



Safonov hero as PSG clinch Intercontinental Cup

Parisians' goalkeeper saves four penalties in shootout after 1-1 draw with Flamengo, helping PSG complete a six-trophy haul in 2025



PSG's players celebrate on the podium after winning the 2025 FIFA Intercontinental Cup final. AFP

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Goalkeeper Matvei Safonov stole the spotlight as Paris Saint-Germain lifted the FIFA Intercontinental Cup Qatar 2025, edging past CR Flamengo 2-1 in a tense penalty shootout following a 1-1 draw in a thrilling final yesterday.

Tensions ran high at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium, packed with over 42,000 spectators, as Khvicha Kvaratskhelia put PSG ahead in the 38th minute.

Flamengo responded in the 62nd when Jorginho converted a penalty after Marquinhos was adjudged at fault for bringing down Giorgian De Arrascaeta, taking the title clash to a shootout following a stalemate at full time.

The penalty drama saw early successful strikes from Nicolas De La Cruz for Flamengo and Vitinha for PSG. Safonov then denied Saul, while Ousmane Dembele – who came off the bench in the 78th minute – scooped his penalty over the bar.

The goalkeeper followed up with crucial saves from Pedro and Leo Pereira, with Nuno Mendes' successful strike proving decisive. Flamengo's goalkeeper Agustin Rossi kept his side in contention by saving Bradley Barcola's attempt, but Safonov's stop on Luiz Araujo's final shot sparked wild celebrations for PSG.

The Intercontinental Cup triumph completed a six-trophy haul for Luis Enrique's side in 2025, having already secured the UEFA Champions League, UEFA Super Cup, Ligue 1, Trophee des Champions, and Coupe de France titles in a dominant season. They became only the third club this century to win six trophies in a year, following Barcelona in 2009 and Bayern Munich in 2020.

Flamengo, coached by Filipe Luis, leave Qatar with plenty of memories, having given PSG a stern test and capturing the FIFA Derby of the Americas and FIFA Challenger Cup.

PSG dominated large periods but Flamengo also had their moments, combining resolute defending with flashes of attacking threat.

Vitinha tested Rossi with a long-range set-piece attempt, Joao Neves volleyed just wide, and Lee Kang-in fired another long-range effort during PSG's early pressure.

PSG thought they had opened the scoring in the ninth minute when Fabian Ruiz volleyed into an open goal after Rossi left his line to clear a ball heading for a corner, but a VAR review showed the ball had crossed the line earlier, disallowing the goal. ➔P19



Saudi Arabia, UAE seek Arab Cup consolation

CHINTHANA WASALA
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates meet today in the third-place match of the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025 at Khalifa International Stadium, with both sides chasing consolation after dashing title hopes in the semi-finals.

Saudi Arabia enter today's encounter following a 1-0 defeat to Jordan in the semi-finals, while the UAE lost 0-3 to Jordan.

Despite the heartache, head coach Herve Renard said his team is aiming to conclude the tournament on a high.

"We will play for third place in the tournament, and of course, this is not the match we wanted," Renard said.

"We weren't happy with our performance, and we need to focus on winning to end our tournament run," Renard said at a pre-match press conference.

Having again missed a place in the Arab Cup final, this time in Doha, Saudi Arabia are currently undergoing a 23-year-long title drought.

Renard has come under fire for the team's disappointing run, but the French veteran rejected suggestions linking him to the team's unfortunate state.

He stressed that his players showed high motivation throughout the tournament and were in control for most of the match against Jordan, but failed to convert their chances into goals.


UAE players attend a training session in Doha.


Saudi Arabia coach Herve Renard


UAE coach Cosmin Olariu

"The Saudi national team has not won a title since 2003. That is not my problem," Renard said.

"I started my work with the Saudi national team in 2019, and I know these players very well. Their motivation is very high. We entered this tournament with a clear goal and the same spirit from the beginning," Renard said.

Saudi winger Abdulrahman Al Aboud also echoed the frustration, admitting the defeat was unexpected.

However, Al Aboud stressed that winning trophies remains the primary objective for the Green Falcons.

"Our goal in every tournament is to win the title," he said.

"The defeat was unexpected because qualification was our clear target. Now our focus is on the match against the UAE and finishing the tournament in third place."

He highlighted the involvement of several young players as a positive outcome of the campaign.

"The Arab Cup tournament was an opportunity for many young players to emerge. They got the chance to participate and gain experience in strong competitive matches," he added.

Meanwhile, UAE coach Cosmin Olariu described the third-place match as an important challenge.

> *We will play for third place in the tournament, and of course, this is not the match we wanted. We weren't happy with our performance, and we need to focus on winning to end our tournament run.*
> ***Herve Renard***
> ***Saudi Arabia coach***

"The Arab Cup has been a very demanding tournament with many matches in a short period," Cosmin said.

"This is our final game, and all our focus is on winning against a strong Saudi team. We see it as an important challenge."

He acknowledged the psychological impact of losing at the last-four stage but insisted that reaching the semi-finals remains a positive step for a young squad, gaining valuable experience.

"Our objective now is to secure third place and continue building a strong team for the future," Cosmin added.

Although a tight battle is expected, history favors Saudi Arabia in today's clash.

The Green Falcons have faced the UAE 37 times in official and friendly matches, winning 21 and losing 8, while 8 matches have ended with no results.

Despite the numbers, the UAE will aim to fly back home with one last win, but Saudi Arabia will also seek a strong finish to their Arab Cup Qatar 2025 campaign.

Safonov hero as PSG clinch Intercontinental Cup

FROM PAGE 20

Flamengo, who spent much of the opening period defending, began to create chances after the 15th minute. Jorge Carrascal saw his shot blocked, and Safonov denied Erick Pulgar's subsequent attempt. The Brazilian side began closing gaps effectively, limiting PSG's opportunities inside the box.

PSG eventually found their breakthrough when Desire Doue received a long ball and delivered a diagonal cross from the right, allowing Kvaratskhelia to tap in from close range.

Flamengo responded immediately, with Pulgar's header from a corner sailing just over the bar.

The second half began with Neves firing straight at Rossi, but Flamengo carved out the next clear chance, prompting the introduction of Pedro for Carrascal in the 56th minute.

PSG responded by bringing on Barcola for Senny Mayulu, pressing high in the final third. Neves saw another effort blocked by Leo Ortiz, while Flamengo made a triple substitution, bringing on Everton, Saul and De La Cruz. PSG followed with the introduction of Dembele, who was quickly involved but had a close-range effort blocked.

Flamengo remained dangerous on the counter, with Pereira and Bruno Henrique testing PSG from distance. A late chance fell to Marquinhos, but he failed to connect with a Dembele cross inside six yards, sending the match into extra time.

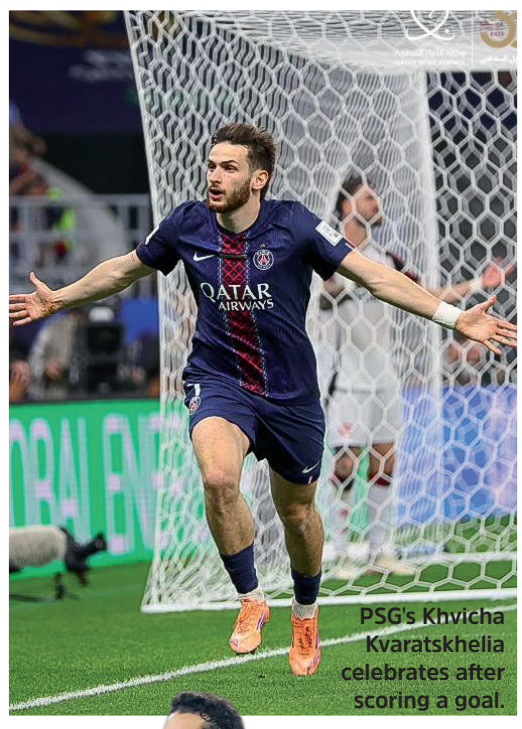
In extra time, PSG pressed relentlessly. Neves saw his effort blocked, Dembele fired twice over the bar, and Rossi denied Mendes as neither side could find the winner.

Ultimately, Safonov's heroics in the penalty shootout sealed PSG's triumph, completing another memorable chapter in their dominant 2025 season.


PSG's Matvey Safonov celebrates with the FIFA Intercontinental Cup trophy.


PSG President Nasser Al-Khelaifi congratulates Vitinha.


PSG squad members toss Matvei Safonov in the air.


PSG's Khvicha Kvaratskhelia celebrates after scoring a goal.


PSG's players celebrate after winning the penalty shootout. PICTURES: AFP/PSG

Carey slams ton as Australia seize upper hand in third Ashes Test

ADELAIDE: A composed Alex Carey slammed a majestic 106 on his home ground and Usman Khawaja hit a defiant 82 yesterday to put Australia in the driving seat of the third Ashes Test against England.

Batting after captain Pat Cummins won the toss as temperatures topped 36 Celsius at Adelaide Oval, the hosts were 326-8 at stumps on day one after the shock news of Steve Smith being ruled out with illness.

Mitchell Starc was not out 33 and Nathan Lyon yet to score.

A tireless Jofra Archer ended with 3-29 on a tough day toiling in the field.

Australia lead the five-Test series 2-0 and will retain the Ashes if they win or draw, after back-to-back eight-wicket thumpings in Perth and Brisbane.

Smith, who has more than 10,000 runs, had been feeling unwell in the lead-up but was on Tuesday named in the side.

He was on the field during the morning warm-up but left 20 minutes before the toss shaking his head.

His absence gave an unexpected chance for Khawaja, who turns 39 on Thursday and was overlooked as opener in favour of Travis Head and Jake Weatherald with many fearing it spelt the end of his career. Khawaja, who missed Brisbane after suffering back spasms in Perth, grabbed his chance in a stoic knock after being handed a reprieve when dropped on five.

He was eventually out just before tea, slog-sweeping to Josh Tongue in the deep off the spin of Will Jacks.

Carey picked up the mantle, first alongside Josh Inglis (32), then Pat Cummins (13), and latterly Starc, who once more showed his prowess with the bat. He hit eight fours and a six in his third Test century, bringing up the milestone in front of family, friends and 56,298 fans -- the biggest cricket crowd ever at the venue.

A blistering first over after lunch from Archer had left Australia reeling.

He removed Marnus Labuschagne for 19 with his first ball after the interval.

Two deliveries later Cameron Green was gone, with Brydon Carse collecting catches at midwicket to dismiss both.

Inglis and Cummins also fell in the final session to Tongue and Carse respectively.

Weatherald was earlier out for 18 and Head for 10.

BRIEF SCORES

Australia *326 for 8 (Carey 106, Khawaja 82, Archer 3-29)* ***vs England. — AFP***



Morocco, Jordan eye FIFA Arab Cup glory

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Under the bright lights of the iconic Lusail Stadium, an irresistible finale awaits as free-scoring Jordan take on Morocco's rock-solid defence in a thrilling Asia-Africa showdown tonight, with both sides chasing the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025 glory.

Both World Cup-bound teams arrive at the final with fond memories of Qatar, with Morocco having made history by reaching the FIFA World Cup semi-finals three years ago, while Jordan contested the AFC Asian Cup final last year.

Jordan have been the highest-scoring side in the tournament with 10 goals from five matches, while Morocco have been watertight at the back, conceding only one goal – an own goal against Comoros in their opening match.

Despite suffering a huge injury setback with the absence of star striker Yazan Al Naimat, Jordan showed they are capable of lifting the title by defeating an in-form Saudi Arabia 1-0 in the semi-finals.

On the other hand, African giants Morocco, who hold an edge in the final, thrashed surprise semi-finalists United Arab Emirates 3-0.


Morocco coach Tariq Sektioui


Jordan coach Jamal Sellami


Morocco players during a training session.


Jordan players gearing up for the final.

ARAB CUP CHAMPIONS

YEAR	HOST	WINNER	SCORE	RUNNER-UP
2021	Qatar	Algeria	2-0 a.e.t.	Tunisia
2012	Saudi Arabia	Morocco	1-1 a.e.t. (3-1 pens)	Libya
2002	Kuwait	Saudi Arabia	1-0 a.e.t.	Bahrain
1998	Qatar	Saudi Arabia	3-1	Qatar
1992	Syria	Egypt	3-2	Saudi Arabia
1988	Jordan	Iraq	1-1 a.e.t. (4-3 pens)	Syria
1985	Saudi Arabia	Iraq	1-0	Bahrain
1966	Iraq	Iraq	2-1	Syria
1964	Kuwait	Iraq	–	Libya
1963	Lebanon	Tunisia	–	Syria

Jordan will rely heavily on Ali Olwan – the tournament's leading scorer with four goals – in the absence of Al Naimat against Morocco, who remain a formidable force despite missing several regulars due to the upcoming Africa Cup of Nations on home soil.

Jordan's attack will need solutions to break down goalkeeper El Mehdi Benabid, central defenders Soufiane Bouftini and Marwane Saadane, and full-backs Mohamed Boulacsout and Hamza El Moussaoui.

For Morocco coach Tariq Sektioui, the Atlas Lions are itching for the final with triumph firmly in their sights.

"Our morale is high, and we look forward to winning and making millions of Moroccan football fans happy," Sektioui said on the eve of the final.

However, the Moroccan coach acknowledged that Jordan pose a major challenge.

> *We hope to conclude the journey by crowning the Jordanian national team. The final brings together two of the best teams in the competition.*
> ***Jamal Sellami***
> ***Jordan coach***

"Jordan have been playing together for many years and are a strong team led by a top-level coach. This is football, and any coach wants to win a match of this magnitude. We are ready for the challenge, and our goal is to win the title."

Morocco defender Marouane El Ouadni said the players will approach the final with full responsibility.

"The players are ready and committed to the instructions of the technical staff. We strive to win and be crowned with the title, and we know that we will face a respectable team, but we are ready for the final match."

Jordan's Moroccan coach Jamal Sellami said winning the Arab Cup would provide a huge boost for the country.

"It will be a major step forward for the future of Jordanian football," Sellami said.

"We hope to conclude the journey by crowning the Jordanian national team. The final brings together two of the best teams in the competition."

The coach added that apart from Al Naimat, who successfully underwent knee surgery, all players would be available for the final.

"We will face a strong and experienced Moroccan team with clear technical qualities, but we also have strengths that help reduce these differences. A final means only one thing: winning."

"I am Moroccan to the core, and no one doubts my Moroccan identity. This is an honour for us as Moroccan coaches to meet in the final," Sellami said while responding to a query.

> *Our morale is high, and we look forward to winning and making millions of Moroccan football fans happy.*
> ***Tariq Sektioui***
> ***Morocco coach***

Jordan centre-back Saed Al Rosan expressed optimism ahead of the team's first Arab Cup final.

"Our goal has been to win the title and make the Jordanian fans happy. We have the best defensive line in the tournament," he said.

"This is Jordan's first Arab Cup final, and we carry a great responsibility towards our fans. Our goal is to win in Doha, and I am always optimistic whenever I come to Qatar."

The final will kick off at 7pm, with fans advised to reach the venue early.

Winners of 2026 World Cup to pocket $50m in prize money

PARIS: The winners of the 2026 World Cup will receive $50m in prize money as part of a record financial contribution for the tournament from FIFA, world football's governing body announced yesterday.

The total World Cup prize fund of $655m represents an increase of almost 50 percent from the $440m distributed to teams taking part in the last tournament in Qatar in 2022.

However, next year's World Cup -- to be held in the United States, Mexico and Canada from June 11 to July 19 -- will be the first to feature 48 teams, a 50 percent increase from the 32 teams last time.

The Argentine Football Association received $42m in prize money after Lionel Messi inspired them to glory three years ago, when they won on penalties in the final against France.

France received $30m for their run to the final.

This time, the beaten finalists will pocket $33m, with the third-place finishers collecting $29m and the other defeated semi-finalists getting $27m.

Teams eliminated in the group phase will receive $9m, while all 48 participating nations will get an additional $1.5m to cover "preparation costs."

On Tuesday, organisers unveiled a new cut-price ticket category after a wave of criticism from fans over pricing for the 2026 tournament.

FIFA said it had created a limited number of tickets priced at $60 for all 104 matches, including the final.

It said the plan was "designed to further support travelling fans following their national teams across the tournament".

Fan group Football Supporters Europe (FSE), which last week called prices "extortionate" and "astronomical", responded to the move by saying FIFA was offering too little.

It described the creation of the new ticket category as "nothing more than an appeasement tactic due to the global negative backlash" and claimed few fans would benefit.

"Based on the allocations publicly available, this would mean that at best a few hundred fans per match and team would be lucky enough to take advantage of the $60 prices, while the vast majority would still have to pay extortionate prices, way higher than at any tournament before," the group said.

— AFP

Naseeb Zakhir storms to Zekreet Cup triumph

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Naseeb Zakhir confirmed his rising form with a commanding performance to capture the feature Zekreet Cup, a Local Purebred Arabian Handicap (75–95) for 4YO+ over 1200m, winning by four and a half lengths.

Owned and trained by Osama Omer Al-Dafea and ridden by Faleh Bughenaim, the 4-year-old grey colt recorded his second win from four starts this season, following two runner-up finishes.


The connections of Naseeb Zakhir celebrate after the Osama Omer Al-Dafea-owned grey colt won the Zekreet Cup. PICTURES: JUHAIM/QREC

Breaking sharply from barrier six in the seven-runner field, Naseeb Zakhir was prominent from the outset, briefly leading before settling just off the pace behind early leader Azzam FBR.

Flanked through the middle stages by Al Wasmi and Khaled Al Shahania, he traveled purposefully before unleashing a decisive turn of foot in the straight, quickly asserting superiority. Al Wasmi, representing Al Wasmiyah Farm, finished second, while Khaled Al Shahania held on for third.


Jockey Faleh Bughenaim and Naseeb Zakhir on their way to win the Zekreet Cup.

The Zekreet Cup Day at Al Rayyan Racecourse featured eight races in total.

Aljalta, ridden by Alberto Sanna, opened the card with a record-breaking 20-length win.

Taimoor (jockey Saleh Faraj Al-Otaibi) edged a thrilling finish in Local Thoroughbred Handicap (0-45), while Bint Al Hareth (Soufiane Saadi) and Kafalat (Mohammed Hassan Ali Alabdulmalik) produced late surges to claim victories in their respective contests.

Prince D'ossau (Tomas Lukasek), Flame Fair (Mohammed Hassan Ali Alabdulmalik) and Nibras Al Marroona (Salman Fahad Al-Hajri) rounded off the winners, each delivering emphatic performances that lit up the day's program.