

To subscribe  
**GULF TIMES**  
Newspaper  
Please call  
**444 666 35**



CRICKET | Page 2

Rahul powers  
Delhi to big win  
over Lucknow  
in IPL



PREMIER LEAGUE | Page 4

Arsenal will not  
rest players for  
Crystal Palace  
clash, says Arteta

To advertise here,  
PLEASE CALL  
**444 666 21**

Wednesday, April 23, 2025  
Shawwal 25, 1446 AH

# GULF TIMES

# SPORT



ATHLETICS

Duplantis kicks off  
Diamond League  
amid Johnson-led  
changing landscape

Page 3

FOOTBALL

# Clinical Sadd sink Ahli to reach Qatar Cup final

Sadd await the winner of semi-final between Duhail and Gharafa



Al Sadd's Tarek Salman (right) celebrates after scoring against Al Ahli in the Qatar Cup semi-final yesterday.

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

**Q**atar Stars League champions Al Sadd continued to show fine form as they stormed into the final of Qatar Cup with a 3-0 win over Al Ahli at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday.

In the semi-final, Al Sadd went ahead after an own goal from Ahli's Matej Mitrovic in the 30th minute. Tarek Salman then doubled the lead in the 76th minute before Rafa Mujica put the game to bed in the 82nd minute. Akram Afif was instrumental in two of the three goals for his team.

Al Ahli, looking to bounce back after their recent loss in the league to Al Sadd, made a braveheart start to the match but had more to rue, including luck, at times. Al Ahli could well

have gone up the lead in the 26th minute but a powerful Driss Fettouhi free kick from the right went on to hit the crossbar and fall out.

Minutes later, Al Sadd went on the prowl but an Afif cross from the left was hit just wide left by Claudinho. It didn't matter as Afif came back again and this time sent in a rasping cross from the left but before the ball could reach an intended Giovanni Henrique, it was intercepted by a sliding Mitrovic who drove the ball into his own net.

Al Sadd having gained the lead looked for more but held on by Al Ahli for a long time. In the 67th minute, Afif slammed in a goal but was ruled offside as he broke off early.

But Al Sadd kept charging on and were soon rewarded for their efforts. Salman doubled their lead and in super style after Fettouhi made a header and Al Ahli's defence erred. Salman made a sprint to beat two defenders

before going on to beat the lone goalkeeper Marwan Sherif.

Al Sadd's third goal was all the more entertaining as an Afif strike was staved off by Sherif but the ball went to Paulo Otavio, who rammed in a cross and Mujica left - heeled it in, shaking the net.

Al Sadd now await the winner of today's semi-final between Al Duhail and Al Gharafa.

Sadd defender Salman credited the win to the collective effort of the squad, saying: "We achieved a good victory over Al Ahli, through which we advanced to the final match to compete for another title. This win came thanks to great effort from the players and technical staff."

Looking ahead, Tariq emphasised the importance of shifting focus to continental duties, as Al Sadd prepare to face Japan's Kawasaki Frontale in the AFC Champions League Elite quarter-finals in Jeddah.

PREVIEW

# Galtier plots Duhail comeback against Gharafa after missing out on league title

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

**A**l Duhail will take on Al Gharafa in the second semi-final of Qatar Cup 2025 at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium today at 7pm. Duhail qualified for the Qatar Cup 2025 after finishing second in the Qatar Stars League while Gharafa were third.

Al Duhail coach **Christophe Galtier** hopes for the team to overcome the disappointment of missing out on the league title by winning the Qatar Cup.

Ahead of the clash with Gharafa, Galtier said, "Our goals are the same as those of the other teams: to achieve victory, qualify for the 2025 Qatar Cup final, and compete for the title. This match is a continuation of the rivalry between the two teams, who have fought hard throughout the season."

"It will be an exciting semi-final. We respect Al Gharafa a lot, but our goal is to reach the final. Now the league championship is over and the competition for the 2025 Qatar Cup title has begun. It is a very important tournament for us. Cup matches are different and decisive. We must be ready to face a team like Gharafa."

"After losing the league title, we have to fight for the rest of the season's tournaments. We lost the league title to Al Sadd despite the team's good performance in the second half. I would be happy to win any upcoming championship to make up for the disappointment of losing the league and I congratulate Al Sadd on winning the

league title," said Galtier.

Gharafa, however, won't be easy opponents, having a similar ambition. Gharafa coach Pedro Martins said his team will do their best to beat Duhail. "We will do our best to win and qualify for the final. We lost our last match against Al Shahania in the league championship, and we are striving to improve in the Qatar Cup match to maintain our chances of qualifying for the final," he said.

"We are focusing on Duhail's style of play and studying it carefully to deliver the best possible performance. Our opponents are a very strong and distinguished team, and we will be fully prepared to play the match with all our strength. "I expect great support from Gharafa fans in the upcoming match against Duhail, especially since the fans are very important in helping boosting the morale of the players to win the championship," Martins added.

Gharafa forward Yacine Brahimi said, "We are fully aware of the importance of this match and the tournament, and therefore we strive to do our best. Our focus is high and we will try to deliver a distinguished performance."

The current season witnessed two matches between Al Duhail and Al Gharafa in the league. The first-leg match ended in a 1-1 draw, while Al Duhail won the second leg 2-0. Duhail have prominent stars in their team such as Michael Olunga, Edmilson, Almoez Ali, Ismail Mohammed, Bassam al-Rawi and Hakim Ziyech. Gharafa are served by a group of distinguished players, such as Joselu, Brahimi, Ferjani Sassi and al-Janahi.



ATHLETICS

# Olympic Steeplechase medallists set for rematch at Doha meet

**O**lympic champion Winfred Yavi (Bahrain) will be reunited with Paris silver and bronze medalists Peruth Chemutai (Uganda) and Faith Cherotich (Kenya) in a top-quality women's 3000m steeplechase field at the Doha Diamond League meeting on May 16. Yavi - the Asian record holder with a best of 8:44.39 (Rome, 2024) - is the second-fastest women's steeplechaser of all time and holds three of the ten quickest times ever recorded. She is currently the reigning Olympic, world and Asian Games champion.

"I am always looking for opportunities to run faster and win more," said the 2023 Diamond League champion. "When I ran my personal best in Rome last year I was actually a little bit disappointed not to break the world record (8:44.32) because I thought it was possible. I've been working very hard over the winter and I believe it will happen at some point. It is important to stay focused and to stay hungry. To win gold in Tokyo and successfully defend my world title is my main goal for this year, but I want to run fast and set a high standard when I open my Diamond League season in Doha. Conditions are good in Qatar and when the crowd get behind us, anything is



Winfred Yavi - the Asian record holder with a best of 8:44.39 - is the second-fastest women's steeplechaser of all time and holds three of the ten quickest times ever recorded. She is currently the reigning Olympic, world and Asian Games champion.

possible."

Ugandan record-holder Chemutai, who won the Olympic title in Tokyo (2021), is ranked third-fastest all-time with a best 8:48.03 achieved at the 2024 Diamond League event in Rome where she finished second to Yavi.

Former world U20 champion and 2023

World Athletics Rising Star award-winner Cherotich finished third behind Yavi and Chetumai at the Olympic Games in Paris in a personal best of 8:55.15 and went on to be crowned 2024 Diamond League champion.

The Doha meeting is the third leg of the 2025 Diamond League. The series - which will pay out a record total of \$9.24mn in

prize money - comprises 15 of the most prestigious events in global track and field across four different continents, starting with Xiamen on April 26 and concluding with a single final across two days in Zurich (27-28 August).

For the local fans, the most anticipated battle will be between home hero and former Olympic champion Mutaz Barshim and reigning Olympic champion Hamish Kerr in is shaping up to be an incredible high jump field at Doha meet.

The 28-year-old Kerr won the 2024 World Athletics Indoor Championships with a national record and Oceania best of 2.36m, upgrading his 2022 bronze. He matched that height in Paris, winning Olympic gold after a jump-off inspired by the Tokyo 2021 actions of Barshim and Italy's Gianmarco Tamberi, who, in contrast, chose to share the gold medal. The Commonwealth champion most recently finished second in the 2025 World Indoors.

Barshim, who finished third in Paris, is also a two-time Olympic silver medalist (2012 and 2016). A true championship performer, he won an unprecedented third successive global title with victory at the World Championships in Eugene 2022.

A great ambassador for the sport and

his country, the 33-year-old launched his own innovative event in 2024 - the 'What Gravity Challenge' - bringing together a group of the world's best high jumpers at the Katara Amphitheatre in Doha.

Meanwhile, Olympic javelin silver medalist Neeraj Chopra of India, the reigning world and Asian Games champion, will also compete in Doha. Chopra is India's national record holder with a best of 89.94m. He was the first Indian track and field athlete to set a world record (under-20) when he threw 86.48m to win the 2016 World U20 Championships, which was also the first time an Indian athlete had won a global track and field title. He made history in Tokyo when he became the country's first Olympic gold medalist in track and field and that trend continued at the 2023 World Athletics Championships in Budapest when he became the first athlete from India to strike gold.

The Doha meeting is the third leg of the 2025 Diamond League. The series - which will pay out \$9.24mn in prize money - comprises 15 of the most prestigious events in global track and field across four different continents, starting with Xiamen on April 26 and concluding with a single final across two days in Zurich (27-28 August).



CRICKET

# Skipper Shanto leads Bangladesh fightback



Bangladesh's captain Najmul Hossain Shanto watches the ball after playing a shot during the third day of the first Test against Zimbabwe at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium in Sylhet yesterday. (AFP)

AFP  
Sylhet, Bangladesh

Najmul Hossain Shanto's batting heroics yesterday pushed Bangladesh's second innings lead to 112 on the third day of the first Test against Zimbabwe, with the home team on 194-4.

Bangladesh skipper Shanto, who scored 40 in the first innings, remained unbeaten on 60 when bad light stopped play in Sylhet.

He was ably supported by Jaker Ali, who was unbeaten on 21, and the duo will be looking on day four to stretch their team's lead beyond 200 against an impressive Zim-

babwe batting line-up. The hosts ended the second day on a strong note after a disappointing first day, when Zimbabwe bowled them out for a modest 191.

An impressive spell by spinner Mehidy Hasan Miraz, who took five wickets, helped Bangladesh restrict the visitors to 273 – a lead of only 82.

The entire morning session on the third day was washed out by rain, making only 44 overs possible through the day's play.

Bangladesh started the day at 57-1 and added 60 runs in a solid second-wicket stand between Mominul Haque (47) and opener Mahmudul Hasan Joy (33).

Zimbabwe speedster Blessing

Muzarabani, who took three wickets in the first innings, added three more to his tally and closed the day at 3-51.

Muzarabani removed both Bangladesh openers Shadman Islam (4) and Joy.

He also took the key wicket of Mushfiqur Rahim (4).

The right-arm was supported by Victor Nyauchi, who was the only other Zimbabwe bowler to take a wicket in Bangladesh's second innings.

Bangladesh have long been formidable on their slow and spin-friendly home pitches, but have several veterans missing this series.

They have won eight out of 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**  
**Bangladesh: 191** (Mominul Haque 56, Najmul Hossain Shanto 40; Blessing Muzarabani 3-50, Wellington Masakadza 3-21) **and 194-4** (Najmul Hossain Shanto 60 not out, Mominul Haque 47; Blessing Muzarabani 3-51)  
**Zimbabwe: 273** (Brian Bennett 57, Sean Williams 59; Mehidy Hasan Miraz 5-52, Nahid Rana 3-74)  
**Bangladesh lead by 112 runs**  
**Toss:** Bangladesh

INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

# Rahul powers Delhi to big win over Lucknow

After being 87-0, Lucknow struggled to below-par 159-6 in 20 overs

AFP  
Lucknow, India

India's KL Rahul hit an unbeaten 57 to steer Delhi Capitals to an emphatic eight-wicket win over Lucknow Super Giants and get his side back to winning ways in the IPL yesterday.

Chasing a modest 160 for victory, Delhi rode on Rahul's 42-ball knock and a second-wicket partnership with Abhishek Porel, who hit 51, to achieve their target with 13 balls to spare at Lucknow's home ground.

Delhi, with six wins in eight matches, bounced back from their previous defeat to table-toppers Gujarat Titans and are second in the 10-team table.

Seam bowler Mukesh Kumar set up victory with his four wickets as he helped pull Lucknow back from 87-0 to 110-4 and then a below-par total of 159-6.

"Once we picked up two quick wickets, we got the momentum and all the bowlers did well to restrict them under 160," Delhi skipper Axar Patel said.

In reply, Delhi lost Karun Nair for 15 bowled by Aiden Markram, a part-time off spinner, but Porel and Rahul combined to get the chase on track in their stand of 69.

Markram struck again to get the left-handed Porel out after his 36-ball knock, which was laced with five fours and one six.

Rahul stood firm and along with Axar, who made 34, put on an unbeaten stand of 56 to steer the team home with a winning six from Rahul.

Rahul hit his third fifty of the season to go past 5,000 runs in the IPL – making him the quick-



Delhi Capitals' KL Rahul in action during an IPL match against Lucknow Super Giants in Lucknow, India, yesterday. (Reuters)

est player to achieve the feat in the T20 tournament.

**Lucknow '20 short'**  
Earlier, openers Markram (52) and Mitchell Marsh (45) combined the right dose of caution and aggression to steer Lucknow to 87 inside 10 overs.

South African batter Markram raised his fifty and alongside Australia's Marsh forced Delhi to rotate their bowling options.

Sri Lanka pace bowler Dushmantha Chameera struck first to send back Markram caught out, and the wicket triggered a mini collapse.

Australia's left-arm quick Mitchell Starc got the big wicket of West Indies left-hander Ni-

cholas Pooran, bowled for nine. Mukesh then got two wickets in one over, including Marsh, and Lucknow wobbled.

Lucknow subbed out Marsh and got Ayush Badoni as the impact player, and the 25-year-old repaid the decision by regularly finding the boundary.

Badoni made the most of a dropped catch by Tristan Stubbs on three to smash 36 off 21 deliveries.

Badoni hammered Mukesh for three successive boundaries in the 20th over but the bowler bowled him on the fourth ball.

Skipper Rishabh Pant dropped himself down to number seven but faced just two balls before being bowled by Mukesh on the

final delivery of the innings. "We knew we were 20 runs short," said Pant. "In Lucknow, the toss plays a big part. Whoever is bowling first, they get a lot of help from the wicket."

"We just had to stay back, we just couldn't get it away."

Wicketkeeper-batsman Pant, who went to Lucknow for a record bid of \$3.21mn in the November auction, has scored 106 runs in eight innings with a highest score of 63.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**Delhi Capitals 161 for 2** (Rahul 57\*, Porel 51, Markram 2-30) **beat Lucknow Super Giants 159 for 6** (Markram 52, Marsh 45, Mukesh 4-33) **by 8 wickets**

ANNOUNCEMENT

## Bumrah, Mandhana win top Wisden awards

AFP  
London

India paceman Jasprit Bumrah has been named as the Leading Men's Cricketer in the World in the 2025 edition of the *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack*, with compatriot Smriti Mandhana picking up the women's award.

Bumrah was given the honour by the sport's "bible" after a stunning 2024 in which he excelled in red-ball and white-ball cricket.

The 31-year-old picked up 71 Test wickets at an average of less than 15 and was named player of the tournament as India won the T20 World Cup in the West Indies.

*Wisden* editor Lawrence Booth described Bumrah as "quite simply the star of the year".

Reflecting on Bumrah's astonishing efforts during India's Test series in Australia, Booth wrote: "He was so lethal, so uniquely challenging – a staccato of limbs somehow forming a symphony – that runs scored off him should have counted double."

"And while taking 32 Australian wickets at 13 each, he laid a claim to be considered the greatest of all time, becoming the first with 200 Test wickets at an average below 20."

Despite Bumrah's heroics, Australia won the five-Test series, which finished in early January, 3-1.

Mandhana, 28, made it an Indian double by being named as the

Leading Women's Cricketer in the World.

The batter scored 1,659 runs across all formats in 2024 – the most by a woman in a calendar year of international cricket.

West Indies batter Nicholas Pooran was named as the game's leading T20 cricketer.

In the almanack, which is published on Thursday, Booth is scathing about Jay Shah's smooth transition from the most powerful figure in Indian cricket to chairman of the International Cricket Council.

"(It is) a sorry truth: 2024 was the year cricket gave up any claim to being properly administered, with checks, balances, and governance for the many, not the few," Booth writes.

He adds: "Cricket has handed over the only key not already in India's possession. All hail the Big One."

The *Wisden Cricketers' Almanack* has been published continually on an annual basis since its first edition in 1864.

*Wisden* also names five Cricketers of the Year – an award that can only be won once in a career – and is generally based on performances in the previous English season.

England trio Gus Atkinson, Jamie Smith and Sophie Ecclestone have been named among the five in the 2025 edition.

Hampshire spinner Liam Dawson, who has also played for England, and Surrey paceman Dan Worrall complete the line-up.

## COLOMBIAN CYCLING STAR 'LUCHO' HERRERA DENIES MURDER CONSPIRACY

**Bogota:** Retired Colombian star cyclist **Luis "Lucho" Herrera** has denied claims by ex-paramilitary fighters seeking to implicate him in the murders of farmers on land adjacent to his over two decades ago.

Two former paramilitaries have accused the 1987 Vuelta a Espana winner of conspiring with them in 2002 to kill four neighbours of one of his farms in central Colombia, according to *Noticias UNO* news channel.

The 63-year-old issued a statement on Monday denying any wrongdoing.

"I have never belonged to criminal organisations nor have I ever intended to cause harm to anyone," he said.

One of Herrera's accusers was sentenced recently to 22 years and six months imprisonment over the forced disappearance of the farmers.

He alleges Herrera flagged up the victims as alleged members of leftist guerrilla groups that were at the time engaged in a bloody territorial struggle with right-wing paramilitary groups.

The paramilitaries claim Herrera's goal was to seize the farmers' land.

A source from the prosecutor's

office told AFP investigators would start looking for the farmers' bodies this week.

Herrera, who is not being formally investigated over the affair, said the claims made against him were an attempt to sully his reputation.

In his career as a businessman and trader, he added, he had been a victim of extortion, threats and kidnapping – all of which had been reported to the authorities.

He said he was available to work with investigators.

Herrera was kidnapped for several hours in 2000 by the Farc guerrilla army seeking a ransom from his family.

The group laid down arms in 2017 after signing a peace deal with the government.

Herrera is known as "the little gardener of Fusagasuga" after his home town and in recognition of the manual labour that had built up his muscles for cycling.

His wins at several major Colombian and then European events in the 1980s – notably 1987's Vuelta – made him a national hero by the time he retired in 1995 to run the farm he had bought near his hometown.



## Zhao sets up all-China clash after beating Jones

**London:** Zhao Xintong became the first amateur to reach the second round of the world snooker championships after beating last year's finalist Jak Jones 10-4 on Monday.

For Zhao, who will face compatriot and fellow giant killer Lei Peifan next, it is a road to redemption after the 28-year-old served a 20-month ban for breaching betting regulations.

As a result he is playing as an amateur in Sheffield, although he will return to the professional circuit next season.

Lei beat 2024 champion Kyren Wilson on Saturday but Jones believes Zhao can go all the way and secure a historic success as he bids to become the first amateur and Chinese world champion.

"I don't see anyone who is playing better than him," said Jones. "If he wins it, I wouldn't be surprised at all and that would be good for the game. There are players who have won a lot more, but I don't see anyone in the tournament who is actually better than him," added the 31-year-old Welshman.

Although Jones won the first two frames of the session – including a century break – to close the gap to 7-4, Zhao rallied and rattled off the next three frames to seal his place in the next round.

Zhao's victory means there will be at least four Chinese players in the last 16 – a record. Zhao said having to battle through four qualifying rounds to earn the right to play in the main event had shaken off some of the rustiness he felt through lack of big tournament play.

"Overall I'm pleased with my performance, especially in terms of scoring," said Zhao. "This match was about regaining confidence. I won't be back on tour until next season, so every match I play now is very important. I haven't had many opportunities to compete this season, so whatever the outcome, I just wanted to do my best and show my game."

FOCUS

## Slater sentenced for domestic violence

Reuters  
Melbourne

Former Australia Test batter and TV commentator Michael Slater was sentenced to four years' prison yesterday after pleading guilty to domestic violence charges but will walk free after serving more than a year in custody.

Slater's prison sentence was partly suspended, a registrar at the Maroochydore District Court said.

Slater was refused bail by the court just over a year ago after being remanded in police custody and charged with multiple domestic violence offences on Queensland state's Sunshine Coast between December 5, 2023 and April 12, 2024.

The charges included allegations of assault, strangulation,

burglary and stalking in relation to multiple incidents against a woman in the Noosa region.

In sentencing yesterday, Maroochydore judge Glen Cash told Slater it was obvious he was an alcoholic, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation reported.

"Your rehabilitation will not be easy – alcoholism is part of your make-up," Slater played 74 Tests from 1993-2001 and became a successful cricket commentator before being axed by the Seven Network in 2021.

He has been charged with multiple domestic violence offences in recent years and struggled with mental health issues.

Slater was sentenced to a two-year community corrections order by a Sydney court in late-2022 after pleading guilty to charges including common assault and attempted stalking of a woman.



ATHLETICS

# Duplantis kicks off DL amid Johnson-led changing landscape

‘What we would have liked to avoid is a day clash with Grand Slam Track’

AFP  
Paris

Armand ‘Mondo’ Duplantis heads up a stellar cast of athletes kicking off the 16th Diamond League season in Xiamen on Saturday amid a changing landscape that has seen Michael Johnson launch his Grand Slam track series.

Petr Stastny, CEO of the Diamond League, insisted that he welcomed competition, but added he thought the 15-meet circuit he oversees was the “backbone” of global athletics, with a record \$9.2mn in prize money on offer.

“You will get the most comprehensive coverage on the highest possible level of competition in our sport, in track and field. Great arenas, great big crowds,” Stastny said.

Former US sprint star Johnson is the founder of Grand Slam Track, which debuted in Kingston earlier this month. Conceived by Johnson as a way of reinvigorating interest in athletics outside of Olympic years, his four-event series aims to showcase more races between the world’s best runners, sprinters and hurdlers. There are no field events.

“We feel strongly that the sport is more than just track and we will continue growing the sport and not just a part of the sport,” said Stastny. “We see other events and series being established around us, which we are, generally speaking, happy about.”

“But we are the backbone of the sport between the major championships, including the Olympics. We have track and field, that’s one. We are truly global.

“With one event in Jamaica and three in the United States I think it depends how you define global,” he said in reference to the Grand Slam Series.

“I see there a substantial difference. Being truly global means that you have athletes from a lot



Swedish pole vaulter Armand Duplantis receives the Sportsman of the Year award during the 26th Laureus World Sports Awards gala in Madrid. (AFP)

of countries and so far we’ve had it in the Diamond League – athletes from 142 countries competing. I don’t see that happening, at least for now, anywhere else.”

While the athletes in Kingston served up some high-quality performances, Johnson’s opening event failed to capture the imagination of spectators, with swathes of empty seats at the National Stadium on all three days of competition. There is also an absence of several high-profile athletes, including Olympic men’s and women’s 100m champions Noah Lyles and Julien Alfred, among the 48 racers contracted, with \$30mn in funding.

Their absence suggest both will soon be playing their trade on the Diamond League circuit, with a

long season featuring meets that are often sold out ending with the September 13-21 World Athletics Championships in Tokyo.

The second Series meet will be between May 2-4 in Miami before rounding off in Philadelphia and Los Angeles.

Stastny said that “competition is good, we welcome that”, regretting however that the Miami meet clashed directly with the second Diamond League meeting of the season. “What we would have liked to avoid is a day clash with the Grand Slam Track,” he added.

“When we have our second Chinese meeting in Shanghai/Ke-qiao, it has a direct date clash with Grand Slam Track.

“We do establish our calendars well in advance, the main reason

being that we allow ... other organisers to look for dates which don’t clash. In this case, we have one clash. There’s not much we can do about it.”

Clash or not, the likes of Norway’s Karsten Warholm, US hurdling star Grant Holloway and Olympic 200m champion Letsile Tebogo of Botswana have spurned the Grand Slam Track by opting to compete in China.

Also taking to the track on the weekend will be Kenya’s three-time Olympic champion Faith Kipyegon, in the 1,000m, while teammate Beatrice Chebet, a two-time Olympic gold medallist will face Ethiopia’s 5,000m world record holder – and two-time world champion – Gudaf Tsegay over 5km.

TENNIS

## Osaka out of Madrid Open after Bronzetti defeat

AFP  
Madrid

Four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka crashed out of the Madrid Open in the first round yesterday with a 6-4, 2-6, 6-4 defeat by Lucia Bronzetti.

The Japanese former world number one, ranked 55th, battled back with a strong second set after losing the first, but eventually came up short against her determined Italian opponent.

“From the outside maybe it seems easy but when you’re on the court against a great champion like her it’s always difficult – I’m proud with how I managed the match,” said Bronzetti.

“She hit the ball very strong... I tried to make some variation in my game like drop shot, I got a lot of points with that.”

Osaka, who is still finding form after a 15-month break from tennis and last played at the Miami Open in March, secured two break points in the fourth game of the first set which she spurned.

Bronzetti broke in the seventh and served it out, before Osaka responded strongly.

The 27-year-old secured three breaks of serve and conceded one to force a decider.

Osaka immediately conceded a break and despite wrestling back on serve at 3-3 when she took her fifth break point of the

game, was broken herself again straight away. Bronzetti triumphed when Osaka slipped as she tried to reach a cross-court shot.

The Italian will face American world number five Madison Keys in the second round.

“I played against her two times, it’s going to be a real tough match like today,” said Bronzetti.

Meanwhile Emma Raducanu will return to action at Madrid Open after a mid-season break and the former US Open champion said she is benefiting from a more focused approach to the season.

The 22-year-old Briton pulled out of the Billie Jean King Cup qualifiers to rest following a run to the quarter-finals in Miami, where she needed medical attention during her defeat by eventual runner-up Jessica Pegula.

Having opted for a training block instead, Raducanu is raring to go in the Spanish capital where she kicks off her campaign against Dutchwoman Suzan Lamens today.

“I’ve realised now that less is more for me sometimes,” Raducanu told Sky Sports. “I work really intense and really hard and can definitely be partial to over-killing it sometimes.

“It’s just making sure when I’m on the court I’m maxing out for X amount of time so I can focus, and then once I’m done, I’m switching off better.”

### I don’t miss tennis, says Nadal

Rafael Nadal insisted on Monday that he doesn’t “miss tennis” after being honoured with a Sporting Icon award at the Laureus World Sport Awards in Madrid. The 38-year-old Spaniard, winner of 22 Grand Slam trophies, including 14 at Roland Garros, retired from the sport after his final match at the Davis Cup in Malaga in November.

“The truth is that I don’t miss tennis. Zero. I don’t miss it at all,” Nadal told reporters. “But not because I finished tired of tennis or fighting against tennis, not at all.

“I finished my career happy and if I could have, I would have carried on, because I loved what I was doing.

“It was my passion and that’s been the case all my life. It’s just that when you realise that physically you can’t do it any more... you try to close that chapter. And I closed it.”

Nadal suffered numerous injuries during his career but resisted retiring as long as possible. “I delayed making my final decision because I needed time to be sure it was the right one. What would have been hard was sitting on my sofa wondering if I should keep trying to play. When I saw that my body wasn’t going to recover to the level I needed to continue enjoying myself on court, then I made the decision to stop. That’s why I don’t miss it,” Nadal added. “Because I finished with the peace of mind of knowing that I’d given it my all, and that my body couldn’t give any more.”

SPOTLIGHT

## Renewal of co-operation agreement between AZF and FC Zenit

As part of international sports co-operation, Aspire Zone Foundation has announced the renewal of its partnership agreement with FC Zenit Saint Petersburg. The agreement aims to enhance sports exchange and develop joint projects in several fields including training camps, sports performance, education, sports medicine, marketing, and digital sports solutions.

The Memorandum of Understanding was signed at Aspire Zone Foundation’s headquarters in Doha, in the presence of Abdulla Nasser al-Naemi, Acting CEO of Aspire Zone Foundation, Director General of Aspire logistics, and Alexander Medvedev, Chairman of the Management Committee of FC Zenit.

The agreement includes organising joint training camps, hosting an annual friendly tournament such as the “Equality Cup”, and sharing expertise in youth development, sports medicine, and performance-enhancing technologies, as well as joint media and social media promotion efforts.



Abdulla Nasser al-Naemi, Acting CEO of Aspire Zone Foundation, Director General of Aspire logistics said: “We are pleased to renew our partnership with FC Zenit. This collaboration marks another step towards strengthening Aspire’s global presence as a leading sports platform. Through this agreement, we continue our commitment to sports talent development and expanding international influence across sports, education, and technology.”

Alexander Medvedev, Chairman of the Management Committee at FC Zenit, stated: “Our relationship with Aspire Zone Foundation is built on trust and mutual understanding. We are proud to continue this fruitful co-operation. We believe that renewing the agreement will open new horizons in sports development, especially in player training, knowledge exchange, and the organisation of unique sporting events.”



FOCUS

## Gymnast Biles ‘not so sure’ about competing at Los Angeles Olympics

AFP  
Madrid

American gymnast Simone Biles, voted Sportswoman of the Year at the Laureus Sport Awards ceremony in Madrid, said she remained uncertain about whether she would compete at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

The 28-year-old, a seven-time Olympic champion, won three gold medals in Paris last year, making a thrilling return to the Olympic stage after a long mental health break. “I’m really enjoying my time off before I decide if I want to go back to the gym and compete,” she said at the ceremony.

“A lot of people think it’s just a one-year commitment but it truly is the four years leading up to the Olympics. It’s in LA it’s back in the States, which is so exciting. But if I’m going to compete again, I’m not so sure. But I will be at the Olympics, whether it’s on the floor or in the stands.”

Swedish pole vaulter Armand Duplantis, the double Olympic champion and world record holder, was named Sportsman of the



US gymnast Simone Biles poses with her Sportswoman of the Year Award during the 26th Laureus World Sports Awards gala in Madrid. (AFP)

Year. Duplantis, 25, took the award ahead of tennis great Novak Djokovic, Formula One world champion Max Verstappen and French swimmer Leon Marchand.

“The Laureus Awards are the ultimate awards that we athletes want to win,” he said. “I know because this is the fourth time I have been nominated – and that proves

it’s harder to win a Laureus than an Olympic gold medal.”

He follows four-time winner Usain Bolt as the second representative from track and field to win the award. Another gymnast, Rebeca Andrade, won the Comeback of the Year award after winning gold in the floor at the Paris Games.

### Inter v Roma one of three Serie A fixtures moved for Pope’s funeral

**Milan:** Inter Milan’s match against Roma has been postponed due to a clash with Pope Francis’ funeral which the Vatican announced will take place on Saturday, Serie A said yesterday. Serie A said all three matches scheduled for Saturday would be rescheduled, with Inter’s – moved to Sunday at 1300 GMT – being the highest profile as they contest the league title with Napoli. The decision comes after the Italian government announced yesterday five days of national mourning for Francis, the head of the world’s 1.4bn Catholics, who died at his home in the Vatican on Monday aged 88 after suffering a stroke.

He had been recovering from double pneumonia that saw him hospitalised for five weeks. Italy’s Olympic Committee CONI, the country’s highest sporting body, “invited” all other federations to suspend any events scheduled for Saturday. CONI also asked a minute’s silence be held at all sporting events held during the days of national mourning. The other two matches Serie A postponed were Como v Genoa, moved to Sunday at 1030 GMT, and Lazio’s home match with Parma, which will be played on Monday to stop fans from flocking to Rome’s Stadio Olimpico on the same day as the funeral.

(AFP)



HORSE RACING

# Toromona blitzes the field in dominant Al Jassasiya Cup victory

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Rashid Awajan K A al-Khayarin-owned Toromona returned to the winner's enclosure in sensational fashion in the Al Jassasiya Cup.

At the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC)'s Al Rayyan Racecourse, the seven-year-old, trained by Hamad al-Jehani, turned his recent runner-up finish into a commanding win in the thoroughbred handicap (80-100 1,900m race. After contesting the lead early, the bay gelding unleashed a devastating turn of foot in the home straight under Lukas Delozier to storm clear and score by an incredible 11 lengths. Engineer Hassan Ali A M Alabdulmalik-owned Cei Connah came second.

Abdulla Rashid al-Kubaisi, QREC Racing Manager, crowned the winners.

The Dunkirk Lads, in the silks of Mohammed Hamad MA Al-Hajri & Sons won the Thoroughbred Handicap (65-85) for three-year-old+ race. Jockey Soufiane Saadi guided the Hadi al-Ramzani-trained horse to a quarter of a length victory in the



Jockey Lukas Delozier guided Toromona to Al Jassasiya Cup win. **PICTURES: Juhaime**

1100m race.

In the second race in the card, a Pure-bred Arabian Maiden Plate for 4-6-years-old over 1,700m (Class 6), Prince D'ossau

delivered an eye-catching performance to break his maiden in his ninth career appearance. The five-year-old gelding handed owner-trainer Ibrahim Saeed Ib-



Connections of Toromona celebrate after the bay gelding won the Al Jassasiya Cup at the Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday.

rahim al-Malki a rapid double on the day, kicking clear for a dominant victory under Youssef Lachhab. In the card-opener race, al-Malki-owned and trained Qahwa won

the 1,700m contest for the Thoroughbred Maiden Plate for three-year-olds. Under jockey Trevor Patel the three-year-old filly won the race by two lengths and a quarter.

PREMIER LEAGUE

# Arsenal will not rest players for Crystal Palace clash: Arteta

Leaders Liverpool will be crowned champions if Arsenal lose to Palace today

Reuters  
London

Arsenal have no plans to rotate their team and rest players for their midweek Premier League meeting with Crystal Palace in preparation for next week's Champions League semi-final against Paris St Germain, manager Mikel Arteta said yesterday.

Arsenal, second in the table on 66 points, are all but out of the running in the Premier League title race with leaders Liverpool needing just one more win to secure the crown. Arteta's side are also out of the FA Cup and were knocked out of the League Cup in the semi-finals, leaving the Champions League as their only realistic chance of lifting silverware this season, but Arteta dismissed the possibility of benching key players against 12th-placed Palace.

"We cannot think in those terms, when the players are fit and available and want to play, they have to play," he told reporters ahead of today's clash at Emirates Stadium. "They are at their best when they are playing and they have consistency in their performances and physically and emotionally they are good. They have the rhythm and that is when they are at their best. If they are not available, there is no discussion. If they are not in a good condition to perform we are not going to play them. But if they are we will play them."

If Arsenal lose to Palace, Liverpool will be crowned champions, with the Merseyside club's captain Virgil van Dijk saying their



Arsenal's Martin Odegaard and Leandro Trossard at a training session in London yesterday.

entire squad might gather together to watch Arsenal's match. Asked if that had given Arsenal added motivation to win, Arteta said: "Our incentive is to win our game and to do our best to continue with our run that

we are in right now, the rest we cannot control."

The Spaniard also provided an injury update on Bukayo Saka, who was on the receiving end of a clumsy challenge by Leif

Davis in a 4-0 victory over Ipswich Town on Sunday, which left the England international hobbling and eventually forced his substitution. "Yeah we have to wait and see how he reacts after the session but he is nothing too serious. I think he will have a good chance to play tomorrow," Arteta said.

Updates on the fitness of Riccardo Calafiori and Jorginho weren't so encouraging. While Calafiori, sidelined with a knee issue, is believed to be nearing a return, Jorginho - who suffered a rib injury against Brentford - could be out for a while. "Ricey is out and Jorginho, unfortunately, as well," confirmed the Arsenal boss. "I think Jorginho will be out for a few weeks."

Jorginho has been heavily linked with a move to Brazilian side Flamengo in the short transfer window before the Club World Cup. Asked whether the Italy international will play again this season, Arteta continued: "I hope so, but I'm not certain. We have to see how he evolves in the next few days. I would say [he's out] a few weeks. The doctor was still quite cautious about talking about any dates. So let's see. The good news is that he's improving. He's feeling much better. It was quite a scary situation and he's in a good place now."

After facing Palace, Arsenal have a six-day break before they host PSG in the first leg of their Champions League tie on April 29. "We have more days, the amount of options we have is not that many, especially because of where the players are coming and the amount of minutes they can play," Arteta said. "It's good to have a little gap because we are really short in numbers."

## League woes continue for Postecoglou

**London:** The rare smile Tottenham Hotspur manager Ange Postecoglou wore four days ago in Frankfurt was replaced by the more familiar frown as a 2-1 home defeat by Nottingham Forest made it 18 Premier League losses for the London club this season.

Tottenham found themselves 2-0 down after 16 minutes and although they dominated the game thereafter and got a late lifeline through Richarlison, it proved another tale of woe in a season that could become Tottenham's worst in terms of points gained since they managed only 44 in 1997-98. With a tough run-in to come, including a trip to champions-elect Liverpool next weekend, they are down in 16th place with 37 points. Only the bottom three clubs have lost more games.

Tottenham's 1-0 win against Eintracht Frankfurt which put them in the Europa League semi-finals kept their season alive and Postecoglou could yet deliver on his claim that he always wins a trophy in his second season at a club. But another damaging league defeat, their eighth at home in the league this season, increases the pressure on the 59-year-old former Celtic manager.

"It's another game we have lost where we shouldn't lose and it's been a big part of our season in that we are just making things really difficult for ourselves in key moments," Australian Postecoglou told reporters.

Tottenham were booed at halftime, but the mood was a little more forgiving at the end after a stirring climax to the game in which the hosts pinned Champions League chasers Forest back. "I don't need to say anything to the fans. The fans are disappointed and angry as we are as well," Postecoglou said. "The fans clearly wouldn't be happy with our results but neither am I or the players."

LA LIGA

# Real boss Ancelotti unconcerned by speculation over future

Reuters  
Madrid

Real Madrid manager Carlo Ancelotti dismissed suggestions yesterday he is under mounting pressure at the club as they sit second in the La Liga standings and were knocked out of the Champions League last week.

Ancelotti's future has been questioned following their Champions League quarter-final loss to Arsenal, with multiple reports suggesting he could leave Real at the end of the season to take over the Brazil national team.

Bayer Leverkusen coach Xabi Alonso and former Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp are among the names that have been linked with the top job at Real in recent weeks.

Asked if he was feeling the pressure, the Italian manager told reporters: "The club is aware that it has been a more complicated year than last year. Together we manage the difficulties. The honeymoon continues. I'm very happy, very happy, with a lot of pressure, but that's how it always is. You see success very close and it's normal



for stress to increase, but stress is fuel for me, it doesn't bother me, it gives me more energy to think about more things. As long as I continue to get up in the morning, everything is fine."

Real are still chasing success on multiple fronts and sit second in the league standings with 69 points from 32 matches, four behind rivals Barcelona.

They face Barca in the Copa del Rey final this weekend, but before that will travel to 12th-placed Getafe for a league meeting on Wednesday, where they will be without Kylian Mbappe and Ferland Mendy.

Forward Mbappe suffered an ankle injury in Real's 2-1 quarter-

final second leg loss to Arsenal last week, while defender Mendy is recovering from a hamstring injury. "(Mbappe and Mendy) are not ready for tomorrow, but they will train these days and I think they will both be available for Saturday's game," Ancelotti said.

"Tomorrow's eleven will be decided taking into account the wear and tear of Sunday night (1-0 win over Athletic Bilbao) and that alone. Some are still a bit tired, but that's quite normal. We'll see tomorrow. Getafe play intense football, very well organised and they are very clear. We are ready and prepared, every time the end of the season approaches, the games become more and more important."

SPOTLIGHT

# Milan's Cup motivation not about ruining Inter's treble bid: Conceicao

Reuters  
Milan

AC Milan can salvage something from a disappointing season with success in the Coppa Italia and do not need the motivation of spoiling neighbours Inter Milan's bid to win the treble, manager Sergio Conceicao said.

Milan are ninth in the Serie A standings, out of the Champions League and well off the pace to qualify for next season's competition, while Inter are top of the domestic league and in the semi-finals of Europe's elite club competition.

Last season, Inter secured the Scudetto with a win over Milan, but Conceicao has enough reasons of his own to want to overcome their rivals in today's Cup semi-final return leg, which is poised at 1-1 after the first game at San Siro. "The motivation does not come from the opponent, but from our work day by day," Conceicao told reporters. "Unfortunately, there are no more chances in the league, even for the Champions League, and so we only think about tomorrow."

Conceicao does, however, realise the importance of the game for a club like Milan, who cannot be content with only winning the Italian Super Cup this season. "It's an important match for everyone, players, clubs and fans and we are aware of that," he said. "Milan have to fight for the Scudetto and the Champions League, they are used to this despite the last few years. For a club like Milan it must be normal to reach the final of the Coppa Italia. I congratulate



Inter for the Champions League and the championship, this shows its strength. But for us this match is fundamental because we want to win and get to the final to give a trophy to the fans."

Bologna lead Empoli 3-0 in the other semi-final with the second leg of that match being played on Thursday.

Milan defender Kyle Walker, on loan from Manchester City, fractured his elbow two weeks ago and midfielder Ruben Loftus-Cheek has been recovering from appendicitis, but Conceicao will have both players available against Inter. "Walker has been training with the team, even if he is not at the top," the manager said. "But both he and Loftus-Cheek will be there. It is positive news for us."