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Sainz, 62, gets
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FOOTBALL

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HORSE RACING

Al Shaqab Racing's Al Mirage lands HH Sheikh Abdullah Bin Khalifa Al Thani Trophy

Al Wakrah, in the silks of Al Shaqab Racing, won the HH Sheikh Abdullah Bin Khalifa Al Thani Cup



His Highness Sheikh Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Thani awarded the connections of Al Mirage after the horse won the HH Sheikh Abdullah Bin Khalifa Al Thani Trophy at the Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday. **PICTURES: Juhaime**



His Highness Sheikh Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Thani awarded the connections of Al Wakrah yesterday.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Shaqab Racing's colours were again in the winners' enclosure with Al Mirage (AF AlBahar) winning the HH Sheikh Abdullah Bin Khalifa Al Thani Trophy race, a 1,400m Local Purebred Arabian contest, in Qatar Racing & Equestrian Club's 19th Race Meeting at the Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday.

His Highness Sheikh Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Thani crowned the winners of the trophy.

It was a befitting finale of the big day with a blanket finish as several runners battled it out just before the finish line that less than a length separated the first four home. Trained by Jean de Mieulle and ridden by Faleh Bughanaim, Al Mirage claimed the victory by a nose ahead of Arman.

Earlier, the HH Sheikh Abdullah Bin Khalifa Al Thani Cup (Purebred Arabians (Gr2 PA), 4YO+, 1,400m) was claimed by Al Wakrah in the silks of Al Shaqab Racing.

Al Wakrah waited until the final 200m of the 1,400m Purebred Arabian Race before responding to jockey Olivier d'Andigne's call, surging to the front. In the blink of an eye, the 7YO mare hit the lead, securing a comfortable 2-length victory for trainer Jean de Mieulle.

The Ahmed Kobessi-trained Ilassad shone in Gr 3 PA Majd Al Arab Sprinter Championship while carrying the colours of Abdulla bin Mohammed bin Abdulla al-Attiya. The 6YO continued his excellent form with a stellar performance to win the black-type contest. Ridden by Alberto Sanna, the horse clinched victory in the 1,200m race for Purebred Arabians, securing a 1½-length win. Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Kuwari, QREC Board Member, crowned the winners.

In a sensational debut, Hamas La Gloire, owned by Time Form Syndicate, claimed the HH Sheikh Abdullah Bin Khalifa Al Thani Silver Cup (Purebred Arabians, 4YO+, 1,400m) with an impressive show.

Trained by Hamad al-Jehani and ridden by Soufiane Saadi, the



Jockey Faleh Bughanaim guided Al Mirage to a thrilling victory yesterday.



Jockey Olivier d'Andigne celebrates after heading Al Wakrah to HH Sheikh Abdullah Bin Khalifa Al Thani Cup victory yesterday.

colt of AF AlBahar led from start to finish, taking control of the 1,400m race for 4YO Purebred Arabians and securing a well-deserved win.

HE Sheikh Mohammed bin Faleh al-Thani crowned the winners of the HH Sheikh Abdullah Bin Khalifa Al Thani Silver Cup.

Wathnan Racing's Bolthole retained the Umm Qarn Trophy in style. The son of Free Eagle delivered a brilliant performance to claim the Trophy for the second consecutive year.

Trained by Alban de Mieulle, the six-year-old showcased his class with a perfectly timed run under jockey James Doyle, surging from the outside in the final stretch to overtake the leaders and secure a clear victory in the 2,100m Thoroughbred Open Race. Sheail bin Khalifa al-Kuwari crowned the winners.



Team Ilassad celebrates after the six-year-old won the Majd Al Arab Sprinter Championship.

Under jockey Tomas Lukasek, the Ibrahim Saeed al-Malki-trained gelding won the 1,400m Local Thoroughbred Open Race by a neck ahead of Al Buraq.

Meshaal bin Ali al-Attiyah, ambassador of the State of Qatar to Bosnia and Herzegovina, crowned the winners. The exciting race day began with Al Jeryan Stud's Surfers Paradise winning the Very Nice Name Cup (Thoroughbred Novice Plate, 4YO+, 1,400m). Surfers Paradise registered an impressive 4-length win. Trained

by M H K al-Attiyah and guided expertly by jockey Szczepan Mazur, the bay gelding made all in the home straight to secure a commanding victory. Abdulla Rashid al-Kubaisi, QREC Racing Manager, crowned the winners.

RESULTS
19th Al Rayyan Race Meeting -
HH Sheikh Abdullah Bin Khalifa
Al Thani Trophy
**WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer,
Jockey)**
1 - HH Sheikh Abdullah Bin

**Khalifa Al Thani Trophy - Local
Purebred Arabian (Class 1)**
Al Mirage, Jean de Mieulle, Faleh
Bughanaim
**2 - HH Sheikh Abdullah
Bin Khalifa Al Thani Cup -
Purebred Arabian (Class 1 Gr2)**
International
Al Wakrah, Jean de Mieulle, Olivier
d'Andigne
**3 - Majd Al Arab Sprinter
Championship - Purebred
Arabian (Class 1 Gr3)**
International Race
Ilassad, Ahmed Kobeissi, Alberto

Sanna
**4 - HH Sheikh Abdullah Bin
Khalifa Al Thani Silver Cup -
Purebred Arabian (Class 2)**
Hamas La Gloire, Hamad al-
Jehani, Soufiane Saadi
**5 - Umm Qarn Trophy -
Thoroughbred Open Race
(Class 2)** Win And In Shalfa
Qualifier
Bolthole, Alban Elie De Mieulle,
James Doyle
**6 - French King Cup - Local
Thoroughbred Open Race
(Class 2)**
Harb, Ibrahim Saeed al-Malki,
Tomas Lukasek
**7 - Yasmeen Cup -
Thoroughbred Handicap 75-95
(Class 3) (Far Bend) Win And In
Shalfa**
Garden Route, Abdulla al-Mulla,
Ivan Rossi
**8 - Charm Spirit Cup -
Thoroughbred Handicap 70-90
(Class 3)**
Karakoul, M H K al-Attiyah,
Szczepan Mazur
**9 - Very Nice Name Cup -
Thoroughbred Novice Plate
(Class 5)**
Surfers Paradise, M H K al-Attiyah,
Szczepan Mazur

ANNOUNCEMENT

Australia axe Marsh and call-up Webster

AFP
Sydney

Out-of-form all-rounder Mitch Marsh was axed yesterday from Australia's team for the series-deciding fifth Test against India in Sydney with Beau Webster to make his debut.

Fast bowler Mitchell Starc retained his place for today's match despite carrying a rib niggle and will line up in the attack alongside Pat Cummins, Scott Boland and Nathan Lyon.

"Mitchy obviously hasn't quite got the runs or wickets he would have liked this series and felt like it was time for a fresher up," said skipper Cummins.

"Beau's been with the squad and been great."

"It's a shame for Mitchy because we know how much he brings to the team, but we feel like now is a good time for Beau to get a chance."

Marsh's position had been under intense

scrutiny after a poor series with bat and ball and his axing could potentially herald the end of the 33-year-old's Test career.

After making his debut in 2014, he struggled to cement his place in the team and with the emergence of Cameron Green had been on the red-ball sidelines in recent years.

He returned to the Test side when Green was ruled out of the series following surgery on his spine.

Cummins said Marsh, who remains a key figure for Australia in the white-ball game, took the news well.

"He was totally understanding. I think his words were, 'I'm not necessarily blindsided.'"

"He knows he hasn't scored the runs or (taken) wickets he would have liked so that makes you vulnerable."

Tasmanian Webster, 31, has toiled for years in Sheffield Shield cricket and will be Australia's third debutant in the series.

Teenage opener Sam Konstas was called up for the fourth Test in Melbourne, in place of Nathan McSweeney who had



Australia's captain Pat Cummins speaks at a press conference ahead of the fifth Test against India at the Sydney Cricket Ground yesterday. (AFP)

made his debut in the first Test in Perth but had a poor run and was dumped after the third in Brisbane. Konstas announced himself with a quickfire 60, audaciously ramping India's premier fast bowler Jasprit Bumrah for a six. Webster can bowl pace and off-spin and was considered a better option in case left-arm quick Starc has any issues. Starc bowled 41 overs in Melbourne - which Australia won by 184 runs on day five - but clearly struggled in the latter stages. But despite this Cummins said: "He was never going to miss this one."

Australia are 2-1 up in the series and will regain the Border-Gavaskar trophy for the first time since 2014-15 if they win or draw the Test which begins today.

Victory would also guarantee them a place in the June World Test Championship final at Lord's against South Africa.

Australia: Sam Konstas, Usman Khawaja, Marnus Labuschagne, Steve Smith, Travis Head, Beau Webster, Alex Carey, Pat Cummins (capt), Mitchell Starc, Nathan Lyon, Scott Boland

PREVIEW

Will Rohit play? India decline to confirm final XI

Coach Gautam Gambhir refuses to say if India captain would play



India's Rohit Sharma (left) chats with a teammate Jasprit Bumrah during a practice session ahead of the fifth Test against Australia at the Sydney Cricket Ground yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters
Sydney

India coach Gautam Gambhir declined to confirm that captain Rohit Sharma would play the fifth Test against Australia, committing only to naming the team before the toss today.

Skipper Rohit has struggled for runs in the first four tests of the five-match series, which India trail 2-1 after a loss in Melbourne earlier this week.

Asked yesterday why the coach was taking the pre-match conference rather than the captain as is usual, Gambhir bridled.

"Everything is fine with Rohit and I don't think it's anything traditional," he told reporters at the Sydney Cricket Ground.

"The head coach is here, that should be fine, that should be good enough. We're going to have a look at the wicket and finalise (our team) tomorrow."

When asked specifically whether Rohit would be in that team, Gambhir was non-committal.

"As I just said, we're going to have a look at the wicket and probably announce the playing XI tomorrow. So the answer remains the same."

At the end of the Brisbane Test, Rohit had admitted that while he wasn't batting well, he was still ticking all the boxes that he needed to.

"As long as my mind, my body, my feet are moving well, I am pretty happy with how things are panning out for me," Rohit had said two weeks ago. "Sometimes those numbers can tell you that



India's Virat Kohli looks on during a practice session ahead of the fifth Test against Australia at the Sydney Cricket Ground yesterday. (AFP)

it's been a while since he has got big runs. But for a person like me, I think it's all about how I feel in my mind.

"As a batter as well, a lot of the things that I am trying to do is not falling in the place that I would want to," Rohit said after India went 2-1 down in the series. "But mentally, it is disturbing without a doubt."

Gambhir did confirm that pace bowler Akash Deep was out of the match with a back issue and denied media reports that he had read the riot act to his team after the loss in Melbourne.

"Those are just reports," he said. "That's not the truth, and I don't think I need to answer to

any reports. "There were some honest words, that's all I can say. Honesty is extremely important if you want to probably go on to do great things."

Gambhir spoke repeatedly about the importance of honesty within the dressing room but said no specific discussions had been held with Rohit and his predecessor as captain Virat Kohli about their roles in the future of the Indian team.

"The only conversation was how we can win the next Test match," he said. "No other conversation has taken place, because we know how important this Test is. It's the team-first ideology that matters," Gambhir

said. "It's a team sport and you've got to play what the team needs you to do. That's as simple as it can get. People can play the natural game. But still, in a team sport, individuals only contribute. It's the team (that is important). If you need to play in a certain way, I think you've got to do it."

"I don't want to talk about individuals. I think everyone knows where they are. And as I just mentioned, in a team sport, it's only the team."

"You have to expect players to do what the team needs you to do. Whether they go to bad sessions, whether they go to be attacking, because that is all that matters in a team sport for me."

SPOTLIGHT

SA hand debut to teen Maphaka vs Pakistan



South Africa's Kagiso Rabasa prepares to bowl during a team training session in Cape Town yesterday. (@ProteasMenCSA)

Reuters
Cape Town

South Africa will give a debut to firebrand 18-year-old fast bowler Kwena Maphaka as one of three changes to their side for the second and final Test against Pakistan starting at Newlands today.

Opening batter Tony de Zorzi has been ruled out with a left thigh strain and will be replaced by all-rounder Wiaan Mulder, who will bat at number three with Ryan Rickelton moving to the opener position.

Spinner Keshav Maharaj has recovered from injury and replaces seamer Corbin Bosch after the latter starred on debut in the tense two-wicket win during last week's first test in Pretoria.

Maphaka has only bowled 60.5 overs in first class cricket and was writing his school exams a few months ago. He takes the place of Dane Paterson, who took 5-61 in the first innings at Centurion Park.

"We want to go with an extra bit of pace, even though Paterson has been superb for us," South Africa captain Temba Bavuma said yesterday. "Whatever happens from a performance point of view, it will put him (Maphaka) in good stead. He will be looking forward to running in with Kagiso Rabada over the next few days."

"You want to allow him to be as free as you can... and allow the exuberance of youth to come out. It is a case of bowl as quick as you can."

"He does not have a foundation (of playing) first class cricket, and this is certainly not a trial for him, we know what his talent is all about."

The previous Test at Newlands against India 12 months ago was completed in 107 overs as the visitors won by seven wickets, the shortest game to have a winner in Test history. The pitch then drew heavy criticism and Bavuma seemed reluctant to discuss it on the eve of the fixture with Pakistan.

"The wicket looks quite interesting. Hopefully it does go the full five days, or at least offers the opportunity to," was all he said.

South Africa have already claimed their place in June's World Test Championship final at Lord's against as yet unconfirmed opponents, but Bavuma said they are fired up to close out the series against Pakistan and are not treating this as a dead rubber.

"The series is still on the line, it is not just a case of we ticked the box of being in the final," Bavuma said. "We still want to be clinical, we are eyeing 2-0. The focus is still there. As much as we won last week, we were not at our best with bat and ball and that is something to work on."

South Africa XI to play Pakistan at Newlands: Aiden Markram, Ryan Rickelton, Wiaan Mulder, Tristan Stubbs, Temba Bavuma (captain), David Bedingham, Kyle Verreynne (wicketkeeper), Marco Jansen, Keshav Maharaj, Kagiso Rabada, Kwena Maphaka.

Perera's 46-ball ton gives SL consolation T20 win over NZ

Nelson, New Zealand: Kusal Perera cracked a career-best 101 off just 46 balls as Sri Lanka secured a consolation seven-run victory in the third and final Twenty20 match against New Zealand in Nelson yesterday. Sri Lanka posted 218-5 in their 20 overs and New Zealand replied with 211-7. New Zealand had already wrapped up the series after winning the first two games by eight and 45 runs respectively when the Sri Lankan middle order failed to fire. But Perera was determined to show there was fight in the visitors as he plundered four sixes and 13 fours to register the fastest century by a Sri Lankan in T20 internationals. He was helped by being dropped on 15 and 60 before he was caught at point by Rachin Ravindra off Daryl Mitchell in the penultimate over. He was also shaken by the first ball he faced from Zak Foulkes which was edged towards third man. "It was a wake-up call so

I had to back myself and try to execute my normal game," Perera said. Perera featured in partnerships of 41 with Avishka Fernando (17) and then 100 with Asalanka, who hammered 46 off just 24 deliveries with five sixes and one four. Sri Lanka, opening the batting for the first time in the series, had 24 on the board inside three overs. New Zealand and Sri Lanka play the first of three one-day internationals in Wellington on Sunday.

BRIEF SCORES
Sri Lanka 218-5 off 20 overs (Kusal Perera 101, Charith Asalanka 46, Kusal Mendis 22, Jacob Duffy 1-30)
New Zealand 211-7 off 20 overs (Rachin Ravindra 69, Tim Robinson 37, Daryl Mitchell 35; Charith Asalanka 3-50, Wanindu Hasaranga 2-38)
Result: Sri Lanka won by seven runs
Toss: New Zealand
Series: New Zealand won 2-1

MOTORSPORT / DAKAR RALLY

Sainz out of comfort zone to defend title

AFP
Bisha, Saudi Arabia

Veteran Spanish driver Carlos Sainz made history when he won his fourth Dakar Rally last year and is confident that he has what it takes to challenge for victory in this season's gruelling race in Saudi Arabia.

Sainz's fourth title came when he was 61 - the oldest winner of the race and the first Dakar victory for German outfit Audi.

Now 62, the Spaniard - the father of Ferrari Formula One driver Carlos Sainz Jr - recently became a grandfather, but the two-time world rally champion known as 'El Matador' professes to be in fine form.

"Personally I've done everything I can to arrive in a good physical condition and I will give everything to try to have a good race,"

Sainz said at the launch of his new Ford Raptor car. "We are comfortable, we have done all the jobs we can."

Sainz added: "I expect first of all to enjoy, to have really good fun driving."

"I expect to have not so many problems and I expect to fight for the victory. I'm happy to help to try to win this challenge, the Dakar."

No one has managed to take a machine fresh from the factory to victory since Ari Vatanen, who triumphed with the Peugeot 205 Turbo 16 in 1987 and then with the 405 - its technical heir - in 1989, followed by the Citroen ZX in 1991.

But that hasn't stopped Sainz's rivals also choosing to blood new cars over the 5,115 kilometres (3,178 miles) of specials mapped out over 12 stages between Bisha and Shubaytah.

Five-time winner Nasser al-Attiyah of Qatar and France's nine-time world rally champion



Sebastien Loeb will be piloting Dacia Sandriders, while Spain's one-time Dakar winner Nani Roma will also be in a Ford.

One notable absentee from the action, however, will be France's 'Mr Dakar', 14-time champion

Stephane Peterhansel, who hung up his keys last year.

In the bike section, two-time winner Ricky Brabec (Honda) will be back to defend his title, with the American's main rival likely to be Botswana's Ross Branch (Hero),

second last year. A 434-strong colourful caravan made up of cars, bikes, quads and trucks sets out from Bisha with an opening prologue today. Twelve stages then await the 778 competitors from 72 countries, with a January 17 finish in Shubaytah, on the border of the United Arab Emirates.

This year's route includes a second 48-hour stage in the Empty Quarter, a vast sea of sand with dunes as far as the eye can see.

Introduced last year, organisers said the concept of the stage, during which competitors have to bivouac on the sand and are not allowed outside help, was simple: "Juggling the twin challenges of endurance and performance while blasting through a thousand kilometres of desert in two days."

"It's the rally of maturity," race director David Castera told AFP. "There's a real level of difficulty, it's a real, tough Dakar, which will push everyone beyond their limits,

beyond their comfort zone."

The 47th running of the event may be called the Dakar, but the last time the Senegalese capital actually hosted the finish was way back in 2007 - the security situation in Mauritania forced the 2008 cancellation. It moved then to South America until finding a new home in Saudi Arabia since 2020.

The Saudis are spending billions to turn the Arab country into a major sporting force as it tries to diversify its economy away from oil.

Aside from the Dakar the Saudis have invested spectacularly in luring some of the world's top footballers into the Saudi Pro-League.

The kingdom also stages a Formula One Grand Prix in Jeddah, high profile boxing fights, the world's richest horse race, and rocked the world of golf with the launch of the LIV Tour in 2022.

The latest scoop for the kingdom was being named as host of the 2034 Football World Cup.

TENNIS

Djokovic beats Monfils for 20th time in his career

The popular Serbian is searching for his 100th ATP Tour title win

Reuters
Brisbane

Novak Djokovic's bid for a 100th ATP Tour title gained momentum yesterday as the Serb thumped fellow veteran Gael Monfils 6-3 6-3 to reach the Brisbane International quarter-finals.

The 37-year-old, who is looking to join Roger Federer (103) and Jimmy Connors (109) as players who have won at least a century of titles, breezed through the first set on the back of a solitary break in the fourth game.

Djokovic never looked back from there as he powered through the second set to extend his win-loss record against the French player to 20-0, nearly two decades after their first encounter in the opening round of the 2005 US Open.

"We've been playing for many years," said Djokovic, who will be gunning for an 11th Australian Open title when the season's opening Grand Slam begins later this month.

"I've known Gael since I was 15. We played quite a bit at juniors and on Tour and have had a good score against him but we have had some incredible battles.

"He's one of the best, if not the best, athlete in our sport over the years," Djokovic said.

Djokovic will step up his preparations for a tilt at a 25th Grand Slam title at the Jan. 12-26 Australian Open when he takes on



Novak Djokovic of Serbia hits a return during his singles match against Gael Monfils of France at the Brisbane International yesterday. (AFP)

big-serving American Reilly Opelka in the next round.

Opelka got past Matteo Arnaldi 7-6(9) 7-6(4) while Frenchman Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard, another player who can blow away his opponents with booming serves, upset fourth seed Frances Tiafoe 6-4 7-6(4).

Czech 19-year-old Jakub Mensik earlier mowed down Serbian lucky loser Dusan Lajovic 6-3 6-2.

In the women's event, reigning US Open and Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka endured a stern test in the opening set against Kazakhstan's Yulia Putintseva before winning 7-6(2) 6-4.

Tunisia's Ons Jabeur, who overcame a shoulder injury that ended her 2024 season early, also dug deep to defeat Armenia's Elina Avanesyan 6-4 1-6 6-4 and reach her first tour quarter-final

since the Berlin Open in June. It was the end of the road for third seed Daria Kasatkina, who fell to a 1-6 6-2 7-5 defeat against fellow Russian Polina Kudermetova, while their compatriot Mirra Andreeva eased past Linda Noskova 6-3 6-0.

Two times Australian Open champion Victoria Azarenka also crashed out after the Belarusian was defeated 6-4 6-4 by Czech Marie Bouzkova.

Tickets for Qatar Exxonmobil, Qatar TotalEnergies tournaments go on sale, say organisers

Doha: The Qatar Tennis Federation (QTF) announced the commencement of ticket sales for the Qatar Exxonmobil Open 2025 Men's Tennis Tournament and the Qatar TotalEnergies Open Women's Tournament.

The tickets will go on sale yesterday, at the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex, and several major shopping centres across Qatar.

Also, they will be rolled out today at the Place Vendome Qatar and Doha Festival City malls.

Earlier, QTF had rolled out the tickets through its official website, providing fans with multiple options to purchase them.

The Qatar TotalEnergies Open Women's tournament will kick

off from Feb 9 to 15, 2025, while Qatar Exxonmobil Open 2025, an ATP 500-point event, will take place from Feb 17-22, bringing together best male and female stars from around the globe, making them the most preeminent sporting events in the region. In addition, QTF highlighted that rolling out tickets at various outlets around the country will facilitate the arrival of fans at them, emphasising that such a step aims to enhance their experience and streamline ticket sales, in alignment with the tournaments' superb organisational level, which manifests the QTF's commitment to offering best experience for all spectators.

QNA

OBITUARY

Agnes Keleti, world's oldest Olympic champion, dies at 103

AFP
Budapest

Agnes Keleti, the world's oldest Olympic champion and Holocaust survivor, has died at the age of 103.

She passed away yesterday at Budapest hospital, her press official Tamas Roth told AFP, confirming a report from local sports daily *Nemzeti Sport*.

She was hospitalised with pneumonia last week.

"We pray for her, she has a great vitality," her son, Rafael Biro-Keleti told local press at the time.

Keleti's life story, including surviving the Holocaust and Olympic glory, reads like a gripping Hollywood film script, with her feisty spirit never breaking in the face of adversity. As Hungary's most successful gymnast, she won 10 Olympic medals, all of them after reaching the age of 30 against much younger competitors, including five gold medals in Helsinki (1952) and Melbourne (1956). Her motivation to do sports was not to chase glory, but to travel abroad, outside the Iron Curtain from the communist-ruled Hungary.

"I was competing not because I liked it but I did it because I wanted to see the world," she told AFP in 2016.

Training in secret

Born on 9 January 1921 in Budapest as Agnes Klein, she later changed her surname to the more Hungarian-sounding Keleti.

Called up to the national team in 1939, "the queen of gymnastics" won her first Hungarian title the next year, but later in 1940 was barred from taking part in any sporting activity due to her Jewish background.

After the Nazi German occupation of Hungary in March 1944, she escaped deportation to a death camp by obtaining false documents in exchange for all her belongings, assuming the identity of a young Christian woman.

While hiding in the countryside, she was working as a maid, but kept training in secret on the banks of the river Danube, when she got some free time.

Her father and several members of her family were killed in Auschwitz, while her mother and sister were rescued thanks to the Swed-



ish diplomat Raoul Wallenberg.

Like many fellow Hungarian athletes, Keleti did not return home from the 1956 Melbourne Olympics, which were held weeks after Hungary's failed anti-Soviet uprising. The following year she settled in Israel where she met and married a Hungarian sports teacher Robert Biro in 1959, with whom she had two children. After she retired from competition, she worked as a physical education teacher, and coached the Israeli national team.

She was only able to return home to then-communist Hungary for the World Gymnastics championships in 1983. She moved back to her home country in 2015.

"It was worth doing something well in life, considering the attention I have received, I get the shivers when I see all the articles written about me," she told AFP in 2020, weeks before her 100th birthday.

Thomas Bach, International Olympic Committee (IOC) president, paid a fulsome tribute to Keleti.

"Agnes Keleti has demonstrated the power of strong determination and courage to overcome tragedy when she, born to a Jewish family, survived the Holocaust and went on to win ten Olympic medals after World War II, five of them Gold," he said in a statement.

"Thank you for everything" Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban wrote on Facebook, sharing a photo of Keleti.

According to Hungarian daily *Nemzeti Sport*, 100-year-old Frenchman Charles Coste, gold medalist in men's team cycling pursuit at the 1948 London Games, succeeds Keleti as the oldest Olympic champion. Coste was born on 8 February 1924, and carried the Olympic torch during the opening ceremony of the Paris games last year.

FOCUS

Swiatek guides Poland into United Cup semis

AFP
Sydney

Battling Iga Swiatek took Poland into a United Cup semi-final against Kazakhstan as last year's runners-up beat Britain in the mixed-teams tournament yesterday.

The five-time Grand Slam champion and world number two Swiatek fought back to beat Katie Boulter 6-7 (4/7), 6-1, 6-4 and give Poland an unassailable 2-0 lead in the quarter-final in Sydney.

With the Australian Open just over a week away, Swiatek has now won all three of her singles matches at the United Cup to launch her season.

"I am just exhausted," Swiatek, who required a medical timeout in the deciding set and had strapping on one thigh, said after prevailing in just under three hours.

"This match was crazy, so many changes in momentum."

A relieved Swiatek added: "I



Poland's Iga Swiatek hits a return to Britain's Katie Boulter during their singles match at the United Cup in Sydney yesterday. (AFP)

took four pain killers, a lot hurt, but happy we won."

It was a first-ever meeting between Swiatek and Boulter, who is ranked 24 in the world, but they did practise together before the United Cup.

Swiatek, at her first event since news broke in late November that she served a one-month ban for a doping violation, roared back in

the second set after Boulter won a tight first. The former number one Swiatek took a medical timeout at 2-1 down in the final set as the duo went toe-to-toe in a tense encounter.

Swiatek, 23, finally wrapped it up on first match point when Boulter fired into the net, before running over to the rest of the Poland team courtside.

Before that, the 16th-ranked Hubert Hurkacz, who has not been at his best to start the season and has a new coach, defeated Billy Harris 7-6 (7/3), 7-5 in the men's singles.

The victory against a player ranked 109 places below him gave Poland one foot in the last four.

It was also a badly needed victory on a personal level for Hurkacz, who had lost both his previous singles matches at the United Cup.

"Super-pleased with myself. Today was a really difficult battle with Billy," said Hurkacz. "Definitely happy to get through this one."

The 27-year-old added: "This win is crucial for me to build confidence and get another match in."

Poland will next face a Kazakhstan team led by women's world number six Elena Rybakina after they dumped out reigning champions Germany on Wednesday.

Today, Italy face the Czech Republic for a place in the semi-finals against the United States.

SPOTLIGHT

Gulf Legends Championship to be staged in Kuwait in February: AGCFF

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Executive Office of the Arabian Gulf Cup Football Federation (AGCFF) yesterday announced the staging of the Gulf Legends Championship in February, in response to the initiative of Abdulrahman al-Mutairi, Minister of Information and Culture and Minister of State for Youth Affairs in Kuwait.

The tournament was planned to be held on the sidelines of the 26th Gulf Cup, but it was decided to postpone it to coincide with the annual national festival hosted by Kuwait during the month of February.

The tournament aims to highlight the Gulf football heritage through the participation of the most prominent former football stars of the region, and to enhance the sporting and cultural experience gained from the current version of the tournament. The ongoing 26th Arabian Gulf Cup, one of the exceptional editions of the tournament which has witnessed distinguished organisation and strong competitions, will conclude with the final between Oman and Bahrain tomorrow.



Minister of Sports and Youth and AGCFF President HE Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed al-Thani chairs a meeting on the sidelines of the 26th Arabian Gulf Cup in Kuwait City.

PSG train ahead of Monaco showdown in Doha



With just two days to go in the Trophée des Champions in Doha, Paris Saint-Germain's players resumed training in Paris yesterday for the first session of the new year. Luis Enrique's men left for Doha later in the afternoon for Sunday's Trophée des Champions clash against AS Monaco at the Stadium 974. Also Monaco, held their training session yesterday to gear up for the showdown.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Teen Nwaneri shines in first start for Arsenal

'I think he was really composed, really determined, taking risks and initiative'

Reuters
London

Arsenal may not have injured talisman Bukayo Saka back until the end of the season but 17-year-old Ethan Nwaneri showed glimpses of what he could offer in his stead with a sparkling performance in Wednesday's 3-1 win away at Brentford.

Saka is often the first name on the team sheet but after being sidelined for "more than two months" following hamstring surgery, Arteta needed a quick solution as Arsenal look to erase Liverpool's six-point lead in the title race.

Gabriel Martinelli auditioned for Saka's role but the right flank did not suit the right-footed winger when they beat Ipswich Town and the Brazilian thrived on his return to the left wing at Brentford, finding the net with a neat finish.

With Arsenal also dealing with injuries and illness in the squad, Arteta handed Nwaneri his first start as the teenager's nascent Premier League career came full circle at the ground he made his debut as a 15-year-old.

"It was a decision I made because I thought he was the best player to play in the position to start the game and because there was a story there with his debut here," Arteta said.

"He made his Premier League debut and sometimes that feeling comes in and you feel it is the right one and then who knows.

"I think he was really composed, really determined, taking risks, taking initiative. Very impressive."

Nwaneri showed no signs of nerves on his first start as the teenager kept busy on

the right flank, carrying the ball with sublime ease as he dribbled past Brentford's midfield and defence, particularly left back Keane Lewis-Potter.

Mixing pace with clever movement, there were times when the bold English winger was not even touching the ball with his feet on the dribble but making rapid body movements as he slithered past and left Brentford players for dead.

Nwaneri was the only player to complete all his passes in the first half despite Brentford's press while he was also on corner duty in a team that has thrived on set-piece goals. He continued to impress in the second half, with his corner leading to Mikel Merino's goal that put Arsenal ahead before his dangerous cross into the box which Brentford failed to clear allowed Martinelli to make it 3-1.

At 17 years and 286 days, Nwaneri is the third-youngest player to start for Arsenal in the Premier League after Cesc Fàbregas and Theo Walcott.

With nine games in all competitions in a hectic January, Arteta will need all the help they can get and even if Saka may be irreplaceable, Nwaneri's potential gives Arsenal another option.

Even if Arsenal seek a temporary replacement for Saka this month, they will rest easy knowing they did not have to pay a penny for an unpolished gem in Nwaneri who has come through the academy ranks having joined the club at the age of eight.

"He was really good. In training he gives us all the right reasons (to play). We could've signed a player from any country, he would be playing," Arteta added.

"We're building him, he's already played a lot of games, a lot of minutes for that age... And he fully deserves that."



At 17 years and 286 days, Ethan Nwaneri is the third-youngest player to start for Arsenal in the Premier League after Cesc Fàbregas and Theo Walcott.

Real's Ancelotti expects close title race in La Liga

Madrid: There is unlikely to be a runaway La Liga victor this season like Real Madrid in the previous edition, with a multi-club title race making it harder for a dominant leader to emerge, the champions' manager Carlo Ancelotti said yesterday.

Barcelona, leaders since August, have slipped to third after winning only one of their last seven league matches, losing the top spot to Atletico Madrid in a 2-1 home loss last month.

Ancelotti's Real Madrid, who are a point behind city rivals Atletico with 40 points from 18 matches, have a chance to provisionally take the top spot when they visit 19th-placed Valencia today.

"The level of competitiveness in La Liga lowers a bit the points you need to win the title," Ancelotti, whose men finished 10 points ahead of second-placed Barcelona when they amassed 95 points during the 2023-24 campaign, told reporters.

"The fact that Atletico are there also generates uncertainty and I think it will take less than 90 points to be champions," Ancelotti said while Barcelona's drop in form was unexpected, the club had a strong chance of staging a comeback.

"You have a slump and then you get competitive like before. Barcelona and Atletico have the same chances of competing with us," he added.

Ancelotti, who has led Real to two La Liga titles since taking charge in 2021, said he did not expect to get an easy win at struggling Valencia.

"Tomorrow we start a new challenge, with a lot of excitement. It will be a demanding game...we want to start the year well," the 65-year-old said.

SCOTTISH PREMIERSHIP

Rangers stun Celtic in rare Old Firm derby win

AFP
Glasgow

Rangers swept aside Scottish Premiership leaders Celtic as Ianis Hagi's superb strike inspired a 3-0 win over their Old Firm rivals yesterday. Hagi put Rangers on course to exorcise their derby demons with a long-range blast early in the first half at Ibrox. Robin Propper struck after the interval and Danilo wrapped up a first victory against Celtic in seven attempts for Rangers boss Philippe Clement.

The only dark cloud on a memorable day for Rangers was the sight of Celtic midfielder Arne Engels being struck by a missile thrown from the crowd in the closing minutes. Beaten for the first time in the league this season, champions Celtic still hold an 11-point lead over second-placed Rangers.

While Rangers remain unlikely to catch their hated neighbours, this was a cathartic win after a 3-0 loss at Celtic in September and a League Cup final penalty shoot-out defeat against Brendan Rodgers' team in December. Those results were part of a miserable run for Rangers in the Glasgow derby and their first win over Celtic since May 2023 was only their second success in the last 15 meetings.

After their Boxing Day defeat at St Mirren and a tepid draw with Motherwell, Rangers' second win in six games eased a little of the pressure on the under-fire Clement. "It is



Rangers' Ianis Hagi scores during the Scottish Premiership match against Celtic in Glasgow, Scotland, yesterday. (Reuters)

a very important win. It gives belief to fans and everyone following Rangers," he said. "The boys get the reward they deserved, what they did not get in the last few weeks and in the League Cup final. The squad is working hard to get better. This is proof of that."

Celtic's first defeat in 19 games in all competitions, since losing 7-1 at Borussia Dortmund in the Champions League, was a

painful start to 2025. "It was not a very good performance. We made too many mistakes. It was very unlike us," Rodgers said. "I'm not sure if the 14-point gap took the edge off. It shouldn't, but maybe subconsciously it can do. We are not robots and Rangers wanted to prove a point."

Rodgers had insisted Celtic would "not soften up" because of their huge lead in the title race. But the Hoops were unusually le-

thargic from the moment Hagi caught them flat-footed to give Rangers the lead in the seventh minute.

Nico Raskin drove forward with intent and slipped a clever pass to Hagi, who unleashed a low drive from 25 yards that appeared to take Kasper Schmeichel by surprise as it flashed past the slow-to-react Celtic keeper. Hagi's first league goal for Rangers since May 2023 was one his father Gheorghe Hagi - who played for Real Madrid and Barcelona in the 1990s - would have been proud of as he watched from the Ibrox stands.

Clement's team were inches away from doubling their lead moments later as Vaclav Cerny's deflected strike slammed against the bar from the edge of the area. Rangers were without skipper James Tavernier, keeper Jack Butland and defenders John Souttar and Leon Balogun due to a variety of fitness issues.

Ignoring those absences, Rangers produced their best performance of the season. Cerny drilled against the far post in the second half, then had a header saved by Schmeichel before the hosts finally delivered the knockout blow in the 66th minute.

Raskin rose to meet a corner and his header was pushed out by Schmeichel to Propper, who slid in to convert from close-range. Danilo kept the New Year party in full swing for Rangers' jubilant fans in the 81st minute as he slotted home from close-range with his first touch after coming off the bench.

Success at Everton should be measured by more than just wins: Dyche

London: Delivering results on the pitch remains the top priority for Sean Dyche, but the Everton manager said his work during two tumultuous years at the club should be measured by much more than just winning games.

Since Dyche took charge in January 2023, Everton were deducted eight points for past breaches of the Premier League's financial rules and faced a long search for a new owner before the Friedkin Group's takeover last month, while building a new stadium.

Dyche's side have fought off relegation in the last two seasons and they face a similar battle this campaign as they sit 16th in the table, two points above the relegation zone, ahead of visiting seventh-placed Bournemouth tomorrow.

When asked if he was getting the best out of his players, Dyche said he was certainly trying.

"My job here has been endless but nobody really cares...we've saved hundreds of millions of pounds, wages, skinning the squad down, all the rest of it. It's not relevant, it's just 'go win a game,'" the 53-year-old said.