The Peninsula
Local focus, Global vision

SPORT

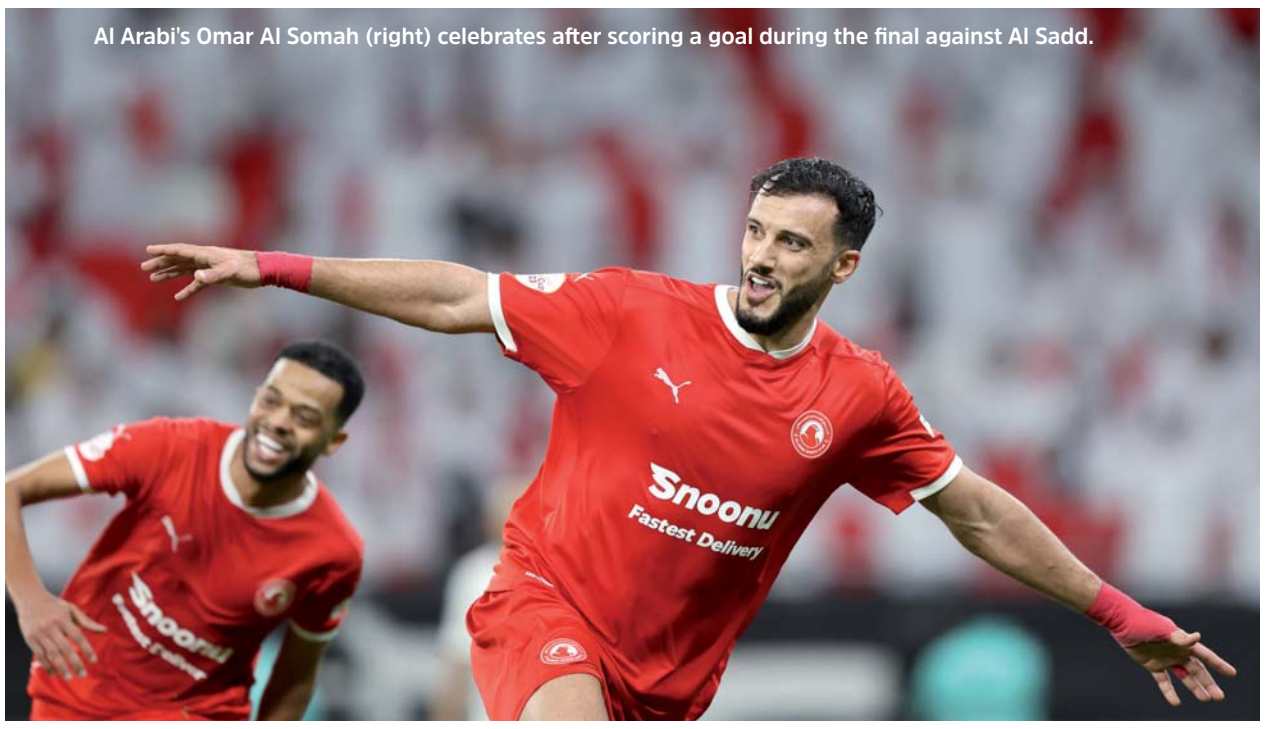


Al Arabi players and officials celebrate with the Amir Cup trophy at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium, yesterday. PICTURES: MOHAMED FARAG

DREAM TEAM ENDS 30-YEAR WAIT

Al Arabi clinch Amir Cup title with 3-0 victory over Al Sadd

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA



Al Arabi's Omar Al Somah (right) celebrates after scoring a goal during the final against Al Sadd.

Syrian forward Omar Al Somah scored a brace as Al Arabi ended 30-year wait for the prestigious Amir Cup title, outclassing Al Sadd 3-0 in the final at packed Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium yesterday.

The Dream Team resisted fiery Al Sadd well in the first half before unleashing their attacking prowess after the break to lift the coveted trophy for the ninth time – their first since the 1992-93 season triumph.

It was also Younes Ali's men first crown of the season with Al Somah emerging as their hero in front of 37,839 spectators including a large number of their passionate fans.

With Al Sadd looking a better side in first hour of the play, the Syrian forward stunned the Wolves taking Al Arabi into lead with a fabulous header in the 62nd minute. He sealed the victory with a strike in eighth minute of stoppage time after substitute Hamid Ismaeil doubled Al Arabi advantage in the 90th minute.

The Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani crowned Al Arabi, which was well deserved for the side that remained consistent throughout the season and finished runners-up in the top flight QNB Stars League (QSL) behind treble winners Al Duhail.

The Dream Team also earned a sweet revenge from Al Sadd, who defeated them 2-1 in the 2020 edition final at the same venue.

Ali, who became the first Qatari coach to win the Amir Cup since 1994 when Ahmed Omar led Al Sadd to win over Al Arabi in the final, praised the entire squad after the victory.

"Al Sadd were very tough but we played very well. I want to thank our fans who supported us throughout the season. We had an excellent season irrespective of our victory in the final," said the Al Arabi coach, who also became the fourth person to lift the prestigious title both as player and coach after Ahmed Omar, Hussein Amouta and Xavi Hernandez.

"It was a sheer teamwork of all people associated with Al Arabi. We will now focus on doing better in the next season," said Ali, who won the Amir Cup three times as a player with Al Rayyan.

After his heroics, Al Somah also credited teamwork for the triumph.

"We are delighted to win the prestigious Amir Cup after a gap of so many years. This historic title has doubled our joy as we have capped a fine season by lifting this coveted trophy," he said.

"After falling behind in QSL title race, all our focus was on winning the Amir Cup. The entire Al Arabi team, the coaching, technical and administrative played their part in this success," he added.

Yesterday, Al Sadd, who were seeking a record-extending 19th crown, remained trophy-less after losing their second final of the season following a 2-0 defeat to Al Duhail in Qatar Cup title clash last month. They ended up third in the QSL standings.

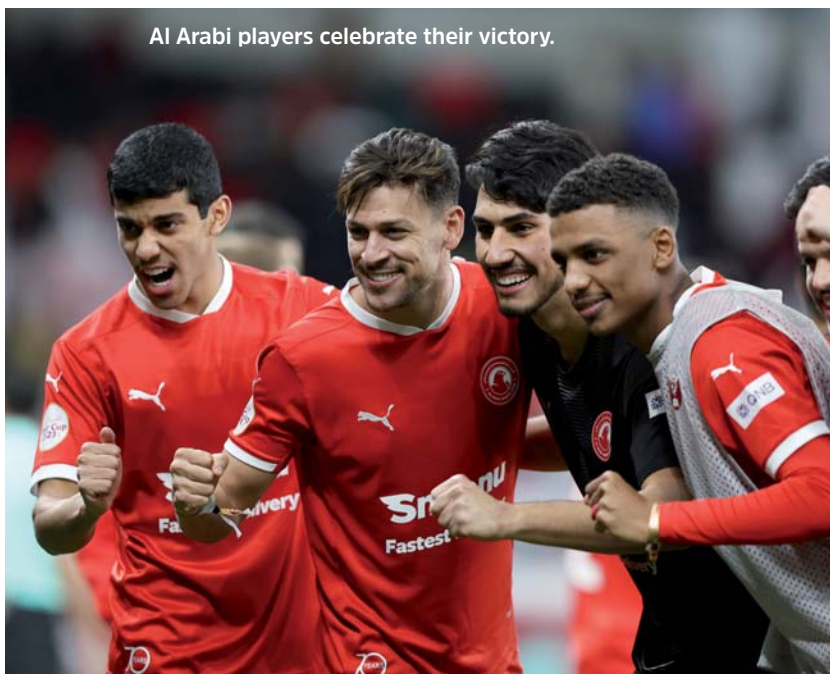
Coach Juan Manuel Lillo said ahead of the final his team must keep the ball and the Wolves responded to his call by maintaining around 70 percent of ball possession in the clash, and created many chances but lacked execution.

Out of 18 attempts, Al Sadd had only two shots on target in the match as Al Arabi converted three of their four hits on target into goals.

With spectators creating electrifying atmosphere at the venue that hosted FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 games, Lillo's side started on a bright note with Akram Afif looking in fine touch putting pressure on opponents with his surges.

The Qatari playmaker hit an angular shot from inside the box but his attempt towards the left corner of the net went wide in 13th minute.

After a quiet spell in the middle, Afif surged from the left clearing two defenders but he didn't get support inside the box to pick his cross.



Al Arabi players celebrate their victory.

As Al Arabi struggled to get the ball, Al Sadd continued to press for a goal and Guilherme Torres struck a threatening long range hit but he missed the target just before the half-hour mark.

A Boualem Khoukhi free kick from 10 yards outside the box also went wide in stoppage time of first half.

Al Arabi star Youssef Msakni, who had a quiet start, gave Al Sadd a scare just before the interval racing inside the box but his hit went straight to goalkeeper Saad Al Sheeb's hands after taking a defender's touch.

The Wolves returned in a similar fashion after the break creating several opportunities including a chance for Ali Asad, which he failed to convert from a close range following Afif's free kick.

From there, Al Arabi turned the tide and took the lead through Al Somah's brilliance.

Ismaeil, who replaced injured Msakni at the end of first half, fired a high cross from the right with the Syrian rising to head the ball into the right corner leaving no chance for Al Sheeb.

Al Sadd stormed to Al Arabi's box various times after conceding a goal but they continued to lack accuracy. Baghdad Bounedjah also missed a chance heading the ball off target while connecting Afif's cross two minutes before time.

As more Al Sadd players advanced to Al Arabi's half in search of an equaliser, Rafinha set up second goal for the Dream Team sprinting from halfway to find Ismaeil, who put the ball past Al Sheeb.

The Brazilian midfielder made his second assist before the final whistle finding Al Somah inside the box with the Syrian wrapping up a memorable victory with a fiery strike in the middle from near the penalty spot.

AL ARABI'S PATH TO GLORY

ROUND OF 16
March 8: Al Arabi 3–0 Al Shamal SC
QUARTER-FINALS
April 8: Al Arabi 2-0 Muaither
SEMI-FINALS
April 25: Al Arabi 7-1 Al Sailiya
FINAL
May 12: Al Arabi 3-0 Al Sadd

RECENT AMIR CUP FINALS

2023: Al Arabi 3-0 Al Sadd
2022: Al Duhail 5–1 Al Gharafa
2021: Al Sadd 1–1 Al Rayyan (aet, 5–4 pen)
2020: Al Sadd 2-1 Al Arabi
2019: Al Duhail 4–1 Al Sadd
2018: Al Duhail 2–1 Al Rayyan
2017: Al Sadd SC 2–1 Al Rayyan
2016: Lekhwiya SC 2–2 Al Sadd SC (4–2 pen)
2015: Al Sadd SC 2–1 El Jaish
2014: Al Sadd SC 3–0 Al Sailiya
2013: Al Rayyan 2–1 Al Sadd SC
2012: Al Gharafa 0–0 Al Sadd SC (5–4 pen)
2011: Al Rayyan 2–1 Al Gharafa
2010: Al Rayyan 1–0 Umm Salal
2009: Al Gharafa 2–1 Al Rayyan
2007–08: Umm-Salal 2–2 Al Gharafa (4–1 pen)
2006–07: Al Sadd 0–0 Al Khor (5–4 pen)
2005–06: Al Rayyan 1–1 Al Gharafa (5–3 pen)
2004–05: Al Sadd 0–0 Al Wakrah (5–4 pen)
2003–04: Al Rayyan 3–2 Qatar SC
2002–03: Al Sadd 2–1 Al Ahli
2001–02: Al Ittihad 4–1 Al Sadd
2000–01: Al Sadd 3–2 Qatar SC

AMIR CUP CHAMPIONS

Al Sadd - 18 titles
Al Arabi - 9
Al Gharrafa - 7 (5 as Al Ittihad)
Al Rayyan - 6
Al Ahli - 4
Al Duhail - 4 (1 as Lekhwiya)
Qatar SC - 2 (2 as Al Esteqlal)
Umm Salal - 1

Adamian claims maiden world title in Doha under neutral flag

CHINTHANA WASALA
THE PENINSULA

Russia's former European Games champion Arman Adamian yesterday clinched his maiden World Championships gold medal at Doha 2023, competing as a neutral athlete.

At the Ali Bin Hamad Al Attiyah Arena, the 26-year-old Adamian defeated Lukas Krpalek of the Czech Republic in the men's -100kg final to clinch his maiden World title.

"I feel very good, I can't wait to speak to my family on the phone to celebrate with them," Adamian, speaking in Russian through a translator, told international media after the title clash in front of a massive crowd.

"I just enjoyed my victory and listened to the IJF anthem," Adamian said after the International Judo Federation (IJF) anthem replaced his country's national anthem.

The IJF has allowed Russian and Belarusian judokas to take part in the World Championships in Doha as neutral athletes, lifting their previous ban due to the invasion of Ukraine.

Adamian eliminated Mustapha Yasser Bouamar (ALG) in round 1 with a controlled uki-otoshi and then took a tactical victory over Adnan Khankan (IRT) in round 2.

The 3rd round saw him take on Simeon Catharina (NED) to reach the quarter-final where he threw out Georgian world No.1 Ilia Sulamanidze.

Adamian went on to face Shady Elnahas (CAN) in the semi-final but despite trying everything he could to continue, the Canadian had to retire after sustaining an injury, sending the Russian into his maiden world championship final.

In yesterday's final, Adamian's opponent Krpalek was the hot favorite.



Russia's Arman Adamian (white) competes with Czech Republic's Lukas Krpalek (blue) in their men's -100Kg final bout. AFP

Krpalek, a two-time world champion, three-time European title holder and a two-tile Olympis gold medallist in the same weight class.

The Czech fighter's sacrifice throw attempts did give him a couple of opportunities on the floor but eventually worked against him, as he picked up a 3rd shido 1 minute into golden score for a false attack as Adamian earned a well-deserved world title.

Pakistan demands neutral World Cup venues in row with India

AFP – NEW DELHI

The chairman of Pakistan's cricket board is demanding his side's World Cup games are moved out of host country India if their arch-rivals refuse to travel to Pakistan for September's Asia Cup, a report said yesterday.

Arrangements for the one-day international World Cup, which is due to start in October, remain shrouded in mystery, with the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) so far failing to release a match schedule or list of venues.

Pakistan is itself hosting the Asia Cup, another 50-over tournament, in September, in which India normally participates.

But the BCCI -- the world's richest and most powerful cricket body -- has refused to travel to Pakistan for several years citing both the diplomatic tensions and the country's challenging security situation.

It wants its Asia Cup games moved out of Pakistan -- and Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Najam Sethi demanded a reciprocal arrangement for the World Cup in an interview with The Indian Express newspaper yesterday. "If India now wants to have a neutral venue and accepts the hybrid model, then we'll use the same hybrid model in the World Cup," he said.

There was no immediate reaction from the BCCI to Sethi's comments.


Red Bull KTM Factory Racing's Jack Miller competes during the 1st free practice session ahead of the French MotoGP, yesterday. AFP

Miller dominates practice at French MotoGP

AFP – LE MANS

Jack Miller was fastest in both sessions at Le Mans yesterday, as practice opened for the French MotoGP.

The Australian, in his first season with KTM, followed his third place in the last race in Jerez by starting fast.

He set the quickest time in the morning with a lap of 1min 31.449sec and improved to 1:30.95 late in the afternoon. It was the only time under 1:31 all day.

Miller was 0.119sec faster than Spaniard Aleix Espargaro on an Aprilia with Italian Marco Bezzecchi third at one-fifth of a second on his Mooney Ducati.

Reigning champion Francesco Bagnaia was ninth 0.558sec off the pace but good enough to put him in the top ten, which gives a direct pass into the second qualifying session on Saturday.

He spent part of the second session dodging Marc Marquez, seeking a tow in an attempt to set a top-10 time.

Despite a crash, six-time MotoGP world champion Marquez, still gained the time he wanted late in the session when he tailed Jorge Martin who was shadowing Bagnaia.

The Spaniard is returning after missing three races. He broke his hand in a crash after starting from pole in the season-opener in Portugal. A fifth surgery in three years followed.

Yesterday, Marquez slid off on turn nine in the second session. After slithering into the gravel shedding bike parts, Marquez leapt up and slapped his hands together in frustration as he ran towards his Honda. He still recorded a lap that put him eighth, 0.482 seconds behind Miller.

Bagnaia, who rides a factory Honda, won the last race in Spain and holds a 22-point lead in this year's standings over fellow Italian Bezzecchi.

Bagnaia has a miserable record in France with his best result fourth in four appearances at the circuit. Last year, he crashed after starting from pole position.

French contender Fabio Quartararo could manage the 12th best time on his Yamaha.

The weekend marks motorcycling's 1,000 Grand Prix landmark, 74 years after the first feast of speed was staged.

Modern racing machines, backed by the big budgets of A-list manufacturers, are a far cry from the 500cc bike which carried Britain's Harold Daniell to victory in the first grand prix staged on the streets of the Isle of Man in 1949.

The bespectacled Daniell, who had been barred from fighting in the Second World War due to poor eyesight, claimed victory on a storied Norton machine.

Fast forward to 2023 and the MotoGP series is dominated by manufacturers from Japan, Italy and Austria.

Record $54m prize money up for grabs at French Open

AP – PARIS

Paychecks for the two French Open singles champions will return to the pre-pandemic amount of €2.3m each - about $2.5m - and the total prize money is rising to a tournament-record €49.6m - about $54m.

The French tennis federation announced yesterday what it will be offering at the clay-court Grand Slam event. Qualifying begins May 22; main-draw play starts May 28.

The title winners in singles will get the same pay as in 2019, which was the high mark in Paris.

During the coronavirus pandemic, those prizes dropped to €1.6m in 2020 and €1.4m in 2021, before going back up to €2.2m a year ago.

Total prizes sank during that span, too, including to €34m in 2021.

This year's total represents a jump of more than 10% from 2022.

Losers in the first round of singles will get €69,000 - about $75,000 - which is a 50% hike from what they got in 2019, and an 11% increase from last year.

Losers in the first round of qualifying receive €16,000 - a little more than $17,000 - more than double what the 2019 payout was and up 14% from last year.

Money for wheelchair and quad tennis competitions rose 40% to €810,000 ($880,000), while women's and men's doubles payouts are 4% higher, including €590,000 ($640,000) to each winning pair.



Al Atya begins Rally de Portugal campaign

Qatar's Nasser bin Khalifa Al Atya and his Italian navigator Giovanni Bernacchini during the ceremonial flag off of the Rally de Portugal 2023. The Qatari driver finished 2:11.4 minutes behind the race leader Pierre-Louis Loubet of France in yesterday's first Special Stage. A former Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) series runner-up in 1993, Al Atya returned to track in 2019 after a gap of 22 years.

Swiatek gets off to perfect start in Rome

AFP – ROME

Iga Swiatek started her bid to win her third straight Italian Open title in perfect fashion yesterday, not dropping a game in her straight-sets thrashing of Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova.

World number one Swiatek looked in exceptional form as she demolished Pavlyuchenkova 6-0, 6-0 in just over an hour to ease her way into the third round in Rome.

Losing finalist in Madrid last weekend, Swiatek looked in great form in the tournament she won last year before going on to blitz the French Open.

Swiatek now faces either Bernarda Pera or Lesia Tsurenko in the last 32 after extending her winning streak in the Italian capital to 12 matches.

The only real resistance from Pavlyuchenkova, who reached the final of Roland Garros two years ago, came in the final game of the first set, when she saved six set points from 0-40 down on her serve.

Swiatek eventually came through that game and swept Pavlyuchenkova aside in the second set, finishing the job against the serve with her first match point.

Poland's Iga Swiatek celebrates after winning a point against Russia's Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova, yesterday. AFP

Earlier, Jannick Sinner cruised into the men's last 32 with a straight-sets win over Thanasi Kokkinakis, 6-1, 6-4.

World number eight Sinner took one hour, 18 minutes to deal with Australian qualifier Kokkinakis, and will now play Russian Alexander Shevchenko, who beat Argentinian Sebastian Baez 6-3, 6-4.

Sinner, 21, did not drop a single point on his serve in a dominant first set in which the gulf in class between the Italian and Kokkinakis was painfully evident.

Kokkinakis, ranked 104 in the world, put up more of a fight in the second set but once Sinner broke in the seventh game to take the score to 4-3, it was only a matter of time before the deal was sealed.

Sinner made no mistake, serving to love in games eight and nine to ensure comfortable passage to the next round.

Rome has not seen an Italian winner of the tournament since Adriano Panatta in 1976.

With local boy Matteo Berrettini out of action again with abdominal problems, Sinner will be getting the bulk of the capital city's support.

Cameron Norrie strolled past French qualifier Alexandre Muller 6-2, 6-3 to set up a clash with Marton Fucsovics or Alex de Minaur in the next round.

Suryakumar's first IPL century seals Mumbai win

AP – MUMBAI

Suryakumar Yadav's masterful maiden Indian Premier League hundred set up Mumbai Indians' 27-run win over the high-flying Gujarat Titans yesterday.

Yadav's unbeaten 103 off 49 balls, featuring 11 fours and six sixes, propelled Mumbai to 218-5, and made the Indians the first team to register 200-plus scores five times in one season.

The total held up. Gujarat could reach only 191-8 despite Rashid Khan's unbeaten 79 off 32 balls from 10 sixes and three fours.

Even after its fourth defeat, Gujarat still topped the table and was favorite to qualify for the playoffs with two games in hand. Mumbai rose to third.

"Felt like only Rashid Khan turned up from our team, batted and bowled incredibly well," Gujarat captain Hardik Pandya said. "Rashid ensured there wasn't a big dent to our net run-rate.

"People have spoken enough about 'Sky' (Suryakumar Yadav), one of the best batters in T20 cricket. Really tough to set fields for him. He kept putting pressure on our bowlers."

Yadav brought the packed home crowd on its feet at Wankhade Stadium after Ishan Kishan (31) and captain Rohit Sharma (29) provided a rollicking start of 61 in the powerplay.

Yadav smashed the fast bowlers and upped the ante when he completed his half-century off 32 balls, raising his second fifty off just 17 deliveries.

Afghanistan legspinner Rashid finished off in style when he caught Tim David off his own bowling for 4-30, but his departure left Yadav to take apart the pacers in the last three overs.

Yadav smacked Mohit Sharma for three fours and a swept six over square leg and reserved his best hit for Mohammed Shami when he smacked the seamer for a six over short third man with his powerful wrist work.

Yadav needed three off the final ball to complete his coveted century and he reached the landmark in style with his trademark swept six over square leg against Alzarri Joseph.

Mumbai fast bowler Akash Madhwal, playing in his fourth IPL game, proved a perfect impact substitute when his 3-31 helped to put Gujarat on the mat at 103-7.

Rashid smacked five sixes against left-arm spinner Kumar Kartikeya, including three in the final over, but they only narrowed the margin of Gujarat's defeat.

BRIEF SCORES
Mumbai Indians 218 for 5 (Suryakumar 103*, Rashid 4-30) **beat Gujarat Titans** 191 for 8 (Rashid 79*, Madhwal 3-31) **by 27 runs**