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AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ELITE

Sanchez confident as Sadd gear up for Kawasaki test

‘Kawasaki have a defined way of playing with lots of options. We have to try to manage this situation’



Al Sadd captain Akram Afif has contributed to goals (3 goals and 2 assists) in his last four matches in the AFC Champions League Elite.

By Sports Reporter
Jeddah

Al Sadd head coach Felix Sanchez said he has mapped out his strategy after studying Kawasaki Frontale's recent performances, expressing confidence that his players will rise to the challenge when the two sides meet in the AFC Champions League Elite quarter-finals in Jeddah today. The match will kick off at 7:30pm at the Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Stadium.

Sadd advanced after a fourth place finish in the West League Stage, before being put through a tough test by UAE's Al Wasl in the last 16, winning the two-leg tie 4-2 on aggregate in.

Sanchez said: "We know it's going to be a tough game but the players have shown that we can compete in all the 10 games so far. We hope to produce a performance to get a positive result."

The Spaniard added: "We followed the Kawasaki team in the league in the last weeks. They have a defined way of playing with lots of options. We have to try to manage this situation. We need to be aware of the opposition but



Al Sadd head coach Felix Sanchez speaks at a press conference in Jeddah yesterday.

we need to focus on producing our best level."

The Spanish coach highlighted the impact of new signing Claudinho, noting that the Brazilian has quickly adapted to the team and is performing at a high level.

Frontale head coach Shigetoshi Hasebe in-

tends to stay true to his footballing principles against Sadd. Despite coming into the tournament on the back of a five-match winless run domestically, Hasebe has no intention of making drastic changes to the Japanese side.

While acknowledging Al Hilal's incredible 7-0 win against Gwangju FC in Friday's opening quarter-final tie, Hasebe does not believe the result can be used as a yardstick for other matches. "The result was what it was but we cannot say too much in general about East teams versus West teams," said Hasebe. "Every team is different but if that's the perception then I hope to be able to break that kind of thinking."

"Al Sadd are a very strong team with an experienced coach and players. We have to keep our attacking football and show that. And we cannot concede goals easily. Our target is of course to win the three games and the title but most important now is to focus on the first one and win that."

Frontale finished second in the East League Stage with five wins, then had a tricky Round of 16 tie against China's Shanghai Shenhua, coming back from a 1-0 first leg defeat to triumph 4-0 in the second leg.

SPOTLIGHT

Al Sadd's al-Haydos determined to relive glory of 2011

By Sports Reporter
Jeddah

Hasan al-Haydos is as ambitious as ever with the Qatar and Al Sadd legend aiming to add the AFC Champions League Elite title to his 2011 triumph.

A then 20-year-old al-Haydos played a pivotal role as Al Sadd lifted the 2011 AFC Champions League trophy by beating South Korea's Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors FC 4-2 on penalties with the midfielder netting in the shoot-out.

Fourteen years on, al-Haydos is eyeing a second winners' medal in a competition that evokes plenty of memories for the one-club player. "This competition is very important for us and for me personally," said the midfielder. "It's like a kind of dream and the dream is still there. I wish to win it again in the remaining years I have in football. It's very important to win

the title and the fans are equally thirsty"

Al-Haydos, however, is under no illusion about the task at hand with Japan's Kawasaki Frontale standing in their way today with Al Sadd seeking only a third semi-final appearance since winning the title.

"The game will be tough and hard because this is the elite level but the team will be ready for the challenge. Winning the title (2024/25 Qatar Stars League) will have a good effect on the team. We hope to continue at the same level. We consider this match as a final. Kawasaki are hard and strong, so we have to take the competition step by step."

It will be inaugural meeting between Kawasaki Frontale and Al Sadd. The teams have never previously faced off, with Frontale meeting a side from Qatar for the first time while this will be Al Sadd's maiden encounter against a Japanese club.



Hassan al-Haydos played a pivotal role as Al Sadd lifted the 2011 AFC Champions League trophy by beating South Korea's Jeonbuk Hyundai Motors FC 4-2 on penalties with the midfielder netting in the shoot-out.

Rayyan, Shamal win in Amir Cup Basketball Championship

Al Rayyan stayed on course for the Amir Cup Basketball Championship semi-finals with a 93-79 win over Al Wakrah at Al Gharafa Sports Club Hall yesterday, led by Tyler Harris' 27 points. In the same Group B, Al Shamal earned their first victory by defeating Al Khor 69-62, with Emmanuel Ezenwa scoring 21 points.

MATCH REPORT

Mahrez, Firmino propel Al Ahli into semis

AFP
Riyadh

Riyad Mahrez and Roberto Firmino helped fire Al Ahli into an all-Saudi Arabian AFC Champions League Elite semi-final after the Jeddah club beat Thailand's Buriram United 3-0 yesterday.

Effectively playing as hosts since the quarter-finals to final are staged in Jeddah, Al Ahli needed only four minutes to take the lead at King Abdullah Sports City. Captain Firmino slid the ball through to Mahrez, who rifled his right-footed shot past Neil Etheridge in the Buriram goal.

It took the Algerian, a treble winner with Manchester City, to nine goals in this season's competition, making him the joint-top scorer alongside Al Hilal's Salem al-Dawsari and Gwangju's Jasir Asani. Mahrez also leads the assist charts, with seven. Within two minutes, Al Ahli had another. This time, defender Roger Ibanez's expert pass sent fellow Brazilian Galeno through and the winter-signing from Porto fired through Etheridge's legs to double the hosts' advantage.

On 16 minutes, Firmino missed a golden opportunity to make it 3-0, the former Liverpool forward somehow glancing wide with the



Al Ahli captain Firmino celebrates after scoring against Thailand's Buriram United.

goal at his mercy. Firmino, a UEFA Champions League winner during his time at Anfield, does not play for Al Ahli in the Saudi Pro League having been replaced in their domestic league squad by Galeno.

On the half hour, Firmino atoned for his earlier miss, tapping home Medih Demiral's flick from a Mahrez corner. Al Ahli seemed to ease off in the second half, although Demiral and Ivan Toney did have efforts at goal, while Mahrez fired off target in injury time.

Matthias Jaissle's side will now meet Al Hilal, another Saudi club, in the semi-finals on Tuesday. Al Hilal, the record four-time Asian champions, booked their spot in the last four on Friday with a thumping 7-0 win over South Korea's Gwangju.

Late last night, Cristiano Ronaldo's Al Nassr were seeking to to make it three Saudi clubs in the semi-finals, as they faced last year's runners-up Yokohama F-Marininos of Japan at Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Sports City.

ATHLETICS / DIAMOND LEAGUE

Warholm sets hurdles world record, Holloway shocked

CHEBET WINS TSEGAY DUEL IN 5,000M, DUPLANTIS TAKES POLE VAULT, JACKSON BACK ON TRACK

AFP
Xiamen, China

Karsten Warholm broke the men's 300m hurdles world record yesterday at the opening Diamond League meeting of the season in Xiamen, but Olympic 110m hurdles champion Grant Holloway suffered a shock defeat.

The 29-year-old Norwegian 400m hurdles world record holder crossed the finish line in a blistering 33.05 seconds, taking 0.21 seconds off his own mark set four years ago in the little-run event.

"I thought it was a very good race and a little bit surprised over how easy my legs were feeling out the last bend," said Warholm, who won gold in the 400m hurdles at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and silver in Paris last year.

"This is a very good test for speed and hurdles so it is a very good first race for me," he said. "I am looking to win as much as I can."

US sprint hurdles star Holloway finished last after leading for much of his race but losing momentum disastrously after the eighth hurdle.

The three-time world champion trailed across the line in 13.72sec, way behind fellow American Cordell Tinch, who won in 13.06.

Faith Kipyegon came within 0.23sec of breaking a decades-old world record in the women's 1,000m, finishing in 2min 29.21sec. "It went how I wanted just to start my season in a good way," said the Kenyan.

"I wanted to do my personal best which was very close to the world record."

Swedish superstar Armand "Mondo" Duplantis won the pole vault comfortably with a jump of 5.92m, but failed with three attempts at 6.01 in a performance that never threatened his world record of 6.27 set in February.

"It was not the easiest day out



Norway's Karsten Warholm poses with his time of 33.05 seconds after he broke the men's 300m hurdles world record during the Xiamen IAAF Diamond League athletics meeting in Xiamen, China, yesterday. (AFP)

there," said Duplantis. "We had a little bit of trouble with the wind."

Duplantis said he had "work to do" before next weekend's meeting in Keqiao, China.

"Hopefully, we can get after it a little bit better in Keqiao and jump a little bit higher," he said.

Yaroslava Mahuchikh from Ukraine won the high jump after clearing 1.97m on her first attempt.

"I am so happy that I opened my season with a win," said the Olympic and world champion, who has been battling back from a heel injury.

"It is a great sign for me. For me it is important to not feel any pain. Hope the next Diamond League will be a higher result."

Zhang Mingkun had the home fans cheering as he took China's only victory of the night in the men's long jump, but he left it late with his leap of 8.18m on his fifth attempt that proved just enough to beat Australia's Liam Adcock (8.15).

Kenya's Beatrice Chebet edged world record holder Gudaf Tsegay of Ethiopia to win the women's 5,000m, finishing in 14:27.12.



(L-R) Ivory Coast's Jessica Gbai, US' Anavia Battle and Jamaica's Shericka Jackson, Switzerland's Mujinga Kambundji and US' Jenna Prandini compete in the women's 200m event in Xiamen. (AFP)

"I said just let me start my season well," Chebet said. "I am so happy to see that my speed is still there."

Tsegay said after the race that she was battling a "strong flu" but that she was happy and vowed to "come back strong".

"Yesterday is gone, today is today, tomorrow is another day," she said. "Everything is possible tomorrow."

Meanwhile Shericka Jackson finished second on her return to the track in 200m.

The Jamaican hasn't competed since July 2024, being forced to

withdraw from last year's Paris 2024 Olympic Games due to a nagging injury she picked up in training ahead of the Games.

But last evening in Xiamen the 30-year-old took her first steps in global competition in nine months, clocking 22.79 seconds from lane 6 in the women's 200m at the Egret Stadium.

Jackson started well, keeping up with early leader Mujinga Kambundji on her inside around the bend. Her Swiss opponent faded, but on Jackson's outside, US sprinter Anavia Battle kicked as the pack hit the finishing straight,



Sweden's Armand Duplantis competes in the men's pole vault event in Xiamen yesterday. (AFP)



Beatrice Chebet in action during the women's 5,000m yesterday. (Reuters)

pulling away from 80m to go.

The Jamaican recognised she would not catch Battle, who set a meeting record 22.41 seconds, but held her second position through to the finish line ahead of another U.S. athlete, Jenna Prandini.

"This is my opener," Battle said of her win. "I was so nervous cause I had not run a 200 yet, but I am happy I did it here. Really good

competition. It had a really good feel, it was great.

"That 15 hour flight (to China) hurt, but I had to suck it up and get out here and compete. Me and my coach have been working on the first half of the race for my 100m so I feel like that has helped a lot. We are going to Shanghai next, get some rest before Shanghai, then back home."

MOTOPGP

Marquez wins Spanish GP sprint after Quartararo crash

AFP
Jerez de la Frontera, Spain

Marc Marquez secured his fifth consecutive sprint victory at the Spanish Grand Prix in Jerez yesterday to expand his lead at the top of the MotoGP standings.

The six-time premier class world champion took 12 points on his factory Ducati to reach 135 in total, ahead of his brother Alex Marquez, who came in second, 1.001sec behind, and is also second overall, 20 points behind the leader. Francesco Bagnaia, third overall, also finished third in the sprint to reach 104 points. French rider Fabio Quartararo started in pole position after setting a Jerez course record on his Yamaha earlier in qualifying but he fell on turn six of the second lap, allowing Marc Marquez to claim the lead, which he held on to.

"Today it wasn't easy because of these very high temperatures," said Marc Marquez under the sizzling Andalusian sun. "I struggled a bit at the end but I was controlling (it)."

Marc Marquez, is undefeated in the sprint races this season after winning just one last season, the former Honda rider looking ever more comfortable on his factory Ducati. He opened up a 1.4 second gap on Alex Marquez, in second at the halfway point, with the top six all riding Ducatis in the sprint - Maverick Vinales came in seventh on his KTM.

Alex Marquez started the race fourth, but was able to edge ahead of Bagnaia right at the start and moved up to second when Quartararo lost the front and crashed out. Quartararo held off Marc Marquez at the start of the sprint and despite his early exit was pleased with his day's work.

"It was very good for me on a mental level, and after that I was pushing the limit a lot... when Marc came alongside me, my bike



Ducati Lenovo Team's Spanish rider Marc Marquez celebrates after winning the MotoGP Spanish Grand Prix Sprint at the Jerez racetrack in Jerez de la Frontera yesterday. (AFP)

moved a lot and I could not stop it," said the Frenchman. "It would have been better to finish differently - but we can be happy."

Reigning MotoGP world champion Jorge Martin was not involved as he recovers from various injuries after a brutal crash in the previous race in Qatar, and he stands virtually no chance of defending his title.

RESULTS SPRINT RACE

1. Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati) 19min 32.107sec, 2. Alex Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) at 1.001sec, 3. Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati) 3.077, 4. Franco Morbidelli (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 3.530, 5. Fermin Aldeguer (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 5.791, 6. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 7.691, 7. Maverick Vinales (ESP/KTM-Tech3) 7.849, 8. Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Aprilia) 10.175, 9. Joan Mir (ESP/Honda) 10.414, 10. Pedro Acosta (ESP/KTM) 12.673, 11. Brad Binder (RSA/KTM) 13.204, 12. Ai

Ogura (JPN/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 13.438, 13. Luca Marini (ITA/Honda) 16.572, 14. Enea Bastianini (ITA/KTM-Tech3) 17.918, 15. Alex Rins (ESP/Yamaha) 19.963, 16. Raul Fernandez (ESP/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 21.690, 17. Augusto Fernandez (ESP/Yamaha-Pramac) 21.932, 18. Aleix Espargaro (ESP/HRC) 22.515, 19. Lorenzo Savadori (ITA/Aprilia) 30.200, 20. Somkiat Chantira (THA/Honda-LCR) 30.968 Did not finish: Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha), Johann Zarco (FRA/Honda-LCR), Jack Miller (AUS/Yamaha-Pramac).

World championship standings
1. Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati) 135 pts, 2. Alex Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 115, 3. Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati) 104, 4. Franco Morbidelli (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 84, 5. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 52, 6. Johann Zarco (FRA/Honda-LCR) 38, 7. Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Aprilia) 34, 8. Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) 30, 9. Ai Ogura (JPN/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 29, 10. Luca Marini (ITA/Honda) 26

CRICKET

Kolkata Knight Riders-Punjab Kings match called off due to rain

AFP
Kolkata

Defending champions Kolkata Knight Riders and Punjab Kings shared a point each after rain forced this Indian Premier League season's first no result in Kolkata yesterday.

Chasing 202 for victory, Kolkata were seven for one when rain stopped play, and after about 90 minutes officials called off the match at Eden Gardens.

Punjab, still searching for their first title in the popular T20 tournament, climbed a place to fourth in the 10-team table with five wins, three losses and one no result. Kolkata, who won their third title last season, stay at seventh with three wins, five de-

feats and one no result.

Punjab reached 201-4 after Priyansh Arya, who hit 69, and Prabhsimran Singh, who top-scored with 83, lay the foundations for the total in an opening stand of 120. The left-right batting combination of Arya and Prabhsimran mixed the right dose of caution and aggression to keep the opposition bowling in the hunt for the first 11 overs.

Arya changed gears and raised his fifty in 27 balls with a four, six and four off pace bowler Harshit Rana and kept up the attack until his departure in the 12th over.

West Indies pace bowler Andre Russell got the breakthrough when Arya mis-timed a pull to be caught deep mid-wicket.

Prabhsimran remained unaffected by his partner's departure and smashed the bowlers for

fours and sixes but fell to pace bowler Vaibhav Arora after his second half-century of this season. Kolkata's bowlers attempted check the surge with key wickets including Glenn Maxwell bowled by spinner Varun Chakravarthy and Marco Jansen out to Arora.

The run-flow also dipped after the 15th over but skipper Shreyas Iyer smashed an unbeaten 16-ball 25 and along with Josh Inglis, on 11, took the team past 200. Kolkata began their chase with a cautious first over before rain stopped play and consistent drizzle made officials call off the game.

BRIEF SCORES
Match abandoned: Punjab Kings 201 for 4 (Prabhsimran 83, Arya 69, Arora 2-34) vs **Kolkata Knight Riders 7 for 0 in 1 over.**

Qatar beat Saudi Arabia in ACC U16 West Zone Cup



Qatar U-16 team players celebrate a wicket during their ACC Men's U16 West Zone Cup 2025 match against Saudi Arabia at the University of Doha for Science and Technology yesterday. Qatar beat Saudi Arabia by six wickets to secure their first win in the tournament. Batting first, Saudi Arabia posted 171 runs in 42.3 overs with Muhammad Shoaib and Sami Ahsun taking two wickets each for the home side. In response, Qatar lost early wickets but found stability through Sri Induvadan Reddy's patient 45 (93) and Joel Silas' unbeaten 55 (77). Chirag played a useful knock of 29 not out, as the duo guided Qatar safely home in 41.3 overs. The tournament features six teams including hosts Qatar, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, UAE and Bahrain. Qatar will next face Oman tomorrow, UAE on May 1 and Kuwait on May 3 at West End International Stadium.

2ND AL SHAQAB SHOWJUMPING LEAGUE

Eight Qatari riders qualify for FEI Group VII regional finals

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Eight Qatari riders qualified for the International Equestrian Federation (FEI) Group VII (Mena) regional finals with excellent performances on the third and final day of the 2nd Al Shaqab Showjumping League at the Longines Indoor Arena of Al Shaqab yesterday.

HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee and Chairman of Al Shaqab, who witnessed the final day's action, congratulated the riders on their qualification.

Qualifying from the CSIJ-B Junior Champions - FEI Group VII Qualifier 2025 category were Tamim bin Joaan H K al-Thani, Ibrahim Khalid al-Kuwari, Suhaim Hamad al-Yafei and Amer Hamad al-Mansoori.

The International Equestrian Federation (FEI) Group VII MENA finals will be held at Al Shaqab later this year in November.

In the Table A, One round against the clock with jump off (1.20m) event was won by Bah-



HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee and Chairman of Al Shaqab, who witnessed the final day's action, congratulated the riders on their qualification.

rain's Sultan Abdulaziz Mayoof al-Romaihi, who with mare Haneen clocked 34.55secs. Tamim Joaan H K al-Thani was second on gelding Carport, followed by Ibrahim Khalid al-Kuwari in third on Flexy Bel Z.

Suhaim Hamad al-Yafei came fourth with stallion Gamin Raye

(64.98secs), while Amer Hamad al-Mansoori, riding mare Honolulu Brl, ended up in fifth but also qualified.

In the CSICH-B Future Champions - FEI Group VII Qualifier 2025 class, Noora Abdulaziz al-Rumaihi, Yousuf Abdulrahman al-Muftah, and Khalid Nasser al-

Khater made the grade.

Table A, One round against the clock with jump off (1.10m) event was clinched by Saudi Arabia's Fawaz Alhokair, who rode mare Cool Cassina and clocked 34.30secs. Noora was second astride gelding Nobile Della Genesiana (39.43secs). Sultan Jaasim M A

al-Suwaidi was third with mare Proud (28.52secs and 4 penalties), and Khalid Nasser al-Khater, riding mare Baccarat d/Azur was fourth.

CSIY-B Youth Champions - FEI Group VII Qualifier 2025 - Table A, One round against the clock with jump off (1.30m) class was

won by UAE's Eisa Omran al-Owais, who with mare Miss Cooper clocked the best 75.51secs. Qatar's Saif Mohammed al-Naimi was second with gelding Hero (76.42secs), Yaqoub Nasser al-Mass, riding gelding Lexus, third (83.64secs), and Saif Mohammed al-Kaabi, astride mare Higgs, fourth (76.52secs).

Winning the marquee CSI* Al Shaqab Champions final event was Qatar's seasoned rider Ghanim Nasser al-Qadi, who rode grey mare Isis for a flawless routine in 39.23secs.

Following him was Saudi Arabian Khaled Abdulaziz al-Eid on bay stallion Q Sahel (40.57secs) while Qatar's Hussain Said A M Haidan, riding chestnut gelding Viahipi d'Auzay, was third in 38.07secs (4 penalties).

Earlier, the Intro 2 Optimum Time class was won by USA's Mohammed Talal Talal, who rode Cascade Sammy to finish the routine in 48.98secs. The Amateur (100cm) class was won by Qatar's Abdulla Faisal al-Mana, riding Brooq and finishing in 20.84secs to edge Qatar's Abdulaziz Hamad al-Kaabi, who also finished in the same time on Vahine de Curaine.

TENNIS

Djokovic crashes to Italy's Arnaldi in Madrid opener

The fourth-seeded suffered the second consecutive opening defeat

AFP
Madrid

Novak Djokovic admits he may have played his last-ever match in Madrid after he crashed out in his opening round at the Caja Magica yesterday.

Djokovic's bid for a 100th career title was scuppered by Italian Matteo Arnaldi, who beat the Serb 6-3, 6-4 in the Madrid Open second round. The fourth-seeded Djokovic suffered a second consecutive opening defeat, after losing his opener against Alejandro Tabilo in Monte Carlo two weeks ago.

Asked if this was his last on-court appearance in the Spanish capital, Djokovic said: "It could be. It could be. I'm not sure if I will come back. So, I don't know. I mean, I'll come back, maybe not as a player, of course. I hope it's not, but it could be."

Arnaldi, ranked 44th in the world, recorded just the second top-five win of his career and scribbled 'OMG' on the camera lens after his landmark victory.

The athletic Arnaldi squandered a 2-0 lead early in the contest but pounced again in the eighth game, breaking the Djokovic serve. The Italian wrapped up the opening set in 48 minutes.

Djokovic, a three-time champion in Madrid, fired 20 unforced errors in the first frame and finished the contest with a total of 32.

"He's my idol, he's always been. I was just glad that I could play him because I never played him, I just practised once with him. So playing him on a stage like this was already a victory for me," said Arnaldi, who showcased an entertaining brand of all-court tennis.

"But, you know, he is not at his best right now, so I came on court to try to play my best tennis and win. It happened. So right now, I don't even know what to say."



Serbia's Novak Djokovic greets Italy's Matteo Arnaldi, winner of their 2025 ATP Tour Madrid Open tennis tournament second round singles match at the Caja Magica in Madrid, yesterday. (AFP)

The 37-year-old Djokovic conceded he is trying to accept a "new reality", where he is approaching tournaments with low expectations, given his recent subpar results.

"(My expectations were) Not big at all, to be honest. I was hoping I can play one more match than I played in Monte Carlo," said the 24-time Grand Slam champion.

"Kind of new reality for me, I have to say, trying to win a match

or two, not really thinking about getting far in the tournament. It's a completely different feeling from what I had in 20-plus years of professional tennis, so it's kind of a challenge for me mentally to really face these kind of sensations on the court, going out early now regularly in the tournaments.

"But that's, I guess, the circle of life and the career; eventually it was going to happen."

Elsewhere, Lorenzo Musetti, playing his first match since reaching the biggest final of his career in Monte Carlo, moved past Argentina's Tomas Etcheverry 7-6 (7/3), 6-2 to book a third-round meeting with Stefanos Tsitsipas.

The talented Italian is on the cusp of making his top-10 debut, having entered the tournament at a career-high number 11.

Musetti admitted he is doing his best not to check the ATP live rankings website until he officially joins the top-10 club.

"This week, I don't want to look," said the 23-year-old, who moved up to number nine in the live rankings on Saturday.

Reigning Australian Open champion Madison Keys was broken while serving for her third-round victory at 5-4 in the second set against Anna Kalinskaya, but recovered to complete a 7-5, 7-6 (7/3) in one hour and 48 minutes.

The fifth-seeded Keys lost to Kalinskaya earlier this month in Charleston.

"I knew I had to raise my level after getting a bit of spanking last time," said Keys.

A semi-finalist in Madrid 12 months ago, Keys awaits her compatriot Emma Navarro or Croatia's Donna Vekic in the round of 16.

American fourth seed Coco Gauff eased past compatriot Ann Li 6-2, 6-3 to set up a last-16 clash with Swiss Olympic gold medallist Belinda Bencic.

Seventh-seeded teenager Mirra Andreeva continued her impressive form at WTA 1000 tournaments this season by storming into the fourth round with a 7-5, 6-3 performance against Polish 27th-seed Magdalena Frech.

The 17-year-old Russian, who won back-to-back titles in Dubai and Indian Wells, will take on Ukrainian qualifier Yulia Starodubtseva for a shot at reaching a second consecutive Madrid quarter-final.

FOCUS

Sinner does not expect easy road on return from doping ban

Reuters
Rome

Jannik Sinner held onto his world number one ranking ahead of his return from a three-month doping ban, but the Italian does not expect his comeback to be as smooth when he takes to the court again at the Rome Masters next month.

Sinner has not played since winning the Australian Open at the start of the season and accepted a ban in February following a deal with the World Anti-Doping Agency, which had challenged a tribunal's decision to clear him after two positive tests.

The 23-year-old was allowed to return to training on April 13 and his suspension will end on May 4, before his competitive return at the Italian Open, which gets underway three days later.

Sinner, who spent time building fitness mindful of the French Open starting on May 25, was

assured of retaining the top ranking for his home tournament after his closest challenger Alexander Zverev crashed to an early defeat in Monte Carlo.

"We're training very hard. Hopefully we'll get some momentum going again ahead of the clay season. It certainly won't be easy for me," Sinner told broadcaster ORF Sudtirol.

"The first games will be really difficult. But hopefully I'll be able to get back into the rhythm and then we'll see how it goes."

Sinner, who trained with Britain's world number six Jack Draper at the Tennis Club de Beaulieu in France recently, said there were plenty of positives from his enforced absence from the tour.

"I think at the beginning of the three months, it was quite nice," Sinner added.

"A bit of time away from all the grind, I spent time with family, with friends. I was doing new things and getting to know myself better, finding out where I stand.

"I think it helped me a lot."



FOOTBALL

Celtic clinches fourth successive title

AFP
Glasgow

Celtic clinched their fourth successive Scottish Premiership title in fitting style with a 5-0 demolition of Dundee United yesterday.

Nicolas Kuhn and Adam Idah both scored twice after Ryan Strain's own-goal set Celtic on course to wrap up their 13th Scottish crown in the last 14 seasons.

With four matches left for Celtic, the champions sit 18 points clear of second-placed Rangers, who have five games remaining.

The Glasgow club have claimed 21 of the last 26 domestic trophies as Brendan Rodgers' men reign supreme in Scotland.

Celtic had only needed a point at Tannadice to start their title party, but their goal spree ensured the celebrations went with a swing.

It was a familiar feeling for Celtic after a 5-0 win at Kilmarnock last term earned Rodgers the title in his first season back at Parkhead.

Rodgers' latest triumph moved the former Liverpool manager on to 11 major trophies as Celtic manager.

The title success keeps Celtic on course for their sixth treble in nine seasons, and Rodgers' third, when they face Aberdeen in the Scottish Cup final in May.

Celtic substitute James Forrest also wrote himself into the club record books with his 26th winners' medal, one more than Bobby Lennox, who played for the team's famous 1967 European champions.

Celtic captain Callum McGregor said: "Amazing performance, outstanding. It means the world to us.

"The sky is the limit for us. We were so good today. We have four league games to try and arrive into the Scottish Cup final in the best moment."

Intermarche-Wanty's Faure-Prost sustains fractures after being hit by car

French cyclist Alexy Faure-Prost's routine training session turned into a nightmare when he was struck by a car, but the 21-year-old escaped with fractures and a concussion. His team, Intermarche-Wanty, on Friday said Faure-Prost has started recovering at home after undergoing surgery. The incident occurred on Tuesday, a day before La Fleche Wallonne. Faure-Prost finished 10th overall in the Tour of Oman last year after having switched to Intermarche-Wanty from Wanty-Nippo-ReUz. "I collided with a vehicle and suffered a head injury with loss of memory, convulsions, 2 fractures in my left hand and a fractured left collarbone, which required stitches," Faure-Prost posted on Instagram on Friday. "I came home after 2 days in hospital and 1 successful hand operation! "Take care on the road, see you soon!" La Fleche Wallonne, a one-day race, started in the Belgian city of Ciney and concluded in Huy on April 23. It was won by UAE Team Emirates XRG's Slovenian rider, Tadej Pogacar.

Albatross and closing birdie lift China's Liu to LPGA Chevron lead

China's **Liu Yan** made a stunning albatross and a closing birdie to seize a one-stroke lead when darkness halted Friday's second round of the LPGA Chevron Championship. The 27-year-old sank a 15-foot birdie putt at the par-five 18th hole to finish off a level par 72 and grab the lead on seven-under 137 for 36 holes at Carlton Woods in the year's first major women's tournament. "I'm glad I made that last birdie," she said. "Today I had so many putts so close. Last hole was my first birdie today so I'm very happy." Liu's most spectacular shot, however, came at the par-five eighth when she holed out her second shot from 170 yards with a seven-iron. "There was helping wind and I hit a really solid driver on the fairway," Liu said. "I took my seven-iron and yeah, it was pretty crazy." It was the first albatross in a women's major since American Morgan Pressel made one at the 2015 Women's British Open.

HORSE RACING

Kimnkate claims Al Ghariyah Cup after late surge

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Kimnkate staged a dramatic late charge to clinch victory in the Al Ghariyah Cup - the highlight of the day's racing card - a 1,200m sprint for Thoroughbred Fillies and Mares held at Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday.

The five-year-old mare, owned by Al Hajaj Stud and trained by Hamad al-Jehani, was expertly guided by jockey Szczepan Mazur, timing her finish to perfection to snatch the win in the final strides. Deputy Director of the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC)'s Registration & Studbook Department Saad Ali al-Kubaisi presented the trophy to the winning connections.

Earlier in the seven-race meet, trainer Jassim Ghazali and Marco Casamento notched up a double when Ghanem stormed to victory in the Purebred Arabian Handicap 70-90 (Class 3).

The pair secured their first victory of the day when Liable claimed the Thoroughbred Maiden Plate (Class 6) in thrilling fashion, edging out Salah Al Deen by a nose in a dramatic photo finish. Alhoby finished third, just a neck behind, in what was a nail-biting conclusion to the 1,700m contest.

Meanwhile, trainer Mohammed Ghazali and jockey Pierre Charles Boudot enjoyed a rapid double, with Due To Dance tak-



Szczepan Mazur rides five-year-old mare Kimnkate to Al Ghariyah Cup win at Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday. **PICTURES:** Juhaïm

ing the Thoroughbred Handicap 50-70 (Class 5) and Thayir claiming victory in the Purebred Arabian Novice Plate (Class 5) in back-to-back races.

In the Local Thoroughbred Maiden Plate (Class 6), Pranil Arvind Kharat steered Al Hattan to an impressive win, while Abdulla Rashid al-Hajri piloted Jaazmina Du Soleil to Purebred Arabian Maiden Plate victory.

RESULTS 44TH AL RAYYAN RACE MEETING - AL GHARIYAH CUP

Winners (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)
1 - Al Ghariyah Cup - Thoroughbred Fillies And Mares (Class 2)
Kimnkate, Hamad al-Jehani, Szczepan Mazur
2 - Purebred Arabian Handicap 70-90 (Class 3)
Ghanem, Jassim Ghazali, Marco Casamento
3 - Thoroughbred Handicap 50-70 (Class 5)
Due To Dance, Mohammed Ghazali, Pierre Charles Boudot
4 - Purebred Arabian Novice Plate (Class 5)
Thayir, Mohammed Ghazali, Pierre Charles Boudot
5 - Local Thoroughbred Maiden Plate



Deputy Director of the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club's Registration & Studbook Department Saad Ali al-Kubaisi presented the trophy to the connections of Kimnkate.

Ghanem, Jassim Ghazali, Marco Casamento
3 - Thoroughbred Handicap 50-70 (Class 5)
Due To Dance, Mohammed Ghazali, Pierre Charles Boudot
4 - Purebred Arabian Novice Plate (Class 5)
Thayir, Mohammed Ghazali, Pierre Charles Boudot
5 - Local Thoroughbred Maiden Plate

(Class 6)
Al Hattan, Khalifa Hamed Nasser al-Sawai, Pranil Arvind Kharat
6 - Thoroughbred Maiden Plate (Class 6)
Liable, Jassim Ghazali, Marco Casamento
7 - Purebred Arabian Maiden Plate (Fillies and Mares) (Class 6)
Jaazmina Du Soleil, Mohd Ahmed Mohd Hasan al-Sulaiti, Abdulla Rashid al-Hajri

PREMIER LEAGUE

Ipswich relegated; Newcastle, Chelsea boost top five bids

Brighton end a five-match winless run after beating West Ham

AFP
London

Ipswich were relegated from the Premier League after slumping to a 3-0 defeat against Newcastle, while Chelsea kept alive their hopes of a top five finish with a 1-0 win over Everton yesterday.

Emblematic of the self-inflicted wounds that hampered Ipswich this season, Kieran McKenna's side had Ben Johnson sent off in the 37th minute for two bookings in quick succession at St James' Park. Newcastle's Alexander Isak converted a penalty after Jacob Murphy was fouled by Julio Enciso in first half stoppage-time. Dan Burn's 56th-minute header doubled Newcastle's lead and William Osula's 80th-minute goal left Ipswich with no chance of beating the drop.

Third-bottom Ipswich are 15 points behind fourth-bottom West Ham with four games left, ensuring their first season in the top-flight for 22 years will end with an immediate return to the Championship.

Out of their depth among the Premier League elite, Ipswich have won just four of their 34 league games.

Their relegation alongside Southampton and Leicester, who were both already condemned to the drop, means all three promoted sides will be back in the second tier next season. Ipswich's fairytale rise to the Premier League had captured the hearts of football romantics after their successive promotions from League One and the Championship.

McKenna, 38, had earned plaudits for Ipswich's attacking style during their surge up the divisions after his appointment in 2021. But the former Manchester United assistant coach was unable to preserve Ipswich's top-flight status.

"We've been through it the last few weeks, we knew it was pretty likely. At the end we have fallen short but it's not for lack of effort," McKenna said.

"We know there's a time for reflection. Today the mathematical completion doesn't change too much. We've been through the emotions."

Newcastle climb to third place as the League Cup winners eye Champions League qualification.

Enzo Maresca saluted Chelsea's "nasty" performance after a gritty success that kept them in the hunt for a Champions League berth. Nicolas Jackson struck for the first time since December to seal a vital victory at



Ipswich Town manager Kieran McKenna and players look dejected after their loss to Newcastle, which confirmed club's relegation from the Premier League. (Reuters)

Stamford Bridge. The Senegal striker's first-half blast from 20 yards moved Chelsea into fifth place with four games left.

Chelsea's third win in their last five league matches eased the pressure on Blues boss Maresca, who has come under fire for his team's cautious tactics during their slump in the second half of the season.

"First half we controlled the game, we dominated, created chances and didn't concede nothing. Then second half we dropped a little bit," he said.

"We were strong, nasty enough when we needed to be like that. Overall I think we deserved to win and we are happy."

Ryan Sessegnon struck in stoppage-time as Fulham won 2-1 at Southampton to stop the hosts moving past the record-low Premier League points total. Jack Stephens' 14th-minute opener had Southampton on course for a first home league victory since November, but Emile Smith Rowe levelled for Fulham after 72 minutes.

A draw would have helped Southampton move onto 12 points and avoid Derby's unwanted lowest-ever Premier League points

total of 11 from the 2007-08 season, only for Sessegnon to net in the final seconds. Brighton reignited their European push by piling more misery on former manager Graham Potter with a dramatic 3-2 victory over West Ham at the Amex Stadium.

Potter, who left Albion to join Chelsea in 2022, saw Mohammed Kudus and Tomas Soucek put the Hammers ahead after Yasin Ayari's opener for Brighton.

But Kaoru Mitoma headed the Seagulls level in the 89th minute before Carlos Baleba sensationally curled home from distance in stoppage-time.

Brighton ended a five-match winless run, while West Ham's dismal streak extended to a seventh game without victory. Wolves claimed a club record-equalling sixth successive top-flight win as they put relegated Leicester to the sword with a 3-0 victory at Molineux.

Matheus Cunha, Jorgen Strand Larsen and Rodrigo Gomes scored for Wolves, who last won six in a row in the top-flight in 1970, while second-bottom Leicester's winless run stretched to 11 matches.

SPOTLIGHT

Palace ease past Villa to reach FA Cup final

AFP
London

Crystal Palace reached the FA Cup final for the first time in nine years as Is-maïla Sarr's double and a rocket from Eberechi Eze sealed a 3-0 win against Aston Villa at Wembley yesterday. Oliver Glasner's side took the lead in the semi-final through Eze's long-range blast before Sarr netted twice in the second half.

In the final on May 17, Palace will face Nottingham Forest or Manchester City, who meet in the second semi-final today. The Eagles have never won the FA Cup, losing their two final appearances against Manchester United in 2016 and 1990.

"All the credit to the players. They had to work so hard. They had to overcome a few difficult moments," Glasner said. "We got more control and it was an unbelievable performance. The players stuck to the plan and we never lost our heads. I don't know at the moment how I feel - a bit exhausted. The players have four days off now. They should enjoy the moment."

Villa, who last won the FA Cup in 1957, were hoping to make the final for the first time since 2015. But Unai Emery's team produced a dismal display and will have to settle for fighting to qualify for the Champions League via a top five finish in the Premier League. "When they scored the first goal it was more difficult for us and we only reacted after 2-0 and then we created more chances to score and we didn't do. In transition they are very good, and they deserve to win," Emery said. "Sorry to our supporters because they were motivated. We have to accept it. We

have to be quick to react because in the league we have the most important objective?"

Jean-Philippe Mateta had the ball in the back of the net just before the half-hour mark, but it was chalked off after a VAR check confirmed the Palace striker had fouled Ezri Konsa in the build-up. There was no such doubt about Eze's opener, however, after Sarr got in the way of Pau Torres' pass, then collected the resulting ricochet to the right of the Villa area.

Sarr found Eze and the midfielder curled a superb strike beyond the reach of Villa goalkeeper Emiliano Martinez. Torres looked for an instant reply when he nodded just over the crossbar. Konsa came closer, forcing Dean Henderson into a low save with a header of his own from a corner.

Villa piled on more pressure after the restart when Henderson made another fine save to deny John McGinn's sharp volley, then Lucas Digne fired narrowly wide through a crowd of players. Palace were awarded a 53rd-minute penalty after Eze was tugged down by Boubacar Kamara and Mateta stepped up to the spot after a VAR check, but his shot clipped the post and went wide.

Just as Villa started to gain momentum, Adam Wharton intercepted a pass and, after a quick touch from Mateta, Sarr fired into the bottom corner. Henderson repelled a blast from Villa substitute Leon Bailey, moments after Mateta slid in to deny Ross Barkley. Sarr nodded Eze's cross off target, while Matty Cash's attempt to claw a late goal back for Villa sailed wide. Sarr put the seal on Palace's impressive performance in stoppage-time, outpacing Konsa before slotting home to send the Eagles into the final.



Crystal Palace's Eberechi Eze (left) vies for the ball with Aston Villa's Matty Cash during the FA Cup semi-final in London. (AFP)

LEVERKUSEN WIN TO DELAY BAYERN MUNICH AND KANE'S TITLE PARTY

Munich: Bayern Munich and Harry Kane's title celebrations will need to wait after Bayer Leverkusen's 2-0 win over Augsburg cancelled out the Bavarians' 3-0 home victory over Mainz in the Bundesliga.

Bayern needed to win and hope Leverkusen dropped points to lift the title. First-half goals from Leroy Sane and Michael Olise and a late Eric Dier strike put Bayern on course, but Xabi Alonso's defending champions were not willing to cede their title so easily. Bayern can collect

their 34th league title with a win next week at RB Leipzig but will need to do so without Kane. The England captain, who has famously never lifted a team title with club or country in his career, will miss the match with a yellow card suspension. Serge Gnabry created Bayern's opener for Sane, dribbling through a crowded penalty area and cutting back for the former Manchester City winger to score.

Olise doubled up with 40 minutes played, drifting in off the right and wrong-

footing the goalkeeper with a low shot at the near post. With 10 minutes remaining, Bayern veteran Thomas Mueller, who will leave the club at season's end, came off the bench for his 500th Bundesliga appearance. Dier, also yet to win a team trophy in his career, headed in from a corner with six minutes remaining.

In Leverkusen, Florian Wirtz helped create the hosts' opener, threading the ball to Nathan Tella on the counter. Tella found Patrik Schick whose shot took a wicked

deflection and looped over the goalkeeper for his 19th league goal of the season. Emi Buendia curled in from the edge of the box just before half-time, giving the hosts, who have dropped more points than any other side from a winning position this season, some welcome breathing space.

Eintracht Frankfurt thrashed a 10-man RB Leipzig 4-0 at home, all but securing a top-four finish and Champions League football next season. Ansgar Knauff scored twice for the hosts, with Hugo Ekitike and

Robin Koch also finding the net.

Leipzig lost defender El Chadaille Bitshiabu to a red card with 50 minutes gone and Frankfurt scored three times in the following 21 minutes. Frankfurt, whose only Champions League appearance came from winning the 2022 Europa League, are now six clear of fifth-placed Leipzig with three games remaining. Elsewhere, Waldemar Anton scored in stoppage time to snatch a 3-2 win for Borussia Dortmund at Hoffenheim, to boost their top-four hopes.