SPORT ↘11
PATRIK SCHICK SAVES CZECHS IN DRAW AGAINST DEBUTANTS GEORGIA



SPORT ↘11
SPANISH GRAND PRIX: MCLAREN'S LANDO NORRIS ON POLE AFTER 'BEST EVER LAP'



The Peninsula SPORT
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Portugal down Turkiye to book knockout stage berth

DORTMUND: Portugal swept into the last 16 of Euro 2024 yesterday after comfortably seeing off Turkiye 3-0 and guaranteeing first place in Group F.

Bernardo Silva's fine finish in the 21st minute, a comical Samet Akaydin own goal shortly afterwards and Bruno Fernandes's second-half tap-in gave Portugal a straightforward win in front of swathes of passionate Turkish fans in Dortmund.

Portugal looked every inch a team aiming to win their second European Championship after triumphing in 2016, their star-studded line-up easily dealing with Vincenzo Montella's enthusiastic but limited Turkiye team.

Cristiano Ronaldo will have at least two more tries to become the oldest goalscorer at a European Championship as Martinez said on Friday that the 39-year-old is in the right shape to play every four days.

It was Ronaldo who unselfishly set up Fernandes for a simple goal in the 56th minute after springing through Turkiye's offside trap, and he then had time to pose for a selfie with a child fan who invaded the pitch midway through the second half.

Martinez's side, on a perfect six points, will face one of the four best third-place finishers in the next round and go into their final group game against Georgia without any pressure for a result.

The same cannot be said for Turkiye who need a draw against the Czech Republic on Wednesday to ensure second place.



Portugal's Bernardo Silva prepares to shoot and score his team's first goal against Turkiye, yesterday. AFP

Turkiye's passionate support again flocked to the Westfalenstadion in huge numbers, with long tailbacks on the roads leading to the ground several hours before the 6:00 pm (1600 GMT) kick-off.

Some fans sat on the top of cars leading chants among the thousands of supporters who crawled towards their destination.

Once inside what was effectively a home crowd let out a deafening chorus of whistles and jeers when Portugal jogged out for their pre-match warm-up.

However, once the match got underway there was a clear gap in class between the two sides and Portugal went deservedly ahead through Silva as the Manchester City midfielder confidently smashed in Nuno Mendes's deflected low cross.

Soon after, Akaydin gifted Portugal a two-goal lead with his sloppy backpass which turned into an own goal as Zeki Celik and goalkeeper Altay Bayindir tried in vain to prevent the ball crossing the line.

Those two goals and the dominance of the Portuguese players quietened down the partisan crowd and the result was sealed when Fernandes stroked home his former Manchester United teammate Ronaldo's present of a pass.

The Portugal fans then turned up the volume to celebrate their country reaching the last 16.

And cheers then rang around the ground from both sets of supporters as a pint-sized fan ran onto the pitch midway through the second half, just as the game was stopped to allow Nelson Semedo to replace Joao Cancelo for Portugal.

The youngster was cool enough to grab an amused Ronaldo for a photo and then dashed off on a mazy run his hero would have been proud of, dropping his shoulder on security staff before eventually being carted away from the pitch.

Ronaldo was less amused when five much larger fans then made copycat bids for selfies, only to be showered with boos and refused a photo before annoyed stewards reached them. — *AFP*

Belgium beat Romania to breathe new life into Euro challenge

COLOGNE: Youri Tielemans breathed new life into Belgium's Euro 2024 campaign as the Aston Villa midfielder's goal after just 73 seconds inspired a vital 2-0 win against Romania yesterday.

Domenico Tedesco's side would have been on the brink of elimination if they had suffered a second successive Group E defeat.

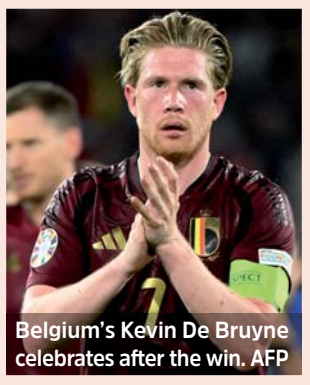
But Tielemans' second-minute strike in Cologne eased fears of yet another major tournament flop from star-studded Belgium.

Kevin De Bruyne wrapped up the points in the closing stages to leave all four teams in the group level on three points.

The stage is set for a dramatic final round of fixtures in the battle to reach the last 16.

Belgium face Ukraine and Romania play Slovakia on June 26.

With 45 rungs separating the two nations in FIFA's rankings, third-placed Belgium's 1-0 loss to Slovakia on Monday was the biggest upset in European Championship history.


Belgium's Kevin De Bruyne celebrates after the win. AFP

Romania, ranked in 47th place, competed gamely as they chased their own shock, but this time Belgium's superior class proved decisive.

Having bowed out at the group stage of the 2022 World Cup and lost in the quarter-finals of the last two Euros, Belgium's golden generation have given themselves fresh hope of finally delivering on their vast potential. Romania had powered to a 3-0 win against Ukraine yesterday - their first victory in a major tournament since beating England at Euro 2000.

Despite this loss, Edward Iordanescu's team are still in contention to make the Euro knockout stage for the first time in 24 years. — *AFP*

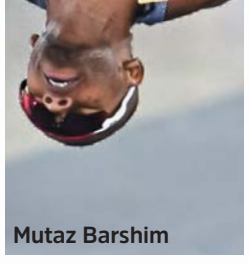
Barshim spearheads Qatar's challenge as hurdlers set to make Olympic history

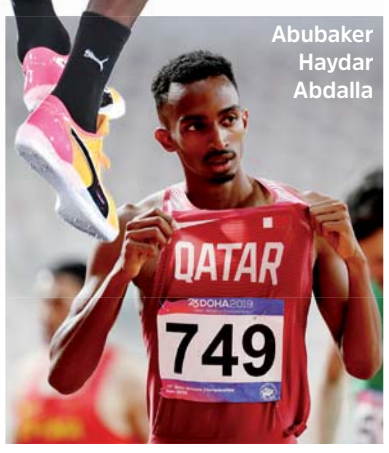
The Peninsula takes a look at Team Qatar's track and field stars who have qualified for the Paris Games

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA




QAF President Mohammed Issa Al Fadala


Mutaz Barshim



Abubaker Haydar Abdalla



Abderrahman Samba (left) retained his 400m hurdles title at the 2022 Asian Games, while Bassem Hemeida took silver. AFP



Ismail Doudai Abakar

DOHA: In his fourth appearance at the Summer Olympic Games, Mutaz Barshim, 32, will again lead Qatar's medal hopes as five Al Annabi track and field athletes are gearing up for this year's Games in Paris.

The high jump superstar – having also clinched silver in London and Rio Olympics – is aiming for his second consecutive gold after famously sharing the victory with his Italian friend and opponent Gianmarco Tamberi in the COVID-delayed Tokyo Games three years ago.

The Olympics are scheduled to be held from July 26 to Aug 11 with athletics events getting underway on August 1.

Barshim faces a strong field in his bid to retain gold but hopes are high from the three-time world champion who has often proved himself a big competition athlete.

The lanky athlete has shown improvement in every competitive contest he took part this year, leaping 2.27m to open his season in Xiamen Diamond League before raising the bar to 2.29m in Shanghai. In his last event to date, he cleared 2.31m to win the What Gravity Challenge at home last month.

"The target for me is always the Olympics. It's my fourth Olympics and it's very important to me and I want to be sure that I am ready to fight and jump high. So everything I'm doing now is according to the plan to be ready for the Olympics," Barshim had said after the Xiamen meet in April.

Apart from Barshim, a trio of Qatar athletes – Abderrahman Samba, Bassem Hemeida and Ismail Doudai Abakar – are also set to grab the spotlight in the men's 400m hurdles. The three sprinters have already made history by becoming the first Asian trio from a single nation to qualify for the event at Olympics.

Samba and Hemeida had qualified for Paris following a historic 1-2 for Qatar at the Asian Games in Hangzhou, China last October. Abakar had sealed his place in the elite list in March, clocking 48.68 secs to win the title at Continental Tour Challenger 2024 in Potchefstroom, South Africa. The mark to qualify for this year's Olympics is 48.70.

It would be a huge challenge for the trio as they would be up against the likes of Olympic and three-time world champion Karsten Warholm, Rai Benjamin and Alison Dos Santos with Samba, a World Championships Doha 2019 bronze medalist, leading the Al Annabi charge in the battle.

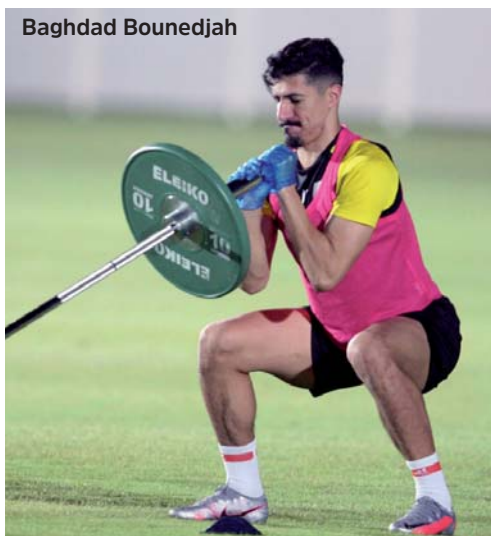
In a positive development, the 28-year-old Samba returned to action from an injury layoff earlier this month competing in the Diamond League meet in Stockholm where he clocked 49.69 secs.

Meanwhile, middle-distance runner Abubaker Haydar Abdalla – a two-time Asian champion – will also compete in Paris after he booked his spot in the men's 800m event clocking 1.44.60 secs at the Athletics Championships in Spain in April.

Qatar Athletics Federation (QAF) President Mohammed Issa Al Fadala hoped Qatar's athletes to shine at Olympics, praising the achievement of the 400m hurdlers.

"To be on the podium it's very hard, especially in the Olympic Games or the World Championships. The competition is very tough. Our first goal is that our athletes stay completely fit and healthy. They enjoy their game and after that, we see the results. But, yes, I hope we will be on the podiums," he had told reporters recently.

"We hope to see two more athletes joining these five athletes in our ranks for Olympics. I am happy with the achievement of our hurdlers as it is the first time in history that three Asian athletes are representing one country in the men's 400m hurdles at Olympics," Al Fadala added.


Baghdad Bounedjah

Al Shamal announce Bounedjah signing for two seasons

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Newly-elected Al Shamal President Ibrahim Al Sada yesterday announced the signing of Algerian striker Baghdad Bounedjah, who is set to stay in Qatar for the 10th consecutive season.

The Qatar Stars League (QSL) side has roped in the former Al Sadd player for two seasons, Al Sada said on the sidelines of the club's General Assembly.

"We are happy to have Baghdad Bounedjah in our team as we build up for the new season. We wish him the best and hope for an improved performance from the team in the forthcoming season," said the president.

The announcement brought an end to speculations over Bounedjah's future, who was earlier linked to a move to Saudi Arabia.

The 32-year-old left his longtime club Al Sadd last month after playing for them for nine seasons.

Bounedjah has been one of the most successful players in Qatar's domestic football scoring 150 goals in 157 appearances for the Wolves. He also has scored 30 international goals.

Al Shamal are aiming for a strong comeback after they finished in ninth position in the 12-team QSL.

They will set up their preseason training camp in Tiel, the Netherlands from July 14 to August 2. The 2024-2025 QSL season is scheduled to begin on August 9.

Schick saves Czechs in draw against Georgia


Czech Republic's Patrik Schick (left) celebrates with teammates Robin Hranac (centre) and Ondrej Lingr after scoring against Georgia yesterday. AFP

HAMBURG: Patrik Schick chested home to earn the Czech Republic a 1-1 draw against debutants Georgia yesterday in an entertaining match, but it leaves both teams in a tricky spot in Euro 2024 Group F.

They have a point each behind ahead of Cristiano Ronaldo's Portugal facing Turkey later on, as the top two clash having already beaten the Czechs and Georgia respectively.

Georgia coach Willy Sagnol said his players' disappointment at their opening defeat showed how far his team has come, and they gave everything in Hamburg to earn their first Euros point.

Goalkeeper Giorgi Mamardashvili made a string of superb saves to keep his team in the game and they took the lead just before the break through Georges Mikautadze's penalty.

However Schick reprised his Euro 2020 goalscoring heroics with an improvised finish to leave honours even at the end of a pulsating clash.

"Of course one-all is not enough for us -- we were better throughout the game, we had more chances, unfortunately the goalkeeper stopped everything in the first half, and then came the unfortunate penalty," Schick told Czech television.

"It didn't go our way, we were able to equalise, we pushed them but were not able to score a second... we have a point and will play for everything in the last game."

Georgia's key attacking duo Mikautadze and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia both needed medical treatment in the warm-up but were able to start the match.

They pressed with fury from the off but it was Ivan Hasek's Czech side who carved out the first clear chances and peppered the Georgia goal. Valencia stopper Mamardashvili made fine early saves to deny Adam Hlozek and then Schick on a busy afternoon.

Georgia wanted a penalty when Zuriko Davitashvili fell under pressure from Ladislav Krejci, but their appeals were waved away.

After both sides were beaten in their opening matches, they were under pressure to take three points at the Volksparkstadion in Hamburg, leading to a thoroughly entertaining end-to-end game.

In their thrilling opening defeat by Turkey Georgia's fans were outnumbered, but here they were in the majority and every time Napoli winger Kvaratskhelia got the ball in opposition territory they began to roar.

Hlozek put the ball into the back of the Georgian net after 23 minutes but the goal was disallowed after a VAR review for handball.

The striker's first effort was saved by Mamardashvili, with the rebound hitting Hlozek in the face and then his arm before crossing the line.

In first half stoppage time Czech goalkeeper Jindrich Stanek saved brilliantly from Georgia captain Guram Kashia but VAR spotted a handball in the build-up by defender Robin Hranac and the referee awarded a penalty.

Mikautadze dispatched it confidently to give his side the lead at the interval, but not before Mamardashvili brilliantly saved low from Schick.

The Czechs were back level when Euro 2020 joint top scorer Schick chested home from close range after substitute Ondrej Lingr's header from a corner bounced back off the post.

Schick's strike took him ahead of Milan Baros as their top ever Euros scorer with six goals but the Bayer Leverkusen forward limped off with an apparent calf injury midway through the second half.

Georgia had a glorious chance right at the end of the match to win the game but at the end of a three-on-one break, substitute Saba Lobjanidze blazed over with just the goalkeeper to beat.

It might have been an historic moment for the Atlanta United forward but he leant back and watched the ball sail into the agonising Georgia fans behind the goal.

Georgia players collapsed to the turf at full-time, devastated at the chance to win the game slipping through their fingers. — *AFP*

Spanish Grand Prix: McLaren's Norris on pole after 'best ever lap'

BARCELONA: McLaren's Lando Norris produced a spellbinding late lap to deprive Max Verstappen of pole for the Spanish Grand Prix in qualifying yesterday.

Lewis Hamilton will start on the second row alongside his Mercedes teammate George Russell.

Verstappen looked sure to start Sunday's 10th round of the season from the front of the grid.

But in the last throw of the top-10 shoot-out Norris denied the Red Bull ace by a mere two hundredths of a second.

"Today was the perfect lap," said Norris after only his second career pole.

"My best lap by a long way, I knew I had to do something perfect, it was probably my best lap ever."

Norris produced his minute of magic after a "stressful" day when the McLaren hospitality unit caught fire before third practice earlier.

"I lost my shoes. It's all been a bit messy. I like to listen to my music loud beforehand, but didn't have that this time. But it's not the end of the world. I'm not going to complain about it."

Turning back to a vintage qualifying session, Norris, whose only other pole came in Russia in 2021, reflected: "It's been a while since Sochi, all the way back then.


FROM LEFT: Red Bull's Max Verstappen, McLaren's Lando Norris and Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton pose after the qualification session yesterday. AFP

"Max seemed a bit stronger today, but we made some changes," added the Briton who won his maiden Grand Prix in May in Miami.

"I'm super happy to be on pole, it's going to be tough but we're here to win!"

Verstappen, targeting a fourth straight world title, leads the championship by 56 points from Charles Leclerc, who starts Sunday's race in fifth, with Norris seven points back in third.

Verstappen won his maiden Grand Prix in Barcelona in 2016 and is on a hat-trick after wins in 2022 and 2023.

"I think the whole of qualifying was better than practice for me," said Verstappen.

"It all clicked much better. The other teams are catching up, we need to bring more performance to the car."

Hamilton was happy to be towards the front of the grid.

"It's good to be back up here, great to see we are progressing.

"We are slowly climbing closer to the guys in front, it's really on a knife edge.

"I'm really happy to be in P3 with that long straight to turn one."

SPANISH GP GRID

Front row
Lando Norris (GBR/McLaren), Max Verstappen (NED/Red Bull)
2nd row
Lewis Hamilton (GBR/Mercedes), George Russell (GBR/Mercedes)
3rd row
Charles Leclerc (MON/Ferrari), Carlos Sainz (ESP/Ferrari)
4th row
Pierre Gasly (FRA/Alpine), Esteban Ocon (FRA/Alpine)
5th row
Oscar Piastri (AUS/McLaren), Fernando Alonso (ESP/Aston Martin)
6th row
*Sergio Perez (MEX/Red Bull) Valtteri Bottas (FIN/Sauber)
7th row
Nico Hulkenberg (GER/Haas), Lance Stroll (CAN/Aston Martin)
8th row
Zhou Guanyu (CHN/Sauber), Kevin Magnussen (DEN/Haas)
9th row
Yuki Tsunoda (JPN/RB), Daniel Ricciardo (AUS/RB)
10th row
Alex Albon (THA/Williams), Logan Sargeant (USA/Williams)
* Sergio Perez qualified eighth but has a three-place penalty carried over from the Canadian Grand Prix)

This is the 10th round of the 24-race season and the first of a triple header with Austria and Silverstone coming up over the next two weekends. — *AFP*


Doha Falcons led from start to finish to claim victory.

Doha Falcons secure thrilling GCL victory

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Converting their pole position to a win Doha Falcons of Julien Anquetin, Jerome Guery and Michael Pender stormed to victory in the Global Champions League (GCL).

The Paris leg of the GCL saw fierce competition and spellbinding performances, but it was Doha Falcons that led from start to finish with Jerome's horses Careca LS Elite and Great Britain V , Julien onboard Z Ice Cube Z and big gun Pender's HHS Calais being pulled in for round two.

Championship leaders Stockholm Hearts powered by H&M We Love Horses duo of Nicola and Olivier took home second place on board Katanga v/h Dingeshof and H&M Legend of Love in round 2. But hot on their heels Cannes Stars powered by Iron Dames once again stood on the podium in third with Sophie Hinners on Special Life and Katrin Eckermann delivering a double clear with Cala Mandia NRW.

In the team's first win since GCL Samorin in 2021, the Doha Falcons took their well earned spot at the top of the podium. Speaking with *GCTV*, Pender said, "There really are amazing crowds here in Paris, it was brilliant."

"The team has been a bit unlucky all year, but we have a good team and have been going well in general... just knocking on the door. We have a brilliant team bond, all the shows we have such brilliant riders, and I think that helps a lot - hopefully we can keep it going," he added.

Sinner to clash with Hurkacz in Halle final



HALLE Westfalen: World number one Jannik Sinner **(pictured)** reached his first career grass-court final when he beat Zhang Zhizhen 6-4, 7-6 (7/3) at Halle yesterday.

"It means a lot. I had four very tough matches to go to the final," Sinner said in his post-semi-final interview. "It was a good match today."

In the final the Italian, will face Pole Hubert Hurkacz who beat Alexander Zverev 7-6 (7/2), 6-4 in the pre-Wimbledon warm-up tournament.

Sinner and Zhang both dominated on serve and only allowed one break point each. Sinner converted his only break point and that was enough to take the first set.

Zhang's lone break point gave him set point at 5-6 in the second. Sinner responded by ripping a brave forehand winner and then made a fast start on his way to winning the tie-break.

"In important moments (I was) trying to serve well," the Italian said. "He returned actually really well in some moments so I had to be very careful. I had to save a set point in the second set. If not I had to go again in three sets. But this is a grass court, anything can happen."

Earlier, Hurkacz beat the second-seeded German in one-hour, 33-minutes.

The fifth-seeded Pole, winner in Halle two years ago, will bid to collect his second title of the season after winning on clay at Estoril in April.

"I'm really confident on my serve," said Hurkacz who fired 17 aces including 13 in the first set and saved all four break points he faced.

"It needed to be really good." — *AFP*

Kuldeep and Pandya lead India to 50-run win

NORTH SOUND: Leg-spinner Kuldeep Yadav took three key wickets while Hardik Pandya blasted an undefeated half-century as India moved to the brink of the T20 World Cup semi-finals with a 50-run rout of Bangladesh yesterday.

Chasing 197 for victory, Bangladesh lost three of their top five batsmen to Kuldeep who removed Tanzid Hasan (29), Towhid Hridoy (four) and Shakib Al Hasan (11).

Kuldeep finished with an impressive 3-19 from his four overs.

India now have two wins from two Super Eight games and will be guaranteed a semi-final spot if Australia defeat Afghanistan and also make the last four from Group 1.

> *Our top score was 50, and we still got 196. In T20 you don't need fifties and hundreds, what matters is the pressure you put on the bowlers. That's how we want to play.*
> ***Rohit Sharma***


India's Hardik Pandya plays a shot during match against Bangladesh. AFP

Pandya, who had made 50 when India batted, started the slide when he took the first Bangladesh wicket, tempting opener Liton Das (13) to sky a chance.

Once skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto fell to Jasprit Bumrah for a 32-ball 40, Bangladesh's hopes went with him.

Bumrah also ended Rishad Hossain's brief 24-run cameo as the veteran seamer enjoyed figures of 2-13 in four overs before the Tigers finished their 20 overs on 146-8.

"Our top score was 50, and we still got 196," said India captain Rohit Sharma after the win.

"In T20 you don't need fifties and hundreds, what matters is the pressure you put on the bowlers. That's how we want to play."

He added: "Hardik batting well, the way he did today, puts us in a very good place. We all know what he can do, and today was the perfect example of that. He's a very important player for us, with bat and ball."

Put in to bat, 2007 champions India saw five of their top six batsmen reach double-figures.

All-rounder Pandya top-scored with an undefeated 50 off just 27 balls with four boundaries and three sixes.

India had raced to 71-1 in seven overs with Sharma making a rapid 23 and Virat Kohli hitting his tournament best 37 off 28 balls with one four and three sixes.

The only blip was Suryakumar Yadav, who had made back-to-back fifties in his last two innings, scoring just six.

Those runs came off the first ball he faced before falling to Tanzim Hasan Sakib who had dismissed Kohli in the same over.

Rishabh Pant cracked 36 off 24 balls with Shivam Dube making 34 -- 18 of those runs coming from three sixes.

"I think we had a lot of batting options today, but we didn't show the intent we needed," admitted Shanto.

India beat Afghanistan by 47 runs in their Super Eight opener in Bridgetown while Bangladesh lost to Australia by 28 runs in a rain-hit clash in Antigua.

India have now won all five T20 World Cup clashes against Bangladesh and taken their overall head-to-head record to 13-1. — *AFP*