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# GULF TIMES SPORT



**PREMIER LEAGUE**  
City suffer first loss since December, Arsenal crash as Liverpool go top

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## Arabi beat Ahli to emerge Qatar Cup basketball champions



AI Arabi were crowned the Qatar Cup basketball champions after a convincing 74-57 victory over AI Ahli in the final at the AI Gharafa Hall yesterday. It was the fourth Qatar Cup title for AI Arabi after their triumphs in 2019, 2022 and 2023. Victor Dewayne Rod was the star for AI Arabi firing 25 points while Omar Rushdi chipped in with 15 points for AI Ahli. Qatar Basketball Federation (QBF) President Mohammed bin Saad al-Mughaiseeb presented the trophy to the winners. AI Arabi also received winners' prize of QR200,000 while AI Ahli received QR75,000 for second place. President of AI Arabi Sports Club Sheikh Tamim bin Fahad al-Thani, QBF Secretary General Saadoun Sabah al-Kuwari and QBF Assistant Secretary-General Nasser Ajjan al-Kaabi were also present during the presentation ceremony.

### QATAR INTERNATIONAL BAJA

# X-Raid Mini's Krotov and Zhiltsov snatch maiden win

Al-Balooshi and al-Noumesi win in bike and quad categories; engine issues derail al-Attiyah's hopes



Motorcycle winners with the QMMF president Abdurrahman al-Mannai and Executive Director Amro al-Hamad during the podium ceremony of the Qatar International Baja at the Katara - the Cultural Village amphitheatre.

By Sports Reporter  
Lusail

**X**-Raid Mini Team's Denis Krotov and Konstantin Zhiltsov overtook the overnight-leading Dania Akeel and Stephane Duple to snatch a first victory in an enthralling three-day Qatar International Baja yesterday. Meanwhile, MX Ride Dubai's Mohammed al-Balooshi (KTM) delivered one of the greatest rides of his career to overturn a 15-minute deficit and upstage teammate Abdullah al-Shatti and win for the second time in the motorcycle category after the Kuwaiti suffered a niggling gearbox issue. Saudi Arabia's Hani al-Noumesi (Yamaha) won the quad section.

Yesterday's action featured one stage of 251.10km that started to the east of Dukhan and wound its way through the western Qatar deserts before cutting across the country to take in the dunes near Sealine and the Inland Sea in the south. The special then turned north to finish south of the Al Udeid Air Base, east of Mesaieed.

Dania Akeel was first on the road and attempting to become the first woman ever to win a Baja-type event in the Middle

East. She had a 1min 32.9sec lead to defend but Krotov applied the pressure from the outset. It took the Mini driver over 45 minutes to catch the determined Saudi but he gained the virtual rally lead on the run southeast before the run towards the dunes and the Inland Sea.

Akeel kept Krotov in her sights for much of the stage but the X-Raid driver gave the new petrol-engined Mini JCW Rally 3.0i a maiden win by a somewhat flattering margin of 30min 06.7sec.

A delighted Krotov said: "I am very happy to come back to Qatar and take the win with the new petrol Mini. This race is very challenging and tough for the driver, co-driver and the car. I am proud that we have the first victory with X-Raid in the new car. I am sure this project has a great future. Thanks to the organisers for an amazing race. Our crew was on the podium last year and now we have won."

Cruelly, Akeel stopped shortly before the stage finish with a broken steering arm and was deprived of her second runner-up spot in as many weekends in her Overdrive Racing Toyota Hilux. She managed to make desperate emergency repairs and reached the finish in fifth place.

Her misfortune paved the way for the

Portuguese pairing of Joao Ferreira and Filipe Palmeiro to snatch second overall and vital FIA World Baja Cup points in their Can-Am Maverick XRS Turbo RR. Their Santag Racing team-mates Joao Dias and Gonçalo Reis rounded off the podium places in the second of the Can-Ams.

Czech driver Miroslav Zapletal was fourth in his self-built Ford F-150 Evo, Akeel's teammate Akira Miura finished sixth after a late time penalty for a tyre infringement and South Racing's Fernando Alvarez collected valuable FIA World Baja Cup points for finishing seventh and sixth of the registered drivers.

Eighth-placed Anja van Loon (Can-Am) won the Challenger category after Khalid al-Jafra (Taurus) incurred a late seven-minute time penalty and slipped to 10th behind Rashid al-Muhannadi.

Qatari drivers Abdulaziz al-Kuwari and Ahmed al-Kuwari were fastest on the last stage in the Challenger and SSV categories. Abdullah al-Rabban won the Stock category in his Nissan Patrol.

Engine issues prevented local hero Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah from restarting and Kuwait's Nasser al-Ajmi was also sidelined with mechanical issues.

Time penalties of two hours were



Denis Krotov and Konstantin Zhiltsov celebrate their win.

awarded to both Salem al-Dhafeeri and Abdulaziz al-Yaesh on Friday evening for running off-road tyres not fitted with FIA bar codes. Al-Yaesh also relinquished any points he would have earned in the FIA Middle East Baja Cup.

Numerous time penalties for route violations were imposed on a large number of the bike entrants before the final stage. Al-Shatti emerged unscathed and opened the stage trying to defend a lead of 7min 29.1sec over Badr al-Hamdan, after the Saudi rider's hefty overnight penalties were withdrawn yesterday because of a GPS error.

FIM Bajas World Cup title contenders, al-Balooshi, Pedro Bianchi Prata and David Megre, were classified in fifth, 11th and 19th. American rider Terrell Thien withdrew before the restart with physical fatigue and was joined on a growing list of retirements by Hanno Geysler, Mishal al-Ghuneim, Norbert Swietochowski, Han-Yeh Chiang and Karsten Hoitz.

Al-Shatti was happy for Gregor Mikl and Pole Filip Grot to pass him and lead the way after the start and the Kuwaiti rode alongside teammate al-Balooshi. The quartet ran close together on the run south with al-Shatti using the 'safety in numbers' tactic to guide him through the closing stage. FIM Veteran class rider Andrew Houlihan and Canadian Matthew Glade retired with rear tyre mousse issues. Muhamad Plicanic (Yamaha) and Frederic Fontarosa (Kove) also broke down.

After refuelling, al-Balooshi and al-Shatti pulled away from their European challengers and headed for the dunes and the Inland Sea. The Emirati then pulled clear of Grot and al-Shatti but al-Hamdan had started 36th on the road after his time penalty and was running strongly in the chasing pack until he lost time in the dunes. Briton Robert Wallace had struggled to keep his KTM running and then stopped to support Mikl, who crashed out of the Baja and was suffering from heat exhaustion.

Al-Balooshi claimed the stage win in 3hr 48min 15.8sec to earn a sensational second victory in the event. He had started the stage 15min 33.8sec behind his friend and team-mate and pulled away on the run south to beat al-Shatti by 23min 47.4sec.

Briton Alex McInnes rounded off the podium places and Pole Filip Grot and Rafic Eid finished fourth and fifth after a gruelling two-wheel event held in punishing heat.

The Portuguese duo of Pedro Bianchi Prata and David Megre kept the FIM Bajas World Cup title fight alive with sixth and seventh places but trail al-Balooshi heading to the last three rounds in Portugal, Jordan and Dubai. Isle of Man TT legend James Hillier completed the event in 10th.

Al-Noumesi fended off Abdulaziz al-Atawi to seal an emphatic victory in the quad category after lengthy delays for third-placed Abdulaziz al-Shayban on Friday.

CRICKET

# NZ lead by 143 as spin rules in seesaw third India Test

'I was honestly trying to have fun in the middle even if it was difficult - enjoy the difficult moments'

AFP  
Mumbai

New Zealand lead by 143 runs in their second innings, after Indian spinners Ravindra Jadeja and Ravichandran Ashwin triggered an opposition collapse in a keenly fought third Test yesterday.

The tourists were 171-9 on day two after Jadeja bowled Matt Henry for his fourth wicket of the innings at the stroke of stumps on a sharply turning track in Mumbai.

Ajaz Patel was batting on seven after he took five wickets to help bowl out India for 263, with the hosts taking a slender lead of 28.

New Zealand won the first two matches to seal their first-ever Test series triumph in India and now eye a 3-0 sweep. "To be honest it's (the pitch) turning quite sharply," Ajaz told reporters.

"I suppose inconsistent in terms of how much it does turn and bounce. It has started to turn from both ends and from a batting perspective that can be a challenge."

India's Shubman Gill, who hit 90, said: "It's all about one good partnership when you are chasing a total which is around 150-160. If you have one partnership about 70-80 runs the match is done and dusted."

Will Young stood out with his 51

before being caught and bowled by Ashwin, who took three wickets with his off-spin.

Fast bowler Akash Deep struck in the first over when he bowled skipper Tom Latham for one to keep up India's fight after Gill's knock. Washington Sundar sent back Devon Conway for 22, and Ashwin dispatched Rachin Ravindra for four, as New Zealand slipped to 44-3.

But Young and Daryl Mitchell put on 50 runs to resist the Indian attack, which hit back through Jadeja's left-arm spin. Jadeja got Mitchell out for 21, with Ashwin taking a stunning catch while running backwards from mid-off, and soon the bowler dismissed Tom Blundell.

Earlier Ajaz's heroics - at the same venue where he claimed all 10 wickets in a Test innings in 2021 - helped end India's reply to their 235 in the second session. Gill and overnight partner Rishabh Pant, who hit 60, stood out as they counter-attacked in a stand of 96 while Sundar smashed an unbeaten 38 off 36 balls.

"I was honestly trying to have fun in the middle even if it was difficult - enjoy the difficult moments," said Gill. "If I was to put too much pressure on myself then I am losing on the art of batting."

Off-spinner Glenn Phillips struck soon after lunch to send

back Jadeja, caught at slip for 14.

Ajaz got Sarfaraz Khan caught behind for a duck in the next over.

Gill took on the spinners with boundaries in the next few overs before Ajaz had him caught at slip.

Sundar and Ashwin took India into the lead before Ajaz got Ashwin out for his sixth career five-wicket haul.

Resuming on 86-4, the batsmen came out aggressively as India look to avoid an embarrassing whitewash on home soil. Gill survived a reprieve on 45 by substitute fielder Mark Chapman, who failed to hang on to a high catch off Phillips' bowling while running in from long-on. Gill reached his fifty with a single and Pant kept up the attack with regular boundaries to raise his half-ton in 36 balls.

**BRIEF SCORES DAY 2**  
New Zealand 235 and 171 for 9 (Young 51, Jadeja 4-52, Ashwin 3-63) lead India 263 (Gill 90, Pant 60, Ajaz 5-103) by 143 runs.

India's Washington Sundar (second from right) celebrates with Ravindra Jadeja (right) and wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant after taking the wicket of New Zealand's Devon Conway (left) during the second day of the third Test in Mumbai yesterday. (AFP)



SPOTLIGHT

## Pakistan captain Shan backs Babar to return stronger after drop

Reuters  
Melbourne

Babar Azam could benefit from a break after being dropped from the Pakistan Test squad, red-ball captain Shan Masood said as he backed the batter to rediscover his best form.

Babar stepped down as skipper in all three formats last year after Pakistan failed to make the knock-out stage of the 50-overs World Cup. He returned as white-ball captain in March for the T20 World Cup, where the team did not make the Super Eight.

The out-of-form batsman, who once again gave up the captaincy last month, was then dropped for the second and third tests against England in October after scoring just 35 runs across both innings in Pakistan's defeat in the first Test.

Babar's absence from the Pakistan set-up is set to be brief, however, with the 30-year-old named in the one-day international and Twenty20 squads for this month's tour of Australia.

Asked about Babar's future, Shan told the BBC's 'Stumped' podcast yesterday: "I think he's one of the best batsmen in the world. I'm nobody to deny him a



future. He has every quality to be one of the greatest batsmen in Test cricket.

"He's always there or thereabouts in the rankings. Sometimes, people need a break. I personally think this break will do him a great deal of benefit and he'll come back a stronger player."

"There's no harm in being pulled out at times and having a breather. He's played a lot of cricket and gone through a lot, and he'll always be one of the main batsmen to play for Pakistan."

Pakistan next play a Test in December in a two-match series against South Africa.

## Najmul to lead Bangladesh against Afghanistan after SA mauling

Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto will lead the squad in a three-match ODI series against Afghanistan to be held in Sharjah as the Tigers look to bury the misery of their Test mauling by South Africa.

Bangladesh are reeling from a drubbing by the Proteas, who thrashed them by an innings and 273 runs inside three days in the second Test at Chattogram on Thursday, to sweep the series 2-0. They lost the first Test by seven

wickets. Uncapped fast bowler Nahid Rana joins the side, while key batsman Litton Das is missing as he is still suffering from a fever, which had kept him out of the second Test against South Africa. Bangladesh sit eighth in the ICC ODI team rankings - just ahead of Afghanistan at ninth. But Afghanistan are on a high in limited overs cricket, having beaten top nations including England, Pakistan and Sri Lanka in last year's World Cup held in India. The

three ODI matches are scheduled for November 6, 9 and 11.

**Bangladesh squad:** Soumya Sarkar, Tanzid Hasan Tamim, Zakir Hasan, Najmul Hossain Shanto (capt), Mushfiqur Rahim, Mahmudullah Riyad, Tawhid Hridoy, Jaker Ali Anik, Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Rishad Hossain, Nasum Ahmed, Taskin Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman, Shoriful Islam, Nahid Rana.

(Reuters)

MOTORSPORT

## Martin takes big step towards MotoGP title as Bagnaia crashes

AFP  
Sepang, Malaysia

Jorge Martin took a major step towards his first MotoGP world title as he won the sprint race in Malaysia yesterday and rival Francesco Bagnaia crashed out.

Spain's Martin extended his championship lead to 29 points from 17, with just the grand prix on Sunday at Sepang and one more race weekend to go.

It was a bitter blow for Italian two-time reigning champion Bagnaia, who started on pole but came off his Ducati early on to gift a big advantage to Martin.

Pramac Ducati's Martin romped home nearly a second ahead of six-time world champion Marc Marquez and can seal the title on Sunday if he earns nine more points than Bagnaia.

"I think last year I wasn't ready to win," said the 26-year-old Martin, who came second in the title race behind his rival last year.

"This season I am more mature. It is a privilege to be here at this point with this advantage, but nothing is over till it's over." Light rain fell at a sweltering Sepang five minutes before the start of the 10-lap sprint, adding to the tension on the grid.

Bagnaia started on pole with Martin alongside him on the front row, only for the Spaniard to seize the lead at the first corner.



Prima Pramac Racing's Spanish rider Jorge Martin celebrates after winning the sprint race of the MotoGP Malaysian Grand Prix at the Sepang International Circuit in Sepang yesterday. (AFP)

With eight laps to go and pushing hard, Bagnaia lost control of his Ducati at turn nine and slid out. He was unhurt but had his head in his hands.

"I entered the corner a bit slower but I touched the back on the apex of the corner and I lost the front," said the 27-year-old.

"It's something that can happen, but all the risk I was taking to fight back with Jorge wasn't over the limit."

Bagnaia dominated Friday's practice and clocked a track record to grab pole for the sprint and the grand prix today, when 25 points are up for grabs for the winner.

"I think Pecco will risk a lot

tomorrow to win," Martin said of the Italian.

"So to beat him in these conditions is really tough.

"He has nothing to lose now. It's all or nothing."

The season finale had been scheduled for Valencia in a fortnight but it was cancelled Friday after deadly flooding in that part of Spain.

Organisers are rushing to find a replacement venue.

A minute's silence was held in Sepang before the sprint race to remember the more than 200 dead.

"Right now all my prayers are for Valencia and people at home," said Martin.

## CHERIF CONTINUES HER BRILLIANT RUN AT HATHAB



Cyrene Cherif continued her domination in the Big Tour securing the top two spots yesterday as fourth round of Longines HATHAB concluded at outdoor arena of the Qatar Equestrian Federation (QEF). The Qatar-based French rider clocked a flawless 67.22 secs with Triple T Calamando Blue to claim first position while her time of 68.52 secs with Van Gallettana Z lent her second position. Khalid Mohammed al-Emadi, who received four penalty points in his round of 63.55 secs with Chikita was third. Director of the First Equestrian Team Fahad Rashid al-Amri crowned the podium winners of Big Tour. In the Open Class, Faris Saad al-Qahtani teamed up with Hidene to clinch victory with a time of 42.15 secs. Riding Calgary VD Haterbeek Z, Ali Saeed al-Misned was second in 44.62 secs. Jassim al-Jaham al-Kuwari had to be content with third position after he completed the course in 46.06 secs with Cesar Des Marquets. Vice-President of Al Khor Club Mohammed Mubarak al-Mohannadi honoured the podium winners of Open Class.

TENNIS

# Zverev to face Humbert in Paris Masters final

AFP  
Paris

Germany's Alexander Zverev outserted Holger Rune in the semi-finals of the Paris Masters yesterday to book his place in the final, where he will take on France's Ugo Humbert.

Zverev's 6-3, 7-6 (7/4) win against the Dane sent the 27-year-old to his second ATP 1000-level final of the season after his victory in Rome in May. World number 18 Humbert, who downed world number two Carlos Alcaraz in the last 16, overcame Russian Karen Khachanov 6-7 (6/8), 6-4, 6-3 after the 2018 Paris champion suffered a thigh injury in the final set.

"I feel like I made it a little difficult for myself but he (Rune) is a champion," said Zverev.

Zverev previously made the

Paris final in 2020 but lost in three sets to Daniil Medvedev. For 2022 champion Rune, the loss put an end to his outside hopes of reaching the ATP Finals in Turin, which run from November 10-17.

Zverev, standing at 198cm, relied on his big first serve and the speed of the surface at Paris' Bercy Arena to carry him through his service games.

Rune, on the other hand, misfired regularly on his first serve and lacked fluency with his groundstrokes as he gave the German a 3-1 lead in the first set.

The 21-year-old then raced to 15-40 in the next game but was again let down by his backhand as he sent two shots long and an attempted pass wide as Zverev recovered to consolidate. Despite leading 4-1, the 2024 French Open runner-up was also unconvincing from behind the baseline as the unforced errors accumulated



Germany's Alexander Zverev plays a backhand return to Denmark's Holger Rune during their Paris Masters semi-final yesterday. (AFP)

for both players. However, Zverev could always rely on his serving to carry him through as he claimed the first set. Neither Rune nor Zverev challenged on serve at the beginning of the second set, with both holding to love or 15 until the seventh game. At 3-3, Zverev pounced to take a 40-0 lead and

he broke Rune with a powerful inside-out forehand that set him up to finish easily at the net. The third seed now seemed in total control of the match and consolidated the break with a hold to love. But the resilient Rune defied expectation by suddenly breaking Zverev when the German was serving for the

match. As the pressure mounted, both responded by upping their level and winners flew off both racquets as Rune eventually held a gripping game at 5-5, which had lasted 17 minutes. Zverev then served out comfortably to set up a tiebreak. Errors again crept into Rune's play and Zverev got an early mini-break, which he defended to book his spot in the final.

In the day's second semi-final, France's Humbert exchanged early breaks of serve with Khachanov as both players started nervously in front of a packed partisan crowd.

The decisive moment in the set had seemed to come when the 26-year-old Frenchman played three poor shots at 4-4 to hand Khachanov the chance to serve out the opener.

However, Humbert showed fight and forced his opponent into an error-strewn game as he levelled immediately, and the set

ticked towards a tiebreak. Humbert double-faulted when serving at 5-2 in the breaker, before dragging a backhand into the net as Khachanov wiped out the Frenchman's mini-breaks.

The 28-year-old won four consecutive points until he smashed long on his first set point, but managed to seal the tiebreak second time round when Humbert overhit. Humbert got the break he needed in the second set to go 3-2 ahead and kept his nose in front to serve out, even hitting an ace on set point after being given a time violation. Khachanov called for a medical time-out to receive treatment on his thigh at 3-2 in the deciding set, his movement afterwards becoming visibly very limited. And Humbert took full advantage as he pushed the Russian back and forth across the baseline as he won four consecutive games to reach a career-first Masters final.

WTA FINALS

# Sabalenka mows down Zheng for winning start

Paolini defeats Rybakina for milestone 40th win of the year

AFP  
Riyadh

World number one Aryna Sabalenka commenced her WTA Finals campaign in Riyadh yesterday with a fifth victory in as many meetings against Olympic champion Zheng Qinwen of China, racing to a 6-3, 6-4 victory.

Facing off for the fifth time in the last 14 months, Sabalenka and Zheng opened the action at the first ever professional women's tennis tournament in Saudi Arabia in front of a near capacity crowd at King Saud University Indoor Arena.

The Belarusian top seed needed just one hour and 24 minutes to defeat Zheng, dropping a mere two points behind her first serve throughout the contest. A runner-up at the WTA Finals in Texas two years ago, Sabalenka is eyeing a maiden trophy at the prestigious season finale, which would also guarantee her the year-end number one ranking.

"It's going to mean everything for me, that's one of my dreams and I really worked hard in the past years and I really hope that one day I'll be able to hold this beautiful trophy," said 26-year-old Sabalenka on court.

"Qinwen is such a great player and we always had great battles against each other. She's playing really aggressive tennis. I'm super happy with the win, especially against such a tough opponent.

"I think I served really well today and I put her under so much pressure on her serve. So I think



Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka serves against China's Zheng Qinwen during their WTA Finals match in Riyadh yesterday. (AFP)

my serve helped me tonight."

Very little separated the players in the opening set as both dominated the points behind their first serves, Sabalenka winning 18/19 and Zheng winning 13/16.

But it was the second serve where Sabalenka found an edge, and after she saved a break point in the third game, the top seed broke for a 4-2 advantage and sealed a one-set lead in 39 minutes.

With Chinese supporters representing the majority of the crowd and rallying behind their Olympic hero, Zheng was near clinical through the first eight games of the second set. But Sabalenka upped the ante in game nine, con-

verting her second break point opportunity to inch ahead and she closed out the win on her own serve minutes later.

In a bizarre incident, Sabalenka had to wait at the net for a short moment before Zheng realised she had actually lost the match.

Sabalenka, a three-time Grand Slam champion, has now won her last seven consecutive matches against top-10 opposition.

Zheng acknowledges there are things she must improve ahead of her next group match but was happy she could finally face Sabalenka "like a usual opponent", so it was positive things for me."

The world number seven had

her right thigh taped during the match and revealed she felt pain in her leg two days ago.

"For the moment I'm not that concerned but we'll see how it goes in the next two matches," said the 22-year-old.

After her match, Sabalenka got to meet Brazil football ace Neymar, who performed the coin toss for the next clash between Jasmine Paolini and Elena Rybakina.

Neymar, who plays for Saudi club Al Hilal, gifted Sabalenka a signed jersey and took pictures with her before returning to the stadium to catch the rest of the action.

"It's cool, right? He watched my match and it's a pleasure that such big players come to watch me play. I was super happy to see him," said Sabalenka.

WTA Finals debutante Paolini claimed her third win in five encounters with Rybakina with a 7-6 (7/5), 6-4 performance. It was a milestone win in a breakthrough season for Paolini, too—it was the Italian's 40th win of the year.

Paolini, who also beat Rybakina in the French Open quarter-finals this season, is at a career-high ranking of number four after reaching two major finals in 2024, in Paris and Wimbledon.

"It's amazing, I'm really happy with the win today. All tough matches here and Elena is playing unbelievable. It's good to see her back on tour!" said Paolini.

Rybakina, who has dealt with insomnia, allergies, and a back injury in recent months, was playing her first match since she withdrew ahead of her US Open second round 10 weeks ago.

CYCLING

# Cavendish coy on future as Girmay wins in Japan

AFP  
Japan

Cycling great Mark Cavendish refused to discuss his future amid hints that he could reverse his decision to retire, after finishing third behind Biniam Girmay at yesterday's Tour de France Saitama Criterium in Japan.

The 39-year-old Cavendish, the record stage winner on the Tour with 35, is set to compete in the final race of his storied career next week in Singapore.

But he said last week that he "will see" about racing in next year's Tour de France, explaining that he "saw things a bit differently" despite previously vowing not to compete in it again.

When asked if the Singapore race would definitely be his last, the British rider said: "I'm here in Saitama.

"I'm not here to talk about my future, I'm here to talk about the Saitama Criterium."

Cavendish finished third in driving rain in Japan after a furious finish that saw Eritrea's Girmay pip Slovenia's Primoz Roglic at the finish.

Roglic, who won the Vuelta a Espana for a record-equalling fourth time in September, broke away from the pack with around 3km to go.

Girmay, who became the first African to claim the Tour de France's green jersey for most sprint points in this year's race, reeled him in to win ahead of Roglic and Cavendish, with Belgium's Jasper Philipsen fourth.

"That's one of the nicest finishes for me," said Girmay.

"I just went all-out for the finish line."

Fans lined the street circuit despite constant rain in Saitama, north of Tokyo.

Girmay, who signed a contract extension with his Inter-marche-Wanty team after his Tour de France success, was cheered on by a small group of Eritrean fans.

"If you win it's always special," said the 24-year-old.

"It doesn't matter if you win yesterday, if you win today that's always the best feeling."

Spain's Roger Adria did not finish after a crash with two other riders midway through the race.

Australia's Ben O'Connor withdrew beforehand after crashing in the time trial.

## Juventus back to winning ways with 2-0 victory over Udinese

An own goal by Maduka Okoye and Nicolo Savona's strike earned Juventus a 2-0 win at Udinese in Serie A yesterday, as the visitors snapped a three-game winless run in all competitions.

Following a Champions League defeat and two league draws, Juve remained unbeaten in Serie A and provisionally moved up to third on 21 points, level on points with second-placed Inter and four behind leaders Napoli, both with a game in hand.

Thiago Motta's side dominated from early on and took the lead in the 19th minute when Khephren Thuram's shot struck the far post before bouncing off Udinese goalkeeper Okoye's back and into his own net. Savona doubled the lead when he slammed home a loose ball after another rebound off the post from Kenan Yildiz's shot in the 37th minute.

The hosts tried to be more dangerous after the break, but were unable to pose any real threat, with Lorenzo Lucca's header hitting the crossbar late on the closest they came to score.

The defeat leaves Udinese seventh on 16 points, three points shy of European football spots. (Reuters)

FORMULA 1

# Norris wins Brazil sprint as Verstappen demoted to fourth

AFP  
Sao Paulo

Lando Norris trimmed three points off Max Verstappen's lead in the world championship yesterday after claiming victory ahead of his McLaren team-mate Oscar Piastri in the sprint race at the Brazilian Grand Prix.

The title-chasing Briton took the lead on lap 22 of the 24-lap race, when Piastri swapped positions with him before fending off the challenge of three-time champion Verstappen in his Red Bull.

Norris, 24, came home 0.593 seconds clear of Piastri who finished 1.5 seconds ahead of the Dutchman with Charles Leclerc finishing fourth.

However, Verstappen was later demoted a place by the stewards for breaking virtual safety car rules.

Norris admitted he was for-

tunate to collect his first career sprint race win. "I'm not proud of it, but it worked well and as a team we had a good day - and thanks to Oscar," said Norris.

"He deserved to win, but it was good team work and we had great pace. And we executed it well."

Verstappen now leads Norris by 44 points with four race weekends left. "It was a tricky race," said Verstappen who will already start Sunday's race with a five-place grid penalty after the engine was changed on his Red Bull.

He added he would be aiming to "limit the damage" to his title defence in Sunday's race.

McLaren's one-two success lifted them 35 points clear of Ferrari in the constructors' championship and ended Verstappen's run of four consecutive sprint wins this year.

Piastri said it had been a terrific day for the team.

"It was tricky and very bumpy out there and the racing line is



McLaren's British driver Lando Norris crosses the finish line of the sprint race at the Jose Carlos Pace racetrack in Sao Paulo, Brazil, yesterday. (AFP)

very narrow, but it was a great day for the team to score a lot of points," said the Australian.

"We showed we are in decent shape."

Carlos Sainz was fifth for Ferrari while George Russell came home sixth for Mercedes ahead of Alpine's Pierre Gasly and Ser-

gio Perez in the second Red Bull, who collected the final point in eighth.

The race began in hot conditions with an air temperature of 28 degrees Celsius and the track at 47, making it tough on tyres.

The two McLarens made a clean start, Piastri covering off

the threat of Norris while Leclerc resisted Verstappen's early attack for third at the Senna S.

Norris was clearly unhappy to be running a second adrift of his McLaren team-mate, asking his team to request Piastri to move aside, but without avail until lap 10 when he was asked to "give

Lando DRS" - a signal to switch places. But Norris remained stuck in second in Piastri's dirty air as he attempted to make his move, the top four staying in place at half distance in the 24-lap sprint.

By lap 17, tyre-wear was affecting several cars and Norris remained six-tenths adrift.

The team told him "we're happy to make the switch on the last lap," shortly before Verstappen, with Drag Reduction System (DRS) and superior pace, swept past Leclerc on the straight.

McLaren finally made their swap on lap 22, leaving Piastri vulnerable in second to the charging Verstappen before a VSC was deployed with two laps to go.

Verstappen, who closed very near to Piastri, immediately complained that he was running too slowly before the race went 'green' again for a final flying lap.

Qualifying for the Grand Prix was scheduled to take place later on Saturday amid fears of rain.

**WORLD PADEL CHAMPIONSHIPS**

# Argentina men retain title, sixth women's title in a row for Spain

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Argentina claimed the men's title while Spain secured the women's title at the FIP World Padel Championships in Doha yesterday.

At a packed Khalifa Tennis & Squash Complex, the Argentine men successfully defended their title, coming back from a match down to defeat Spain 2-1 in a thrilling final, avenging the earlier loss of their female counterparts.

In the decisive match, Leandro Augsburger and Valentín Gomez Libaak triumphed over Miguel Yanguas and Francisco Navarro in a gripping three-set battle, finishing 3-6, 7-5, 7-6, igniting celebrations in the Argentine camp.

Spain initially took the lead when Arturo Coello and Javier Nieto delivered a convincing 6-1, 6-2 win against Franco Stupaczk and Martín Di Nenzo.

However, Argentina quickly levelled the score in the second match, with Agustín Tapia and



Argentina and Spain (right) players celebrate after winning titles at Khalifa Tennis & Squash Complex yesterday.

Federico Chingotto – ranked second and fourth in the world – defeating Juan Lebron and Alejandro Galan 7-6, 3-6, 6-2. Augsburger

and Libaak then held their nerve to secure a memorable victory for Argentina.

Earlier, Spain's women's team



claimed their sixth consecutive title and ninth overall with a 2-0 victory over Argentina in an emotional final. Players wore black ribbons to honour the victims of the Valencia floods, adding a sombre note to the celebration.

Spain took the lead after Gemma Triay and Claudia Fernández defeated Virginia Riera and Julieta Bidahorra 6-3, 6-2. Argentina fought back in the second match,

with Delfi Brea and Claudia Jensen winning the first set against Paula Josemaria and Ari Sanchez and leading 5-4 in the second set.

However, Josemaria and Sanchez rallied to win, sealing Spain's victory with three consecutive games.

"It was a very tough match, but we are an incredible team and we showed that throughout the week," said Sánchez. "At the most

important moment, we brought out all our qualities."

"Especially in the first set, the match was really tough," added Josemaria.

"We suffered, but we focused on putting as many balls in play as possible. Congratulations to Argentina for pushing us to our limits; we want to dedicate this win to the victims of the flood in Valencia."

**PREMIER LEAGUE**

# City suffer first loss since December, Liverpool go top

Arsenal hopes hit by Newcastle defeat, Southampton beat Everton 1-0

AFP  
London

Manchester City suffered their first Premier League loss since December as Bournemouth stunned the champions, while Arsenal were rocked by Newcastle and Liverpool seized top spot yesterday.

City were unbeaten in their previous 32 league games dating back to a defeat at Aston Villa last year. But Pep Guardiola's second-placed side saw that streak come to an unexpected end in a 2-1 loss on England's south coast. The Cherries had never beaten City in their 21 previous meetings, losing 19 of those matches, yet Andoni Iraola's team sprang a huge upset to derail the champions' push for a fifth successive title. Bournemouth recently damaged Arsenal's title hopes with a 2-0 win at the Vitality Stadium and they inflicted pain on City as well.

Guardiola had claimed City faced an injury "emergency" after they suffered fitness problems in Wednesday's League Cup defeat at Tottenham. But Manuel Akanji, Kyle Walker and Josko Gvardiol all started against Bournemouth after injury doubts, with Kevin De Bruyne, Savinho and Jeremy Doku fit enough to be named among the substitutes.

Exhausted or not, City were rocked in the ninth minute when Bournemouth winger Antoine Semenyo drilled Milos Kerkez's cross past Ederson from inside the area. Guardiola's men were unable to muster a response to that blow and Evanilson doubled Bournemouth's lead in the 64th minute with a composed finish from Kerkez's cross.

Gvardiol's header reduced the deficit in the 82nd minute, but it was too late to save City from a sec-



AFC Bournemouth's Evanilson celebrates with teammates after scoring their second goal against Manchester City yesterday. (Reuters)

ond defeat in four days. Newcastle put a huge dent in fourth-placed Arsenal's title aspirations with a 1-0 win at St James' Park. Alexander Isak netted in the 12th minute, heading home Anthony Gordon's pinpoint cross. Injury-hit Arsenal struggled to get out of first gear and produced just one shot on target in the entire game.

Mikel Arteta's team, runners-up to City for the past two years, have taken just one point from

their last three games as their push for a first title since 2004 was derailed by a second league defeat this term.

"Today we weren't our best version. It's about how you react to that. We're not going to find the right words or answers to describe how we feel," said Arteta, whose side are seven points adrift of first place. At Anfield, Liverpool were in danger of a surprise loss of their own before regrouping to take ad-

vantage of their rivals' stumbles with a 2-1 win over Brighton. Ferdi Kadioglu gave Brighton the lead in the 14th minute with a fierce strike that cannoned in off the post after Danny Welbeck flicked on Kaoru Mitoma's cross.

But Liverpool had beaten Brighton in the League Cup last 16 in midweek and they repeated the trick thanks to a late revival.

Cody Gakpo bagged the equaliser in the 70th minute with a cross that looped straight into the net. Two minutes later, Mohamed Salah put Liverpool ahead, the Egypt forward curling a fine finish into the top corner for his ninth goal this season. In Arne Slot's first season in charge, Liverpool are two points clear of City after their eighth win in 10 league games.

Nottingham Forest are up to third place after beating 10-man West Ham 3-0 to make it three consecutive top-flight victories for the first time since 1999.

Chris Wood grabbed his eighth goal in 10 league games as the New Zealand striker headed home after 27 minutes. West Ham had Edson Alvarez sent off in first half stoppage-time for two bookings. Callum Hudson-Odoi struck in the 65th minute and Ola Aina sealed the points 12 minutes from full-time at the City Ground.

Jordan Ayew's stoppage-time equaliser denied Ipswich their first top-flight win since 2002 as Leicester rescued a 1-1 draw at Portman Road. Leif Davis's 55th minute volley put Ipswich ahead but the hosts had Kalvin Phillips sent off in the 77th minute.

Ayew levelled with seconds left to leave third-bottom Ipswich winless after 10 games.

Second-bottom Southampton earned their first league win this season as Adam Armstrong's 85th minute strike sealed a 1-0 success against Everton.

**FOCUS**

# PSG extend lead atop of Ligue 1 with win over Lens

AFP  
Paris

Paris Saint-Germain opened up a six-point gap over second-placed Monaco in Ligue 1 with a 1-0 home win over Lens yesterday.

A single Ousmane Dembele goal was enough for PSG to take full advantage of title rivals Monaco's latest stutter after the principality side lost at home to lowly Angers on Friday.

Luis Enrique's side sit top of the table on 26 points, six ahead of Monaco with third-place Lille a further two points adrift.

For Will Still's Lens, they remain just outside the European spots in seventh place with 14 points.

The champions swept into the lead on four minutes as Dembele tucked home a cross following good wing play by Bradley Barcola, bringing up his fifth league goal of the season.

The 27-year-old totalled just three goals in Ligue 1 during his first season at PSG last year.

Fabian Ruiz was denied 10 minutes later by the foot of Brice Samba after Achraf Hakimi had teed him up inside the box.

Lens' chances of an equaliser took a hit on 20 minutes when attacker Florian Sotoca was forced off with a thigh issue.

Samba then denied Marco Asensio in the 34th minute as PSG pushed forward in search of a second goal.

The hosts peppered the Lens goal as half-time approached but had to remain content with their narrow lead going into the second period.

Just before the hour, Lens were reduced to 10 men as a VAR review adjudged Abdou Kodir Khusanov's tackle to have been high and he was given his marching orders.

Only a fine fingertip save from Samba against Barcola in the 73rd minute kept the visitors' chances alive.

PSG's level then dropped as the second half progressed but already a goal and a man to the good, they were able to hold Lens at arm's length and close out the three points.



Paris Saint-Germain's Ousmane Dembele celebrates after scoring against RC Lens during the Ligue 1 match at The Parc des Princes Stadium in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

# Kane double takes Bayern past Union, Frankfurt hit seven

Harry Kane scored twice and set up another as Bayern Munich moved three points clear at the top of the Bundesliga with a 3-0 home win over Union Berlin yesterday.

The England captain put Bayern ahead from the spot after 15 minutes after Union's Benedict Hollerbach brought down Michael Olise on the edge of the box. Kane turned provider just before half-time, tapping the ball into Kingsley Coman's path, the France forward blasting in over Union goalkeeper Frederik Ronnow. Kane added another after 51 minutes, eagerly getting to a loose ball

inches ahead of teammate Jamal Musiala to complete his brace. RB Leipzig can go back level at the top later on Saturday with a win when they travel to struggling Borussia Dortmund. Kane's double took him past his rival in this season's goalscoring battle, Omar Marmoush, who scored one and assisted two more in Eintracht Frankfurt's 7-2 demolition of hapless Bochum. Hugo Ekitike scored a brace while Marmoush, Ansgar Knauff, Nathaniel Brown, Mahmoud Dahoud and Can Uzun all got on the scoresheet in the rout. Marmoush now has 10 goals to

Kane's 11 this season, but the Egyptian's six assists - the best in the league - are one more than the England captain's five. Frankfurt leapfrogged defending champions Bayer Leverkusen into third place, six points behind leaders Bayern. Bochum scored goals in each half through Dani de Wit and Philipp Hofmann but were thoroughly outclassed. Bochum now have just one point from nine games to sit stranded at the bottom of the table after both promoted sides St Pauli and Holstein Kiel won yesterday. Kiel beat Heidenheim 1-0 at home thanks to a goal from Patrick Erras,

for their first ever win in the top division, to go three points clear of Bochum. Goals from Oladapo Afolayan and Andreas Albers took St Pauli to a 2-0 win at Hoffenheim, drawing them level with their opponents on eight points just above the direct relegation zone. Elsewhere, Wolfsburg drew 1-1 at home with Augsburg.

Bayern Munich's Harry Kane celebrates scoring a goal during the Bundesliga match against Union Berlin in Munich yesterday. (AFP)

