The Peninsula
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SPORT

Fernandez tops action-packed Qatar GP practice

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

It's not new for the iconic Lusail International Circuit to spring a surprise, and it happened again yesterday.

With all eyes on title contenders Francesco Bagnaia and Jorge Martin, RNF Aprilia's Raul Fernandez displayed a stunning performance to top second free practice for the MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar 2023 with an impressive 1:52.843.

Ahead of the weekend, Fernandez said: "I've learnt that when I arrive at a track and don't expect anything special, it usually works out better" and the 23-year-old was spot on as he emerged as the fastest rider, edging Gresini Racing's Fabio Di Giannantonio by 0.049 seconds after an hour of running.

The only practice session under lights in Lusail was an action-packed affair as riders set the pace for today's qualifying stages and the sprint race taking place for the first time in Qatar, with free practice session up first.

Yesterday, Aprilia Racing's Maverick Vinales had set the fastest time breaking Bagnaia's lap record the Italian set two years ago, but he saw 1m52.652s deleted from his time following a yellow flag to settle for third place in the second free practice.

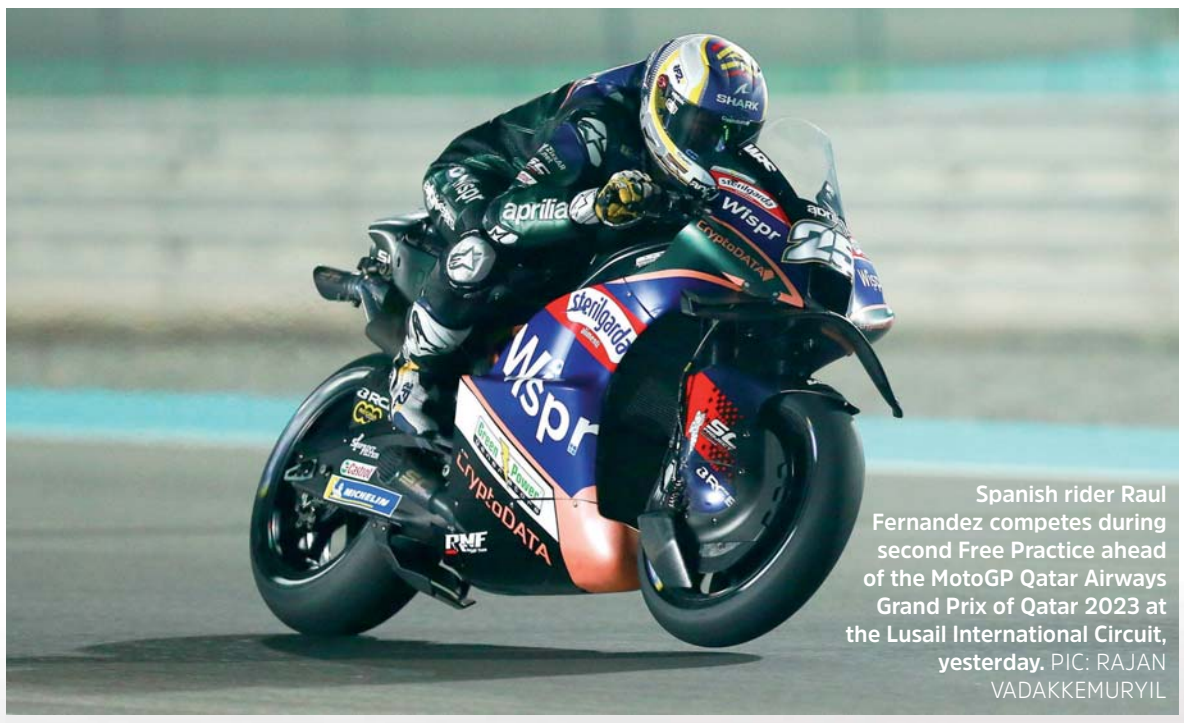
Red Bull KTM Factory Racing's Brad Binder was the fourth fastest while Aprilia Racing's Aleix Espargaro completed the top five after outpacing Luca Marini.

Pramac Racing's Martin, who topped the first free practice in the day, was seventh quickest under lights after struggling for an hour due to handling issues.

With the pair locked in a duel, Championship leader Bagnaia, who leads the Spaniard by 14 points, finished eighth behind his title rival by 0.007 seconds after setting the third fastest time in the first free practice.

GASGAS Factory Racing Tech3 Augusto Fernandez was ninth with Respol Honda Team star Marc Marquez rounding up the top 10.

Earlier in Moto2, Beta Tools SpeedUp's Fermin Aldeguer clocked a fastest time of 1:58.059 to wrap up a successful opening day of the weekend. Pons Wegow Los40 rider Aron Canet was second while Sam Lowes of Elf Marc VDS Racing also enjoyed a fine day after registering the third best time.



Spanish rider Raul Fernandez competes during second Free Practice ahead of the MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar 2023 at the Lusail International Circuit, yesterday. PIC: RAJAN VADAKKEMURYIL



Spanish rider Jorge Martin competes during the second Free Practice, yesterday. PIC: RAJAN VADAKKEMURYIL

MOTOGP - FREE PRACTICE 2

1	Raul Fernandez (ESP)	CryptoDATA RNF MotoGP Team	01:52.8430
2	Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA)	Gresini Racing MotoGP	+0.049
3	Maverick Viñales (ESP)	Aprilia Racing	+0.093
4	Brad Binder (RSA)	Red Bull KTM Factory Racing	+0.112
5	Aleix Espargaro (ESP)	Aprilia Racing	+0.190
6	Luca Marini (ESP)	Mooney VR46 Racing Team	+0.251
7	Jorge Martin (ESP)	Prima Pramac Racing	+0.352
8	Francesco Bagnaia (ITA)	Ducati Lenovo Team	+0.359
9	Augusto Fernandez (ESP)	GASGAS Factory Racing Tech3	+0.446
10	Marc Marquez (ESP)	Repsol Honda Team	+0.480
11	Jack Miller (AUS)	Red Bull KTM Factory Racing	+0.494
12	Alex Marquez (ESP)	Gresini Racing MotoGP	+0.718
13	Franco Morbidelli (ITA)	Monster Energy Yamaha MotoGP	+0.721
14	Pol Espargaro (ESP)	GASGAS Factory Racing Tech3	+0.853
15	Marco Bezzecchi (ITA)	Mooney VR46 Racing Team	+0.861
16	Johann Zarco (FRA)	Prima Pramac Racing	+0.935
17	Joan Mir (ESP)	Repsol Honda Team	+1.078
18	Enea Bastianini (ITA)	Ducati Lenovo Team	+1.094
19	Miguel Oliveira (PRT)	CryptoDATA RNF MotoGP Team	+1.162
20	Iker Lecuona (ESP)	LCR Honda CASTROL	+1.411
21	Fabio Quartararo (FRA)	Monster Energy Yamaha MotoGP	+1.417
22	Takaaki Nakagami (JPN)	LCR Honda IDEMITSU	+1.598

MOTO 2 (Top 10)

1	Fermin Aldeguer (ESP)	Speedup Racing	1:58.059
2	Aron Canet (ESP)	Pons Wegow Los40	+0.104
3	Sam Lowes (GBR)	Elf Marc VDS Racing Team	+0.254
4	Somkiat Chantra (THA)	Idemitsu Honda Team Asia	+0.308
5	Jake Dixon (GBR)	GASGAS Aspar Team	+0.375
6	Manuel Gonzalez (ESP)	C P Yamaha VR46 Mastercamp	+0.614
7	Ai Ogura (JPN)	Idemitsu Honda Team Asia	+0.773
8	Pedro Acosta (ESP)	Red Bull KTM Ajo	+0.795
9	Alonso Lopez (ESP)	Speed Up Racing	+0.868
10	Tony Arbolino (ITA)	Elf Marc VDS Racing Team	+1.053

MOTO 3 (Top 10)

1	Jaume Masia (ESP)	Leopard Racing	2:06.794
2	Romano Fenati (ITA)	Rivacold Snipers Team	+0.546
3	Collin Veijer (NED)	Liqui Moly Husqvarna Intact GP	+0.622
4	Ivan Ortola (ESP)	Angeluss MTA Team	+0.631
5	Matteo Bertelle (ITA)	Rivacold Snipers Team	+0.808
6	Xavier Artigas (ESP)	CFMOTO Racing PruestelGP	+0.870
7	David Alonso (COL)	GASGAS Aspar Team	+1.001
8	Ayumu Sasaki (JPN)	Liqui Moly Husqvarna Intact GP	+1.074
9	Daniel Holgado (ESP)	Red Bull KTM Tech3	+1.269
10	Stefano Nepa (ITA)	Angeluss MTA Team	+1.353

All-out war in Q1

There are some heavy hitters set for battle in Q1 today. Jack Miller (Red Bull KTM Factory Racing) was the first to miss out on a Q2 spot as the Aussie fell just 0.014s short of the top 10 in P11.

Miller will be joined by the Sprint victor and podium finisher from last weekend Alex Marquez (Gresini Racing MotoGP) as well as Franco Morbidelli (Monster Energy Yamaha MotoGP), Pol Espargaro (GASGAS Factory Racing Tech3), Marco Bezzecchi (Mooney VR46 Racing Team), and Johann Zarco (Prima Pramac Racing).

The action has only just started at the Lusail International Circuit. The title fight is on with MotoGP enjoying some of the closest racing in its history. The action unfolds in Qatar with Qualifying and Tissot Sprint coming up today as well as free practice at 15:00 local time. MotoGP

QATAR AIRWAYS GRAND PRIX OF QATAR

TODAY'S SCHEDULE		
13:30-14:00	Moto3	Practice Nr. 3
14:15-14:45	Moto2	Practice Nr. 3
15:00-15:30	MotoGP	Free Practice Nr. 2
15:40-15:55	MotoGP	Qualifying Nr. 1
16:05-16:20	MotoGP	Qualifying Nr. 2
17:50-18:05	Moto3	Qualifying Nr. 1
18:15-18:30	Moto3	Qualifying Nr. 2
18:45-19:00	Moto2	Qualifying Nr. 1
19:10-19:25	Moto2	Qualifying Nr. 2
20:00-20:45	MotoGP	Tissot Sprint (11 Laps)



Riders competes during the second free practice session yesterday, ahead of the MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar 2023. AFP



Qatar GP Junior reporters with MotoGP riders.

Opening day wraps up with broken record

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

The exciting race weekend of MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar 2023 has begun.

The first day of the Grand Prix revolved around teams from all categories familiarizing themselves with the track and determining strategies for the upcoming races during the weekend. This is the first-time teams have raced in the newly upgraded circuit and the free practice sessions gave them an opportunity to learn more about the technical aspects of the race.

The Grand Prix offered spectators continued racing action with MotoGP categories as well as the Idemitsu Asia Talent Cup which is the biggest platform for aspiring young riders on their journey to participate in MotoGP. Among the contenders in the championship is Hamad Al Sahouti, an emerging talent from Qatar. Hamad Al Sahouti has also made strides in previous seasons of the Asia Talent Cup as well as the European Talent Cup.

Overall in the practice sessions Jaume Masia from Leopard Racing in Moto3 and Fermín Aldeguer from Speed Up racing in Moto2 took the lead with lap times averaging to 2 minutes, 6 seconds and 1 minute and 58 seconds respectively. Fermín Aldeguer's incredible performance led him to break the record with the fastest lap time in the practice sessions. In the MotoGP category, with an unexpected outcome, Raúl Fernández from CryptoDATA RNF team finished with the fastest lap time of 1 minute and 52 seconds in the practice session.

The Fan Zone was bustling with attendees participating in numerous activities and they got the chance to engage with the riders during the meet and greet sessions. Fans were delighted by the presence of Qatar GP Junior reporters interacting with the riders and creating a lively atmosphere in the Fan Zone.

The MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix Of Qatar 2023 promises thrilling race action with the Tissot Sprint Race Saturday coming to Lusail International Circuit for the first time ever. During the next two days, spectators will watch teams in intense competition to secure the title.



Queiroz sets perfect target for Al Annabi

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

Carlos Queiroz **(pictured)** has set Qatar the target of winning all their matches following a resounding start to their Preliminary Joint Qualification – Round 2 for the FIFA World Cup 2026 and AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027 campaign on Thursday.

The reigning AFC Asian Cup champions were at their best as they cruised to an 8-1 win over Afghanistan in a Group A tie at the Khalifa International Stadium.

Queiroz, taking charge of his first official match since being appointed head coach, was pleased with his side's focus and drive.

"We will play to win all matches regardless of the other results in the group. This will be our way to achieve our target and qualify," said the highly experienced Queiroz.

Almoez Ali led the way with four goals, with Hassan Al Haydos, Mostafa Meshaal, Ahmed Alaa and Tameem Mansour all netting one each.

"Our team spirit is very high, which is a very important thing as it makes things easier at the technical side. We managed to win today but our target is to develop the team and we will now concentrate on the second match."

Qatar's journey to qualify for the FIFA World Cup Finals on merit for the first time takes them to India on Tuesday, with the South Asian side having opened their campaign with a 1-0 defeat of Kuwait.

QFA President celebrates Afif, Almoez milestones

THE PENINSULA – DOHA



Qatar strikers Almoez Ali (right) and Akram Afif holding jerseys to mark their 100th international-match milestones along with Qatar Football Association President Jassim Rashid Al Buenain and Qatar head coach Carlos Queiroz besides teammates.

Qatar Football Association President Jassim bin Rashid Al Buenain paid tribute to national team stars Akram Afif and Almoez Ali for reaching the remarkable milestone of 100 international matches with the Qatar national team.

The celebration took place right after Qatar's commanding 8-1 victory over Afghanistan, a match where the dynamic duo's brilliance was on full display, contributing significantly to the triumph.

The duo's partnership has been instrumental in Qatar's successes in recent years, notably clinching the AFC Asian Cup in 2019.

In a symbolic gesture on the pitch, Al Buenain, alongside coach Carlos Queiroz, presented the players with national team jerseys commemorating the occasion, acknowledging their commitment and dedication to Al Annabi.

Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show begins

THE PENINSULA – DOHA

The two-day Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show began yesterday under the patronage of the President of the Qatar Olympic Committee and Chairman of Al Shaqab H E Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al Thani.

Organized by Al Shaqab, a member of Qatar Foundation, at Al Shaqab indoor and outdoor arena, the inaugural day of event saw fierce competitions among participants. The equestrian spectacle brings together a total of 272 horses amid greater participation of horse owners from Qatar and beyond.

In Yearling Fillies section A (Class 1A) competitions, Shiekh Hamad bin Ali Al Thani's Farida Mudhar won the first place, followed by D Rayah, owned by Al Rajhiah Stud, in second place and Jood Al Yacoub, owned by Al Yacoub Stud in third place. Rahaf Mudhar, owned by Shiekh Hamad, claimed the first place in the Yearling Fillies Section B (Class 1B) completions, followed by Hariryah Al Nasser, owned by Al Nasser Stud, and Sabha Al Khor, owned by Al Dawasir Stud, respectively.

In Fillies 2 Years Old Section A (Class 2A), Mzoon Al Diriyah, owned by Al Diriya Stud, finished in the first place, while Sheikha Iman Mohamed bin Khalifa Al Thani-owned Sab'ah Al Shahania and Sheikh Hamad Khaled Al Sabah's Joud Al Hamad won the second third places, respectively.

Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show is classified as a B show by the European Conference of Arab Horse Organizations (ECAHO), allowing winning horses to qualify for international shows of higher classification. This show not only showcases the beauty and grace of purebred Arabian horses but also celebrates the traditional and cultural significance of owning these magnificent creatures, reflecting the deep-seated love for Arabian horses in the community.

Since its establishment in 1992, Al Shaqab's vision has been to build on Qatar's Arabian horse heritage and be a leading global center for equine professionals. Al Shaqab's facilities, which are distinctively designed in the shape of a horseshoe, cover 980,000 square meters, with a state-of-the-art Main Arena comprising both an indoor and outdoor venue capable of holding over 5,000 spectators.









Scenes during the opening day of Al Shaqab International Arabian Horse Show yesterday.

Leclerc fastest in Vegas practice after farcical opening session

AFP – LAS VEGAS

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc was fastest in the second practice at the Las Vegas Grand Prix at the end of an embarrassing first night on Thursday when the opening session was abandoned after just nine minutes because of a loose drain cover.

Leclerc was 0.517 seconds faster than his team-mate Carlos Sainz, who had been at the centre of the farcical FP1 session when his car hit the drain cover earlier.

Adding to the messy nature of the opening night of action at the new track, the second practice finished at 4am local time having started two and a half hours behind schedule and with fans being asked to leave the venue.

Sainz was forced to a stop in his Ferrari after hitting the cover, resulting in a red flag and damage to the front of his car on what should have been a triumphant return for F1 to Vegas after two races in 1981 and 1982.

Sparks flew from the bottom of Sainz's car after it hit what organisers called a "water valve cover".

After some delay organisers announced that the session would not be resumed.

The second practice session was scheduled for midnight local time but was delayed as course workers carried out urgent checks and repairs.

Adding to the public relations damage, fans at the track were left unclear about when that session would take place for over two hours before they were asked to leave by police with volunteers and staff having reached the end of their shifts.

When FP2 began, Sainz was promptly handed a ten-place grid penalty for the weekend's race for using a third energy store of the season -- one more than regulations allow. Stewards said they had no choice but to impose the mandatory sanction despite "highly unusual external circumstances".

Ferrari team principal Frederic Vasseur was clearly angry about the state of the track in a news conference after FP1.

"We damaged completely the monocoque, the engine, the battery. I think it's just unacceptable," he said. "It cost us a fortune. I think it's just unacceptable for F1 today," he added.

Esteban Ocon's Alpine also suffered damage and the team were forced to begin changing the chassis on his car.

A similar incident occurred at the 2019 Azerbaijan Grand Prix when George Russell, then racing for Williams, had his car hit by a loose manhole cover and the first practice session was cancelled.

Thursday's practice was the first time the new circuit had been raced upon.

While the Ferrari pair were out front, Aston Martin's Spanish veteran Fernando Alonso was third fastest ahead of Red Bull's Sergio Perez.

Alfa Romeo's Valtteri Bottas was fifth quickest with world champion Max Vertstappen of Red Bull sixth, 0.918 behind Leclerc.



Charles Leclerc driving during practice ahead of the F1 Grand Prix of Las Vegas. AFP



Uruguay's Ronald Araujo (right) fouls Argentina's forward Lionel Messi (left) during the match. AFP

Uruguay stun Argentina; Diaz shines as Colombia sink Brazil 2-1

AFP – MONTEVIDEO

Uruguay ended Argentina's 14-match unbeaten streak with a 2-0 victory over the world champions in World Cup qualifiers on Thursday as Luis Diaz scored twice to fire Colombia to an emotional 2-1 win over Brazil.

Defender Ronald Araujo fired Uruguay ahead on 41 minutes before Liverpool forward Darwin Nunez made the game safe with an 87th-minute goal on the counterattack to settle a hard-fought clash at the Bombonera Stadium in Buenos Aires.

It was Lionel Messi and Argentina's first defeat of the 2026 World Cup qualifying campaign, and their first loss since they were stunned 2-1 by Saudi Arabia at the 2022 finals in Qatar.

"We never felt comfortable," Messi said after the defeat.

"They're a physical team that works well and on the counterattack they were very dangerous," added Messi, praising the work of Uruguay's revered Argentine coach Marcelo Bielsa.

Argentina, who had won all four of their opening qualifiers, remain on top of the standings with 12 points from five matches. Uruguay's win leaves them in second place on 10 points.

Diaz sinks Brazil

In other South American qualifiers, Nunez's Liverpool team-mate Diaz scored two goals in five minutes as Colombia came from behind to stun Brazil 2-1 in Barranquilla. Diaz's dramatic double capped a roller-coaster month for the forward, whose father was taken hostage by Colombian guerrillas at the end of October before being released last week.

Diaz's father, Luis Manuel Diaz, was watching from the stands in tears as his son scored in the 75th and 79th minutes to fire Colombia to a crucial win.

Diaz's second-half double cancelled out Brazil's opener, which came from Arsenal forward Gabriel Martinelli after only four minutes.

A disappointing result for Brazil was compounded by an injury to Real Madrid star Vinicius Jr., who limped off clutching his left thigh after 27 minutes.

Diaz meanwhile said he had experienced "hard moments" after learning of his father's kidnapping in late October.

"But life makes you strong and brave and I think that's football, and not just football but life," said Diaz, dedicating his performance to Colombian compatriots.

Colombia moved up to third place after the win with nine points from five games.

In other games, Venezuela ground out a 0-0 draw with Ecuador while Bolivia moved off the bottom of the 10-team standings with their first points of the qualifiers after a 2-0 home win over Peru.

Chile and Paraguay remain outside the qualifying spots after a goalless draw in Santiago. Chile's Argentine coach Eduardo Berizzo resigned after a 0-0 draw that leaves 'La Roja' in eighth place, with five points from five games. The top six teams of the round-robin home-and-away qualifying tournament will earn berths at the expanded 2026 World Cup taking place in the United States, Canada and Mexico, while the seventh-placed team goes into a play-off.

Hojgaard leads by 2 shots at World Tour Championship

AP – DUBAI

Jon Rahm, Viktor Hovland and Tommy Fleetwood were among the marquee players moving into contention at the season-ending World Tour Championship yesterday.

Rory McIlroy wasn't among them. While McIlroy was, in his words, "stuck in neutral" on his way to shooting an even-par 72 in the second round, Rahm, Hovland and Fleetwood all had 66s on the Earth Course to be in a good position heading into the weekend.

Nicolai Hojgaard, a 22-year-old Dane boosted by his recent Ryder Cup experience, had a back nine of 30 containing four birdies and an eagle to shoot 66 and lead on 11-under par, two shots clear of a five-man group including Hovland and Fleetwood.

Rahm was five shots back but happy with his game, while McIlroy was languishing on 1 under for the tournament, in 34th place in a curtailed field of 50 for the last event of the European tour's 2023 season.

ATP Finals: Alcaraz sets up Djokovic last four clash with Medvedev win

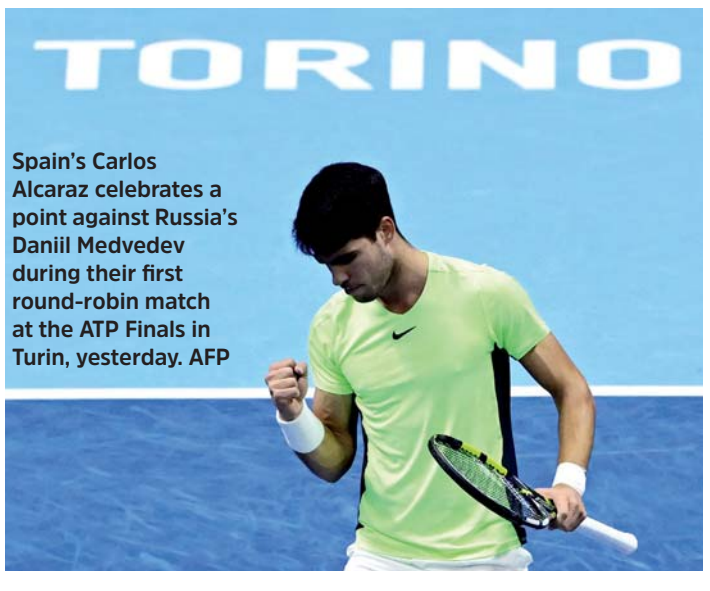
AFP – TURIN

Carlos Alacraz set up an ATP Finals last-four showdown with Novak Djokovic after beating Daniil Medvedev 6-4, 6-4 yesterday and topping the Red Group.

World number two Alcaraz needed to win to ensure a spot in the last four on his debut appearance at the season-ending tournament. And he did just that in impressive fashion, cruising to a straight-sets victory which ensured him first place ahead of Medvedev regardless of what happens in Friday night's dead-rubber between Alexander Zverev and Andrey Rublev.

"It's amazing to be able to play the semi-finals here on my first time. I played some great tennis these last two matches," said Alcaraz.

"Novak is Novak, he is the best player in the world right now, he's just lost six matches this year so that means he is unbelievable. I'm going to bring my best tennis." Alcaraz also gained a small measure of revenge for defeat in the US Open semi-finals against Medvedev, who finishes second in the group after having already qualified for the semis on Wednesday.



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz celebrates a point against Russia's Daniil Medvedev during their first round-robin match at the ATP Finals in Turin, yesterday. AFP

Alcaraz came into the Finals struggling with form and injury but has warmed up as the tournament has progressed and his semi-final with Djokovic on Saturday promises to be a blockbuster. Djokovic, who has already secured the year-end top spot in the world rankings, is gunning for a record-breaking seventh Finals triumph after qualifying second in the Green Group.

Medvedev, the 2020 Finals champion, will now face home hope Jannik Sinner, who became the first Italian ever to reach the semis on Thursday.

The Russian has faced Sinner in four finals this season, sharing them with two wins each but prevailing in the most important, at the Miami Masters back in April.