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TENNIS

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FOCUS

# Qatar Olympic Committee unveils 2025 sports calendar

Calendar features a robust lineup of 84 events, including 15 world-class championships



By Sports Reporter  
Doha

The Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) yesterday revealed its 2025 sports events calendar, featuring a robust lineup of 84 events, including 15 world-class championships. Among the most anticipated event is the ITTF World Table Tennis Championships, scheduled from May 17-27, 2025, across Lusail Multipurpose Arena, Qatar University Arena, and Qatar Sports Arena. Additionally, Qatar will also host the FIFA U-17 World Cup from November 5-27, 2025, at the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 stadiums.

The year will open with the finals of King of the Court beach volleyball tournament, organised by the Qatar Volleyball Association in early January, followed by the Beach Pro Tour Elite16 in February.

February also features the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters, hosted by the Qatar Golf Association, the Qatar ExxonMobil Open for men and Qatar TotalEnergies Open for women, organised by the Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel and Badminton Federation. Meanwhile, the HH The Amir's Shooting Cup



and the Lusail Shotgun Championship will be conducted by the Qatar Shooting & Archery Association. In April, the spotlight will be on the FIG Artistic Gymnastics Apparatus World Cup, showcasing both men's and women's competitions.

In May, Doha will host the ITTF World Table Tennis Championships with top players competing for the ultimate prize in the sport. This prestigious event marks a triumphant return to Doha, two decades after the city hosted the successful ITTF World Championships in 2004. As the first host in the Middle East region, the 2004 event contributed signifi-



cantly to the growth of the sport and inspired the next generation of table tennis enthusiasts.

The 2025 edition continues Doha's longstanding association as one of the most established cities in global table tennis calendar.

The ITTF World Table Tennis Championships Finals 2025 promises to be an incredible spectacle, where the best players in the world will compete at the highest level. There will be a 128-player main

draw in both the men's and women's singles events, and 64-pair main draws for the men's, women's, and mixed doubles events.

June will feature the FIFA 3x3 U-23 Youth League, hosted by the Qatar Basketball Federation. Later in the year, the QTerminals Qatar Classic squash tournament will take place from September 28-October 4, 2025, organised by the Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel and Badminton Federation.

The calendar boasts 36 international championships, including the Al Shaqab International League which is a qualifier for the FEI Group 7 final, the WTT Star Contender, the Qatar Fencing Grand Prix, the Qatar International Optimist Sailing Championship, HH The Amir's Sword Equestrian Festival, the Commercial Bank CHI Al Shaqab presented by Longines, the Doha Diamond League, the 5th Qatar Open Taek-

wondo Championship, and the 10th Qatar Weightlifting Cup.

On the Asian level, Qatar will host 14 events, such as the Asian Beach Volleyball Championship, the FIBA Asia Cup 2025 Qualifiers, the West Asia One-Day Athletics Championship, the West Asia Badminton Championship, and the Asian Padel Championship.

On the Arab level, the Qatar Football Association will organise the FIFA Arab Cup, from December 1-18 at the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 stadiums. Gulf competitions include six championships, including the GCC Men's Tennis Championship (singles and doubles), the GCC Padel Team Championship for U-14, U-18, men, and women, and the GCC Youth and Junior Athletics Championship.

In addition, the newly-released calendar includes a big number of local and community events such as: National Sport Day, QOC Half-Marathon, Qatar Volleyball Cup Final, HH The Amir Basketball Cup final, Qatar Football Cup Final, Qatar Handball Cup Final, HH The Amir Volleyball Cup final, closing ceremony of Olympic Schools Program, HH The Amir Football Cup final, HH The Amir Handball Cup and World Olympic Day.

No.	Event	Host	Venue	Start Date	Ending Date
1	Al Shaqab International League 2 (Group 7 Qualifier)	Al Shaqab	Al Shaqab Longines Arena	2-Jan-25	4-Jan-25
2	King of the Court BEACH VOLLEYBALL	Qatar Volleyball Federation	Al Gharafa beach playgrounds	5-Jan-25	8-Jan-25
3	Asian Beach Volleyball Championship	Qatar Volleyball Federation	Al Gharafa beach playgrounds	6-Jan-25	9-Jan-25
4	WTT Star Contender Doha TABLE TENNIS	Qatar Table Tennis Federation	Lusail	6-Jan-25	11-Jan-25
5	Doha International Equestrian Tour 2025 (Tour 1)	Qatar Equestrian Federation & Modern Pentathlon	Al Shaqab Longines Arena	9-Jan-25	11-Jan-25
6	GCC Men (Single & Double) TENNIS	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	9-Jan-25	12-Jan-25
7	QSF 3 PSA Satellite "Senior" (IK) SQUASH	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	13-Jan-25	16-Jan-25
8	1st Qatar Men's ITF World Tennis Tour (M15)	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	13-Jan-25	19-Jan-25
9	Doha International Equestrian Tour 2025 (Tour 2)	Qatar Equestrian Federation & Modern Pentathlon	Al Shaqab Longines Arena	16-Jan-25	18-Jan-25
10	2nd Qatar Men's ITF World Tennis Tour (M25)	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	20-Jan-25	26-Jan-25
11	1st Doha Promotion Tournament 2025 - PADEL	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	20-Jan-25	26-Jan-25
12	Doha International Equestrian Tour 2025 (Tour 3)	Qatar Equestrian Federation & Modern Pentathlon	Al Shaqab Longines Arena	23-Jan-25	25-Jan-25
13	Fencing Grand Prix - Epee	Qatar Fencing Federation	Aspire	24-Jan-25	26-Jan-25
14	1st Doha FIP RISE 2025 PADEL	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	27-Jan-25	2-Feb-25
15	WTT Youth Star Contender Doha 2025 - TABLE TENNIS	Qatar Table Tennis Federation	Lusail or Aspire Women's Hall	27-Jan-25	8-Feb-25
16	Katara International Arabian Horse Festival	Qatar Racing & Equestrian Club	Katara Cultural Village	29-Jan-25	1-Feb-25
17	Qatar International Optimist Regatta 2025	Qatar Sailing and Rowing Federation	Rixos Gulf Hotel Doha	3-Feb-25	8-Feb-25
18	The 2025 Commercial Bank Qatar Masters Golf Championship 28th Edition - GOLF	Qatar Golf Federation	Doha Golf Club	6-Feb-25	9-Feb-25
19	Qatar Total Energies Open 2025 TENNIS	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	9-Feb-25	15-Feb-25
20	VW-Beach Pro Tour Elite 16	Qatar Volleyball Federation	Al Gharafa beach playgrounds	10-Feb-25	15-Feb-25
21	National Sports Day	Qatar Olympic Committee	Lusail	11-Feb-25	11-Feb-25
22	QOC Half Marathon 2025	Qatar Olympic Committee	Lusail	11-Feb-25	11-Feb-25
23	HH The Amir's Sword International Equestrian Festival	Qatar Equestrian Federation & Modern Pentathlon	Al Shaqab Longines Arena	13-Feb-25	15-Feb-25
24	Amir Grand Prix - Lusail Shotgun Competition	Qatar Archery and Archery Federation	Lusail Shooting Range	13-Feb-25	21-Feb-25
25	National Teams International Tournament - BASKETBALL	Qatar Basketball Federation	Lusail Sports Hall	15-Feb-25	19-Feb-25
26	Qatar ExxonMobil Open 2025 TENNIS	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	17-Feb-25	22-Feb-25
27	2025 WAGR - Qatar Open Amateur Championship 39th Edition - GOLF	Qatar Golf Federation	Doha Golf Club	20-Feb-25	22-Feb-25
28	Commercial Bank CHI Al Shaqab Presented By Longines	Al Shaqab	Al Shaqab Longines Arena	20-Feb-25	22-Feb-25
29	FIBA Asia Cup 2025 Qualifiers BASKETBALL	Qatar Basketball Federation	Lusail Sports Hall	21-Feb-25	25-Feb-25
30	QSF 2 PSA World Bronze "Senior" (50K) - SQUASH	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	24-Feb-25	28-Feb-25

No.	Event	Host	Venue	Start Date	Ending Date
31	Longines Global Champions Tour EQUESTRIAN	Al Shaqab	Al Shaqab Longines Arena	27-Feb-25	1-Mar-25
32	QSF 3 PSA Satellite "Senior" (IK) SQUASH	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	17-Mar-25	20-Mar-25
33	West Asian Beach Volleyball Championship	Qatar Volleyball Federation	Al Gharafa beach playgrounds	1-Apr-25	7-Apr-25
34	1st Qatar Asian Junior Tournament 14 years & Under TENNIS	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	7-Apr-25	12-Apr-25
35	2nd Qatar Asian Junior Tournament 14 years & Under TENNIS	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	14-Apr-25	19-Apr-25
36	World Cup Artistic for Apparatus (MAG-WAG) - GYMNASTICS	Qatar Gymnastics Federation	Aspire Academy	16-Apr-25	19-Apr-25
37	Qatar Junior Open - SQUASH	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	21-Apr-25	24-Apr-25
38	1st Qatar ITF World Tennis Tour Junior (Group 4)	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	21-Apr-25	26-Apr-25
39	GCC Teams U14,18, Men's & Women's - PADEL	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	21-Apr-25	27-Apr-25
40	Qatar Cup Volleyball Final	Qatar Volleyball Federation	TBC	25-Apr-25	25-Apr-25
41	2nd Qatar ITF World Tennis Tour Junior (Group 4)	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	28-Apr-25	3-May-25
42	HH The Emir's Basketball Cup Final	Qatar Basketball Federation	Al Gharafa Sports Club Hall	3-May-25	3-May-25
43	The Gulf Cooperation Council Athletics Championship for Young Men and Women	Qatar Athletics Federation	Qatar Sports Club	4-May-25	6-May-25
44	Qatar Cup Football Final	Qatar Football Federation	TBC	10-May-25	10-May-25
45	Qatar Cup Handball Final	Qatar Handball Federation	Duhail Handball Sports Hall	15-May-25	15-May-25
46	HH The Emir's Volleyball Cup Final	Qatar Volleyball Federation	TBC	16-May-25	16-May-25
47	West Asian One-Day Athletics Championships	Qatar Athletics Federation	Qatar Sports Club	16-May-25	16-May-25
48	Diamond League Championships in Athletics	Qatar Athletics Federation	Qatar Sports Club	16-May-25	16-May-25
49	ITTF World Table Tennis Championships Doha 2025	Qatar Table Tennis Federation	Lusail, Qatar University and Qatari Women's Hall	17-May-25	27-May-25
50	School Olympic Program (Boys)	Qatar School Sports Federation	TBC	20-May-25	20-May-25
51	School Olympic Program (Girls)	Qatar School Sports Federation	TBC	21-May-25	21-May-25
52	HH The Emir's Football Cup Final	Qatar Football Federation	TBC	24-May-25	24-May-25
53	HH The Emir's Handball Cup Final	Qatar Handball Federation	Duhail Handball Sports Hall	26-May-25	26-May-25
54	QSF 4 PSA Challenger "Senior" (3K) - SQUASH	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	26-May-25	29-May-25
55	FIBA 3x3 U23 Youth League BASKETBALL	Qatar Basketball Federation	Qatar Basketball Federation Hall	12-Jun-25	18-Jun-25
56	World Olympic Day	Qatar Olympic Committee	TBC	23-Jun-25	23-Jun-25
57	QTerminals Qatar Classic PSA Platinum - SQUASH	Padel & Badminton Qatar Tennis, Squash, Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	28-Sep-25	4-Oct-25
58	WTT Youth Contender Doha 2025 - TABLE TENNIS	Qatar Table Tennis Federation	Aspire Zone Women's Hall	2-Oct-25	12-Oct-25
59	3rd Qatar Asian Junior Tournament 14 years & Under TENNIS	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	13-Oct-25	18-Oct-25
60	QSF 5 PSA World Bronze "Senior" (50K) - SQUASH	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	19-Oct-25	23-Oct-25

No.	Event	Host	Venue	Start Date	Ending Date
61	West Asian Junior Championship 2025 - BADMINTON	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	19-Oct-25	25-Oct-25
62	4th Qatar Asian Junior Tournament 14 years & Under TENNIS	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	20-Oct-25	25-Oct-25
63	1st Qatar Junior International Series 2025 - BADMINTON	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	28-Oct-25	31-Oct-25
64	Ooredoo Qatar Major 2025	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	TBC	TBC
65	1st Qatar Future Series 2025 BADMINTON	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	3-Nov-25	6-Nov-25
66	Junior World Cup - FOOTBALL	Qatar Football Federation	World Cup Stadiums	5-Nov-25	27-Nov-25
67	GCC Padel Championship	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	7-Nov-25	11-Nov-25
68	Doha FIP Promotion - PADEL	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	17-Nov-25	23-Nov-25
69	GCC Teams Under 12 & 14 TENNIS	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	18-Nov-25	22-Nov-25
70	Qatar Open Taekwondo Championship G1	Qatar Taekwondo, Judo and Karate Federation	Lusail	20-Nov-25	23-Nov-25
71	Doha Junior Open - SQUASH	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	24-Nov-25	27-Nov-25
72	5th Qatar Asian Junior Tournament 14 years & Under TENNIS	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	24-Nov-25	29-Nov-25
73	2nd Doha FIP RISE 2025 PADEL	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	24-Nov-25	30-Nov-25
74	International Series Qatar 3rd Edition 2025 - GOLF	Qatar Golf Federation	Doha Golf Club	27-Nov-25	30-Nov-25
75	Asian Padel Championship - Qatar PADEL	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	TBC	TBC
76	QSF 6 PSA Challenger "Senior" (3K) - SQUASH	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	1-Dec-25	4-Dec-25
77	6th Qatar Asian Junior Tournament 14 years & Under TENNIS	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	1-Dec-25	6-Dec-25
78	2nd Doha FIP RISE - PADEL	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	1-Dec-25	7-Dec-25
79	Arab Cup Football Championship	Qatar Football Federation	World Cup Stadiums	1-Dec-25	18-Dec-25
80	World Junior B Curling Championships	Qatar Winter Sports Committee	Ali Bin Hamad Al-Attiyah Arena Doha	6-Dec-25	20-Dec-25
81	3rd Qatar Men's ITF World Tennis Tour	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	8-Dec-25	14-Dec-25
82	Qatar International Cup 10th WEIGHTLIFTING	Qatar Weightlifting Federation	TBC	10-Dec-25	20-Dec-25
83	4th Qatar Men's ITF World Tennis Tour	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	15-Dec-25	21-Dec-25
84	GCC Under 10 (Boys & Girls) TENNIS	Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel & Badminton Federation	Khalifa Intl. Tennis & Squash Complex	23-Dec-25	29-Dec-25

COMMENT

# Ex-India coach Shastri wants two-tier Test system after MCG blockbuster

AFP  
Sydney

Former India coach **Ravi Shastri** called yesterday for a two-tier structure in Test cricket with relegation and promotion to ensure the survival of the red-ball game.

His comments follow the blockbuster fourth Test between India and Australia that drew a record 373,691 spectators to the Melbourne Cricket Ground over five enthralling days.

That beat the previous record of 350,534 at the same ground during the 1936-37 Ashes series against England, when Donald Bradman ruled the sport and Tests were played over six days.

Shastri, now a commentator, said he could not remember "a bigger advertisement for Test cricket" and said it proved the five-day game continued to hold its own in the face of ever-increasing T20 franchise cricket.

But the 62-year-old said it also reinforced his view that for Test



cricket to survive, the biggest teams needed to be playing each other more often.

"To break crowd records that have stood for nearly a century... is testimony to the fact that when the best teams play, the toughest and best format of the game is still alive and thriving," he said in a column for *The Australian* newspaper.

"It was also a sound reminder to the ICC (International Cricket Council) that the best should play the best for Test cricket to survive.

"I will say that there's too much of a clutter otherwise. "This match further emphasises why we need a two-tier system with the top 6-8 teams and then include promotion and demotion.

"You will not get these kinds of crowds if you don't have two proper teams playing."

The ICC has been contemplating a two-tier system for years to keep the format competitive but the plans have never got off the ground.

A proposal for a de facto premier league featuring the top seven sides was on the agenda of the world governing body in 2016.

It was scrapped after the powerful Indian board led a backlash.

While India stand to gain from playing more matches against teams such as England and Australia, the BCCI said at the time the cost to smaller cricketing nations was too great.

Shastri also said the Melbourne game proved that Tests should remain five days, amid chatter that they should be reduced to four to help streamline schedules.



Australia's Nathan Lyon (right) celebrates the wicket of India's Nitish Kumar Reddy on day five of the fourth Test at the MCG on Monday. (AFP)

"The theatre in the end on (day five) Monday was further proof of why we need five days for a classic Test match," he said.

"However, if you don't create

a two-tier system, you'll continue to have unmatched teams up against each other and then it's very unlikely they'll be able to take a game into the fifth day.

"Then there'll always be talk of four-day Tests." Australia won the Test by 184 runs deep into day five and lead the series 2-1 heading into the final clash in Sydney this week.

CRICKET

# South Africa eye home advantage in Pakistan Test

The hosts go into the second game expecting a bumper crowd

Reuters  
Cape Town

South Africa have already sealed their place in this year's World Test Championship (WTC) final ahead of the second and final Test against Pakistan at Newlands tomorrow but will want to keep their momentum going in the longest format.

South Africa beat Pakistan by two wickets in a tense first Test in Pretoria and have won their last six red ball matches in a row, their joint best run since a team record nine victories in succession in 2002 and 2003.

This form has propelled them into the WTC final at Lord's in June but questions around their brittle batting line-up will be a major focus on what has recently been a perilous Newlands pitch.

The previous Test played there against India 12 months ago lasted only 107 overs as the visitors won by seven wickets inside two days, the shortest test that has had a winner in history.

The wicket should be better this time round, but at a ground that used to be a fortress for the home team, they have lost two of their last three tests in Cape Town.

"We definitely haven't been clinical or ruthless when the opportunity or the situation is called upon," South Africa captain Temba Bavuma said. "But I think what we've done is that we've found ways to make sure that the result is on our side.

"If I look at our batting group, we don't have batters that are averaging 45-plus. All of us are mid-30s, late-30s, which shows that at some point guys are going to make some contribution to the team."

Pakistan will rue not closing out the first Test having reduced South Africa to 99-8 chasing 148 on a tough Centurion Park wicket,



Pacers Kagiso Rabada (left) with Marco Jansen after South Africa beat Pakistan in the first Test of two at Centurion. (@ProteasMenCSA)

only for all-rounder Marco Jansen and fast bowler Kagiso Rabada to carry the hosts to victory. Pakistan captain Shan Masood has also spoken of the need for his side to be more ruthless when on top, both with the bat and the ball.

"We keep making the same mistakes but we have to get over the line and seize moments," he said.

"There are moments where you get that extra cushion and we have to finish off games. We have to finish off our batting and bowling in-nings well."

Pakistan have won only two of their previous 16 Tests in South Africa, and none since 2007. They have lost all four previous visits to Cape Town.

There is likely to be a bumper holiday crowd and they should enjoy the occasion with a sparse home calendar over the next 18 months.

According to the ICC's Future Tours Programme as it currently stands, this will be South Africa's last home test until the visit of Australia in September 2026, and their only home international across all three formats in 2025.

SPOTLIGHT

# Canada's Dabrowski reveals cancer blow amid run to Paris bronze

AFP  
Montreal

Canada's **Gabriela Dabrowski** revealed yesterday that her run to Olympic bronze in Paris came as she received treatment for breast cancer.

"How can something so small cause such a big problem? This is the question I asked myself when I was diagnosed with breast cancer back in mid-April," the 32-year-old doubles specialist wrote on Instagram.

"I know this will come as a shock to many, but I am okay and I will be okay. Early detection saves lives," she said.

"I can wholeheartedly agree with this."

Dabrowski said she discovered a lump in her left breast during a 2023 self-exam, but at that time was told its size meant there was no cause for concern.

A year later it was larger and she underwent a biopsy and received the diagnosis.

"Those are words you never expect to hear, and in an instant your life or the life of a loved one turns upside down," said Dabrowski, who won the 2023 US Open women's doubles title, the 2018 Australian Open mixed-doubles title and the 2017 French Open mixed-doubles title.

Dabrowski said her "surreal" second half of the 2024 season

included two surgeries and radiotherapy, before slightly delaying further treatment to compete at Wimbledon and the Olympics.

She teamed up with New Zealand's Erin Routliffe to finish runners-up at Wimbledon and won mixed-doubles bronze in Paris with Felix Auger-Aliassime.

She and Routliffe won the doubles crown at the season-ending WTA Tour Finals in Riyadh.

Dabrowski said she waited to share her story because she "wanted to figure everything out and handle things privately with only those closest to me in the loop". Now, she says, her perspective on her tennis career and life has changed.

"When the threat of losing everything I'd worked for my entire life became a real possibility, only then did I begin to authentically appreciate what I had," she said.

"My mindset shifted from 'I have to do this' to 'I get to do this'."

"Through this lens I find it so much easier to find joy in areas of my life I previously viewed as a heavy weight."

Dabrowski's post was met with an outpouring of support from WTA colleagues, including Americans Coco Gauff and Jessica Pegula, Pegula calling her "effing strong".

Routliffe said she was "lucky" to be by Dabrowski's side through it all.

"Here's to more smiling in 2025," Routliffe said.



FOCUS

# Carey backs pacer Starc to win fitness race ahead of final Test

Reuters  
Sydney

Australia wicketkeeper Alex Carey has backed Mitchell Starc to be ready for the decisive fifth and final Test of the series against India when it starts in Sydney tomorrow despite doubts over the fast bowler's fitness.

Starc was sent for back scans after clutching his ribs and side in the latter stages of Australia's thrilling 184-run victory in the fourth test in Melbourne, which earned Pat Cummins' side a 2-1 series lead.

"He'll be fine, he'll push through," Carey said. "I have played with Starc for a long time now and he is one of the toughest cricketers I have played with.

"So he'll grimace, he'll grab his rib, no doubt, but he'll be ready for the contest."

Despite seeing Starc claim only one wicket during the fourth Test, the vital scalp of Virat Kohli during India's second innings run chase, Carey was impressed with the 34-year-old's performance at the MCG.

"I thought that first spell (on the last day in Melbourne) without the reward was, you know, some of the best bowling I've seen this series from him," he said.

"He's got an opportunity now to help this team in a Test match. He'll be up for the contest. And I think his bowling just got better throughout the series."

The win in Melbourne means the Australians can claim the Border-

Gavaskar Trophy, with a draw in Sydney. Carey stressed, however, that he and his team mates would be pushing for another victory to seal the series in style.

"To go into this last game 2-1 up is great for the group but it's another opportunity to win a test match," he said. "We always play to win the game and then work backwards from there. "We're in a good position but I think this group's really keen to come here, put our good foot forward from day one and see what happens."

Former Australian player Glenn McGrath (front row centre) poses with Australia's players wearing pink caps ahead of the fifth Test against India at the Sydney Cricket Ground yesterday. (AFP)



ATHLETICS

# A stunning time set at Aspire Academy

Aspire Academy's indoor athletics track witnessed the third fastest under-20 men's 60m hurdles time of all time.

The historical mark came during an Aspire Academy Invitational Sprint Indoor Meeting, which is set to be recognised by World Athletics.

Aspire-trained Kendry Fuentes, who is 18, ran 7.48 seconds in his heat of the 60m indoor hurdles, putting him third on the all-time list for under-20 athletes and the fastest of 2024.

The meeting brought together Aspire's student-athletes, sprinters from local Qatari clubs, and members of the Abu Dhabi Athletics Club.

It featured 60m and 60m hurdles events for various age groups, from under-16 through senior men, and races for junior girls who train with Aspire.

This meeting provided a competitive environment for all the participants and is a key part of the athletics programme at Aspire Academy.

World Athletics officially recognises the times recorded during the competition, ensuring the athletes' performances receive global acknowledgement and contributing to their growth on the international stage.

Hamdi Mhirsi, Sprint Coach on Aspire Academy's Sprint Performance Team, organised the event and explained its importance: "This meeting is a vital opportunity for Aspire Academy and Qatar national team athletes to prepare for major upcoming competitions, including the World Indoor and Outdoor Championships. It also aligns with the long-term vision of Aspire Academy and Qatar, which is to build towards success at the 2030 Asian Games. The athletes



Athletes in action at Aspire Academy Invitational Sprint Indoor Meeting.

you see here today represent Qatar's future on the global stage.

"Currently, this is categorised as an F-tier event by World Athletics, but our ambition is to climb to higher levels with the right support."

"Hosting performances like this makes us proud, witnessing one of the fastest junior 60m hurdles runs ever recorded. This achievement is not only historic but also a testament to Aspire Academy's role in shaping future champions."

Aspire Academy-trained Oumar Doudai Abakar, who ends 2024 as the 6th fastest under-20 athlete over 110m hurdles outdoors, was also in action as he prepares to step up to the senior ranks in 2025. He will begin the new year competing on the upcoming World Indoor Tour with stops in Luxembourg, Denmark, and Kazakhstan as he begins his professional career.

Mohammed Essa M al-Thawadi, Aspire Academy's Head of Team Co-ordinators, highlighted the exceptional standard of the event's organisation.

"Organising this event required a significant effort and meticulous attention to detail to ensure World Athletics recognised the times. Hosting young athletes from outside Qatar, such as our guests from the Abu Dhabi Athletics Club, reaffirms the prestigious position Aspire Academy has achieved both regionally and globally.

"We will continue to work on developing outstanding young athletic talent locally and provide opportunities for guests from various parts of the region to benefit from our expertise and resources," he added.

Khalid al-Zaabi, the Chairman of Abu Dhabi Athletics Club, praised the event: "Competing at Aspire Academy is a valuable experience for our athletes, helping them build confidence and prepare for future competitions. Through this experience, we aim to develop their skills and professionally prepare them for future competitions."

Further events are planned for the coming weeks as Aspire Academy, as part of its athletics programme, to identify and nurture young talented athletes to fulfil their potential as they work with Qatar's Athletics Federation to produce the stars of the future.

TENNIS

# Navarro stunned by young Birrell, Dimitrov wins

The doubles journey for Djokovic and Kyrgios ends in a loss

AFP  
Brisbane, Australia

Australian wildcard Kimberly Birrell stunned second seed Emma Navarro yesterday while the doubles act of Novak Djokovic and Nick Kyrgios came to a shuddering halt at the Brisbane International.

But it was all smiles from defending men's champion Grigor Dimitrov, who powered into the quarter-finals in straight sets. In the opening match on Pat Rafter Arena, Birrell matched world number eight Navarro stroke-for-stroke to put a dent in the American's Australian Open preparations. Navarro had a stellar 2024, going deep in all four Grand Slams including a run to the semi-finals of the US Open. She was expected to brush aside the challenge of 26-year-old Birrell, who has never broken into the top 100 in her 10 years on the WTA Tour.

But the Australian, who trains at the Queensland Tennis Centre and is ranked 113, was not intimidated and delighted her home crowd with a nerveless display.

Birrell, who will face 35th-ranked Russian Anastasia Potapova in the last 16, said she embraced the role of underdog.

"I guess it's kind of like one of those situations where you have no choice, you just have to go for it," she said. "That was kind of the attitude I had going into today - I think that really benefited me, along with having played a lot of hours on this court here."

Dimitrov continued his love affair with Brisbane by easing past another Australian wildcard, Aleksandar Vukic, 6-2, 7-6 (7/5).

The Bulgarian world number 10 raced through the first set then held off Vukic as the Australian raised his game in the second.

"I'm starting to find my game but I think there is still a lot to do," said Dimitrov, who has won the tournament twice and finished runner-up once. "So hopefully with each match I can build up a little bit more and play better and better."

"It's such a home atmosphere, honestly. It doesn't feel like a tournament to me," the Bulgarian said. "That's why I think the excitement is different. My attitude I think also changes quite a bit. It's a very special week."

He will play either Australian Jordan Thompson or American Alex Michelson for a place in the last four. Djokovic and Kyrgios teamed up for a rare doubles appearance this week, but after winning a close first round were stopped by top seeds Michael Venus of New Zealand and Croatia's Nikola Mektic 6-2, 3-6, 10/8.

Venus and Mektic came from three points down to clinch the match tiebreak. "Playing those guys, they hit some unbelievable shots," Venus said.



Kimberly Birrell of Australia celebrates after winning her singles match against Emma Navarro of the US at the Brisbane International yesterday. (AFP)



Serbia's Novak Djokovic (second left) and Australia's Nick Kyrgios (second right) shake hands with Michael Venus of New Zealand and Nikola Mektic of Croatia after their doubles match at the Brisbane International yesterday. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

## Spirited Kazakhstan end Germany's title defence, US in United Cup semis



Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina serves against Germany's Laura Siegemund during their singles match at the United Cup in Perth yesterday. (AFP)

Sydney  
Reuters

Kazakhstan ended Germany's title defence at the United Cup yesterday while inaugural champions United States also made the last four beating China in the mixed team tennis tournament.

Elena Rybakina put Kazakhstan ahead with a comprehensive 6-3 6-1 victory over Laura Siegemund in the first match of the tournament's knockout stages.

Germany suffered a blow when world number Alexander Zverev withdrew from the quarter-final tie with a bicep strain minutes before his match.

His replacement Daniel Masur began well but Alexander Shevchenko prevailed 6-7(5) 6-2 6-2 to give Kazakhstan an unassailable 2-0 lead in the tie.

Shevchenko significantly cut down on his unforced errors after the first set and asserted himself more in a brilliant comeback.

Coco Gauff and Taylor Fritz won their respective singles matches against their Chinese opponents to put the US in the last four.

Gauff downed an erratic Zhang Shuai 7-6(4) 6-2 to give her team a perfect start.

The American looked under pressure in the opening set but found a way to get out of trouble before asserting herself.

Gauff made amends for her nine double faults in the match with 14

fewer unforced errors compared to her opponent's 40.

"I felt like, the hard I hit, the harder she was hitting," the 2023 US Open champion said.

"I felt like I couldn't get her on defence. She was playing so aggressive..."

Fritz downed Zhang Zhizhen 6-4 6-4 to clinch the tie for them with the mixed doubles to spare.

Earlier, Iga Swiatek inspired Poland to a 2-1 victory against Czech Republic in Group B that put them into the quarter-finals.

Tomas Machac put the Czech Republic ahead with his 7-5 3-6 6-4 victory against Hubert Hurkacz.

World number two Swiatek brought Poland level with a hard-fought 6-3 6-4 win against Karolina Muchova.

She returned to team up with Hurkacz to beat the Machac-Muchova pair 7-6(3) 6-3 in the deciding mixed doubles to secure their place in the last eight.

"Honestly I was sure they were going to play amazing tennis because they have always great teams in doubles and mixed doubles," Swiatek said.

"But I knew that we have the game to win it. For sure we were leading from the beginning," added Swiatek, who become the first player to secure 10 singles victory at the United Cup.

Katie Boulter's 6-2 6-1 victory against Australian Olivia Gadecki booked Britain's place in the last eight as Group F winners.

## Schauffele still vying to supplant Scheffler for No. 1

Xander Schauffele hasn't forgotten nor given up on one of his biggest career goals, though he knows how difficult the climb will be. Schauffele has said in the past that he wants to earn the No. 1 spot in the Official World Golf Ranking someday, but even with World No. 1 Scottie Scheffler out of the field this week at The Sentry, it's not as simple as Schauffele winning a few more tournaments. The 2025 season begins with Scheffler leading No. 2 Schauffele by 6.3727 average points in the OWGR's ranking system, which utilizes a two-year rolling period, emphasizes players' most recent performances and factors in tournaments' strength of field. When speaking with reporters Tuesday ahead of The Sentry in Kapalua, Hawaii, Schauffele nodded to the dominant year Scheffler had to build such a massive lead in the OWGR. He agreed that he feels "under the radar" - ironic after a year in which he won his first two major championships. "Yeah, just kind of cruising around right where I want to be," Schauffele said. "It's a wild time. Winning two majors and being further away, or closer to the 30th-ranked player than the first is - hat's off to Scottie. He's a beast." It's not exactly accurate to say Schauffele is closer to No. 30 in the rankings to No. 1, but the margin is similar to the gap between Schauffele and World No. 22 Aaron Rai of England. "He just kept winning. Even in sort of his downtime, he won another event, which pushed him even further away," Schauffele said. "So it's one of my goals that will just have to stay on the calendar for a few more years." Schauffele was referencing Scheffler's victory at the Hero World Challenge in early December, which is not an official PGA Tour event but still counted for ranking points. It capped a historic year for Scheffler, who also won the Masters, the Players Championship and the Olympic gold medal.

## HORSE RACING

## Casamento rides Eifrit to Umm Al Zubar Cup victory



Meshaal bin Ali al-Attiyah, ambassador of the State of Qatar to Bosnia and Herzegovina, presented the trophies to connections of Eifrit, which won the Umm Al Zubar Cup at Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday. PICTURES: Juhaim



Marco Casamento guides Eifrit to a commanding 2¼ lengths victory.

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Sheikh Ahmad bin Mohamed F N al-Thani-owned Eifrit registered a convincing victory to win the Umm Al Zubar Cup yesterday.

At the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC)'s Al Rayyan Racecourse, the Jassim Ghazali-trained six-year-old bay under Marco Casamento, reserved his effort for the final stages of the 190mm Purebred Arabian race to secure a commanding 2¼ lengths victory to retain the cup for Sheikh Ahmad.

The win also completed a quick-fire

double for veteran trainer Ghazali.

HE Sheikh Iman M K al-Thani's Fayq Al Shahania finished second.

Meshaal bin Ali al-Attiyah, ambassador of the State of Qatar to Bosnia and Herzegovina, crowned the winners.

Ghazali was in the winners' enclosure in penultimate race for the day, when Nasser Saeed MS al-Eida's Mystical Music won the 1,700m contest - Thoroughbred Handicap (80-100) for four-year-old+. Jockey Mohammed Hassan Ali Alabdulmalik guided the six-year-old gelding to a length victory over Al Shaman, in the colours of Time Form Syndicate.

Al Gaiah Racing's Sky Blue won the 1,900m race for the Local Thoroughbred

Handicap (55-75), four-year-old+. Jockey Alberto Sanna rode the Ahmed al-Jehani-trained Nine-year-old bay gelding to five lengths victory over Hamad Ateeq Mohammed al-Marri's Suheal Qatar.

In the card opener, Hamad Ahmed Hassan al-Malki al-Jehani-owned and trained Lavinia De Carrere won the 1,700m Purebred Arabian Maiden Plate for the 4-6-year-olds.

The highly anticipated nine-race HH Sheikh Abdullah Bin Khalifa Al Thani Trophy Day will take place today at Al Uqda Racecourse.

The opening week of the New Year will conclude with the Al Rakayat Cup Day, scheduled for Saturday and featuring sev-

en exciting races at Al Uqda Racecourse.

#### RESULTS 18TH AL RAYYAN RACE MEETING - UMM AL ZUBAR CUP

##### WINNERS (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)

**1 - Umm Al Zubar Cup - Purebred Arabian Open Allowance Race (Class 2)**

Eifrit, Jassim Ghazali, Marco Casamento

**2 - Thoroughbred Handicap 80-100 (Class 2)**

Mystical Music, Jassim Ghazali, Mohammed Hassan Ali Alabdulmalik

**3 - Local Thoroughbred Handicap 55-75 (Class 3)**

Sky Blue, Ahmed al-Jehani, Alberto Sanna

**4 - Thoroughbred Handicap 65-85 (Class 4)**

One Nation, Ahmed al-Jehani, Arnaud De Lepine

**5 - Thoroughbred Handicap 50-70 (Class 5)**

He's A Dream, Abdulaziz Ali al-Kathiri, Szczepan Mazur

**6 - Local Thoroughbred Handicap 0-50 (Class 5)**

Mallhog, Fahad Bin Mubarak al-Groon, Abdulla Rashid al-Mansoori

**7 - Local Thoroughbred Maiden Plate (Class 6)**

Surooh, Julian Colin Smart, Maikon De Souza

**8 - Purebred Arabian Maiden Plate (Class 6)**

Lavinia De Carrere, Hamad al-Jehani, Arnaud De Lepine.

## PREMIER LEAGUE

# Arsenal beat Brentford to close gap on Liverpool

Gunners are unbeaten in 12 games in all competitions, including four successive wins

AFP  
London

Arsenal closed the gap on Premier League leaders Liverpool to six points as Gabriel Jesus extended his hot-streak in a 3-1 win at Brentford yesterday. Mikel Arteta's side were rocked by Bryan Mbeumo's first-half goal at the Gtech Community Stadium.

But Arsenal refused to be blown away on a wet and windy evening in west London as Jesus equalised before the break. It was the Brazilian's sixth goal in his last four games after he scored just once in his first 20 matches this season.

Mikel Merino and Gabriel Martinelli netted in quick succession soon after half-time to ensure Arsenal moved into second place above Nottingham Forest.

Excluding their 5-1 rout of Crystal Palace, the Gunners had spluttered through their last four games with lacklustre draws against Fulham and Everton followed by a narrow win over lowly Ipswich. But Arsenal's first Premier League game of 2025 provided compelling evidence that they are ready to compete in the title race with Liverpool, who have a game in hand on the north Londoners. Runners-up to Manchester City for the last two seasons, Arsenal are unbeaten in 12 games in all competitions, a revitalising run that includes four successive wins.

Jesus, speaking after the game, said: "I think the team did great today. To come here and play the way we played is amazing. Of course, the most important thing is the three points and we did it, but then the most important thing was how we reacted and we did it. I keep working and everyone at the club can tell how I work every day, not just me but everyone. I don't give up and it is not easy to play for a big club like Arsenal. Now I can score and I am very happy - I want to keep scoring to help the team."

On Arsenal being title contenders, the Brazilian said: "Yes for sure the previous two years was amazing. We didn't win the league, but we were there fighting."

With Bukayo Saka sidelined for several



Arsenal's Gabriel Jesus (centre) scores past Brentford's goalkeeper Mark Flekken during the Premier League match in London. (Reuters)

months due to a hamstring injury, 17-year-old Ethan Nwaneri made his first league start for Arsenal.

Kai Havertz was absent after scoring Arsenal's winner against Ipswich but Jesus ensured the German was not missed. Arsenal did not lose a single one of their 10 league London derbies in 2024 and they maintained their impressive record in capital clashes after surviving an early blow.

Arsenal keeper David Raya was making his first return to Brentford since leaving in 2023. The Spaniard was taunted by his former club's fans, who took great delight in his misjudgement as Brentford went into the lead from their first serious attack in the 13th minute. Martin Odegaard surrendered possession cheaply and Mikkel Damsgaard's pass picked out Mbeumo on

the right flank.

Mbeumo cut inside Riccardo Calafiori but the Cameroon forward's low drive from 20 yards should have been dealt with by Raya, whose slow reaction allowed the ball to beat him at the near post. Raya nearly gifted Brentford a second goal when he let Mbeumo's shot slip through his grasp before desperately clawing it away just centimetres before it crossed the line.

Arsenal responded emphatically after that chaotic period and drew level in the 29th minute. Thomas Partey's thunderous blast from the edge of the area was parried by Brentford 'keeper Mark Flekken and Jesus alertly pounced on the rebound with a diving header that looped into the net from six yards.

Jesus was left with a bloodied mouth af-

ter a clash with Damsgaard that brought no punishment from the officials. Arsenal delivered a sucker punch of their own five minutes after half-time as their set-piece prowess paid off again.

When Flekken made a hash of dealing with Nwaneri's corner, Jesus' snap-shot deflected to Merino and the Spain midfielder poked home from close range.

Merino's second goal for Arsenal since his close-season move from Real Sociedad shattered Brentford's resistance and Martinelli bagged the visitors' third three minutes later.

Nwaneri exposed Brentford's defensive deficiencies with a clever cutback and when his shot was deflected to Martinelli inside the area, the Brazilian curled a fine finish past Flekken.

### Rashford slams 'ridiculous' claim over potential Man United exit

London: Marcus Rashford has blasted "ridiculous" claims that the unsettled Manchester United star wants a new agent to fulfil his desire to quit Old Trafford.

A report this week said England forward Rashford had met with a leading sports agency in a bid to engineer a move. The 27-year-old hinted he would be prepared to leave United in an interview last month.

Rashford said he was ready "for a new challenge" after falling out of favour under new boss Ruben Amorim. The United youth academy graduate was omitted from four successive matchday squads last month, starting with the derby against Manchester City, before being an unused substitute for Monday's defeat by Newcastle.

He has struggled badly over the last two seasons, netting just four times in the Premier League this term. Paris Saint-Germain and Chelsea are among the club linked with Rashford recently.

But Rashford, who is currently represented by his brother Dwayne Maynard, responded to the latest claims about his future by insisting he had not changed agent. "Been a lot of false stories written over the past few weeks, but guys this is getting ridiculous - never met with any agency and don't have any plans to..." he wrote on Instagram.

### NO ONE EXPECTED CHELSEA TO BE WHERE THEY ARE NOW, SAYS BOSS MARESCA

Ipswich Town put a dent in Chelsea's Premier League title hopes with a 2-0 win at Portman Road on Monday, but the west London side's head coach Enzo Maresca said no one expected his young team to be in their current position this season.

Chelsea were stunned by the promoted side after Liam Delap and Omari Hutchinson scored either side of the break, which dropped Maresca's side down to fourth place, 10 points behind leaders Liverpool who have a game in hand. Having finished sixth in the last campaign and 12th in the 2022-23 season, Chelsea hired Maresca in June after he guided Leicester City to the English Championship title in his first season in charge.

"Not one of us in this room expected us to be where we are now," Maresca told reporters. "This means and shows that we are in the right direction, as I've said many times, but also shows that we are far from competing (with) consistency and to be there with the best teams in England. I think we (have) to be satisfied with where we are, but at the same time we need to know we (can) do things better."

Maresca has consistently played down his expensively assembled squad's title chances, despite some impressive victories this season.

Chelsea have now collected just one point from their last three league outings.

## HORSE RACING

## Isak can get even better, says Newcastle boss Howe



Reuters  
Manchester

Newcastle United striker Alexander Isak probably does not want the year to end after setting the Premier League alight in December with a scintillating burst of form.

The Swede, who joined Newcastle for a club record 63mn pounds in 2022, scored his eighth goal of the month in Monday's 2-0 win at Manchester United - a result that means Eddie Howe's side end the year fifth in the table. Isak, 25, also has two assists in December when Newcastle won five

successive league games to put themselves right in the hunt for a top-four finish and a return to the Champions League. "I evaluate his game on a daily basis and I just try to keep pushing him for more," Howe said of the former Real Sociedad striker. "His game is in a good place. But my job is to find areas in which he can improve. He has all the ingredients in there."

Isak's form has put him on the wish list of some of Europe's biggest clubs and keeping hold of him could well hinge on Newcastle qualifying for next season's Champions League. He is contracted until 2028 and media reports say Newcastle have slapped a 100mn pounds plus price tag on him.

Pundit Gary Neville said on Monday: "I think he is the best striker at this moment in time in the country, purely because I watch (Manchester City's) Erling Haaland a lot who is a world-class striker but his overall play is nowhere near Isak's level at this moment in time."

Howe, asked after the win at Old Trafford whether Isak was nearing his best, said: "He is getting there. His goal was really pleasing, he was where he needs to be in the middle of the six-yard box. He affects games in the way only he can."

Newcastle are the form team in the Premier League and are only three points behind fourth-placed Chelsea.