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FOOTBALL

Ahli eye redemption at Qatar Cup as Sadd chase double

THE WINNER OF TODAY'S SEMI-FINAL CLASH WILL MEET DUHAIL OR GHARAFA IN THE FINAL

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Ahli will once again face-off against Al Sadd, this time in the semi-final of the Qatar Cup to be played at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium today at 7pm.

Al Sadd had defeated Al Ahli 5-0 in the final round match of the Qatar Stars League on Friday to lift the Falcon Shield. Both Al Sadd and Al Ahli qualified for the Qatar Cup as the first and fourth-placed teams respectively of the Qatar Stars League.

Anticipation is high for this thrilling encounter, as both teams are determined to secure victory and progress to the final, where they will meet winners of the second semi-final featuring Al Duhail and Al Gharafa, which will be played tomorrow.

Al Sadd coach Felix Sanchez while addressing to the media ahead of their Qatar Cup 2025 semi-final against Al Ahli, said: "We are happy to win the league title and participate in Qatar Cup 2025, a tournament that includes the top four teams in the final standings of Qatar Stars League. The match against Al Ahli is an important one and we are striving for a positive result and qualification for the final.

"Al Ahli have achieved positive results in the league and we know this well. We tied with them in the first-leg match, but the next match is different from the previous one. Al Ahli will also give their best and we must be careful and perform better to overcome them. We are preparing hard for the match and our focus is now on the strengths of my team. This match is different from league matches and all the players are fully prepared.

"The journey in the league championship is long, and we entered the competition strongly, succeeded in outperforming everyone and demonstrated our strong character at the end of the competition. The match against Al Ahli in Qatar Cup is



FROM LEFT: Al Sadd defender Ahmed Suhail, coach Felix Sanchez, Al Ahli's goalkeeper Marwan Sherif and coach Igor Biscan at a press conference ahead of Qatar Cup semi-final.



different and we strive to give our best, especially since we have only one chance to qualify. "Winning the Qatar Cup is a personal challenge after winning the league title. Our goal is to win every tournament this season, making it a historic season for The Wolves," said Sanchez.

Al Sadd player Ahmed Suhail said: "Al Sadd vs Al Ahli matches are always strong and exciting. It is a special match and we are up to the task of giving our best and achieving victory to advance to the final match. The match will be different and difficult for both teams, and we are very excited to achieve victory and qualify for the final. I hope that our fans will be there and our goal is to give our best to please our fans by qualifying for the final."

Al Ahli coach Igor Biscan too hoped for support from fans for his team.

"This is an important match for us. We

are preparing the team well. We are facing the best team in the league Al Sadd and we are striving to do our best to advance to the final," said Biscan.

"Al Ahli have had goals since last season and we are on the right path to achieving these goals after being among the top four teams in the league. This is a source of pride. The Qatar Cup match has a special style and approach, and we are striving to do our best against Al Sadd to achieve victory and advance to the final.

"It will be a strong match and the more focused and motivated the team is, the greater chance we will have of winning and reaching the final. I have confidence in my team, and we need to focus and work hard to achieve this.

"The match against Al Sadd in the Qatar Cup will be different and both teams will be cautious. We will strive to perform well.

Most of the players will be present for the match, and we are ready," added Biscan.

Al Ahli goalkeeper Marwan Sherif said: "Al Ahli are capable of reaching the final. The team is improving from match to match. Our goal is to win a championship that will make our fans happy and we are on the right path towards achieving this. We have great motivation and the players' morale is very high to achieve victory and advance to the final.

"We hope for the support of Al Ahli fans in Qatar Cup semifinal against Al Sadd."

Al Sadd approach the match as newly-crowned champions of 2024-2025 season Ooredoo Stars League with 52 points, while Al Ahli concluded the season in fourth place with 35 points.

Both teams feature a selection of notable players who are capable of delivering impressive performances. Al Sadd are bank-

ing on their offensive strengths, highlighted by talents such as Rafa Mujica, Akram Afif, Claudinho and Hassan al-Haydous, among others.

Conversely, Al Ahli will depend on the exceptional attacking partnership of Oumar Sekou and German midfielder Julian Draxler, along with contributions from Driss Fettohui, Amin Tihi, Jassim Omar and others. Al Sadd aim to extend their successful run in the Qatar Cup by securing a win that would allow them to advance to the final and vie for the title for the fourth time, having previously triumphed in 2017, 2020 and 2021. The Wolves have played in the tournament since its inception in 2014, marking their 10th consecutive appearance.

In contrast, Al Ahli are entering the tournament for the first time under its new name.

Sailiya, Kharaitiyat, Mesaimmer and Lusail reach Amir Cup last 16



Al Sailiya, Al Kharaitiyat, Mesaimmer, and Lusail SC advanced to the Amir Cup Round of 16 after winning their preliminary round matches. Al Sailiya defeated Muaither 1-0 in extra time, Al Kharaitiyat edged Al Bidda SC 3-2 on penalties after a 1-1 draw, Mesaimmer beat Al Markhiya 2-1, and Lusail SC overcame Al Waab 1-0. The victorious teams will take part in the Round of 16 draw on Thursday, where they will be joined by the 12 clubs from the Qatar Stars League.



SPOTLIGHT

Samla Race partners with Visit Qatar for event's international edition launch

Visit Qatar has partnered with Samla Race to launch the international edition of the Samla Race. Set to take place January 24th, 2026, the international edition of the race will welcome male and female participants from all over the world to compete in Qatar's toughest endurance race.

Katara Hospitality joins as the official hospitality partner, contributing to an exceptional stay that reflects the warmth of local hospitality. First launched in 2017, the Samla Race has become a hallmark of Qatar's sports calendar.

Engineer Abdulaziz ali al-Mawlawi, CEO of Visit Qatar, said: "Our partnership with Samla International Race underscores Visit Qatar's ongoing commitment to positioning Qatar as a premier global destination for major international sporting events. The launch of the international edition of this race marks a significant milestone not only in elevating Qatar's profile in sports tourism, but in showcasing an authentic Qatari initiative that has demonstrated excellence at the local level and now steps confidently onto the global stage. It also reflects the strength of Qatar's world-class infrastructure, and the creativity embedded in its sporting culture. We are proud to be the main partner of an event that embodies both the spirit of challenge and the innovation that defines Qatar's ap-



Engineer Abdulaziz ali al-Mawlawi, CEO of Visit Qatar, and Azzam al-Mannai, CEO of the Samla Organising Committee at a press conference yesterday.

proach to sport and tourism development."

Azzam al-Mannai, CEO of the Samla Organising Committee, said: "We take pride in organising the international edition of the Samla Race, through which we welcome elite athletes from around the world to Qatar. The event serves as a platform for fair competition, cultural exchange, and a truly holistic sporting experience. We extend our sincere gratitude to Visit Qatar, the official sponsor, for their generous support of this edition, and we greatly appreciate the role of all official sponsors in contributing to the success of this exceptional sporting event."

The Samla International Race comprises four endurance challenges: swimming, mountain biking, running, and kayaking – each

designed to test the participants' stamina and skill. The race begins with a 3km swim, followed by a 49km run. Competitors then tackle a 44km mountain biking trail, before concluding with a 4km kayaking challenge. Registration is available through the official Samla Race website, where a comprehensive guide with rules and instructions can be found. The race is open to all nationalities and genders aged 18 and above.

The organising committee has allocated valuable cash prizes for the winners in both the men's and women's categories, with a total prize pool of approximately \$300,000. The first-place winner will receive \$50,000, while the second and third places will be awarded \$30,000 and \$20,000, respectively. Competitors placing fourth to tenth will receive prizes

ranging from \$10,000-4,000, depending on their ranking. These prizes are a gesture of appreciation for the participants and serve as an incentive to excel in one of the most challenging races in the region.

Qatar's global positioning as a hub for international sporting excellence continues to grow, and events such as the Samla International Race contribute to its sporting legacy. By hosting globally recognised events such as the Formula 1 Qatar Grand Prix, and the AFC Asian Cup, Qatar has demonstrated its ability to captivate sport audiences and engage enthusiast from around the world.

• For more information about the inaugural edition of the Samla International Race, please visit the following link: <https://visitqatar.com/intl-en/events-calendar/samla>



or scan the QR code

• For real-time updates about the race and registration, please visit the following link: <https://samla.com.qa/samla100/>



or scan the QR code

CRICKET

Mehidy's 5 wickets help Bangladesh fight back on Day 2

SEAN WILLIAMS TOP-SCORED FOR ZIMBABWE WITH 59

AFP
Sylhet, Bangladesh

Bangladesh ended the second day of the first Test against Zimbabwe yesterday trailing by only 25 runs after spinner Mehidy Hasan Miraz took five wickets to restrict the visitors to 273 in their first innings.

It was a comeback for Bangladesh after a disappointing first day when skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto won the toss in Sylhet and decided to bat first.

However, his batters failed to capitalise and were bowled out by an impressive Zimbabwe attack for a modest 191.

Zimbabwe then piled on the misery by racing to 67-0 by the end of play on the first day.

Starting from a commanding position, both Zimbabwe openers fell early on the second day to aggressive pace bowling by Nahid Rana. Ben Curran was the first to go on 18 and his partner Brian Bennett, who hit an aggressive 64-ball 57, was removed soon after with the score on 88-2.

Sean Williams (59) was the only other Zimbabwe batter to reach fifty. Wessly Madhevere (24), Nyasha Mayavo (35) and Richard Ngarava (28) all failed to build bigger scores.

Off-spinner Mehidy took the key wickets of Williams, Mayavo and Ngarava to finish with 5-52 on a wicket that was expected to help

the pace bowlers. Nahid took 3-74 with aggressive bowling in support of Mehidy.

Starting the second innings with an 82-run deficit, Bangladesh lost Shadman Islam on 4 to Blessing Muzarabani with the score on 13.

His opening partner Mahmudul Hasan Joy soldiered on to 28 in an unbeaten 44-run partnership with Mominul Haque, on 15, to end the day at 57-1.

Shanto must now hope that they can make the most of the friendly home conditions to set an imposing target for the visitors.

Bangladesh have been formidable on the slow and spin-friendly home pitches but have several veterans missing.

They have won eight of the 18 Tests against Zimbabwe, their highest total against any Test side, including four of the past five. The second and final Test will be played in Chattogram from April 28.

BRIEF SCORES
1st innings: Bangladesh 191 all out (Mominul Haque 56, Najmul Hossain Shanto 40; Blessing Muzarabani 3-50, Wellington Masakadza 3-21)
1st innings: Zimbabwe 273 all out (Brian Bennett 57, Sean Williams 59; Mehidy Hasan Miraz 5-52, Nahid Rana 3-74)
2nd innings: Bangladesh 57-1 (Mahmudul Hasan Joy 28 not out, Mominul Haque 15 not out; Blessing Muzarabani 1-21)



Bangladesh's Mehidy Hasan Miraz delivers a ball during the second day of the first Test against Zimbabwe at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium in Sylhet yesterday. (AFP)

INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Gill, Sudharsan help toppers Gujarat boss Kolkata Knight Riders

AFP
Kolkata

Shubman Gill led from the front with his 55-ball 90 to help Gujarat Titans hammer holders Kolkata Knight Riders by 39 runs yesterday and consolidate their top spot in the IPL.

Gujarat posted 198-3 after Sai Sudharsan, who hit 52, and Gill put on 114 runs for the first wicket to lay the foundations of the total at Kolkata's Eden Gardens. The bowlers then combined to restrict Kolkata to 159-8 with skipper Ajinkya Rahane playing a lone hand with 50 to register Gujarat's sixth win in eight matches.

Kolkata, who won their third title of the popular T20 tournament last year, slipped to their fifth defeat in eight matches.

The batters set up victory for Gujarat with England's Jos Buttler hitting an unbeaten 41 off 23 balls as he steered the team after the opening stand between the Sudharsan and Gill.

Gill was watchful at the start but the left-handed Sudharsan hit a few boundaries to get Gujarat going after being invited to bat first.

Gill took on Moeen Ali with a six and two fours in the second spell for the former England spinner and soon reached his third half-century of the season.

Sudharsan raised his fifth 50-plus score in this edition as he went past 400 runs to nudge out Lucknow Super Giants batsman Nicholas Pooran (368) as the leading batsman. Buttler is third

with 356 runs in his eight innings.

Andre Russell handed Kolkata its first breakthrough as the pace bowler dismissed Sudharsan after his 36-ball knock but he came under attack from Buttler who hit him for three successive boundaries. Buttler and Gill kept up the attack before fast bowler Vaibhav Arora denied the Gujarat captain his hundred.

Buttler lost another partner in Rahul Tewatia but Gujarat finished with a flourish in a 18-run 20th over from Arora.

In reply, Kolkata lost Rahmanullah Gurbaz in the first over of the chase when Mohammed Siraj got the Afghanistan wicketkeeper-batsman trapped lbw for one. Sunil Narine and Rahane hit back with regular boundaries in a brisk partnership of 41 until Afghanistan leg-spinner Rashid Khan broke the stand. Rashid had Narine caught out for 17 before Rahane and Venkatesh Iyer put on another stand to keep Kolkata in the hunt. Sai Kishore removed Iyer on 14 and fellow spinner Washington Sundar sent back Rahane stumped out after his fifty to derail the chase.

Russell added some spark with a 15-ball 21 as he hit three fours and one six but Rashid picked up his second wicket to remove him thanks to a Buttler stumping. Season's leading bowler Prasidh Krishna then took two wickets in one over to take his count to 16.

BRIEF SCORES: GT 198 for 3 (Gill 90, Sudharsan 52, Buttler 41*, Russell 1-13) **beat KKR 159 for 8** (Rahane 50, Prasidh 2-25, Rashid 2-25) **by 39 runs.**



Iyer, Kishan win back India contracts as Pant's deal upgraded

Batsmen Shreyas Iyer and Ishan Kishan yesterday returned to India's central contract list after a year's absence, the cricket board said, while wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant was promoted to Grade A.

Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, Jasprit Bumrah and Ravindra Jadeja were unchanged as the four players in the top A+ category as the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) announced its central contracts for 2024-25. Iyer entered at Grade B along

with Kuldeep Yadav, Axar Patel, Yashasvi Jaiswal and India T20 captain Suryakumar Yadav. Kishan, a left-handed wicketkeeper-batsman, was in Grade C. Both Iyer and Kishan were "not considered" for the annual contracts in the previous round after they skipped domestic tournaments. The BCCI did not stipulate pay for each category, but A+ contracts in 2023 carried an annual salary of \$844,000, with A grade players earning \$603,000. Seven players, including Sar-

faraz Khan, Abhishek Sharma and Harshit Rana were handed central contracts for the first time. Ravichandran Ashwin, who retired from international cricket earlier this year and formerly had a grade A contract, was dropped from the list.

India contracted players for 2024-25:
Category A+: Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, Jasprit Bumrah, Ravindra Jadeja
Category A: Mohammed Siraj, KL Rahul, Shubman Gill, Hardik Pan-

dya, Mohammed Shami, Rishabh Pant
Category B: Suryakumar Yadav, Kuldeep Yadav, Axar Patel, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Shreyas Iyer
Category C: Rinku Singh, Tilak Varma, Ruturaj Gaikwad, Shivam Dube, Ravi Bishnoi, Washington Sundar, Mukesh Kumar, Sanju Samson, Arshdeep Singh, Prasidh Krishna, Rajat Patidar, Dhruv Jurel, Sarfaraz Khan, Nitish Kumar Reddy, Ishan Kishan, Abhishek Sharma, Akash Deep, Varun Chakravarthy, Harshit Rana.

FOCUS

Al Abdulghani Motors joins forces with Mohamed Naser Al Sayer & Sons Est Co to kick off first-ever Toyota GR Yaris Regional Cup



Al Abdulghani Motors, the authorised distributor of Toyota in Qatar, proudly participated in the inaugural Toyota GR Yaris Regional Cup, held in Kuwait. Organised in partnership with Mohamed Naser Al Sayer & Sons Est Co, Toyota's official distributor in Kuwait, the event brought together top racers from both countries for an adrenaline-fuelled motorsports showdown, marking a significant milestone in the evolution of Toyota Motorsports in the region.

On April 10th and 11th, racers from Qatar and Kuwait showcased their talent and the capabilities of the high-performance Toyota GR Yaris vehicle at Kuwait Motor Town. The competition featured two intense races, where drivers from both teams went head-to-head in a thrilling battle that demonstrated the endurance, agility, and power of the vehicle. Ultimately, Team Kuwait took the lead, securing victory with an impressive 34 points, while Team Qatar followed behind with 10

points.

In parallel with the Regional Cup, Al Abdulghani Motors held the third round of the Toyota GR Yaris Cup Qatar at the same venue. Ten skilled racers, who had competed in the previous rounds, took to the track once again. These racers were proudly sponsored by Qatar National Bank (QNB), Ooredoo, Al Araby 2/Winwin, Chedid Insurance Brokers, I Love Qatar (ILQ), Qatar Living, IPrint, ENEOS/QALCO, Moteri Auto-care Center, and Al Abdulghani



Motors, competed in two action-packed races, battling for supremacy on the track.

Following three action-packed rounds, the championship leaderboard now stands with Team QNB in the lead. Represented by Faisal al-Yafei and Khaled al-Maraghi, Team QNB holds the top position with a combined total of 34 points. Close behind is Team ENEOS/QALCO, led by Saadon al-Kuwari, in second place with 33 points, followed by Team Qatar Living represented by Izz Bustami, in

third place with 22 points. These results reflect the cumulative performance across all rounds leading up to the grand finale.

The Toyota GR Yaris Cup Qatar will conclude with an exciting final round on 25th April 2025 at Lusail International Circuit. Building on the strong public engagement in previous rounds—which featured family-friendly activations in Kuwait such as kids' games, arcade zones, GR Club member activities, karting, drift shows, and hot laps—the final promises to deliver

an even more exhilarating experience for fans.

Looking ahead, Qatar will host season 2 of the Toyota GR Yaris Regional Cup towards the end of 2025 further cementing its reputation as a regional hub for motorsport excellence. This milestone underscores Al Abdulghani Motors' dedication to nurturing a vibrant and sustainable motorsports scene, empowering local talent, and strengthening community engagement through the power of performance driving.

FOCUS

Chopra hopes eponymous event will bring Diamond League to India

Reuters
New Delhi

Neeraj Chopra will tick off an item in his bucket list with an eponymous javelin competition in Bengaluru next month but the poster boy of Indian athletics has also added a new one to it – watching a Diamond League event in the country.

The Neeraj Chopra Classic on May 24 will be a World Athletics Gold category event featuring former world champions Anderson Peters and Julius Yego, 2016 Olympic winner Thomas Roehler and American Curtis Thompson among others.

Chopra, who won the gold at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics but settled for silver behind Arshad Nadeem in Paris last year, could not confirm the participation of his Pakistani frenemy though.

“He is consulting his coach but has not confirmed his participation yet,” Chopra told a virtual press conference yesterday.

“Like other top throwers, Arshad too has been invited. It will involve government (permission). Once everything is confirmed, we will know the final list.”

India and Pakistan have suspended bilateral cricket over their soured political relations though the bitter neighbours continue to engage in Olympic sports.

Chopra is the first Indian track-and-field athlete to win an Olympic gold, world championship and the Diamond League and has single-handedly raised the profile of Olympic sports in an otherwise cricket-mad country. Having an event bearing his name, like pole vaulter Armand Duplantis has one in Sweden, is another dream Chopra wanted to fulfil.

“It’s always been a dream of mine to see India host a world class athletic event. To have such an event, that too named after me, feels surreal,” the 27-year-old said. “This is going to be an annual event and were are going to expand it to include more disciplines.”

“People will get to see top throwers competing right in front

of their eyes. It would be a major boost for local talent, who will get to perform against the best athletes. “Our next effort should to bring a Diamond League event to India. It is not impossible.

“We have the stadiums and World Athletics is aware of the growing popularity of these events in India. They also want more crowd follow athletics.”

Neeraj last competed on home soil at the Federation Cup in Bhubaneswar last year, throwing 82.27m in his build-up to the Paris 2024 Olympics.

The Indian javelin thrower began this 2025 athletics season with a win at the Potch Invitational Meet in Potchefstroom, South Africa and will be competing at the Doha Diamond League on May 16 before travelling back to India for the NC Classic.

The NC Classic will also serve as a crucial qualification event for the World Athletics Championships 2025, scheduled in Tokyo from September 13 to 21. Neeraj, the reigning world champion, has already secured his spot.



ATHLETICS

Korir wins Boston Marathon, Lokedi upstages Obiri

WITH THE WIN, KORIR EMULATES HIS BROTHER WESLEY’S FEAT

AFP
Boston

Kenya’s John Korir stormed to victory in the Boston Marathon yesterday, while compatriot Sharon Lokedi trumped defending champion Hellen Obiri in the women’s race.

Korir, whose victory in the 2024 Chicago Marathon in a time of 2:02:44 made him the sixth fastest marathoner in history, clocked 2hr 04min 45sec for the win.

The 28-year-old’s feat emulated that of his brother Wesley Korir, the now-Kenyan politician having won in Boston in 2012 on his first attempt in five appearances.

Tanzania’s 2017 world bronze medalist Alphonse Felix Simbu was second, just holding off Kenya’s Cybrian Kotut in a photo-finish in 2:05.04.

The first American home was Conner Mantz in fourth, missing out on a podium place by just four seconds, a time that was also just eight seconds off Ryan Hall’s fastest US marathon time ever.

Lokedi timed 2:17:22 in the women’s race, outpacing Obiri by 19sec, with Yalemserf Yehualaw rounding out the podium.

She smashed the previous course record of 2:19:59 set by Ethiopia’s Buzunesh Deba in 2014.

The men’s field included 21 sub-2:09 runners, but none could get close to Kenyan Geoffrey Mutai’s course record of 2:03.02 set



Sharon Lokedi (left) of Kenya and John Korir of Kenya celebrate after winning the 129th Boston Marathon yesterday. (AFP)

back in 2011. US Olympian Mantz took the lead group of 21 runners through the 5km mark in 14:20 in a marathon which first saw men compete back in 1897.

By the 10km mark, hit in 28:52, defending champion Sisay Lemma had taken up the front running and the pack fell to 16 5km later.

Rory Linkletter led Lemma through halfway in 1:01.52, but the pace proved too much for the Ethiopian, who promptly dropped out just after 1:19 on the road.

Coming to the business end of the race, Korir, Mukhtar Edris,

Daniel Mateiko and two-time winner Evans Chebet were all in the running in a lead field 13 deep, Mantz doing the majority of the pace setting.

Korir made his move around the 34km mark, surging to take a lead he would never cede.

He quickly built it up to nearly a minute as the others scrambled not only to reel him in but also fight for podium spots.

Korir held his nerve as Kotut and Simbu surged through themselves to stage their own mini-battle for second place, Mantz doing well

for fourth as Edris faded into fifth spot. Obiri had been looking to become the first woman since 1999 to win three consecutive Boston Marathon titles, something only four women have ever done.

Only Deba had broken 2:20 pace in Boston, but a group of 14 remained on track for that mark at the halfway point.

The pack split, but Obiri had not counted on Lokedi’s electric finish, the 31-year-old pulling clear at the death for a new Boston record, with 32,000 participants on the heels of the elite runners.

TENNIS

Ostapenko stuns Sabalenka to win Stuttgart title

AFP
Stuttgart

Jelena Ostapenko stunned world number one Aryna Sabalenka in straight sets to win the WTA event in Stuttgart yesterday, securing the ninth title of her career.

Ostapenko, unseeded and ranked 24th in the world heading into the final, won 6-4, 6-1 to win her first title on clay since her 2017 French Open triumph.

The Latvian cruised to victory, converting her first match point to lift her first WTA singles trophy since February last year.

“It’s great to share the court with you – you’re a champion,” Ostapenko said to Sabalenka in her on-court interview.

Three-time Grand Slam champion Sabalenka has now lost four finals in Stuttgart in the past five seasons.

“I’m sure you hate me now because you wanted this car so badly, but I’m sure you’ll get it another time,” Ostapenko added of the car tournament winners receive as a bonus prize.

The 26-year-old Sabalenka, who won the 2024 US and Australian Opens, is still waiting for her first tournament victory on clay since the 2023 Madrid Open.

“You were a better player than me, that’s all there is to it,” Sabalenka said.

Ostapenko broke her opponent in the very first game of the match to set the tone.

She did the same in the opening game of the second set, which appeared to break Sabalenka’s resistance, with the Belarusian growing increasingly frustrated. At one point, Sabalenka fell to the clay, but signalled to her opponent and the umpire that she was not injured. The tournament win completes an impressive week for Ostapenko in Germany.

She defeated five-time Grand Slam winner Iga Swiatek, ranked second, in the quarters before a straight-sets victory over Ekaterina Alexandrova in the semi-finals.

Ostapenko will climb six places in the WTA rankings to 18th after her first win over Sabalenka at the fourth attempt.



Latvia's Jelena Ostapenko celebrates with the trophy in front of the winner's car after winning the final match against Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka at the Women's Tennis Grand Prix WTA tournament in Stuttgart yesterday. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

Alfardan Automobiles brings BMW's high-performance thrill to MotoGP

Alfardan Automobiles, the official importer of BMW vehicles in Qatar, is once again bringing the heat to the MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar 2025 with a powerful presence at Lusail International Circuit, headlined by an impressive display of BMW M high-performance machines – both on two wheels and four.

This year's BMW M Stand at the MotoGP fan zone from April 11 to 13 is all about pure adrenaline, with visitors getting up close to the fierce BMW S 1000 RR – a track-bred superbike that epitomises speed, precision, and M engineering at its finest.

BMW's M power continues at the Vehicle Display Stand, where motorsport fans can check out two of the most high-performance cars in the M line-up: the BMW M2 and the limited-edition BMW M4 CS. With aggressive styling and track-inspired dynamics, both models exemplify BMW's



BMW M Stand showcases the dynamic BMW S 1000 RR in the fan zone.

signature M DNA, turning heads and stirring hearts in equal measure with their power, agility and design. Taking centre stage outside the Paddock main entrance is the all-new BMW M5 Touring Safety Car, making its first appearance in Qatar.

Officially unveiled on February 9, 2025, during the MotoGP season launch at the One Bangkok

complex in Thailand, this model showcases BMW M's commitment to innovation and motorsport safety. Combining the practicality of a touring model with the force of M performance, the M5 Touring brings fresh energy to MotoGP's world-class safety car fleet.

Designed to strengthen the championship's fleet of official safety cars, the M5 Touring stands



Safety Car BMW M5 Touring takes centre stage at the Paddock main entrance.

out with its cutting-edge design, spacious layout, and powerful performance. It embodies BMW M's core values, seamlessly blending advanced innovation, everyday functionality, and the highest motorsport safety standards.

For over 25 years, BMW M Motorsport has proudly served as the official supplier of safety cars for the MotoGP championship,

a longstanding partnership that underscores BMW's unwavering dedication to motorsport excellence.

In addition to the fan zone, Alfardan Automobiles also provided a dedicated fleet of BMW models for transporting the VIPs attending the MotoGP weekend.

Ayman Berjawi, General Manager of Alfardan Automobiles for

BMW, said: “Being part of MotoGP is more than a showcase - it's about sharing our passion for performance with one of the most enthusiastic motorsport audiences in the world. This year, we wanted to elevate the fan experience and bring them closer to the heart of BMW M. From the cutting-edge BMW S 1000 RR superbike to the new BMW M5 Touring Safety Car, we're offering a full-spectrum M experience that reflects our commitment to innovation, design, and unforgettable driving moments.

“As BMW M Motorsport marks over 25 years of serving as the official supplier of MotoGP safety cars, it's an honour for Alfardan Automobiles to continue delivering that legacy right here in Qatar.”

Alfardan Automobiles' presence at MotoGP follows its standout participation in last year's Lusail Speed Fest, reinforcing its role as a key player in Qatar's motorsport and luxury automotive landscape.

LA LIGA

Ancelotti hails Real team effort in win over Athletic

Real, who lacked spark in the first half, looked better after the break

Reuters
Madrid

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti praised his team's character after their hard-fought 1-0 win over Athletic Bilbao on Sunday, keeping their La Liga title hopes alive while responding in the best possible way to their Champions League exit.

A late winner from Federico Valverde prevented the reigning Spanish champions from slipping further behind in the league title race, moving them to 69 points in second place, four points behind leaders Barcelona. "Valverde was the key because he scored the goal," Ancelotti told reporters.

"The team did well. We were a bit slower in the first half, but in the second half we did very well in every aspect. We wanted to win, to bounce back after being knocked out of the Champions League. It was a good match. We were aggressive and didn't concede. We were more solid and played better as a team."

Real lacked a spark in the opening half but looked better after the break, with midfielder Jude Bellingham playing as a false nine.

"We controlled the first half, we didn't feel any pressure from Athletic, but we didn't create any chances," Ancelotti said. "(Bellingham as false nine) gave us a big advantage last year. We didn't use it in the first half, but we did in the second. We attacked many times from the outside and he was there to finish it off. He deserved to score."

Ancelotti also praised winger Vinicius Jr, saying he was instrumental in the win, having a goal disallowed late in the second half and leading the attack in the absence of the suspended Kylian Mbappe. "Vinicius has a fantastic attitude and was exhausted in the second half. He was decisive, as always," the Italian coach said. "These haven't been happy days for him, but I really liked his reaction. He's going to be very important in the coming games, because of what he is on the pitch and because of his attitude."

With the Copa del Rey final against Barcelona looming, Ancelotti dismissed the suggestion that his lineup was a rehearsal for that game and said the win will give his team momentum heading into the next week's Clasico. "It was a lineup to have more control with Luka (Modric) and Dani Ceballos," he said. "We have time to prepare. The victory is good for us."



A late winner from Federico Valverde prevented Real Madrid from slipping further behind in the title race, moving them to 69 points in second place, four points behind leaders Barcelona. (AFP)

FLICK HOPES HARD-FOUGHT CELTA WIN IS WAKE-UP CALL FOR BARCELONA

Meanwhile, Barcelona coach Hansi Flick said his side cannot afford any complacency in the home stretch of the La Liga title race, after his side were forced to dig deep to claim a 4-3 comeback win over Celta Vigo on Saturday. The leaders had to fight back from 3-1 down to beat Celta and conceded three goals for a second straight match after their 3-1 quarter-final second leg loss to Borussia Dortmund in the Champions League last week.

The Catalan outfit have 73 points from 32 matches, four ahead of rivals Real Madrid. "We must always improve. After Dortmund, after Celta, we have to do much better. We have the quality to beat anyone, but we have to do

it well," Flick told reporters ahead of a home meeting with Mallorca today.

"The comeback against Celta, that positive energy, that's the state of mind we need. La Liga has a high level and the objective is to not drop points, but it's not easy. We saw that against Celta. I hope it's a wake-up call, it's a long road. Madrid are fantastic and they also want to achieve their objectives."

Today, Barcelona host seventh-placed Mallorca, who are looking to qualify for European football next season. Flick, who may look to rotate his squad against Mallorca with one eye on the Copa del Rey final against Real on the weekend, urged some of Barcelona's disgruntled fringe players to do their talking on the pitch if they are given a chance.

SPOTLIGHT

Akel wins Qatar Seniors Open Golf Championship

The Qatar Seniors Open Golf Championship concluded successfully over the weekend at the Doha Golf Club. The tournament saw the participation of nearly 100 players – both men and women – from Qatar and various countries across Asia, the Arab region, and Europe.

As the first tournament of its kind in the region dedicated to senior golfers aged 45 and above, the event delivered two days of intense competition, showcasing high-level skills and a spirit of sportsmanship. The championship featured a distinguished lineup of Arab and international golfers, including many business leaders and senior executives who are also avid golfers.

Lebanese golfer Rachid Akel emerged victorious in the main category after delivering a consistent and impressive performance, finishing with a total score of 146 strokes over the two days. He edged out South African Theo Scheepers, who came in second

with a score of 147 strokes

In the Net category, Qatari player Abdulaziz al-Buainain clinched first place with a net score of 137 strokes. In the women's division, Uzma Mir of Pakistan led the gross category with 176 strokes, while Tasnim Qazi of India secured the top spot in the women's Net category with a net score of 142 strokes.

This year marked the seventh edition of the championship, which continues to grow in reputation and reach. The significant turnout is a testament to the dedicated efforts of the Qatar Golf Association, in collaboration with the Doha Golf Club, to enhance and promote the tournament.

With its unique focus on senior golfers, the Qatar Seniors Open has carved out a distinct place in the regional golf calendar, attracting a growing number of participants and building a strong reputation as a premier event for seasoned players from around the world.



Serie A Scudetto showdown could be decided by penalty shootout

Milan: The possibility of a play-off or even a penalty shootout to decide the Serie A title is becoming more likely with Inter Milan and Napoli level on points at the summit and just five rounds of matches remaining.

After 33 games, the top two are locked together on 71 points, and while defending champions Inter have a much healthier goal difference, this criteria will not come into play should they end the season level on points.

Italy's league title has only been decided by a playoff on one occasion, back in 1964. Inter were involved, losing out to Bologna who claimed their last Scudetto with a 2-0 win at the Stadio Olimpico in Rome.

In 2005, the playoff rule was abandoned, with the title to be decided by the head-to-head record followed by goal difference if two or more teams ended level on points, but this never came into play. A return to the playoff system came in 2022, but with Napoli winning by 16 points that season and Inter taking last season's title with a gap of 19 points over second place, the change made little

difference. But now, with these two sides locked in battle, there may well be an even more dramatic finale to what has been an exciting Serie A season, with Atalanta leading at one time, and Inter spending most of the campaign playing catch-up. Inter claimed top spot at the end of February, eventually stretching their lead to three points, but that all changed at the weekend.

Antonio Conte's Napoli won 1-0 at bottom club Monza on Saturday and Simone Inzaghi's tired-looking treble-chasing Inter lost to a late goal at Bologna on Sunday, as the season took yet another twist. Should Inter retain their better goal difference, they would have home advantage in an eventual playoff, and if the game were to finish level after 90 minutes the match would go straight to penalties, with no extra-time.

The sides have met twice already this season, both games ending 1-1, so there is a real chance that the league title's destination could be decided by a missed penalty and a goalkeeper may well become the hero.

Leeds and Burnley promoted to Premier League

London: Leeds United and Burnley were promoted to the Premier League, condemning faltering Sheffield United to a Championship play-off battle. Daniel Farke's Leeds beat Stoke 6-0 and Burnley's 2-1 win at home to Sheffield United in the later kick-off confirmed both clubs will be in England's top division next season.

Leeds and Burnley both have 94 points and neither can now be caught by Sheffield United (86), who have won just one of their past five games. Leeds have spent the past two seasons in the Championship while Burnley, under the leadership of Scott Parker, have secured an immediate return to the Premier League.

BAYERN'S NEUER AND UPAMECANO RETURN TO TRAINING

Bayern Munich captain Manuel Neuer and

French international defender Dayot Upamecano returned to training, raising hopes they could play again this season. Bayern issued a statement saying Upamecano, Neuer and back-up goalie Daniel Peretz had returned to training with the ball. Both Neuer and Upamecano have been out since March.

Bayern are on course to win the Bundesliga title, they are eight points clear of defending champions Leverkusen with four matches remaining.

LEGENDARY ARGENTINE GOALKEEPER GATTI DEAD AT 80

Hugo Orlando Gatti, a legendary Argentine goalkeeper and former star of the national team, died Sunday at the age of 80, the South American Football Confederation said. Gatti was

hospitalised two months ago for a broken hip but developed pneumonia, kidney and heart trouble and in the end was sedated as his health faded. News reports said his family on Sunday decided to take him off life support. Gatti – whose nickname was 'El Loco,' or the mad man – held the record for most number of games played in Argentina's top football division, with 765. He played from 1962 to 1988.

At age 44 he was still in the starting lineup for regional footballing giants Boca Juniors. Gatti was famously extroverted and one of the first goalkeepers to make a habit of coming out of the six-yard box into the larger area in front of him. Gatti was outspoken and once called the football legend Diego Maradona "gordito," or chubby. Days later Maradona exacted revenge by scoring four goals against him.

FOCUS

Leverkusen's CEO unveils 'gentleman's agreement' to let coach Alonso go

Reuters
Madrid

Bayer Leverkusen and their coach **Xabi Alonso** have a "gentleman's agreement" that would allow the Spanish manager to leave if one of the clubs he played for during his career calls him up, the German club's CEO Fernando Carro said.

The 43-year-old former midfielder, who had a remarkable career playing for Liverpool, Real Madrid, Bayern Munich and his childhood club Real Sociedad, has been rumoured as the strongest candidate to succeed Carlo Ancelotti in the Spanish capital.

The 65-year-old Italian manager's future with Real Madrid is uncertain following their Champions League quarter-final exit, with multiple reports suggesting he could step away from his position at the end of the season to take over the Brazilian national team's vacant spot, which could further



open the door for Alonso's return to Madrid. The former Spanish international, who is under contract until June 2026, has done an excellent job at Bayer Leverkusen in his short managerial career.

He led them to their first Bundesliga title, ending Bayern Munich's 11-year domination, as well

as triumphs in the German Cup and DFB Supercup. "We have a gentlemen's agreement that if any of the teams he has played for calls, we would sit down and talk and we wouldn't put any obstacles in his way," Carro told reporters in Madrid, before attending the Laureus Awards in which Bayer Leverkusen have been nominated as Breakthrough of the year.

"(Last year) Xabi had offers from important clubs but he assured us that he would stay with us. Maybe it is a bit early to talk as the season is still ongoing. Maybe things can happen. So we have given ourselves some time to decide... We are very calm and there is not much more to say other than that."

Carro said that Leverkusen's relationship with Real Madrid "is excellent" but said there has been no contact whatsoever regarding Alonso from the Spanish club. "We are not naive, but the position of the coach is very important for a club and we are preparing the next season with him," Carro said.

LIGUE 1

Motivation is key in PSG's season finale: Coach Enrique

Reuters
Paris

Paris St Germain have already retained their Ligue 1 title but in what could turn out to be the club's greatest ever season, keeping players motivated is the most important thing at this stage of the campaign, manager Luis Enrique said yesterday.

PSG's priority may be winning their first Champions League trophy, with a semi-final against Arsenal to come, and the club can also retain the Coup de France against Stade de Reims in the final, but the league still has much to offer.

Luis Enrique's side can become the first team to remain unbeaten throughout a Ligue 1 season, and avoiding defeat at Nantes today would see them beat AC Milan's record of 38 away games without defeat. "We are very motivated because we can set a record of the European team in the big five leagues with the longest unbeaten run away from home," Luis Enrique told reporters. "We are really motivated because we do want our unbeaten title. As for the situation in the table, Nantes are fully motivated as well, so we know how difficult it is."

The manager has been able to rotate his starting team, making nine changes for Saturday's 2-1 win over Le Havre from their Champions League game



against Aston Villa last week, which is key to getting the best out of the whole squad. "Without doubt, that is the challenge that we face at the moment and that is the challenge for coaches," the manager said.

"Because it can be hard to motivate everyone, particularly the ones who are less involved, but I feel very lucky because my players are responding in the best possible way and turning in top level performances. I would like them all to get more playing time but it is difficult to do that because to do that I have to stop high-level players from playing."

PSG have five league matches left, and take on a Nantes side still involved in a survival battle, 14th in the standings and three points above the relegation zone.