahania to ninth place with eight points, while Shamal are seventh on 10 points.

Shahania held the upper hand right through. They attacked from the word go and in the 17th minute Francesco Antonucci made a telling kick but it was saved

by a flying Shamal goalkeeper Babacar Seck.

Soon, Shahania's Marc Muniesa struck again but Seck averted the shot again. The following action saw a goal-mouth melee and this time Shamal's Manai landed his kick on the groin of Mohamed Bader Sayyar. A VAR check saw the referee call for the penalty and Amersfoort saw his side take the lead.

Nine minutes later, Shamal won a free-kick not far from the striking zone but they couldn't gain advantage from it. On the counter, Shahania's Alhassan Koroma attacked the rival den but his kick saw the ball go wide to the left of the goal.

Shahania resumed in the second session with renewed vigour and in the 46th minute Majder essayed a powerful kick, after he beat two defenders, from just outside the box but it was well saved by Seck.

Shamal tried to push for an equaliser with Baghdad Bounedjah working hard but their efforts were spoiled by good Shahania defence. After Manai was shown the red card, the task became even harder.

Meanwhile, Shahania repeatedly kept making forays and were rewarded with a second goal as Antonucci sent across a long high ball from the right for Abdulrahman to make a perfect header from the left into the right corner.

Meanwhile, at the Grand Hamad Stadium Umm Salal were held to a goalless draw by bottom-placed Al Khor. A win would have taken Umm Salal to third spot, instead they stay sixth with 11 points, while Al Khor, who are yet to register a win, are on four points.

Umm Salal seemed to be the better of the two sides from the get-go, as more of the chances fell to them, while Al Khor were put on the backfoot, being forced to defend for most of the early minutes.

Umm Salal's Oussama Tannane had the first major opportunity in the 13th minute, but the Moroccan shot wide.

Al Khor came out of the dugout more determined than they were in the first half and they clearly showcased a team who were bent on leaving the stadium with at least a point. Al Khor's Yohan Boli had his right-footed shot from very close range, following a sublime assist by Ahmed Reyad, saved in the top centre of the goal.

With the time running out and the match seemed stalemated, Umm Salal were reduced to 10 men in the 85th minute, with Kenji Gorre getting the marching orders for violent conduct.

Despite their numerical advantage, Al Khor were unable to capitalise on it as The Orange Fortress ensured that the match ended with the spoils shared, ensuring that Al Khor's search for their first win of the season continues.

FOCUS

Curtain falls on 85th FIG Congress in Doha

The 85th Congress of the International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) concluded successfully in Doha after three productive days, bringing together over 500 officials from 157 member federations to advance the future of gymnastics.

The event, hosted by the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) and the Qatar Gymnastics Federation (QGF), welcomed FIG President Morinari Watanabe, First Vice-President Ali al-Hitmi, and senior FIG and Member Federation representatives. Delegates approved a comprehensive four-year financial plan (2025-2028) aimed at supporting FIG's strategic objectives. Central to this plan are initiatives to host World Championships across all gymnastics disciplines, expand the "Gymnastics for All" movement, streamline global competition management, and enhance educational and developmental opportunities for athletes, coaches, and officials.

Among the Congress highlights were detailed reports from the Independent Ethics Foundation for Gymnastics and the FIG Solidarity Foundation, reinforcing commitments to athlete protection and governance standards.

Updates were also presented from the Association of Summer Olympic International Federations (ASOIF), with discussions encompassing proposed amendments to FIG statutes. Notably, Congress participants endorsed the official recognition of "paragymnastics", marking a milestone with new regulations paving the way for dedicated competitions and a rebranding initiative which will see the launch of a new FIG logo.

At the FIG Awards Ceremony, honorary FIG vice-presidents and distinguished members were recognised, with several receiving silver and bronze distinctions for their service. QGF executives Abeer al-Buainain, Mohamed al-Maraghi, and Essa al-Hitmi were also acknowledged for their contributions to organising the



FIG President Morinari Watanabe (left) and First Vice-President Ali al-Hitmi (right) felicitated Qatar Gymnastics Federation's officials for their contributions to organising the FIG Congress in Qatar.

Congress, setting a high standard for future gatherings and solidifying Qatar's position as a hub for international sports events.

First Vice-President al-Hitmi praised the Congress' outcomes, emphasising its role in strengthening the global impact of gymnastics. "The Congress achieved significant progress on regulatory matters, budget approvals, and initiatives that advance gymnastics on the world stage," he said.

Reflecting on his re-election, al-Hitmi hailed it as a win for Qatar and the Arab region, expressing gratitude to the QOC and its President HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, for their unwavering support.

Noha Abu Shabana, Chair of FIG's Rhythm

mic Gymnastics Technical Committee, also celebrated Qatar's successful organization of the Congress. She noted that the event saw the largest attendance in FIG history, addressed essential technical and strategic priorities, and held pivotal elections for the coming term.

Thailand was selected to host the next FIG Congress in 2026, and Jakarta, Indonesia, as the venue for the 2025 Artistic Gymnastics World Championships.

The Congress concluded with a renewed commitment to FIG's mission, setting a progressive course for gymnastics' global growth. The Qatar Olympic Committee reaffirms its dedication to supporting FIG's mission and advancing gymnastics in Qatar and worldwide.

SPOTLIGHT

Director of refereeing at FIFA attends QSL games

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Massimo Busacca, FIFA Director of Refereeing, attended the matches of Ooredoo Stars League in Doha yesterday.

A former football referee, Swissman Busacca is currently in Doha on a week-long visit at the invitation of the Referees Department and the Referees Committee of the Qatar Football Association, headed by Hani Taleb Ballan, to attend and follow the activities of Qatar Football Association's Referees Department and to closely follow the Qatari referees.

Busacca was present with Ballan at the Al Shamal vs Al Shahaniya match at the Suhaim Bin

Hamad Stadium at Qatar Sports Club, and later also watched the Al Rayyan vs Al Ahli match at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium.

Busacca will also be attending the analytical meetings of QFA's Referees Committee with local referees to analyse and explain, and will be also present for some practical applications for referees. He will also participate in advising and guiding referees with his vast experience in the world of refereeing.

Busacca's visit to Doha comes within the framework of joint cooperation and the strong relationship between the Referees Department of the Qatar Football Association and the Referees Department of FIFA, to provide all means of guidance for development of referees and the system as a whole.



Chairperson of QFA's Referees Committee Hani Taleb Ballan (left) with Massimo Busacca, FIFA Director of Refereeing, at the Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday.

FOCUS

India humbled at home again by NZ for rare series defeat

Reuters
Pune

India's proud streak of not losing a home Test series since 2012 came to an abrupt end yesterday in a humiliating 2-0 defeat by New Zealand, who exposed cracks in the hosts' vaunted batting line-up by tormenting them with pace and then spin. The alarm bells will be ringing for India before they embark on a gruelling five-match tour of Australia next month, with the team's form under the microscope after they were bowled out for 245 in Pune and suffered a 113-run defeat. While spinner Mitchell Santner took six wickets for a match haul of 13 to spell doom on a turning pitch, the hosts were left in tatters by New Zealand's pace bowlers in overcast conditions in the series opener at Bengaluru.

"It's a really special feeling. Very proud to be in this position," said new permanent skipper Tom Latham, who took over from Tim Southee after a 2-0 defeat in Sri Lanka. "It's not just me but a team effort... I'm stoked for the guys. It's really special!"

India continue to top the World Test Championship standings de-

spite the two defeats but will be less confident about a spot in next year's final after their first series loss on home soil since falling to England in 2012. Their run of 18 successive home series wins since that 2-1 humbling was snapped by the inspired Black Caps, who were by far the better side and will target a clean sweep heading to the finale in Mumbai on Friday.

Man-of-the-match Santner ended with 6-104, earning the Black Caps a maiden series victory in India, and they achieved the feat without their best batsman Kane Williamson due to a groin issue.

With spin dominating on the black-soil turner at Maharashtra Cricket Association Stadium, it was fitting that Ajaz Patel took the final two wickets, including Ravindra Jadeja for 42, to seal the victory. New Zealand became only the fourth team to win a Test series in India since 1990 after South Africa, Australia and England.

"When you come over here, you always want to compete," Latham added. "Santner in the first innings was fantastic. To get a break and bowl the way he did, credit must go to him."

India's highest successful run chase at home was the 387-4 they scored to beat England in Chennai



New Zealand's Tom Blundell (left), captain Tom Latham (second from left), Mitchell Santner (second from right) and Daryl Mitchell celebrate after their win against India on the third day of second Test in Pune yesterday. (AFP)

in 2008 but any hopes of a similar effort faded in the spin storm.

They made a blazing start as Yashasvi Jaiswal smacked some spectacular boundaries, but his dismissal for 77 by Santner and Rishabh Pant's shocking run out for a duck after lunch left India in deep trouble at 127-4.

Santner, who earlier removed Rohit Sharma for eight and Shubman Gill for 23, continued to trou-

ble India and trapped trump card Virat Kohli lbw for 17.

Sarfraz Khan was unable to recreate his batting heroics from the opening match, perishing for nine after missing a low delivery from Santner to hand the bowler back-to-back five-wicket hauls.

The shoulders really dropped when Washington Sundar fell for 21 to Glenn Phillips and Santner had Ravichandran Ashwin caught

for 18 as India stared down the barrel. "It's disappointing," said Rohit, who has raised eyebrows for his decision-making, including the move to bat first on a damp pitch in overcast Bengaluru.

"It's not what we expected but you've got to give credit to New Zealand. They played better than us. We failed to capitalise on certain moments in the game, we failed to respond to those chal-

lenges and sit here with this result."

Rohit, who, like Kohli, has had only one fifty in his last eight innings, called on India's batsmen to step up. "I don't think we batted well enough. To win Tests you need to take 20 wickets but the batsmen have to put runs on the board too," he said.

New Zealand were dismissed for 255 in their second innings after Latham's 86 and handy contributions lower down the order put them in a strong position. Resuming on 198-5, New Zealand trotted along nicely in the morning until Jadeja castled Tom Blundell for 41 for his first wicket of the match.

Santner, who took 7-53 to give the Black Caps the upper hand on Friday, looked to target Jadeja but misread a looped delivery from the left-arm spinner and was caught in the deep for four. Southee followed him back into the dugout, edging Ashwin to Rohit, who showed quick reflexes to pull off a superb catch.

BRIEF SCORES: NZ 259 (Conway 76, Ravindra 65, Washington 7-59, Ashwin 3-64) **and 255** (Latham 86, Phillips 48), **Washington 4-56, Jadeja 3-72** **beat India 156** (Jadeja 38, Santner 7-53, Phillips 2-26) **and 245** (Jaiswal 77, Jadeja 42, Santner 6-104) **by 113 runs.**

SPOTLIGHT

Noman and Sajid dismantle England, Pakistan win series

Pakistan's spin skills leave England to reflect on muddled approach



Pakistan's players and team officials celebrate with the series trophy after winning the third and final Test against England at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters
Rawalpindi, Pakistan

Spinners Noman Ali and Sajid Khan combined to destroy England and bowl Pakistan to a comprehensive nine-wicket victory in the deciding third Test and secure a memorable 2-1 series victory yesterday.

Pakistan had been on the ascendency since claiming a handy first-innings lead of 77 on a track where spinners from both sides dominated. Noman (6-42) and Sajid (4-69) bundled out England for a paltry 112 in their second innings to leave Pakistan needing

only 36 to win the series. Pakistan lost the wicket of Saim Ayub before wrapping up victory in the extended morning session on day three of the contest. Home captain Shan Masood hit Jack Leach for four fours in a row before smacking a six in the first ball of the next over from Shoaib Bashir to seal their victory.

"To be here and standing as the winning team, it's the most special thing for us... So many characters in this series and everyone has chipped in," Shan said.

Noman and Sajid claimed 19 of the 20 England wickets while Pakistan did not use their lone seamer Aamer Jamal in the match, in a stark indication of how spin-

friendly the surface was. Sajid, who finished with a 10-wicket match haul, was adjudged player of the series. He and Noman claimed 39 of the 40 English wickets in the last two Tests since their selection after the series opener.

Resuming on 24-3, England lost wickets at regular intervals with Noman and Sajid running through their batting line. Only Joe Root (33) looked comfortable against Pakistan's rampaging spinners and once he fell to Noman, Pakistan's victory was just a matter of time.

England captain Ben Stokes' dismissal, offering no shot to an incoming Noman delivery that trapped him lbw, summed up their

approach in the match. "We got put in some challenges in the last few games and weren't able to match those challenges," Stokes said.

"The next time we face challenges throughout the world we will have to try to match those as well." "The lads trained hard but when you get out in the middle, it can be completely different."

BRIEF SCORES: Pakistan 344 (Shakeel 134, Sajid 48*, Noman 45, Rehman 4-66, Bashir 3-129) **and 37 for 1** (Masood 23*) **beat England 267** (Smith 89, Duckett 52, Sajid 6-128, Noman 3-88) **and 112** (Root 33, Noman 6-42, Sajid 4-69) **by nine wickets.**

Masood says Pakistan need stability after famous England win

Captain Shan Masood said Pakistan need stability to build yesterday's memorable victory over England, their first home Test series win in nearly four years. Masood's team thrashed England by nine wickets in the third and final Test inside three days in Rawalpindi for a 2-1 series win. England destroyed Pakistan by an innings in the first Test, before the hosts roared back with their spinners doing most of the damage. "Like London buses they come together," a relieved Masood told reporters. "The first win came af-

ter a long time and it was backed up by a series win. It's special." Until Pakistan levelled the series in Multan last week, Masood's tenure had been tainted by a string of six successive defeats, including a 2-0 loss at home to Bangladesh. He faced loud calls for his resignation. Pakistan cricket has been struggling in all formats recently, with a revolving door of leadership overseeing chopping and changing among both players and management. "For me the biggest thing is progress," said Masood. "The Pakistan team needs stability

at the moment," he added. "But when we think that changes are necessary to put the team on a winning track, we will do so." Spinners Noman Ali grabbed 6-42 and Sajid Khan 4-69 to bowl England out for 112 in 37.2 overs. The duo did not feature in the first Test, which saw England post a record first innings score of 823 and led to the axing of star players Babar Azam and Shaheen Shah Afridi. Noman and Sajid combined for a spectacular 39 wickets in the subsequent two Tests, tearing through the England batting

and delivering a famous series triumph. "Noman and Sajid were outstanding, like they were in the second Test," said Masood. "To be here and standing as the winning team, it's the most special thing for us." Between the duo's spin wizardry across both England innings, Pakistan were buoyed by a gritty century from middle-order batter Saud Shakeel, ensuring they had vital runs to defend. "People have grown in stature," said Masood. "It's about the whole team and its spirit." (AFP)

ONE DAY INTERNATIONAL

Lewis century gifts Windies consolation victory in Sri Lanka

AFP
Pallekele, Sri Lanka

Opener Evin Lewis blazed his way to an unbeaten century to give the West Indies a consolation eight-wicket victory in yesterday's rain-hit third and final ODI against Sri Lanka.

Returning to 50-over matches after a three-year hiatus, Lewis left spectators at Pallekele in awe as the visitors reached their target of 195 with six balls to spare.

"He's an amazing player, it's great to see him back," West Indies captain Shai Hope said.

"He picked up where he left off. I am happy he scored some runs and I hope he can take that form into the next series."

The 32-year-old Trinidadian shrugged off the pain after twisting his ankle mid-innings to clock his fifth ODI hundred - a vital one for a West Indies side that had struggled against Sri Lanka's spinners all series.

He hit the winning runs with a towering six off Asitha Fernando to finish on an unbeaten 102 off 61 balls with nine fours and four sixes. Sherfane Rutherford made his third consecutive half-century in the series, already sealed 2-0 by Sri Lanka.

Together, the duo forged an unbroken 88-run partnership for the third wicket in 45 balls, showing poise and composure even as the required run rate crept above 12 per over.

Sri Lanka let several chances slip through their fingers, with dropped catches and fielding lapses that could have halted the tourists' momentum.

Successive downpours stole

over five hours from the game, reducing it to a 23-over contest.

Sri Lanka had posted 156-3 before the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern method revised the chase upwards.

"It was a bit disappointing with the way things went on today," home captain Charith Asalanka said.

"We fancied our chances when they had to chase 195. But we weren't good enough."

Kusal Mendis gave the hosts a flying start with a dazzling 19-ball fifty.

When the covers finally came off after dark, he hit four boundaries off Roston Chase in the last four balls of the over.

He twice pulled to mid-wicket, then drilled one down the ground, and deftly cut the final delivery past short third man, giving Sri Lanka the surge they needed. Mendis then humbled left-arm spinner Gudakesh Motie with back-to-back boundaries, the second of which pushed him past 4,000 career ODI runs.

He finished on an unbeaten 56 after hammering nine fours and a six.

Opener Pathum Nissanka anchored the partnership with a composed 56 off 62 balls, before he was run out by Alzarri Joseph.

The West Indies' fielding woes continued with four dropped chances blunting their efforts.

The visitors handed 17-year-old Jewel Andrew his ODI debut, making him the youngest West Indian to play the format.

BRIEF SCORES: (23 overs) **West Indies 196 for 2** (Lewis 102*, Rutherford 50*, Asitha 1-39) **beat Sri Lanka 156 for 3** (Kusal 56, Nissanka 56, Chase 1-20) **(DLS method)**



West Indies' Evin Lewis celebrates after scoring century in the third ODI against Sri Lanka at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Kandy yesterday. (AFP)

QATAR CUP BASKETBALL: AL ARABI AND AL AHLI ENTER FINAL



Defending champions Al Arabi and Al Ahli reached the final of the 12th Qatar Cup basketball tournament yesterday after defeating Al Sadd and Al Gharafa respectively at Al Gharafa Hall. With the help of Victor Dewayne Rudd's 21 points (12 rebounds, 6 assists), Al Arabi defeated Al Sadd 81-70 in the semi-final. Wael Arakji and Abdelrahman Abdelhaleem also chipped in with 16 and 17 points for the winners. Skyler Tyrone Flatten scored 22 points for Al Sadd. Earlier, Holland Woods's match-high 36 points went in vain as Al Ahli defeated record four-time champions Al Gharafa 87-86 in the first semi-final. Nedim Muslic and Mohd Yousuf Mohammed also contributed 15 and 13 points respectively. Bruce Anthony Massey Jr scored 25 points (8 rebounds and 11 assists) while Raekwon Deshawn Rogers and Omar Roushdy Abdelbaset added 20 and 18 points. The final will take place on Thursday at 6:30pm.

MOTORSPORT

Bastianini claims sprint victory at Thai Grand Prix

'Tomorrow will be a long day, different, and I hope we can do the same'

Reuters
Buriram, Thailand

Ducati's Enea Bastianini won the sprint at the Thailand Grand Prix yesterday to claim his second sprint victory of the season, ahead of world championship leader Jorge Martin and defending champion Francesco Bagnaia.

Martin's second place allowed him to narrowly increase his lead over pole-sitter Bagnaia in the championship by two points to 22 heading into today's race. Martin nearly had a dream start when he rocketed into the lead for a split second going into the first turn, but his aggression cost him as he drifted wide and fell to fifth, while Bastianini moved up to the front ahead of team mate Bagnaia.

"Believe me, I think it was the most difficult race of the season, it was so hot behind the other riders," Martin said.

"On the first lap I was braking very hard and I saw that if I released the brake I would hit someone, so I preferred to go wide and lose some positions and then from that moment on I just pushed very, very hard, recovered positions and achieved the objective today.

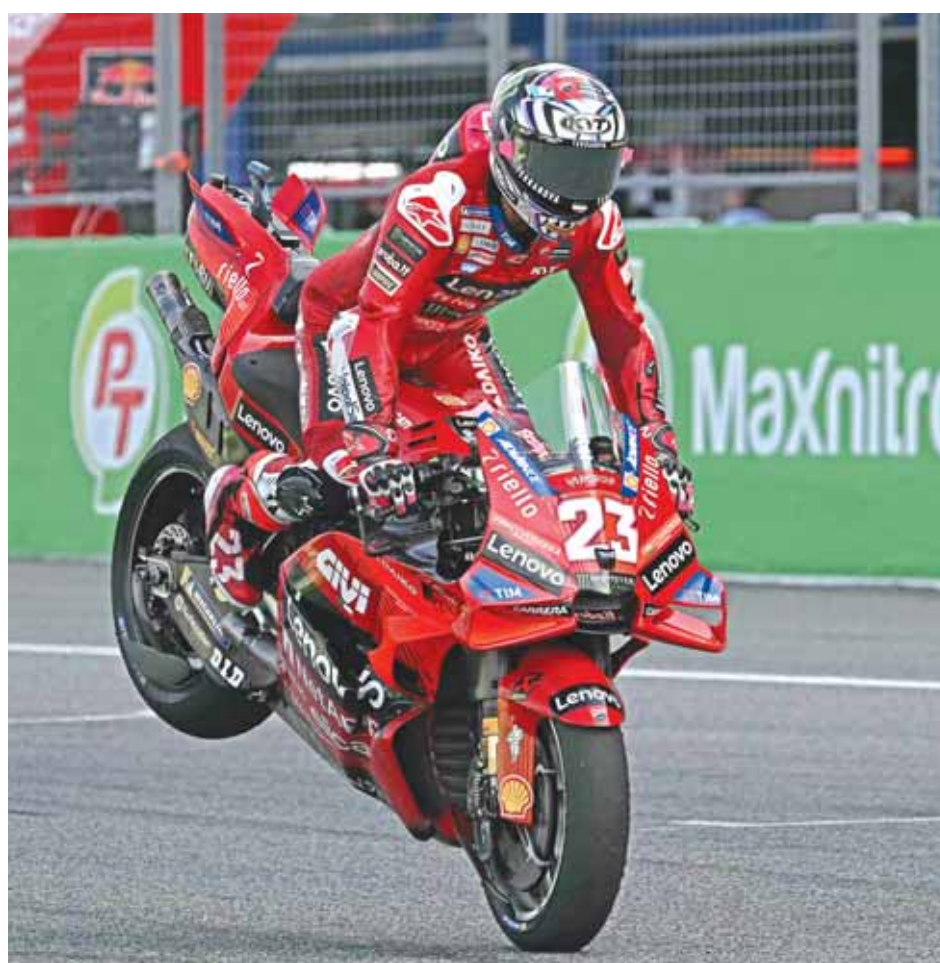
"Tomorrow will be a long day, very different, and I hope we can do the same."

Martin gradually moved back up to fourth and overtook Gresini Racing rider Marc Marquez to move in behind Bagnaia.

With Martin hot on his heels, Bagnaia did his best to hold on but he was eventually chased down in the seventh lap, though his Pramac Racing rival risked incurring a long-lap penalty after coming within centimetres of exceeding track limits.

"I started well but then I lost the positions. I was missing something, which is quite strange compared to my feeling in the other sessions," Bagnaia said. "But in any case we managed to finish third, we lost two points and we can be focused for tomorrow."

Neither of the two title rivals ever looked close to denying Bastianini the victory as the



Ducati's Italian rider Enea Bastianini celebrates after winning the Sprint race of the MotoGP Thailand Grand Prix at the Buriram International Circuit in Buriram yesterday. (AFP)

Italian built up a comfortable lead and crossed the line well ahead of Martin. Marquez and his brother Alex (Gresini) finished fourth and fifth, while Pramac Racing's Franco Morbidelli was sixth. VR46 Racing duo Marco Bezzecchi and

Fabio Di Giannantonio completed a top-eight lockout for Ducati. The penultimate race of the season takes place in Malaysia next weekend, with the season coming to a close in Valencia two weeks later.

Map Of Stars lands Listed Grand Prix Du Nord for Wathnan Racing



Map Of Stars (Sea The Stars) made a strong impression, winning his second Listed race in the Grand Prix Du Nord (Listed race) at Chantilly yesterday. Owned by Wathnan Racing and trained by Francis-Henri Graffard, the three-year-old has now won three races from four starts. In a race led by Any Moon (Sea The Moon), Map Of Stars was calmly ridden by Christophe Soumillon. Entering the final straight, the thoroughbred slowly moved up on the leaders and pulled ahead to win by a length and three quarters. Any Moon came second and Casapueblo (Le Havre) finished third. Bred by Al Asayl France, Map Of Stars is out of a Gr 1 winner Bateel (Dubawi), who is out of Gr 2 placed Attractive Crown (Chief's Crown) and a half-sister to listed winner Basemah (Lemon Drop Kid).

TENNIS

Zheng downs Shnaider to book Kenin clash

Reuters
Tokyo

Zheng Qinwen saw off a spirited challenge from Diana Shnaider to secure a hard-fought 7-6(5) 6-3 win in their Pan Pacific Open semi-final yesterday and set up a title clash against American Sofia Kenin.

Zheng sealed a spot in the final in Tokyo for a second time in her career, where she will be looking to make amends for her 2022 defeat to Liudmila Samsonova.

The Olympic champion wasted little time in the semi-final, breaking twice in quick succession to race into a 4-0 lead and put Shnaider on the backfoot, but a drop in Zheng's level gave the Russian an opportunity to claw her way back into the contest.

Shnaider won three straight games to leave the opening set at 4-3, before defending three set points to hold under pressure for

5-4 and then saving another to break Zheng's serve for a second time and level at 5-5.

Zheng recovered to force a tiebreak, where the 22-year-old won three consecutive points to take the opening set. Early in the second set, Zheng's first-serve percentage plummeted and Shnaider broke for 2-1, but the top seed broke right back and again for a 4-2 lead which she would not relinquish.

Earlier, 2020 Australian Open champion Kenin eased past British number one Katie Boulter 6-4 6-4 in just under 90 minutes to reach her first singles final since San Diego last year.

Britain's Jack Draper defeated Lorenzo Musetti of Italy to reach the Vienna ATP final, ensuring a rise to a career-high in the world rankings. Draper claimed a 6-2, 6-4 win in one hour and 49 minutes and will take on Russia's Karen Khachanov for the title.

Khachanov defeated Alex de Minaur 6-2, 6-4.

4th Qatar Breeders Cup Horse Show: Al Sraiya Stud takes top honours



Arkan Al Sraiya of Al Sraiya Stud emerged as the Gold winner of the Senior Stallions Championship while Azzam Umm Aludham, also of Al Sraiya Stud, was adjudged as best in the Senior Mares Championship of the 4th Qatar Breeders Cup Horse Show held at the indoor arena of Al Shaqab on Saturday. The other winners on the third and final day of 4th Qatar Breeders Cup were Omair Al Sraiya - in the Junior Colts Championship, Haffana Al Jassim of Al Jassim Stud was best in Junior Fillies' Championship while the Yearling Fillies' Championship class gold was won by Durra Al Khor of Al Khor Stud. The two-day 4th Qatar Arabian Horse Show for Local Bred will get underway at the same venue from Sunday. PICTURES: Juhaim

PREMIER LEAGUE

Haaland fires Man City to top, Villa held

Second-placed Liverpool can regain pole position if they beat Arsenal today

AFP
London

Erling Haaland fired Manchester City to the top of the Premier League as the striker sealed a 1-0 win against Southampton, while third-placed Aston Villa were frustrated by Bournemouth's last-gasp leveller yesterday.

Haaland had gone three league games without a goal but he ended that mini drought in the first half at the Etihad Stadium. That was enough to lift Pep Guardiola's side into first place, two points ahead of second-placed Liverpool, who can regain pole position if they win today's blockbuster clash with title rivals Arsenal.

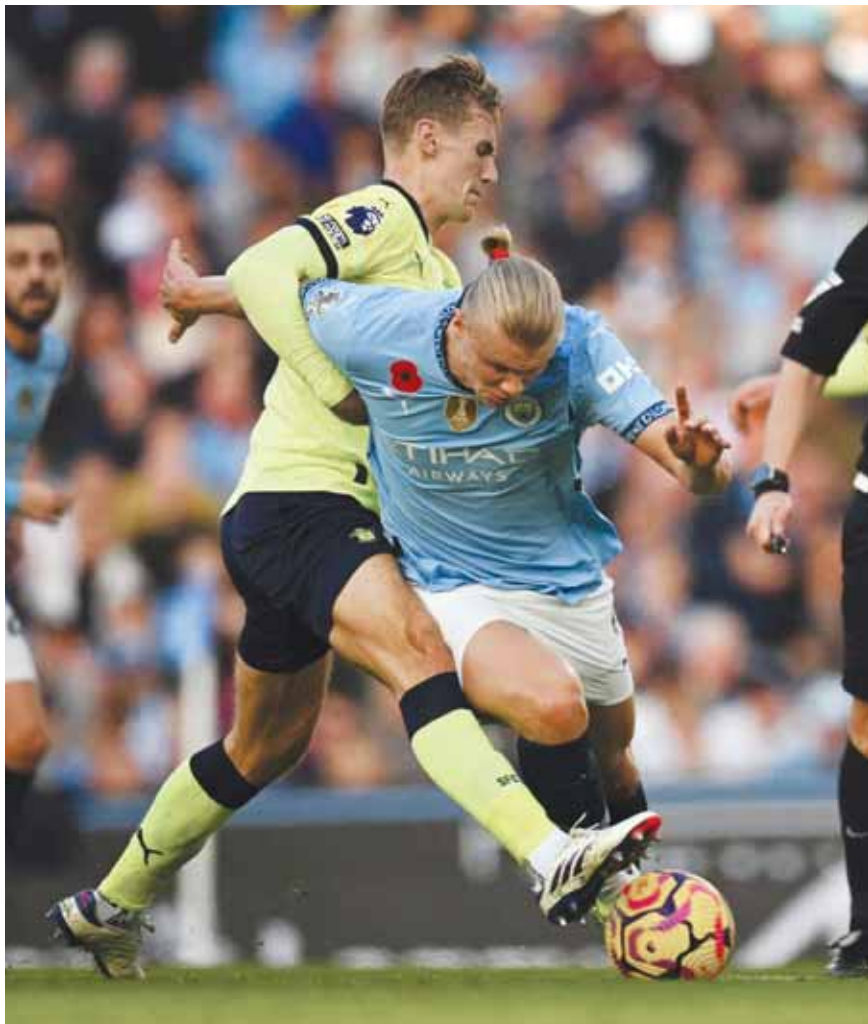
City have not lost a league game at the Etihad for two years, a run encompassing 35 games, and bottom-of-the-table Southampton, who have only one point from nine games this season, were never likely to shatter that impressive streak. With Jack Grealish and Jeremy Doku ruled out, Guardiola made four changes to the team that thrashed Sparta Prague in the Champions League on Wednesday.

Haaland had scored an audacious goal against Sparta and while his effort to kill off Southampton was more prosaic, it was arguably far more valuable given the context of a tense title race. Matheus Nunes' cross reached Haaland in the fifth minute and the Norwegian showed strength and desire to get to the ball ahead of his marker for a close-range strike.

City spurned several chances to increase their lead but Haaland's 14th goal in all competitions this season gave the unbeaten champions seven wins from nine league matches as they chase a fifth successive title. "The way Southampton played, they are so demanding. Big credit to them, it was not because we were sloppy or flat. I don't have that feeling," Guardiola said.

"We created chances and unfortunately couldn't score the second. I think we were there and sometimes they are good. We have to accept that."

Aston Villa's hopes of pushing for the



Southampton's Flynn Downes (left) tackles Manchester City's Erling Haaland during the Premier League match at the Etihad Stadium in Manchester. (AFP)

title suffered a setback as Bournemouth snatched a 1-1 draw at Villa Park. Villa are unbeaten in the Champions League, sitting top of the table after seeing off Young Boys, Bayern Munich and Bologna.

But they couldn't follow their latest Eu-

ropean success with a domestic victory despite taking the lead in the 76th minute. Ian Maatsen crossed and Leon Bailey teed up Ross Barkley to hook in his first goal for the club. But Evanilson rescued Bournemouth with a headed equaliser six minutes into

stoppage-time.

Brentford beat fourth-bottom Ipswich 4-3 in a thrilling clash in west London. Ipswich's Sam Szmodics produced a fine finish from 15 yards in the 28th minute before George Hirst clipped a composed strike past Mark Flekken three minutes later.

But Yoane Wissa netted in the 44th minute and Harry Clarke's own goal seconds later hauled Brentford level. Bryan Mbeumo's 51st-minute penalty, awarded for Clarke's foul on Keane Lewis-Potter, put Brentford 3-2 up. Capping a miserable day for Clarke, he was sent off in the closing stages after fouling Lewis-Potter to earn a second booking. Liam Delap's 86th-minute equaliser appeared to have spared Clarke's blushes, but Mbeumo snatched victory with the last kick of stoppage-time.

Second-bottom Wolves staged a superb fightback to draw 2-2 at fifth-placed Brighton. Danny Welbeck bagged his sixth goal of the season in first half stoppage-time and Evan Ferguson struck with a clinical finish from Tariq Lamptey's 85th-minute cross to leave Brighton in control.

But Rayan Ait-Nouri got one back three minutes later and Matheus Cunha saved winless Wolves from a sixth successive league defeat with a deflected equaliser deep into stoppage-time.

Everton forward Beto salvaged a 1-1 draw against Fulham as his stoppage-time header cancelled out Alex Iwobi's 61st-minute strike against his former club at Goodison Park. Although Everton are unbeaten in their last six games, they sit just three places above the relegation zone.

On Friday night, Chris Wood struck twice in Nottingham Forest's 3-1 win at Leicester as the New Zealand striker condemned Foxes boss Steve Cooper to defeat against his former club. Ryan Yates put Forest ahead in the East Midlands derby at the King Power Stadium before Jamie Vardy levelled for Leicester.

The in-form Wood restored Forest's lead and netted again with his seventh goal in nine matches this season.

Forest's second successive victory lifted them into sixth place in the Premier League.

Girona stumble to 1-0 defeat at Las Palmas

Madrid: Girona suffered a 1-0 defeat at lowly Las Palmas as a first-half goal from Alex Munoz proved decisive in La Liga yesterday.

Munoz put Las Palmas ahead three minutes before the break with a first-time strike, capitalising on a cross that sailed over the box to find him unmarked. The visitors showed little urgency in chasing an equaliser, allowing Las Palmas to control most of the match and the home side came close to doubling their lead.

As the clock ran down, Girona intensified their efforts to find a leveller but their momentum was disrupted by injury stoppages and Las Palmas secured the victory. After defying expectations to finish third last season, Girona now sit 13th with 12 points, while Las Palmas are just outside the relegation zone in 17th with nine.

NIGERIA AWARDED 3-0 WIN OVER LIBYA AFTER AIRPORT DRAMA

Nigeria have been awarded a 3-0 victory over Libya, and three vital points, from their scheduled Africa Cup of Nations qualifier earlier this month which they refused to play after being stuck in a remote Libyan airport for half a day before the match.

The disciplinary committee of the Confederation of African Football (CAF) awarded the match to Nigeria 3-0, putting them on the brink of qualifying for next year's finals as they sit top of Group D. CAF found Libya had made several breaches of its disciplinary code and must also pay a fine of \$50,000.

The three points took Nigeria to 10 with two matches left to play, four ahead of second-placed Benin and five ahead of Rwanda. Libya have a single point from four games and are in last place.

The top two teams in the group qualify for the 2025 finals in Morocco. Nigeria had refused to play the match in Benghazi on Oct. 15, citing mistreatment on arrival in the country some 48 hours before the scheduled kick-off.

BUNDESLIGA

Leipzig surge to top spot with comeback win

AFP
Leipzig, Germany

RB Leipzig came from behind to beat Freiburg 3-1 at home yesterday to leapfrog Bayern Munich and go top of the Bundesliga, while Borussia Dortmund's away woes continued with another defeat.

Freiburg, impressive this season under new coach Julian Schuster, scored first when Japan winger Ritsu Doan was in the perfect place to head in a Vincenzo Grifo cross. Leipzig, who looked heavy-legged after a 1-0 home defeat to Liverpool in the Champions League on Wednesday, were a goal down at half-time but equalised shortly after.

Germany defender Benjamin Henrichs, who was at fault for Freiburg's opener, cut a dangerous cross goalwards for captain Willi Orban to divert into the net. Lutsharel Geertruida put Leipzig in front after 58 minutes when he finished off a lightning-fast counter attack for his first Bundesliga goal.

Lois Openda put the home side in full control with 11 minutes remaining, again on the break - his fifth goal in eight games this season. Leipzig are now three points clear of Bayern, who play at last-placed Bochum today.

In yesterday's late game, Bayer Leverkusen were held 2-2 at Werder Bremen despite twice taking the lead. Bremen's Marvin Ducksch's 74-minute goal cancelled out Victor Boniface's opener. Leverkusen retook the lead three minutes later, Felix Agu blasting the ball into his



Leipzig's Lutsharel Geertruida (left) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Freiburg in the Bundesliga. (AFP)

own net under heavy attention from Jeremie Frimpong.

Romano Schmid's rocket from outside the box drew Bremen level again in the final minute. Unbeaten champions last season while conceding just 24 goals, Leverkusen have already shipped 14 in eight games this campaign and sit five points behind leaders Leipzig.

Just days after letting a 2-0 lead slip to lose 5-2 at Real Madrid in a rematch of last season's Champions League final, Dortmund's poor week continued with a 2-1 defeat at Augsburg despite going ahead early. As he did against Real, Dortmund winger Donyell Mendonça gave his side the lead, blasting an excellent Serhou Guirassy assist into the net after four minutes.

Augsburg were level after 25 minutes however, Alexis Claude-Maurice taking advantage of some lazy defending to waltz through the centre of the park and hit a low shot into the corner. Claude-Maurice scored five minutes into the second half, this time capitalising on an Emre Can error to slide the ball into the right-hand corner.

Dortmund were reduced to 10 men deep into stoppage time when debutant Almugera Kabar collected a second yellow for a tactical foul.

The loss leaves Dortmund seven points off top spot after just eight matches. Last season's Champions League finalists have not won away from home in the league since April.

Elsewhere, Stuttgart won 2-1 at home against promoted Holstein Kiel. Captain Deniz Undav opened the scoring 19 minutes in and El Bilal Toure, who scored a stoppage-time winner against Juventus midweek, added a stunner in the second half.

Jeff Chabot's second yellow meant Stuttgart were reduced to 10 men and Armin Gigovic cut the lead with six minutes remaining but Kiel, who lost Jann-Fiete Arp to a second yellow late, could not cut the gap further. In Hamburg, promoted St Pauli picked up a valuable point in a scoreless draw against Wolfsburg.

SERIE A

Di Lorenzo strike takes Napoli five points clear

AFP
Naples, Italy

Giovanni Di Lorenzo made sure Napoli will stay top of Serie A this weekend after firing the winner in yesterday's 1-0 win over Lecce to move his team five points clear.

Captain Di Lorenzo bundled home the only goal of a scrappy game in Naples after Scott McTominay's header from a corner was saved by Lecce goalkeeper Wladimiro Falcone, giving Napoli their fourth win in as many matches.

The Italy full-back's third goal of the season for Napoli came after he was denied in the first half when his close-range finish was rightly ruled out for offside. Napoli are comfortably ahead of second-placed Inter Milan, who host Juventus today in the biggest match to date of their league title defence.

Antonio Conte's side created little else against spirited Lecce, who remain second from bottom on five points after a fourth straight de-



Napoli's Giovanni Di Lorenzo (centre) scores against Lecce in Naples. (AFP)

feat, as Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and Matteo Politano started on the bench.

Romelu Lukaku fluffed Napoli's best chance of the match when he skied over from inside the six-yard box nine minutes after half-time, and the hosts' were panicky in the final minutes as

Lecce pushed for a leveller.

Lecce came into the match on the back of last weekend's 6-0 home hammering at the hands of Fiorentina which put coach Luca Gotti's job at risk but went toe-to-toe with Napoli and on another day could have easily left with a point.

On Tuesday, Napoli travel to the San Siro to face AC Milan, who sit fifth and will not play this weekend after yesterday's match at Bologna was postponed due to torrential rain and flooding. Bologna and its surrounding areas are still reeling from a massive downpour over last weekend which claimed the life of a 20-year-old man. Swathes of the Emilia-Romagna region in northern Italy, much of which is fertile agricultural flatland, were left under water following a second round extreme weather in a matter of weeks.

On Friday Serie A president Lorenzo Casini said the match would likely be played in February due to the two clubs' Champions League commitments and Milan's involvement in the four-team Italian Super Cup which will be played in Saudi Arabia in early January.

LIGUE 1

PSG must not be ruled by emotions against Marseille: Enrique



Reuters
Paris

Paris St Germain will not need any motivation when they play arch rivals Olympique de Marseille but the players must keep their emotions in check in what promises to be a high-octane Ligue 1 encounter, PSG boss Luis Enrique said yesterday.

Dubbed 'Le Classique', today's match between France's two most successful clubs will see reigning champions and league leaders PSG take on third-placed Marseille who are led by Italian Roberto De Zerbi and sit three points behind.

After eight games in Ligue 1, PSG are unbeaten heading into the clash at Marseille's Stade Velodrome but Luis Enrique said form rarely mattered in such matches where emotions often dictated outcomes.

"With this type of match, it doesn't matter what you've done before. There's so much tension. I'm very satisfied, we played a very good (Champions League) game against PSV Eindhoven (in a 1-1 draw). I'm very optimistic about what I'm seeing," he told reporters.

"High-voltage matches are almost the easiest, you won't have a lack of motivation. But you have to be careful not to get overly motivated, I take that into account. You need 100% motivation, not 105%. You mustn't be ruled by emotions. We're five points clear of last year, we've

started even better. AS Monaco (tied with PSG on 20 points) and Marseille are at a different level. If that continues, we'll see. It's positive for everyone, it keeps the players motivated."

De Zerbi has praised Luis Enrique, describing him as "one of the best coaches in the world" and the Spaniard returned the compliment, noting his counterpart's achievements at Brighton & Hove Albion. De Zerbi helped Brighton to qualify for European competition for the first time in the Premier League club's history with an exciting and attacking brand of football which Luis Enrique admired.

"For me, De Zerbi is an exciting coach that I followed at Brighton. He is a coach who likes to attack, we have that in common," he said. "The way he wants to dominate matches, his ability to convince his players... I had a lot of fun (watching) his Brighton team. I hope I won't have as much fun tomorrow."

PSG will come across one of their own in midfielder Adrien Rabiot, a youth product who now plays for Marseille but Luis Enrique is no stranger to crossing the divide, having played for Spanish rivals Real Madrid and Barcelona.

"My case was 25 years ago and nobody cares. I have nothing to say. It's a matter of feeling," Luis Enrique said.

"It all fits into a context. It's a logical reaction. Everyone does what they want, it would be a shame for people to judge him, it's common in football."