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SPORT



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Bagnaia wins Barcelona sprint to take season to final race

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QSL CUP

Umm Salal beat Rayyan, to meet Arabi in semi-finals

Al Arabi scored a convincing 3-0 victory over Al Shamal at the Thani Bin Jassim Stadium



Umm Salal's Marouane Louadni (left) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Al Rayyan during the QSL Cup quarter-finals at the Grand Hamad Stadium yesterday.



Al Arabi and Al Shamal players duel for the ball at the Thani Bin Jassim Stadium.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Defending champions Umm Salal beat Al Rayyan 2-0 at the Grand Hamad Stadium yesterday to enter the semi-finals of QSL Cup. Marouane Louadni (43rd minute) and Victor Lekhal (71st minute) headed a goal each for the winners.

Umm Salal will meet Al Arabi, who booked their last four spot with a convincing 3-0 win over Al Shamal. In the other semis, Al Duhail will take on Al Wakrah.

The match was tight-fisted, especially for most part of the opening half, and Umm Salal's solid defence dashed Al Rayyan's

hopes of making any breakthrough.

Al Rayyan were left frustrated despite repeated attempts including a potential one in the 31st minute when Khaled Ali Binsabaa had a great chance to strike after he broke into the danger zone following a long charge but his kick was cut off by a chasing Umm Salal defender.

The Barzan's Falcons hit back just before the half time whistle as Louadni headed home a fine curling ball off a free-kick taken (from about 10 yards away from the box) by Naim Abdulrazaq al-Aidouni.

Al Rayyan, in the second half too, pushed hard to find the equaliser but they lacked cohesion and many crosses in front of the goal went abegging with Umm Salal goalkeeper Landing Badji not having much

to do. In contrast, Al Rayyan custodian Fahad Younis Baker had a field day and made umpteen saves for his team flying from one corner of the goal post to another.

Despite the goalie's tight vigil, Umm Salal delivered a second knock-out blow as unmarked captain Lekhal headed a fine long ball from Ali Said al-Muhannadi to dash Al Rayyan hopes of a comeback.

Earlier, Al Arabi scored a convincing 3-0 win over Al Shamal at the Thani Bin Jassim Stadium. Isaac Lihadji (54th minute), Youssef Msakni (57th minute), and Ghanim al-Sulaiti (73rd minute) were the goal-scorers for The Dream Team which took a while to fire against a hopeful Al Shamal side who paid the price for missing out on chances of gaining early lead.

Al Shamal had succeeded in foiling Al Arabi's attempts in the opening half but they missed out on two good chances of their own.

In the 36th minute, Younes El Hannach after beating defenders provided a superb pass but Suhaib Gannan, who was in great position, missed being late in making the kick.

In the 52nd minute, Al Shamal's Mohamed Musa made a dipping header but it went just wide right of the post, after an indirect corner kick.

Two minutes later, Al Arabi's Lih-

adji seized the chance to produce a solid left-foot strike that went just over the stretched hands of Al Shamal goalkeeper Omar Barry for a spectacular goal.

With the lead gained, Al Arabi continued to attack and Msakni made the most of a through ball, sent by Rodriguez Sanchez from the right, to make the score 2-0.

Al Arabi's third goal came after some exciting action in the rival 'D'. Msakni battled on the goal-line to keep the ball in play before Ahmed Alaaeldin made a flying header but the ball hit the post and came back for al-Sulaiti to slam it back in.

MOTORSPORT

Al-Qubaisi, al-Khelaifi and Emmanuel notch double wins

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The postponed round one and the fourth round of the Qatar Superstock 600 (QTSK 600) and Qatar Touring Car Championship (QTCC) concluded at Lusail International Circuit yesterday.

Organised by the Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) and Lusail International Circuit (LIC), the championship provides a platform for local talent to showcase their skills on the internationally renowned Lusail International Circuit. A total of 48 competitors participated in the fourth round. In yesterday's QTSK 600, Abdulla al-Qubaisi won both the races. Veteran riders Meshaal al-Naimi and Saeed al-Sulaiti finished second and third respectively in both races too as Qataris swept the podium.

In the QTSK 600 Trophy Class, India's Kavin Quintal secured victory ahead of Frenchman Alexian Macary and India's Emmanuel Geoffrey. In Race 2, Macary clinched victory, with Geoffrey second and Quintal settling for third spot.

The QSSP 300 championship delivered thrilling performances, with rider Johann Emmanuel claiming both Race 1 and 2 honours. Mahmoud Elbanna secured second place, while Marton Bellelli completed the podium in first race. Bellali and Elbanna switched podium places in the second race. In QTCC, Abdulla al-Khelaifi won both races of the fourth round. Driving a Honda S2000, al-Khelaifi won Race 1 in a thrilling contest while Mohamed al-Hajri coming second in a Toyota GT86. Ahmed al-Asiri was third in his Honda Civic. In Race 2, al-Asiri came second, while Ali Emadadhi who drove an Acura RSX Type S, completed the podium.

On Friday, the postponed Race 2 of



Abdulla al-Qubaisi (centre) celebrates after winning the QTSK 600 Race 1, with runner-up Meshaal al-Naimi (left) and third-placed Saeed al-Sulaiti at the Lusail International Circuit yesterday.



Amro al-Hamad, Executive Director of QMMF and CEO of Lusail International Circuit, with the podium winners of the Qatar Touring Car Championship.

Round 1 for both the QSSP 300 and QTSK championships was held. This race had been previously cancelled due to rain back in March. In the Round 1 of QSSP 300 Race witnessed intense competition for the top position on the podium as rider Emmanuel emerged victorious, with Marton Bellelli claiming second place, and Mahmoud Elbanna rounding out the podium. As for the QTSK 600 postponed Race 2, al-Qubaisi crossed the finish line first, followed by al-Naimi and al-Sulaiti. In the QTSK 600 Trophy category, rider Macary claimed first place, while Alexander Qabazard secured second, followed by Geoffrey in third place.

The fifth round of the QTSK and QTCC is scheduled to take place in January 2025.



GOLF

McIlroy in three-way tie for Dubai lead

AFP
Dubai

Rory McIlroy holds a three-way share of the lead in Dubai as he closed in yesterday on his goal of securing both the trophies on offer at the DP World Tour Championship. World number three McIlroy shot a four-under 68 in his third round and was joined at the top on 12-under overall by Denmark's Rasmus Hojgaard (66) and France's Antoine Rozner (69). McIlroy felt disappointed having made six birdies - and two bogeys - through his first 12 holes not to capitalise on some good shots towards the end of his round, unable to take advantage at either the par-5 14th or 18th holes. Hojgaard, whose twin brother

Nicolai won the tournament last year as McIlroy won the season-long Order of Merit crown, started in brilliant fashion with six birdies in his first eight holes, but had to battle hard on the back nine as he made par at each hole. Rozner turned around an average round through 17 holes with a stunning second shot from 191 yards on the par-5 18th hole to seven feet and made the putt for a closing eagle. In the Race to Dubai, McIlroy seems to have his name engraved on the trophy already. The only player who can deny him a sixth title, South Africa's Thriston Lawrence, is currently tied 17th at four-under. Lawrence needs to win and McIlroy will have to play poorly and finish outside tied 11th position for that to happen.

"A little bittersweet. After the birdie on 12th, I had a good chance, but my putt on the 13th just caught the edge. And then 14 and 15 are birdie holes, and not being able to birdie either of those, and to make a par with only with a six-iron (for his second shot) in my hand going into the last as well," said McIlroy. "A little disappointed how I played those last five holes, but still in a really good position heading into tomorrow. Tied for the lead. Going out on a course that I really like and had success on before. It's a great opportunity to end the year on a high note. Going to go out there tomorrow and give it my everything, and hopefully, things fall my way and I can stand on that 18th green with both trophies." Hojgaard smashed his tee shot into the stream running down the

middle of the 18th green and then pushed his third shot way right, almost out of bounds. But he dropped a huge par putt from 21 feet to keep himself in the reckoning. "The first nine holes, I thought it was one of the best stretches of golf I played this year. I then had to hang in there on the back nine," said Hojgaard, projected to finish second behind McIlroy in the Race to Dubai. "The par save on the 18th was huge. It was looking more like an eight at one point. It wasn't an easy pitch shot from where I got the drop. I had already written down a six on my scorecard mentally, but the putt dropped." "It would be great if a different Hojgaard can defend the trophy and I can get my name next to Nicolai." Rozner, a three-time champion

on the European Tour, said the eagle on 18th was key. "I think the eagle on the last helped me big time and made me happy with my day overall. I didn't produce my best golf of the week so far but I was always hanging in there. I managed to hole a couple of putts on the back nine that were big for me," said the Frenchman. Sweden's Jesper Svensson (68) and Chile's Joaquin Niemann (69) were tied fourth at 10 under par. England's Tyrrell Hatton (71), who broke his club after his second shot on the 14th hole, was in sixth at nine-under.



Northern Ireland's Rory McIlroy plays a shot on the first hole during the DP World Tour Championship at Jumeirah Golf Estates in Dubai yesterday. (AFP)

CRICKET

5-star Johnson earns Australia T20 series win over Pakistan

'IF YOU TAKE THE POSITIVES, THE BOYS BOWLED VERY WELL'

AFP
Sydney

Speedster Spencer Johnson took 5-26 to propel Australia to a tense 13-run victory over Pakistan in Sydney yesterday and seal their three-match T20 series with a game to go. Set just 148 to win after Haris Rauf claimed 4-22 to keep the hosts in check, Pakistan were all out for 134 in the final over despite a lively 52 from Usman Khan. Australia won a rain-hit first match in Brisbane by 29 runs with the final game at Hobart on Monday. "We thought we were there or thereabouts and I thought the way the bowlers went about it was brilliant," said Australian captain Josh Inglis. "There's so many options in this team I can go to. Every time I turned to Johnson tonight, he got a wicket. The way they played to-night was really good." Australia secured a vital breakthrough by removing Babar Azam (3) off Xavier Bartlett in the second over and Pakistan's woes deepened when Johnson accounted for Sahibzada Farhan (5). Runs were hard to come by and after facing 26 balls for 16, skipper Mohammad Rizwan knew he had to up the tempo. But it cost him with Tim David taking a fine diving catch in the deep off Johnson, who then bagged Salman Agha next ball, caught behind by Inglis to leave Pakistan on 44-4 after 10 overs.



Australia's Spencer Johnson (centre) celebrates with teammates after dismissing Pakistan's Abbas Afridi during the second T20I in Sydney yesterday. (AFP)

Khan played himself in and brought up his first T20 half-century. But Johnson struck again with Abbas Afridi (4) following soon after to earn the 28-year-old a maiden five-wicket haul in his seventh T20. Two wickets in an over by spin king Adam Zampa piled the pressure on Pakistan who were unable to rise to the challenge. Earlier, Australia was restricted to 147-9 after a rip-roaring start, but a slew of dropped catches cost Pakistan. "If you take the positives, the boys bowled very well. We know Australia is not an easy team," said Rizwan. "But if you drop crucial catches,

it will cost you the game. "We all know the pitch wasn't easy to bat," he added. Jake Fraser-McGurk and Matthew Short stitched together a highly entertaining 52-run opening stand off just 22 balls before Rauf struck twice in three deliveries. After tempting Fraser-McGurk (20) into another slog that was taken in the deep by Agha, he enticed a leading edge from Inglis (0). Pakistan had their tails up and Short quickly followed for 32, bowled by Afridi, with three wickets falling for four runs. Marcus Stoinis survived two dropped catches but finally fell on

14, reverse-sweeping to Sufiyan Muqem, who was brought into side for Haseebullah Khan. Muqem's wrist-spin then took care of dangerman Glenn Maxwell (21) as the runs dried up. David was removed by Rauf for 18 and he collected his fourth by bowling Bartlett (5). Aaron Hardie made a handy 28 before Afridi removed him and Johnson in successive balls in the final over. **BRIEF SCORES**
Australia 147 for 9 (Short 32, Rauf 4-22, Abbas Afridi 3-17, Muqem 2-21) **beat Pakistan 134** (Usman 52, Irfan 37*, Johnson 5-26, Zampa 2-19) **by 13 runs.**

FOCUS

Artistic gymnastics coaches course concludes successfully

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The five-day artistic gymnastics coaches course, organised by the Qatar Gymnastics Federation in co-operation with the Asian Gymnastics Federation, successfully concluded with the participation of 26 coaches representing nine countries from Pakistan, the Philippines, Thailand, Myanmar, India, Iran, Bangladesh, Jordan and hosts Qatar. The closing ceremony and honouring of the participating delegations were held in the gymnastics training hall in Al Laqta in the presence of Ali al-Hitmi, QGF president, and participants in the Asian course. The participants, both coaches and experts from International Gymnastics Federation, praised the wonderful organisation of the course and their

presence in Qatar, which they wished to return to again in other tournaments and courses. Certificates of participation were awarded to the trainees in the presence of Eric Bishrwan, an international gymnastics expert. Speaking on the occasion, al-Hitmi said the course is of great importance to the Asian federation as it hosts coaches and players from Asia, looking forward to the latest technologies, new training and technical programs, as well as new regulations and laws. Al-Hitmi also pointed out that the course achieved many gains for the coaches and participants in its activities, and we were keen to develop the technical level of our coaches, which will of course be reflected in achieving the goals of the QGF in expanding the base of the game in different age groups at the level of boys and girls in the coming period.



Twenty-six coaches representing nine countries took part in the 5-day artistic gymnastics course organised by the QGF.



SPOTLIGHT

Spain players dominate FIP Promises Aspire Academy Tournament

The first-ever International Padel Federation (FIP) organised youth event in Qatar concluded yesterday at Padel In within Aspire Zone. The FIP Promises Aspire Academy Tournament, part of a global tour for youth padel players, marked a significant moment in Aspire Academy's 20th-anniversary celebrations. Featuring Under-14 and Under-16 players, this event underscored Aspire Academy's partnership with the Qatar Padel Federation to boost youth engagement in the sport across the region. The tournament's final matches drew the attendance of Ali Salem Afifa, Deputy Director General at Aspire Academy, Badr al-Hay, Director of Education, Ali Sultan Fakhro, Head of Shared Services at Aspire Academy, Alanoud al-Mesnadi, Director of Marketing and Communication at Aspire Academy and Mariano Amat Padel head coach - Aspire Academy. Spain dominates event. The under-16 event was won by Izan Violero Lloret and Javier Bolumar Orti from Spain who beat compatriots Rafa Lacuesta Martinez and Jose Manuel Lillo



Albertos 2 sets to 1. It was the same score in the under-14 event as Jaime Rodriguez Gonzalez and Eduardo Vazquez Moruno, also from Spain beat their fellow countrymen Javier Garcia Alonso and Lucas Villa Gimenez. The standout performance by a Qatari player was fourth place in the under-16 for Aspire Academy student-athlete Abdulrahman Khalid Alyafei and his Spanish partner Antonio Gracia Fernandez who lost a tight match against Javier Garcia Caro and Rafael Reyes Moreno from Spain. Following the thrilling finals, a ceremony was held at Padel In at

Aspire Zone, where the winners were awarded trophies and medals to celebrate their achievements and highlighting the growing talent within the sport of padel. The FIP Promises tournament brought together 22 teams from Qatar, Spain, Bahrain, Lebanon, and Kuwait, providing a valuable platform for emerging padel talent. This inaugural event has furthered Aspire's commitment to fostering young padel talent and contributing to a global movement of youth sports development. Many of the Spanish players at the event also spent a week at Aspire Academy for an intensive

training camp that also featured a number of physical tests to record relevant data using the very latest technology. Mariano Amat, Padel Head Coach at Aspire Academy, emphasized the importance of hosting international events and teams to elevate the program's competitiveness and align it with global standards. He stated: "Events like FIP are essential for raising our programme to an international level, comparable to countries like Spain. Hosting top teams, such as those from Spain, elevates our competitiveness and provides valuable opportunities to test and

benchmark our programme." Among the participants were all nine of Aspire Academy's own padel student-athletes, representing Qatar's future in the sport. They were joined by Yousef Largach and Elias Lejmi in the under-14 category, the duo are part of Aspire Academy pre-academy training programme and are aiming to join the Academy full-time in the future. Also in the under-14 category, Aspire Academy's Hamad Mohammed al-Modadi teamed up with Spain's Alex Acelga Dominguez as the top seeds, alongside Ali Abdulrahman al-Malik, who partnered with

Qatar's Ahmed Hassan, and Essa al-Kuwari with Ali Ebrahim al-Malik, all Aspire student-athletes. For the Under-16 category, Aspire was represented by Abdulrahman Khalid Alyafei, Saadon Alkuwari, Rayan Meknassi, Mohammed Ali al-Hiji, and Abdulla Alqadi. Additionally, four other players from the broader Qatari padel community participated, contributing to a strong national showing in both categories. Through its partnership with QPF, Aspire Academy has become a regional leader in padel, one of the fastest-growing sports globally. Since adopting padel as a core sport last year, Aspire has amplified Qatar's presence on the international padel stage. Hosting this FIP Promises event is a testament to Aspire's mission to nurture young athletes and position Qatar as a central hub for padel's growth in the Middle East. "As part of Aspire Academy's 20th anniversary celebrations, we are thrilled to host Qatar's inaugural event on the FIP Promises tour, featuring young talent who embody the future of padel," said Ali Salem Afifa, Deputy Director General at Aspire Academy.

MOTOGP

Bagnaia claims Barcelona sprint to stay in title hunt

'Job done for today but tomorrow we need to repeat what we did'

AFP
Barcelona

Francesco Bagnaia produced a commanding performance to win yesterday's sprint at the Barcelona MotoGP, ensuring that the battle for the world championship title would go to the last race of the season.

Championship leader Jorge Martin finished third behind Bagnaia's Ducati-Lenovo teammate Enea Bastianini and will take a reduced 19-point lead into Sunday's grand prix.

"Job done for today but tomorrow we need to repeat what we did," Bagnaia told TNT. "I just tried to be smooth in the first sector. As soon as I was leading I knew my pace was good enough to open a gap. That was the objective for today. I didn't need to push too much to open the gap."

"Jorge did a fantastic job so it's fantastic that it's like this. But let's see tomorrow."

Bagnaia arrived in Barcelona with a 24-point deficit and knowing that he effectively needed to win both the sprint and the grand prix to have any chance of denying Martin a first world title.

The Italian has already won 10 of 19 grands prix this season but his lack of consistency has let him down. But having won in Malaysia a fortnight ago he was again in imperious form as he set the pace in qualifying to take pole for both the sprint and the grand prix.

Martin, in contrast, could only qualify fourth, on the second row of the grid. The Spaniard, however, made a good start although not good enough to catch Bagnaia who made sure he didn't repeat the error he made in the sprint in Sepang when he crashed out early after again starting on pole.

While Bagnaia ran his own race up ahead Martin was locked in a



Ducati Italian rider Francesco Bagnaia celebrates getting the pole position after winning the MotoGP sprint race of the Solidarity Grand Prix of Barcelona at the Circuit de Catalunya in Montmelo yesterday. (AFP)

thrilling duel with Bastianini, the two swapping places throughout until the final lap when the Italian swept past on turn 5 and held on for second. "Tomorrow will be another story but I'm happy with the podium," said Martin, who has been the most consistent driver of the season and remains the overwhelming favourite to win his first world championship.

"I will go for it. I think we are in a good way so let's try for a big win tomorrow."

If Bagnaia is to collect a third consecutive title, he will have to win today's grand prix and hope that the Madrid rider finishes no better than ninth. Or he can finish second and pray that Martin does no better than 15th. "Nineteen points is still a lot but the objective was to take it to Sunday and we did it," said Bagnaia. "So now we focus on tomorrow. We will do our maximum and what will be will be."

The race was due to take place in Valencia but had to be moved after the region suffered its worst floods in a generation which have killed more than 220 people. The race was switched to the Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya and has been dubbed the Solidarity GP to show support for the people of Valencia.

THE GRID

Front row

Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati), Alex Espargaro (ESP/Aprilia), Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini)

2nd row

Jorge Martin (ESP/Ducati-Pramac), Franco Morbidelli (ITA/Ducati-Pramac), Pedro Acosta (ESP/GasGas-Tech3)

3rd row

Maverick Vinales (ESP/Aprilia),

Enea Bastianini (ITA/Ducati), Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Ducati-VR46)

4th row

Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha), Alex Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini), Johann Zarco (FRA/Honda-LCR)

5th row

Joan Mir (ESP/Honda), Miguel Oliveira (POR/Aprilia-Trackhouse), Alex Rins (ESP/Yamaha)

6th row

Luca Marinini (ITA/Honda), Raul Fernandez (ESP/Aprilia-Trackhouse), Brad Binder (RSA/KTM)

7th row

Jack Miller (AUS/KTM), Takaaki Nakagami (JPN/Honda-LCR), Augusto Fernandez (ESP/GasGas-Tech3)

8th row

Michele Pirro (ITA/Ducati-VR46), Stefan Bradl (GER/Team HRC)

TENNIS

Fritz reaches ATP Finals title decider with Sampras mark in sight

AFP
Turin, Italy

Taylor Fritz reached the ATP Finals title decider yesterday by defeating Alexander Zverev in three sets, moving one win away from becoming the first American champion at the showpiece event since Pete Sampras 25 years ago.

Fifth-ranked Fritz triumphed 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (7/3) over world number two Zverev in a thrilling match at the season-ending event in Turin. Fritz will face either world number one Jannik Sinner or Casper Ruud in today's showdown where he will bid to become the first American since 14-time Grand Slam champion Sampras in 1999 to claim the title. James Blake, in 2006, was the last US man to make the final.

Fritz could yet have the chance to gain revenge on Sinner for being beaten in the US Open final following a gruelling match in northern Italy. Both players had chances to take control in a topsy-turvy third set, but failed to capitalise on a host of break points before Fritz held his nerve better in the tie-break to claim a spot in the final.

Fritz managed to save three break points in game five of the third set, just when it looked like Zverev was set to take control of the match.

"That was probably the biggest turning point, I lose one of those points and that's probably it. That's kind of how it goes with playing Sascha," said Fritz, who got to the semis two years ago. "It's awesome to come back and go a step further. It's an honour to be here so to be in the final is amazing."



USA's Taylor Fritz celebrates after win against Germany's Alexander Zverev during their ATP Finals semi-final at in Turin yesterday. (AFP)

Italy beat Japan to reach BJK Cup semis

Italy became the first team to qualify for the Billie Jean King Cup semi-finals yesterday as Jasmine Paolini won in singles and doubles to claim a 2-1 victory over Japan.

Ena Shibahara won the opening singles after recovering to beat Elisabetta Cocciaretto 3-6, 6-4, 6-4, but French Open and Wimbledon runner-up Paolini levelled the tie with a 6-3, 6-4 win over Moyuka Uchijima. World number four Paolini then teamed up with Sara Errani to defeat Japanese pair Shuko Aoyama and Eri Hozumi 6-3, 6-4 in the decisive doubles rubber. "(It) wasn't easy for me because you enter (trailing) 0-1. But I'm happy with singles and of course with doubles," said Paolini, who has enjoyed a breakthrough season and participated at the WTA Finals last week.

"I'm trying to not think about how many matches I played, but I tried to have the energy today. Of course it helps to have the bench full of the team supporting us, so I think today I had some energy," she said. "I hope that next match is going to be the same." Japan were without Naomi Osaka, who called time on her season in October because of injury. Italy, who lost last year's final to Canada, will meet either Poland - led by five-time Grand Slam champion Iga Swiatek - or the Czech Republic in the semi-finals.

BOXING

Tyson beaten by YouTuber Paul in heavyweight return

AFP
Arlington, United States

Mike Tyson's controversial return to boxing ended in a one-sided defeat on Friday, with YouTuber-turned-prizefighter Jake Paul cruising to victory by unanimous decision against the heavyweight icon in Texas.

Tyson, 58, barely landed a punch during the eight-round bout at the AT&T Stadium in Arlington, with Paul winning by big margins on all three cards - 80-72, 79-73 and 79-73. Paul, 27, used his superior speed and movement to dominate the ageing Tyson with ease, and had the former undisputed heavyweight champion in trouble after landing a flurry of punches in the third round.

Yet the younger fighter was unable to land the knockout blow he had promised to deliver during Thursday's ill-tempered weigh-in, where Tyson slapped him across the face. Tyson, however, looked every bit of his

58 years, managing to land only a handful of meaningful punches during the fight, watched by a live crowd of around 70,000 spectators with an estimated millions more tuning in around the world.

Final statistics showed Tyson connected with just 18 of 97 punches thrown while Paul threw some 278 punches and landed 78 of them. As the final seconds of the eighth round counted down, Paul could even afford to bow in respect to Tyson before the bell sounded. "First and foremost, Mike Tyson, it's such an honour. Let's give it up for Mike," Paul said after embracing Tyson following his win. "He's the greatest to ever do it. He's the GOAT, he's a legend. I'm inspired by him and we wouldn't be here today without him."

Tyson, meanwhile, said he was satisfied with his performance despite the one-sided nature of the defeat. "I came to fight," he said. "I didn't prove nothing to anybody, only to myself... I'm just happy with what I can do."



US YouTuber/boxer Jake Paul (left) and US retired pro-boxer Mike Tyson hug at the end of their heavyweight boxing bout at The Pavilion at AT&T Stadium in Arlington, Texas. (AFP)

MOTORSPORT

Qatar Sand Drag season starts with high-octane action

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The opening round of the Qatar Sand Drag Competition at the Qatar Racing Club's sand strip in Sealine featured widespread participation, fierce competition, and intense rivalries. The event was held under the generous patronage of QRC Chairman HE Sheikh Khalid bin Hamad al-Thani.

The opening round featured an impressive lineup of motorsport champions from Qatar and across the Gulf, including Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

The first day, dedicated to motorcycle and Polaris vehicle competitions, showcased thrilling performances. In the Modified UTV category, Hassan Abdul Karim emerged victorious, delivering the best timing to narrowly defeat Abdullah al-Sulaiti, who claimed second place, while Zayed al-Naimi secured the third spot. In the Pro Modified category, Mhana al-Naimi took the top spot on the podium, leaving Abdul Aziz al-Ali and Mohammed al-Emadi in second and third places, respectively.

The Open UTV category, known as the most competitive and unrestricted class, saw record-breaking performances, with all top-three competitors breaking the four-second barrier. Yaqub al-Alewi clinched the title with the best time, followed by Ahmed Bazkeer and Ibrahim al-Darmaki.

In the Polaris Vehicles for Children category, Homoud al-Sulaiti came first, followed by Youssef Agha in second and Saad al-Kuwari in third.

The motorcycle categories, fea-



Director QRC Sheikh Jabor bin Khalid al-Thani poses with the winners of the opening round of the Qatar Sand Drag Competition. The second round is scheduled on Thursday and Friday.



turing two-wheelers, attracted 14 competitors and delivered thrilling races. Khalid al-Mohannadi emerged as the winner with a remarkable time of 5.054s. Abdulrahman al-Nasr secured second place, while Waleed al-Sharshani completed the podium in third place. The ATV (quad bikes with four wheels) categories drew the strongest participation with 40 competitors battling across three classes.

In the Modified category, Na-

waf al-Sharrah claimed the title, with Dhari al-Ansari and Fahad al-Dashti securing second and third places, respectively. The Professional Modified category saw Ahmed al-Mas take the top spot while Ali al-Derai and Hashim Ismail finished as second and third respectively. In the highly competitive Open category, Mohammed al-Mazmi dominated the field, clinching first place. Abdullah al-Mazmi followed in second

and Abdullah al-Hazza rounded off the podium in third.

The second day saw heightened intensity as powerful engines roared into action, starting with the buggy categories. In the spring suspension class, Mohammed al-Sulaiti claimed victory, with Abdullah al-Sulaiti came second and Mohammed Hassan finished third. In the airbag suspension class, Mhana al-Naimi came first, while Abdullah and Mohammed al-Sulaiti finished second and third respectively.

In the Nitrous category for six-cylinder engine cars, Mzahir al-Kaabi took the title, with Faisal al-Balushi and Mohammed al-Sharshani finishing second and third respectively. The Turbo category was divided into two classes. In the original-bodied cars class, Khalid al-Habsi claimed victory, followed by Fahad al-Jassim in second and Abdulrahman al-Asafi in third. In the modified-bodied cars class, al-Habsi secured his second title with Jaber al-Zaabi and Abdulaziz al-Anzi finished second and third.

HORSE RACING

Legend Of Xanadu, Marinara claim wins

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Legend Of Xanadu won the Thoroughbred Handicap (65-85) by a remarkable margin of six and a half lengths during the Umm Bab Cup Race Meeting, Division 2 at Al Uqda Racecourse yesterday.

Owned by Umm Al Shukhut Farm, trained by Ibrahim Saeed al-Malki and ridden by jockey Tomas Lukasek, Legend Of Xanadu demonstrated dominance throughout the race, pulling away effortlessly in the final stages. Division 1 of the Thoroughbred Handicap (65-85), saw a competitive field over 1400 meters, with Marinara, a four-year-old bay filly, claiming a well-earned victory.

Owned by Wathnan Racing, trained by Alban de Mieuille, and



Wathnan Racing's Marinara won the Division 1 race for the Thoroughbred Handicap (65-85) yesterday.

ridden by jockey Soufiane Saadi, Marinara displayed both tactical speed and determination, securing the win by a length.

The runner-up was Poderoso

(Kodiac) while Sardem (Siyouni) finished third, just half a length further behind. Steamboat, Ibsharah Al Naif and John Steed also clinched victories.



Jockey Tomas Lukasek guided Legend Of Xanadu to Thoroughbred Handicap (65-85) victory during the Umm Bab Cup Race Meeting Division 2 at Al Uqda Racecourse yesterday. PICTURES: Juhaim

Former AFCON champ Ghana bow out as minnows Comoros qualify

Johannesburg: Leicester City striker Jordan Ayew scored for Ghana in a 1-1 draw with Angola on Friday, but could not prevent the four-time champions becoming the biggest casualties of 2025 Africa Cup of Nations qualifying.

While Ghana were eliminated, minnows Comoros and Mali, Zambia and Zimbabwe qualified, swelling the list of countries heading to Morocco to 19, leaving five places up for grabs. New captain Ayew struck on 18 minutes in Luanda only for Ambrosini 'Zini' Salvador to equalise after 64 minutes for already-qualified Group F winners Angola.

The draw left Ghana bottom of the table, four points adrift of Sudan in the second qualifying place, with one round left, and AFCON finals absentees for the first time since 2004. Ghana, lacking eight of the original squad due to injuries, including Bournemouth striker Antoine Semenyo, reserved their best performance for the penultimate round, but it was not enough.

Comoros, a tiny island nation off the southeastern coast, scored in the final minute through Myziane Maolida to snatch a 2-1 win over the Gambia and qualification from Group A. Shock winners over former champions Tunisia last month, the Comorans fell behind in the first half to an Alassana Jatta goal, but Rafiki Said equalised five minutes later.

Zambia ensured they will be among the 24 title contenders with a 1-0 victory over defending champions the Ivory Coast in Ndola. It was the second successive defeat for the Ivorians, who suffered a shock Group G loss to Sierra Leone last month. Tanzania-based Kennedy Musonda notched the only goal after 43 minutes - his third of the qualifying campaign.

While Ivory Coast were assured of qualification on Wednesday after Chad and Sierra Leone drew, the latest loss is sure to trigger soul searching between coach Emere Fae and his squad. Fae masterminded a remarkable comeback at the 2024 AFCON as the host nation recovered from a four-goal group hammering by Equatorial Guinea to defeat Nigeria in the final.

Having been barred from the last AFCON qualifying tournament due to government interference, Zimbabwe will make a sixth appearance at the finals after drawing 1-1 with Kenya in Polokwane. Needing one point to secure a place from Group J and eliminate Kenya, Zimbabwe went ahead in the first half through Tawanda Maswanhise, who plays for Scottish Premiership outfit Motherwell.

Jonah Ayunga levelled early in the second half for the Harambee Stars, who have qualified for only two editions of the biennial AFCON tournament in the past 30 years.

Kamory Doumbia netted after 19 minutes to earn Mali a 1-0 Group I win over Mozambique in Maputo and a 10th straight qualification for the African football showcase.

WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

Ugarte strikes late to hand Uruguay thrilling victory over Colombia

Bielsa's men move above Colombia into second place behind leaders Argentina

AFP
Montevideo

Manuel Ugarte grabbed a dramatic last-gasp winner as Uruguay ended a five-match winless streak with a thrilling 3-2 win over Colombia in South American World Cup qualifying on Friday. Marcelo Bielsa's Uruguay looked set for a 2-1 win until Colombia levelled through Andres Gomez in the sixth minute of stoppage time.

But once the celebrations and the lengthy VAR check were over - Uruguay pumped the ball into the box and the ball fell to the Manchester United midfielder Ugarte and the substitute buried the chance for his first international goal.

The crowd at the historic Estadio Centenario went wild as Uruguay claimed the three points and some revenge for their bad-tempered loss to Colombia in the Copa America semi-finals in July.

The win moves them above Colombia, on goal difference, into second place behind leaders Argentina. Colombia took the lead in the 31st minute with a clever free-kick from Juan Fernando Quintero. With the home defence expecting a cross from the left of the box, Quintero spotted that Venezuela keeper Sergio Rochet had left a gap at his near post and superbly fired his shot into the corner.

Uruguay drew level in the 57th minute in fortunate fashion when Marcelo Sarachi whipped in a cross from the left which deflected off Daniel Munoz and Davinson Sanchez's attempted sliding clearance flew into his own net. But there was no luck about the goal that put Uruguay ahead



Uruguay's Manuel Ugarte (bottom) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Colombia during the 2026 FIFA World Cup South American qualifiers at the Centenario stadium in Montevideo on Friday. (AFP)

three minutes later. Maximiliano Araujo and Mathias Olivera combined well with a smart passing move before Rodrigo Aguirre skipped past a challenge and fired home.

It was an emotional moment for the 30-year-old Aguirre, who plays in Mexico with Club America and had represented his country at youth level but never broken into the senior team. But with Uruguay having failed to score in their last four World Cup qualifiers, coach Marcelo Bielsa handed

him a start and got his reward.

He looked set to be the hero of the night until, after a goalmouth scramble, with Sanchez heading the ball into the box, Gomez pounced to grab what appeared to be a stoppage-time leveller. But then came Ugarte's winner and a much-needed victory for Bielsa's team who had not won since beating Canada on penalties in the third place play-off of the Copa America in July.

In the battle of the bottom two teams in

the ten-team qualifying group, Peru were held to a goalless draw at home to Chile. Peru had a penalty awarded in the seventh minute of stoppage time when Gianluca Lapadula was brought down by Felipe Mora but he was saved by a VAR review which found Lapadula was offside.

Peru are ninth in the standings on seven points with Chile bottom on six. Peru visit world champions Argentina on Tuesday while Chile host Venezuela.

SPOTLIGHT

Ronaldo at double as Portugal reach Nations League quarters

AFP
Paris

Cristiano Ronaldo scored twice as Portugal thrashed Poland 5-1 thanks to a rampant second-half display on Friday to reach the Nations League quarter-finals, while already-qualified Spain beat Denmark.

Roberto Martinez's Portugal wrapped up top spot in Group A1 with a game to spare, securing their place in the next round in March. France, Germany and Italy are also already through to the last eight. Poland were the better side early on but failed to take their chances in Porto and the home side made them pay, netting four times in the last 20 minutes.

"We couldn't impose ourselves on the game in the first half," said Portugal goalscorer Rafael Leao. "(Coach) Roberto Martinez's approach in the locker room was important; it was the key to changing the pressure at half-time."

Ronaldo volleyed over from close range shortly before the interval, as Portugal failed to register a shot on target in the first half. Dominik Marczuk almost broke the deadlock in the 58th minute, but Portugal goalkeeper Diogo Costa produced a brilliant fingertip save to deny him.

The hosts broke from the resulting corner to score less than 60 seconds later, as Leao powered forward before finding



Portugal's forward Cristiano Ronaldo (left) scores a spectacular goal during the UEFA Nations League football match against Poland in Porto. (AFP)

Nuno Mendes, then continuing his run to meet the Paris Saint-Germain full-back's cross with a powerful header. Portugal

were awarded a penalty when Diogo Dalot's strike flicked off Jakub Kiwior's hand at point-blank range and was saved

by Marcin Bulka.

Ronaldo stepped up to dink home a 'Panenka' spot-kick. That goal ended any hopes Poland had of staging a comeback and Fernandes added a third for Portugal with 10 minutes left, crashing the ball in off the crossbar from just outside the box. Pedro Neto also got on the scoresheet, collecting Ronaldo's pass and rifling past Bulka at his near post.

There was still time for Ronaldo to double his tally and move onto 135 international goals, acrobatically volleying home Vitinha's cross from close range in the 87th minute. Marczuk drilled in a consolation for Poland, but they can no longer qualify for the knock-out stages and will be relegated if they lose to Scotland next week.

In the other match in the group, Scotland gave their hopes of avoiding the drop a massive boost as John McGinn scored a late winner in a 1-0 victory over 10-man Croatia. Petar Sucic was sent off in the first half, but Croatia almost hung on for the point they needed to qualify with Portugal, only for McGinn to strike in the 86th minute.

European champions Spain stayed unbeaten in Group A4 with a 2-1 win over Denmark in Copenhagen. Luis de la Fuente's visitors started strongly and went close to a 13th-minute opener when the in-form Ayoze Perez rattled the crossbar.

Spain took an early lead after Denmark

carelessly gave the ball away on the edge of their own box. Perez played in Mikel Oyarzabal who took an excellent first touch and slipped the ball past goalkeeper Kasper Schmeichel and in at the near post. Villarreal forward Perez, who only made his international debut in June, doubled Spain's advantage with a low, left-footed finish into the bottom corner after being picked out by Dani Olmo.

Gustav Isaksen pulled one back for Denmark late on, pouncing on a terrible mix-up between Fabian Ruiz and 'keeper David Raya. "A very, very happy night for me (with a goal and an assist), but the most important thing is going through top of the group," Perez said.

The other game in Group A4 saw Switzerland relegated by Aleksa Terzic's late equaliser in a 1-1 draw with Serbia. Romania's Group C2 game against Kosovo in Bucharest was suspended in injury time and then abandoned with the game goalless after the visiting players walked off the pitch following chants of "Serbia" from the home fans.

"The UEFA Nations League match between Romania and Kosovo has been abandoned. UEFA will communicate further information in due course," said governing body UEFA on its website. In League D, San Marino kept their hopes of an unlikely promotion alive as Nicola Nanni scored an injury-time penalty to grab a 1-1 draw with Gibraltar.