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CRICKET | Page 2

India bowlers frustrated as rain blights Day 1 at the Gabba



SHOWJUMPING | Page 4

Haidan claims victory in Al Shaqab League opener

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GULF TIMES SPORT

SPOTLIGHT

Qatar's Fares secures silver at World Weightlifting Championships

Page 3



HORSE RACING

Al Sij Al Sakab, Jabalah impress with commanding wins

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Sij Al Sakab delivered a commanding performance to win The Late Sheikh Jassim Bin Mohammad Bin Thani Trophy at the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club's (QREC) Al Uqda Racecourse yesterday.

Under a masterful ride by Alberto Sanna, the Khalid Hamad MA al-Atteya-owned and Jassim Hamad al-Atteya-trained six-year-old held off his rivals to secure a memorable half a length victory in the day's 1400m feature race - Local Purebred Arabians for three-year-old+.

Jean de Mieuille-trained Al Mirage, in the silks of Al Shaqab, came second and Al Jeryan Stud's AJS Saeef finished third.

HE Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani, Minister of Sports & Youth, in the presence of Issa bin Mohammed al-Mohannadi, QREC Chairman, crowned the winners of the feature race.

Jabalah, in the colours of Wathnan Racing, won the Qatar National Day Trophy with a brilliant finish under jockey James Doyle. With the win the eight-year-old son of Al Mamun Monlau finally clinched the Group 2 PA contest after near misses in the past two renewals and in the process gave Wathnan Racing and Doyle their fourth win of the day. It was also the third win on the cards for trainer Alban de Mieuille. Khalifa bin Sheail KH J al-Kuwari-owned and Julian Smart-trained Moshrif came second.

Haunted Dream, owned by Wathnan Racing and trained by Hamad al-Jehani, won the QA Group 3 Al Safliya Cup for the second consecutive year. The five-year-old gelding, under the supervision of in-form James Doyle, powered to victory by almost three lengths.

RESULTS - 13th Al Rayyan Race Meeting
Late Sheikh Jassim bin Mohammed Bin Thani Trophy
WINNERS: Horse, Trainer, Jockey



Minister of Sports & Youth HE Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani presented the trophies to connections of Al Sij Al Sakab, which won The Late Sheikh Jassim Bin Mohammad Bin Thani Trophy at the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club's Al Uqda Racecourse yesterday. QREC Chairman Issa bin Mohammed al-Mohannadi was also present on the occasion.



Minister of Sports & Youth HE Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani with the connections of Al Wathnan Racing's Jabalah, which won the Qatar National Day Trophy.

The Late Sheikh Jassim Bin Mohammed Trophy - Local Purebred Arabian (Class 1) Al Sij Al Sakab, Jassim Hamad al-Atteya, Alberto Sanna
Qatar National Day Trophy - Purebred Arabian (Class 1 Gr2) International Race Jabalah, Alban Elie De Mieuille, James Doyle

Al Safliya Cup - Thoroughbred (Class 1 Qa-Gr3) Shalfa Qualifier Haunted Dream, Hamad al-Jehani, James Doyle
Halul Island Cup - Local Thoroughbred Open Race (Class 2) Equinox, Alban Elie De Mieuille, James Doyle
Al Busayir Cup - Thoroughbred Conditions (Class 2)



Alberto Sanna rides Al Sij Al Sakab to victory. **PICTURES: Juhaim**

Dark Trooper, Alban de Mieuille, James Doyle
Falcon Cup - Thoroughbred Conditions (Class 2)
Taxiwalah, Osama Omer E al-Dafea, Soufiane Saadi
Purebred Arabian Conditions (Class 2) Shgarde, Hamad al-Jehani, Christophe

Soumillon
Purebred Arabian Handicap 65-85 (Class 4)
Hemian, Jean de Mieuille, Faleh Bughanaim
Purebred Arabian Maiden Plate (Class 6) Ihtijaj, Jean de Mieuille, Christophe Soumillon

FOOTBALL

Pachuca prevail on penalties to book final with Real Madrid

Abdel-Fattah struck the bar in the shootout, denying Egypt's Ahly a victory that seemed within grasp



Pachuca's players celebrate after winning the FIFA Challenger Cup match against Egypt's Al Ahly at Stadium 974 in Doha yesterday.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Pachuca will face Real Madrid in the FIFA Intercontinental Cup final following their dramatic penalty shootout victory over Al Ahly in the FIFA Challenger Cup at the 974 Stadium in Doha yesterday.

Both sides had chances in the first pe-

riod, with Pachuca goalkeeper Carlos Moreno called into action to stop Taher Mohamed's low drive early on. Down the other end Oussama Idrissi, who was Player of the Match in the FIFA Derby of the Americas win over Botafogo earlier in the week, saw a shot blocked following a mazy run. Captain Salomon Rondon pounced on the rebound, but fired over.

Both Idrissi and Nelson Deossa tested Al Ahly goalkeeper Mohamed El Shenawy in

the second half with long-range efforts but couldn't break through, meaning extra time would be required to try and find a winner.

The best chance of the game came in the additional period, as Percy Tau set Mahmoud Kahraba through, but Moreno did well to tip aside his chipped attempt. Penalties would eventually decide the contest.

Ahly took an early 2-0 lead in the shootout following misses from Pachuca's Salomon Rondon and Borja Baston. With



Wessam Abu Ali (left) of Al Ahly and Andres Micolta of Pachuca vie for the ball at the 974 Stadium yesterday. **PICTURES: Noushad Thekkayil**

the score at 3-2, a sudden-death save by Moreno turned the tide, with two further Al Ahly misses as Mahmoud Kahraba and Omar Kamal failed to convert their spot-kicks, handing Pachuca a lifeline. Khaled Abdel-Fattah then struck the bar, denying Ahly a victory that seemed within grasp.

In nine previous appearances in the Club World Cup, now revamped as the Intercontinental Cup, Ahly have claimed four bronze medals but never progressed beyond the semi-finals. Marcel Koller's men will now set their sights on next summer's Club World Cup.

Pachuca midfielder Pedro Pedraza said his side were prepared on the penalty shootout and was excited to face Spanish heavyweights Real Madrid in the final on Wednesday at the Lusail Stadium.

"We were prepared for that and more. I don't think there's a team that trains harder than us. We had practically lost everything, but trust is the last thing to die, and we trusted our squad, the players who were going to take the shots, and Carlos (Moreno), who became a key figure and truly deserved it. Thanks to him, we became champions. "It's a dream, not just for us, but for the institution, the fans, and our families. We are going to face it in the best way possible," said Pedraza.

Guillermo Almada, Pachuca coach on facing Real Madrid, said: "It's going to be tough, very challenging, especially given the football marathon we endured today. Still, we'll do our best to help the players recover and approach that match with all the motivation in the world."

BRISBANE TEST

India bowlers frustrated as rain blights Day 1

Reuters
Brisbane

India's bowlers were left frustrated and wicketless as rain wiped out most of the opening day's play in the third Test against Australia in Brisbane yesterday.

Australia were 28 for no loss when play was abandoned, with Usman Khawaja unbeaten on 19 and Nathan McSweeney four not out after facing only 13.2 overs at a rain-soaked Gabba.

India captain Rohit Sharma won the toss and elected to field first but his hope of early wickets proved forlorn, rain halting play in the sixth over for about 30 minutes and dashing his pace bowlers' hopes of finding their rhythm.

The rain returned to bring an early lunch and persisted until play was abandoned late in the afternoon, short-changing a crowd of

30,145. The Gabba pitch had a green tinge on what had been a steamy, overcast morning, promising a stiff examination for Australia's top order, but the ball ultimately did little off the spongy pitch.

Barring a probing, opening burst by Bumrah, who repeatedly beat Khawaja's bat, the Indian pacers were culpable of bowling too short. Khawaja capitalised, smashing Mohammed Siraj to the fence with a couple of sweetly struck pull shots but the weather denied a healthy crowd more action.

With the five-test series poised at 1-1, India made two changes to the side that lost by 10 wickets in the day-night test in Adelaide – Ravindra Jadeja replacing spinner Ravichandran Ashwin and Akash Deep coming in for struggling paceman Harshit Rana.

Australia made only one change, with quick Josh Hazlewood replacing Scott Boland after recovering from a side injury.

Rohit, whose poor form with the bat has heaped pressure on his captaincy, will continue to bat at number six, with KL Rahul and Yashasvi Jaiswal retained as the opening combination.

"There's a lot of grass and it looks a little soft as well so we want to try and make the best use of the conditions and try and see what we can do with the ball up front," Rohit had said after winning the toss, adding that the mood in the Indian dressing room was "absolutely buzzing".

"The guys are looking forward to the test match. It's been always nice to come here and play some really good cricket and yeah, when you talk about how everyone's feeling, they want to come out here and showcase themselves."

As it was, India will have to wait until day two to show their skills and may need early wickets to force a third consecutive result in the series.



A general view of The Gabba as rain delays play on the first day of the third Test between Australia and India in Brisbane yesterday. (AFP)

FOCUS

England fight back even on first day of Hamilton Test

'There's still enough in the wicket, and a little bit of uneven bounce'

AFP
Hamilton

New Zealand failed to capitalise on a rock-steady start to reach 315-9 on day one of the third and final Test against England in Hamilton yesterday.

Led by seamers Matthew Potts and Gus Atkinson, the tourists fought back with the ball after openers Tom Latham (63) and Will Young (42) put on 105 for the opening stand.

However, the hard early work was undone by a flurry of loose shots in the afternoon as six wickets fell for 89 runs at Seddon Park.

Late hitting from Mitchell Santner handed the momentum back to the home side, including a straight six off the day's final ball to raise a half-century.

Santner will resume on 50 not out, alongside the scoreless Will O'Rourke. England's goal of completing a 3-0 series clean sweep was kept alive by some disciplined seam bowling after putting the Black Caps in to bat.

Potts (3-75) impressed by removing top-scorer Latham and danger man Kane Williamson (44) to celebrate his recall at the expense of Chris Woakes. The 26-year-old said England had "wrestled" their way back into the game after going wicket-less in the first session. "In this group the character's real strong," Potts said.

"I think if you notice, there's periods where we do go through a phase of not taking any wickets and we know that if we do stick to our guns and we are meticulous with it, that it will come our way eventually."

Atkinson (3-55) took his career tally to 51 wickets, second only to Australian seamer Terry Alderman's 54 wickets in 1981 for the



New Zealand's Tom Latham bats on the first day of the third Test against England at Seddon Park in Hamilton yesterday. (AFP)

most Test scalps in a debut year. Atkinson was among those to benefit from New Zealand's reckless middle-order batting.

Rachin Ravindra (18), Daryl Mitchell (14), Tom Blundell (21) and Glenn Phillips (5) were all caught by fielders on the off-side when failing to keep the ball down.

It reflected a do-or-die approach, with 228 runs – or 72 percent of their total – coming through boundaries.

Latham and Young belatedly unearthed the kind of batting resolve largely missing in big losses in Christchurch and Wellington that had put the hosts down 2-0 in the series. Young fell for his lunch score, caught smartly at second

slip by Harry Brook off Atkinson, before Latham edged down the leg side off Potts soon afterwards.

It ended the best opening stand of the seam-dominated series from either team, surpassing the previous best of 18.

The key wicket of Williamson fell soon after tea, playing on in agonising fashion when he failed to kick the ball clear as it ballooned onto his stumps – prompting a feeling of "pure elation" for Potts.

Veteran bowler Tim Southee, playing his 107th and final Test, delighted supporters at his home ground with a whirlwind 23 off 10 balls. The 36-year-old bowler struck three sixes to take his career tally to 98 and closer to becoming

the fourth player to clear the ropes 100 times in Tests.

Santner said he and Southee deliberately adopted a free-wheeling approach, believing it best suited a pitch offering variable bounce.

"I think Tom and Will did an outstanding job before lunch and I think credit to England, they actually stuck in it for a long time and bowled good areas," said Santner, whose spin could prove important later in the Test. "There's still enough in the wicket, and a little bit of probably uneven bounce."

BRIEF SCORES: DAY 1
New Zealand 315 for 9 (Latham 63, Santner 50*, Atkinson 3-55, Potts 3-75) **vs England.**

SPOTLIGHT

Pakistan's controversial pacer Amir retires from international cricket

AFP
Karachi

Pakistan fast bowler **Mohammad Amir** yesterday announced his retirement from international cricket, ending a controversial career which saw him jailed on spot-fixing charges.

The 32-year-old came out of retirement earlier this year to play in the Twenty20 World Cup in the United States and West Indies.

"After careful consideration I have taken the difficult decision to retire from international cricket," Amir said in a post on X. "These decisions are never easy, but are inevitable. I feel this is the right time for the next generation to take the baton and

elevate Pakistan cricket to new heights."

He retired from all forms of international cricket in December 2021 after being dropped from a tour of New Zealand, but continued to feature in franchise T20 leagues across the world.

He played 36 Tests taking 119 wickets. He took 81 wickets in 61 ODIs and in 62 T20Is he grabbed 71 wickets.

In 2010 he was banned from the sport for five years for spot-fixing during a Test match in England, along with then skipper Salman Butt and Mohammad Asif. All three players were later jailed in the UK.

He returned to the squad in 2016 and played for Pakistan in all formats until his 2021 retirement. Amir is currently playing in a T10 league in Sri Lanka.



TWENTY20

Nabi takes Afghanistan to Zimbabwe series win

AFP
Harare

Veteran Afghanistan all-rounder **Mohammad Nabi** scored seven off three balls in the final over at Harare Sports Club to deliver a three-wicket Twenty20 win over Zimbabwe yesterday, and a 2-1 series victory.

Nabi struck a four off the first ball, followed by a two and a single in a tense finish as the tourists followed up a 50-run triumph on Friday.

Nabi finished unbeaten on 24 – the second best Afghan batter after another all-rounder, Azmatullah Omarzai, who made 34 after taking two wickets.

Zimbabwe posted 127 in 19.5 overs and Afghanistan 128-7 with three balls to spare as they won a sixth consecutive T20 series against the southern African nation. "In the middle of our innings we lost some wickets cheaply which put pressure on us," Nabi told reporters.

"But I managed to control my nerves and that gave me the confidence to go on and score the series-winning runs."

"Next up is the one-day international series and this wicket is not easy to judge. The pitch for the first two games was better – today it was up and down."

Afghan captain Rashid Khan won a third straight toss, but after batting first in the earlier matches, he opted to bowl in the

series decider. Khan took 4-27 for Afghanistan while opener Brian Bennett top scored for Zimbabwe with 31, including four fours.

Afghanistan struggled in reply, losing four wickets for 44 before a 48-run fifth-wicket stand between Omarzai and Gulbadin Naib (22) tilted the balance toward the visiting team.

From then on the tourists looked the likelier winners, but when Omarzai was caught and bowled by Sikandar Raza with 13 balls remaining, there was a glimmer of hope for the home team. But Naib dashed those hopes with his 18-ball knock, which included three fours.

Batters struggled with neither team managing to score a six while Zimbabwe hit 11 fours – two more than Afghanistan. The teams now play a three-match one-day international series in Harare, starting on Tuesday, then two Tests in Bulawayo.

BRIEF SCORES
Zimbabwe 127 in 19.5 overs (B. Bennett 31, W. Madhevere 21; Rashid Khan 4-27, Azmatullah Omarzai 2-10, Mujeeb Ur Rahman 2-20, Naveen-ul-Haq 2-27) **lost to Afghanistan 128-7 in 19.3 overs** (Omarzai 34, Mohammad Nabi 24 not out, Gulbadin Naib 22; B. Muzarabani 2-19, Sikandar Raza 2-19, T. Gwandu 2-30) **by three wickets.**
Series: Afghanistan win 2-1.

SOUTH AFRICA-PAKISTAN FINAL T20 WASHED OUT

The third T20I between South Africa and Pakistan in Johannesburg was washed out by persistent rain without a toss. The game was initially delayed by lightning strikes in the area, before a steady drizzle set in. The drainage at the Wanderers is exemplary, and the groundstaff remained poised. When the rain briefly relented, an official inspection was announced and the groundstaff sprung into action. But before it could happen, the rain returned once more. It means South Africa sealed the three-match T20I series 2-0, having triumphed in the first game by 11 runs, and the second by seven wickets. It's South Africa's first bilateral series victory since August 2022. The teams begin a three-match one-day international series on Tuesday in Paarl, followed by two Tests in Centurion and Cape Town.



A general view of the electronic board displaying the message "play has been abandoned" due to bad weather during the third T20I between South Africa and Pakistan at Wanderers stadium in Johannesburg yesterday. (AFP)

FREESTYLE DRIFTING CHAMPIONSHIP

Al-Qahtani wins, al-Muhannadi finishes second

By Sports Reporter
Doha

With strong participation from the freestyle champions and a large audience in attendance, the second round of the 2024/2025 Qatar Freestyle Drifting Championship concluded last Friday evening. The event was held under the patronage of HE Sheikh Khalid bin Hamad al-Thani, Chairman of the Qatar Racing Club (QRC).

The registration and technical inspection were conducted on Thursday, where the organising committee of the championship set several criteria and conditions that all participants had to meet in order to compete in this round.

These conditions included requirements related to the car, such as the need to equip it with a roll cage, secure the car battery properly, and have an effective seatbelt, among other points. There were also requirements related to the competitors, focusing on safety elements such as sportswear, helmets, and the presence of an effective seatbelt, among others.



Sheikh Jabor bin Khalid al-Thani, Director QRC, poses with the winners of the second round of the Qatar Freestyle Drifting Championship.

On Friday, a briefing session was held for the competitors with the organisers and the judging panel, where several important technical and procedural matters were clar-

ified before the race began. According to the competition structure, each competitor is given one opportunity to enter the track and perform a series of five manoeuvres: drifting, reverse driving, the knot move, and the reverse drive.

These manoeuvres must be completed within a total time frame of four minutes, and the faster the



Action from the second round of Qatar Freestyle Drifting Championship.

competitor completes the manoeuvres, the more points they earn. Additionally, there is a style score awarded based on the overall performance and the execution of specific manoeuvres.

Abdullah al-Qahtani won the race marking his second podium finish in the championship after securing third place in the opening round. Mohammad al-Muhannadi repeated his result from the open-

ing round, finishing in second place, while the third spot went to Saud Abdulaziz al-Kuwari, who had finished in fifth place in the previous round. Abdullah al-Merri and Ahmad Ahmad took the fourth and fifth positions, respectively.

At the end of the competition, Sheikh Jabor bin Khalid al-Thani, Director of QRC, crowned the winners. The third round will take place on December 26 and 27.

MOTORSPORT

QMMF to host Mena Karting Cup for 2nd consecutive year

Premier event draws more than 150 drivers from 16 nations to Qatar

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) is set to transform the karting track into a battleground for the region's most promising racing talent, as the prestigious facility hosts the MENA Karting Cup for the second consecutive year. Following the tremendous success of its inaugural edition in 2023, the 2024 championship promises to deliver even more thrilling karting action.

The championship will showcase the remarkable skills of more than 150 drivers representing 16 nations across the Mena region, including Qatar, Morocco, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Lebanon, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Iran, Türkiye, Mauritania, Syria, and United Arab Emirates. Racers will compete across six dynamic age-based categories: Micro Max (ages eight-11), Mini Max (ages 10-13), Junior Max (ages 12-15), Senior Max (ages 14+), DD2 (ages 15+), and DD2 Masters (ages 31+). The competition will also feature two additional racing categories - R390 Sprint and R390 Endurance - open to drivers aged 15 and above.

Racing enthusiasts are invited to experience the high-octane action firsthand from December 19-21, with complimentary admission. Limited trackside seating will be available for spectators to catch every thrilling moment of the competition, secure your spot now by registering yourself here. (<https://events.lcsc.qa/preregistration>).

To ensure seamless access to the venue, visitors arriving in personal vehicles can utilise the designated General Admission Parking area and take advantage of the complimentary shuttle service to the karting track. A dedicated drop-off/pick-up point is also available for taxi services.



The championship will be held from December 19-21 at the LIC's karting track.

SCHEDULE
DECEMBER 19

10.00am - 11.35am: Practice session - all categories (Micro Max, Mini Max, Junior Max, Max, DD2, and DD2 Masters)
11.40am - 1.15pm: Practice session - all categories (Micro Max, Mini Max, Junior Max, Max, DD2, and DD2 Masters)
1.55pm - 2.35pm: Practice session - R390 Elite
2.45pm - 4.20pm: Practice session - all categories (Micro Max, Mini Max, Junior Max, Max, DD2, and DD2 Masters)

DECEMBER 20

10.30am - 11.25am: Qualifying sessions - all categories (Micro Max, Mini Max, Junior Max, Max, DD2, and DD2 Masters)
12.35pm - 1.55pm: Heat One - (Micro Max, Mini Max, Junior Max, Max, DD2, and DD2 Masters)

2.45pm - 4.05pm: Heat Two - (Micro Max, Mini Max, Junior Max, Max, DD2, and DD2 Masters)
4.15pm - 4.35pm: R390 Elite Endurance Practice
4.45pm - 6.05pm: Heat Three - (Micro Max, Mini Max, Junior Max, Max, DD2, and DD2 Masters)
6.15pm - 8.15pm: RACE - R390 ELITE ENDURANCE

DECEMBER 21

9.20am - 10.05am: Warm-up sessions - Five minutes per category (Micro Max, Mini Max, Junior Max, Max, DD2, and DD2 Masters)
10.20am - 10.50am: Pre-Qualifying 1 and 2 - R390 Sprint
11.00am - 12.35pm: Pre-finals - (Micro Max, Mini Max, Junior Max, Max, DD2, and DD2 Masters)
12.45pm - 2.00pm: Race 1 and Race 2 - R390 Sprint Group 1 and R390 Sprint Group 2
2.15pm - 4.35pm: Finals - (Micro Max, Mini Max, Junior Max, Max, DD2, and DD2 Masters)

4.45pm - 5.05pm: Final - R390 Sprint
5.30pm - 6.00pm: Championship Awards & MENA Nations Cup Presentation.

SHUTTLE SERVICE:

19 December: 9:30am - 5:00pm
20 December: 10am - 6:30pm
21 December: 9am - 6:30pm
For those unable to attend in person, all racing action will be broadcast live via QMMF's official YouTube channel. Beyond the track, visitors can immerse themselves in an entertainment zone featuring cutting-edge racing experiences, including a spacious 10mx10m radio-controlled car racing circuit, PlayStation 5 gaming stations, professional-grade racing simulators, and a 360-degree photo booth to capture the excitement.

WORLD WEIGHTLIFTING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Qatar's Fares claims two silver medals

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's Fares Ibrahim secured two silver medals at the Manama 2024 World Weightlifting Championships for Men and Women, in Bahrain.

The competition, featuring some of the world's most prominent weightlifters, will conclude today.

A gold medallist at the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games, Fares showcased an impressive performance in the fiercely contested 102kg weight class, which included 24 elite lifters, many of them world and Olympic champions.

In the clean and jerk, Fares claimed the silver medal by lift-

ing 225kg.

The gold medal went to Uzbekistan's Artyom Antropov who lifted 230kg, while Colombia's Jhonatan Rivas took bronze with a lift of 213kg.

Fares also earned a silver medal in the total category, achieving a combined lift of 399kg - 225kg in the snatch and 174kg in the clean and jerk.

He narrowly missed the gold, which was won by Antropov with a total of 400kg (230kg in the clean and jerk and 170kg in the snatch).

The bronze medal in the total went to Spain's Marcos Ruiz, who lifted a combined 395kg - 212kg in the clean and jerk and 183kg in the snatch.

In the snatch category of the 102kg event, the gold medal was awarded to Ruiz.



PSG coach Enrique having 'best season of my career'

Paris Saint-Germain coach Luis Enrique insisted yesterday the statistics indicate "the best season" of his career as he brushed aside talk of tensions with some of his players. "Statistically, it's my best as a coach. Even if you (the media) criticise, that there are lies invented, it's my best in terms of numbers, chances generated by us, by the opponents, it's the best," the Spaniard said ahead of today's league match against Lyon.

PSG head into the final round of Ligue 1 games this calendar year unbeaten domestically and with a five-point lead from nearest challengers Marseille and Monaco at the top of the table. However they are in 25th place in the Champions League rankings and in the elimination zone of the elite European tournament. "I look at everything the team does, the players, and we don't depend on any particular player, only on the team. And I see that the level of training

is rising, that the players are getting better every day," he said. The former Barcelona and Spain coach brushed aside talk of tensions with France winger Ousmane Dembele, insisting he had "the same relationship with all the players".

"I'm a coach. I'm not their father, brother or 'bro', I decide, I have to make decisions, I have no problem making them, those that I consider to be the best for my team," he explained. The idea is to "get everyone out of the comfort zone, those who play more as well as those who play less. I have always done it in my career and I do not intend to change."

"To see the best version of these players, we can make unpopular decisions. It's a team, like an orchestra, there can't always be players doing the same thing, we have to co-ordinate." After the Lyon match, PSG play Monaco in Ligue 1 next Wednesday followed by a French Cup tie against Lens on December 22.

MAINZ HAND BAYERN FIRST LEAGUE LOSS UNDER KOMPANY

Two goals from Jae-sung Lee took Mainz to a shock 2-1 home win over Bayern Munich yesterday, handing coach Vincent Kompany his first league loss. Lee scored in each half against an uncharacteristically poor Bayern, who are now just four points clear after Bayer Leverkusen's 2-0 win at Augsburg. Injuries meant Kompany was unable to call on several first team regulars including Harry Kane, Manuel Neuer, Alphonso Davies, Kingsley Coman, Serge Gnabry and Joao Palhinha. Kane's absence was particularly telling in the first half, with the league leaders dominating possession but unable to convert any of their half chances into a goal. Mainz boasted a

better-than-expected home record against the German giants, having won three of their past four home league games over Bayern. The home side struck shortly before half-time, Lee taking advantage of a poor clearance from his South Korea teammate Min-Jae Kim to hammer home. Even with the knowledge that Leverkusen were ahead in Augsburg, Bayern came out poorer after half-time, lacking precision and energy. Mainz soon capitalised through Lee again. Armando Sieb threaded a clever cross goalwards for Lee to collect before blasting home on the spin. Leroy Sane tapped in a deflected Joshua Kimmich shot in the 87th minute to give the

league leaders hope, but Mainz held firm for a famous home win. The win moved Mainz, who battled relegation last season, up to sixth. Defending champions Leverkusen continued their recent resurgence, winning comfortably 2-0 at Augsburg, their seventh victory in a row. Martin Terrier put Leverkusen in front 14 minutes in, curling the ball home with his first touch after a lovely low cross from Jeremie Frimpong. Florian Wirtz added a second in the 40th minute when he controlled the ball, sold the Augsburg defence a dummy before skipping a shot across the grass and into the bottom corner.

SHOWJUMPING

Haidan claims victory in thrilling Al Shaqab League opener

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's Mohammed Saeed Haidan clinched the Al Shaqab Champions 130cm class, the feature event of the first round of the Al Shaqab League at the Longines Indoor Arena in Al Shaqab yesterday.

The thrilling finale, which offered a prize purse of QR70,000, culminated in a sensational showdown with a 17-rider jump-off. In the end, it was Haidan who prevailed as he guided nine-year-old stallion Popeye de Tamise to a fastest time of 41.86 seconds and take home QR17,500 in prize money.

Fellow Qatari rider Awad al-Qahtani took the second spot with eight-year-old gelding Florian in 42.81 seconds, while Saudi Arabia's Bader Alfard, riding Hw Cosette, finished third in 42.84 seconds.

Hamza al-Kuwari, Corporate Services Director at Al Shaqab, presented the trophies to the winners. The main class featured 46 participants, capping two days of high-calibre showjumping, with many young riders displaying abundance of talent and offering a glimpse into the promising future in the sport.

The Junior Champions 115cm class was won comprehensively by Fahad Jassim Hamad al-Thani, who completed the course in 25.36 seconds aboard the 11-year-old mare Gabbana M. The winning time was 2.59 seconds faster than the runner-up, Ibrahim Khalid al-Kuwari, riding Gamin Raye. Al-Kuwari also claimed third place with Flexy Bel, finishing in 28.30 seconds. Khalid al-Jehani, Breeding and Show Manager at Al Shaqab, presented the trophies to the winners.

Jordan's Joud Bassam Elaker won the Amateur Class - Optimum Time - 90cm, clocking in at an impressive 52.33 seconds with the bay mare Lambada.

Qatar's Naylah Tamim Hamad al-Thani, riding Bon Suela, took second place, while



Mohammed Saeed Haidan celebrates with his nine-year-old stallion Popeye de Tamise after winning the Al Shaqab Champions 130cm class yesterday.

Al Qaqa Tamim Hamad al-Thani, also aboard Bon Suela, finished third. Ahmed Khaled al-Hemaidi, Legacy and Heritage Specialist at Al Shaqab, awarded the trophies to the riders.

Meanwhile, Khalifa Joana al-Thani delivered an outstanding performance in the Introductory Class 2 - Optimum Time - 60cm, taking first place while also securing third. Riding the eight-year-old grey stallion Ardfray Apollo, he posted a winning time of 49.96 seconds in a field of 48 participants. He later led Zion II to third place. Mohammed Saleh al-Fadala, on Bay Barney, claimed second place. Abdulrahman al-Kaabi, Commercial Manager at Al Shaqab, honoured the riders.

The team event was won by Wadi, with Al Wathna finishing second and Shahaleh third. Faisal al-Kahla, Hathab Event Director, awarded the trophies to the winners.

The team competition has been introduced for the first time, featuring a unique Team Competition Draw. Each team has been named after legendary Al Shaqab Champion Horses.

Following the success of its inaugural edition, the League continues to nurture young talent and promote excellence in horsemanship, offering aspiring riders under 25 a dynamic and competitive platform to display their skills.

In addition to showjumping competitions, Al Shaqab League also hosted the Hayakum Festival, offering a wide range of fun activities for children and families, along with an assortment of food and beverage options from local cafes and restaurants.

The second round of the Al Shaqab League will take place from December 26-28.



Jordan's Joud Bassam Elaker won the Amateur Class while Qatar's Naylah Tamim Hamad al-Thani and Qaqa Tamim Hamad al-Thani finished second and third, respectively.



Khalifa Joana al-Thani delivered an outstanding performance in the Introductory Class 2 - Optimum Time - 60cm, taking first place while also securing third spot.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Jota rescues Liverpool a point in Fulham draw

Arsenal's title challenge dented by a goalless stalemate against Everton

AFP
London

Diego Jota rescued Liverpool as the Premier League leaders recovered from Andy Robertson's early red card to snatch a 2-2 draw with Fulham, while Arsenal's title challenge was dented by a goalless stalemate against Everton yesterday.

With just four minutes left at Anfield, Arne Slot's side were in danger of losing for just the second time in 15 top-flight games this season. But Jota grabbed a valuable equaliser as Liverpool extended their unbeaten run in all competitions to 19 matches since a loss to Nottingham Forest in September. With last weekend's Merseyside derby at Everton postponed by severe weather, Liverpool have now gone two league games without a win following their 3-3 draw at Newcastle.

The Reds sit five points clear of second-placed Chelsea, who can close the gap with a win against Brentford at Stamford Bridge today.

Liverpool were rocked in the 11th minute as Fulham midfielder Andreas Pereira met Antonee Robinson's cross with an agile volley that deflected in off Robertson.

The Reds suffered another blow when Scotland left-back Robertson was sent off in the 17th minute for a professional foul on Harry Wilson. But Slot's men have made a habit of coming from behind this season and Cody Gakpo equalised in the 47th minute with a stooping header from Mohamed Salah's cross.

Fulham forward Rodrigo Muniz delivered a sucker punch as he bundled over the line from Robinson's cross in the 76th minute.



Fulham's Kenny Tete (right) clashes with Liverpool's Joe Gomez during the Premier League match at Anfield in Liverpool yesterday. (Reuters)

That set the stage for a dramatic finale as Jota levelled in the 86th minute with a cool finish past Bernd Leno from the edge of the area. "I don't think I could have asked for more from my players, especially after going down to 10 men," Slot said. "It's an emotional game. It's good to see our performance after so many setbacks."

Arsenal failed to take advantage of Liverpool's rare stumble as the Gunners were kept at bay on a frustrating afternoon at the Emirates Stadium. The north Londoners have become a force from set-pieces, scor-

ing 23 goals from corners since the start of last season.

But their lack of firepower outside of that route has been questioned this season and once again they were hampered by a failure to turn pressure and possession into goals. After a second successive league draw, third-placed Arsenal remain six points behind Liverpool, who have a game in hand on last season's runners-up.

"We fully deserved to win the game," Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta said. "It's frustrating, especially when we concede zero

chances and dominate the game so much."

Nottingham Forest climbed to fourth place after staging a dramatic late fightback to beat Aston Villa 2-1 at the City Ground. Jhon Duran put sixth-placed Villa in front with a powerful header from John McGinn's 63rd minute cross. But Forest levelled with three minutes left when Nikola Milenkovic's header crept past Emiliano Martinez's weak attempted save.

And Anthony Elanga's composed close-range finish in stoppage-time sealed Forest's third victory in their last four games. Newcastle handed Ruud van Nistelrooy his first defeat as Leicester boss with a 4-0 rout at St James' Park.

Former Manchester United striker Van Nistelrooy had taken four points from his first two games since replacing the sacked Steve Cooper.

But Newcastle ended that encouraging start as Jacob Murphy struck in the 30th minute and Bruno Guimaraes nodded the second goal in the 47th minute. Alexander Isak bagged the Magpies' third two minutes later and Murphy netted again on the hour to leave Leicester two points above the relegation zone.

Jack Taylor's stoppage-time goal gave Ipswich a priceless 2-1 win over relegation rivals Wolves at Molineux. Ipswich went ahead through Matt Doherty's 15th minute own goal before Matheus Cunha grabbed a 72nd minute equaliser.

Taylor headed home from a 94th minute corner to seal Ipswich's second league win since their promotion to the top tier. Third-bottom Ipswich are just one point adrift of safety, while second-bottom Wolves are three points behind them after an 11th loss in 16 league games piled further pressure on boss Gary O'Neil.

Michel upset with toothless Girona's defeat at 10-man Mallorca

Madrid: Girona coach Michel appeared upset with his side's display in a 2-1 loss at 10-man Mallorca in La Liga yesterday, condemning their tendency to control possession over long spells without purpose. Girona were unable to profit from an early lead and their opponents' going down to 10 men in the first half, extending their winless run in all competitions to six games.

"We weren't able to attack well against 10 players," Michel told a press conference. "We made a mistake and they made it 2-1 and we resorted more to hurrying than to football to turn it around. We came into the game well but after the sending off we were too rash, we didn't create superiority."

Mallorca forward Cyle Larin took advantage of Girona's defensive error to seal the win after the break, having cancelled out Donny van de Beek's seventh-minute opener in the first half. "The lack of intensity is always what worries me the most," Michel said. "In attack and defence you have to pin down the opponent and go for it. Passing the ball around without being vertical is not the football I want for my team, I don't like what I've seen. I'm worried about that mentality of having the ball without generating and the lack of connection, only trying to create individual situations."

Girona's only attempt on target was their opening goal. After hosting second-bottom Real Valladolid on Friday, Girona return to league action on Jan 11 at lowly Deportivo Alaves.

Girona, who are ninth in La Liga and 10 points outside the top four, are in their maiden Champions League campaign after a third-placed finish behind Real Madrid and Barcelona last term.

SPOTLIGHT

Record-breakers Atalanta maintain Serie A lead as Napoli lurk



Atalanta's Nicolò Zaniolo (right) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Cagliari in the Serie A. (Reuters)

AFP
Milan

Atalanta's bid for a first Serie A title continued yesterday with a club-record 10th straight league win, 1-0 at Cagliari, which was followed by closest challengers Napoli staying on their heels with a 3-1 win at Udinese.

Nicolò Zaniolo made sure Atalanta stayed top of Serie A this weekend with the goal which decided a hard-fought encounter in Sardinia, the Italy international forward stroking home the winner from Raoul Bellanova's cut-back in the 66th minute. Atalanta, guided by veteran coach

Gian Piero Gasperini, have emerged as genuine Scudetto challengers for the first time in their history and stay two points clear at the top of the league.

However, Gasperini was not happy with his players' performances as, after impressing in Tuesday's 3-2 defeat to Real Madrid, they struggled against Cagliari who are 15th and only two points above the relegation zone. Atalanta, who also struck the post through Ademola Lookman almost straight after Zaniolo's winner, only came away with all three points thanks to a brilliant performance between the sticks from Marco Carnesecchi.

Goalkeeper Carnesecchi pulled off three sensational stops in the six minutes before the break and saved the win in stoppage

time by keeping out Leonardo Pavoletti's header. Zaniolo's strike was his third of the season and a further sign of new life after a difficult last few years.

The 25-year-old was once the rising star of Italian football after coming to prominence at Roma, where two serious knee injuries in 2020 stymied his development as a creative playmaker. He won the inaugural Europa Conference League with Roma in 2022 under Jose Mourinho, but fell out with the Portuguese coach and last year was packed off to Galatasaray, from where he was loaned to Atalanta in July.

Napoli, missing injured star Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, came back from a goal down to secure the three points.

Trailing at the break after Florian Thau-

vin netted on the rebound from his own saved 22nd-minute penalty, Napoli roared back in the second half. Romelu Lukaku levelled five minutes after half-time, bursting through to collect Scott McTominay's pass, holding off Lautaro Giannetti and firing in his sixth Napoli goal.

The unfortunate Giannetti inadvertently put Napoli ahead in the 76th minute when he shinned in David Neres' miscued shot and Andre-Frank Zambo Anguissa sealed the points by coolly finishing off a fine team move. Napoli are four points ahead of Lazio and third-placed Inter, who face off in Rome tomorrow night, and Fiorentina with the Viola at Bologna. Juventus are 10 points behind Atalanta ahead of their home clash with bottom club Venezia.