Enjoy your drive with peace of mind with QIIC
الإسلامية للتأمين
Islamic Insurance



Al Gharafa players and officials celebrate with the trophy.

Al Gharafa lift eighth Amir Cup

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The moment the final whistle blew at Khalifa International Stadium last night, Al Gharafa players dropped to their knees in jubilation – some in prostration – as coach Pedro Martins, overcome with emotion, embraced his team with tears in his eyes.

This was their moment. After a long and determined campaign, Al Gharafa ended a 13-year wait to lift the prestigious Amir Cup, edging Al Rayyan 2-1 in front of 38,149 spectators in a final that swung from one end to the other.

The match had all the ingredients of a classic, especially after the 64th-minute sending-off of Seydou Sano, which came just after Roger Guedes converted a penalty in the 50th minute to halve the lead established by early goals from Ferjani Sassi (4th) and Joselu (18th).

Al Gharafa held firm despite the numerical disadvantage to secure their eighth Amir Cup title – their first since 2012 – and cap a solid season that also saw them finish third in the Qatar Stars League.

Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani presented the coveted trophy to captain Sassi and Yacine Brahimi, as the celebrations unfolded under the lights of the iconic stadium.

"It's impossible to describe the feeling of winning this title. These are historic moments for the club and for us as players. After so many years, bringing the Amir Cup back to Al Gharafa is truly special. It means a lot to everyone involved with the team," Sassi said.

"We fully deserved this win. It was a tough season, full of competition, but we showed quality and character. Winning the Amir Cup again is a great way to close the season. This trophy is for our fans, who have waited a long time for this moment."

Brahimi said, "We're very happy to win this precious trophy. It's the result of a team effort. Without a doubt, winning the Amir Cup is a dream for any player.

"I'm proud to have achieved it with this group, especially in front of our amazing fans in such a special final atmosphere."

Coach Martins added, "It was a tough match, as we expected. We started strong, imposed our style, and created good chances. That two-goal lead was deserved and gave us control early on. The players executed our plan well, and that first half laid the foundation for what became a memorable win."

"Going down to ten men in a final is never easy. It made the game much harder, but the players responded with great discipline and spirit. We stayed compact, fought for every ball, and showed real heart. The most important thing is we held on and took the title," he said.

Martins had said before kickoff that Al Gharafa team had "the level to win the Amir Cup" and his players delivered just that.


Ferjani Sassi scores Al Gharafa's opening goal. PICTURES: MOHAMMED FARAG / THE PENINSULA

> *We're very happy to win this precious trophy. It's the result of a team effort. Without a doubt, winning the Amir Cup is a dream for any player.*
> ***Yacine Brahimi***

The game opened with high tempo. Trezeguet tested the waters early for Al Rayyan with an angled effort from distance that veered wide.

Then came the breakthrough. Brahimi's quick thinking on a free kick caught Al Rayyan off guard, leading to a clever pass from Ahmed Al Ganehi to Sassi, who made no mistake firing into the roof of the net from close range.

Brahimi nearly doubled the lead himself after a brilliant solo run, beating three defenders before firing just wide of the right post. But the second goal wasn't far.

Amro Surag's shot from the right was deflected, but Joselu reacted sharply at the far post, heading home from a tight angle after reading the spin of the ball perfectly.

> *It's impossible to describe the feeling of winning this title. These are historic moments for the club and for us as players. After so many years, bringing the Amir Cup back to Al Gharafa is truly special. It means a lot to everyone involved with the team.*
> ***Ferjani Sassi***

Al Rayyan created some moments, notably when Andre Amaro rose highest to meet a corner but saw his header bounce off the far post. Despite enjoying more possession, they failed to convert it into meaningful chances, with turnovers in key areas hampering their momentum.

Goalkeeper Khalifa Ababacar was largely untested until late in the first half, when he made a solid stop from Hazem Shehata's drive from outside the box.

After the restart, the match took a sharp turn. Ababacar clipped Amaro while rushing out to clear a long ball, earning a yellow card and handing Al Rayyan a penalty.

Guedes, quiet in the first half, stepped up and struck into the left corner, reducing the deficit despite Ababacar getting a touch on the ball.

Rodrigo nearly restored the two-goal cushion moments later, connecting with a long pass and blasting a powerful shot that smashed against the right post. Surag then had another go, but fired wide.

Al Rayyan's urgency increased. Guedes made a searing run down the left and squared to Shehata, who blazed over from a prime position. In the 60th minute, Rodrigo was forced off through injury, replaced by Mohammed Muntari.

The pace remained relentless. Sami Beldi denied Brahimi's curler, and Joselu's header on the rebound was saved on the line by the Al Rayyan goalkeeper.

Sano received a straight red card for a challenge on Guedes near midfield – a decision that drew strong protest from the Al Gharafa bench.

Veteran Rodrigo Tabata entered to loud applause and nearly created the equaliser with a pinpoint set piece, which saw captain Julien De Sart's effort graze the side netting.

Hazem came closest again with seven minutes remaining, striking the post following a corner. Al Rayyan continued to pile on the pressure, but Al Gharafa's back line held its shape and nerve.

The depleted side withstood Al Rayyan's relentless pressure during the stoppage time to end their Amir Cup drought.


Joselu celebrates with teammate Jamal Hamed after the victory.

AMIR CUP FINALS

2025: AL GHARAFA BEAT AL RAYYAN 2-1
2024: Al Sadd beat Qatar SC 1-0 (aet)
2023: Al Arabi beat Al Sadd 3-0
2022: Al Duhail beat Al Gharafa 5-1
2021: Al Sadd drew with Al Rayyan 1-1 (aet, 5-4 pens)
2020: Al Sadd beat Al Arabi 2-1
2019: Al Duhail beat Al Sadd 4-1
2018: Al Duhail beat Al Rayyan 2-1
2017: Al Sadd beat Al Rayyan 2-1
2016: Lekhwiya drew with Al Sadd 2-2 (4-2 pens)
2015: Al Sadd beat El Jaish 2-1
2014: Al Sadd beat Al Sailiya 3-0
2013: Al Rayyan beat Al Sadd 2-1
2012: Al Gharafa drew with Al Sadd 0-0 (5-4 pens)
2011: Al Rayyan beat Al Gharafa 2-1
2010: Al Rayyan beat Umm Salal 1-0
2009: Al Gharafa beat Al Rayyan 2-1
2008: Umm-Salal drew with Al Gharafa 2-2 (4-1 pens)
2006: Al Sadd drew with Al Khor 0-0 (5-4 pens)
2005: Al Rayyan drew with Al Gharafa 1-1 (5-3 pens)
2004: Al Sadd drew with Al Wakrah 0-0 (5-4 pens)
2003: Al Rayyan beat Qatar SC 3-2
2002: Al Sadd beat Al Ahli 2-1
2001: Al Ittihad beat Al Sadd 4-1
2000: Al Sadd beat Qatar SC 3-2

AMIR CUP CHAMPIONS

Al Sadd - 19 titles
Al Arabi - 9
Al Gharrafa - 8 (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

AL GHARAFA'S PATH TO 8TH TITLE

Round of 16
Beat Al Khor 2-1
Quarter-final
Beat Al Sadd 2-2 (5-4)
Semi-final
Beat Umm Salal 4-2
Final
Beat Al Rayyan 2-1

Doha set for FIFA Arab Cup and U-17 World Cup draws

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The draws for the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025 and the FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2025 are set to take place in Doha today.

Approximately 550 guests are expected to attend the event at Raffles Hotel which will kick off at 20:00 local time.

Proceedings will commence with the Draw for the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025, involving a total of 23 teams from the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) and Confederation of African Football (CAF).

The 14 lowest-ranked teams in the FIFA Men's World Ranking published on April 3 will participate in the Qualification Stage, which will see seven pre-determined winner-takes-all ties take place from November 25 to 26.

The winners of these matches will progress to the Final Stage, where they will join the nine highest-ranked teams that have qualified for the phase directly, including hosts Qatar and reigning champions Algeria. These 16 teams will be drawn into four groups, from A to D.

The draw, which will be conducted by FIFA Director of Tournaments Jaime Yarza, is to be hosted by Qatari TV presenter Mohammed Saadon Al Kuwari. Yarza will be assisted by several former and current greats from the Arab game, with Qatar's Hassan Al Haydos, Algeria's Rabah Madjer, Saudi Arabia's Yasser Al Qahtani, and Egypt's Wael Gomaa to act as draw assistants.



Proceedings will commence with the draw for the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025.

FIFA U-17 WORLD CUP QATAR 2025 TEAMS

Argentina, Austria, Belgium, Bolivia, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Czechia, Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, El Salvador, England, Fiji, France, Germany, Haiti, Honduras, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Korea DPR, Korea Republic, Mali, Mexico, Morocco, New Caledonia, New Zealand, Panama, Paraguay, Portugal, Qatar (hosts), Republic of Ireland, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, South Africa, Switzerland, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, USA, Uzbekistan, Venezuela and Zambia.

FIFA ARAB CUP QATAR 2025 TEAMS

Algeria, Bahrain, Comoros, Djibouti, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar (hosts), Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tunisia, Syria, United Arab Emirates and Yemen.

The 16 national teams involved in the Final Stage will vie for a place in the Final which will be contested on Qatar National Day (December 18) and will bring the curtain down on the second successive edition of the competition to be held in the country.

Next up will be the Draw for the FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2025, which will determine the group-stage matches and subsequent pathways for the expanded 48-team tournament.

The teams will be placed into four pots containing 12 teams each, according to their position in the FIFA ranking system, which is based on their performance in the last five editions of the tournament. The teams will then be drawn into 12 groups, from A to L.

FIFA Head of Youth Tournaments Roberto Grassi will conduct the draw and will be assisted by Abdulaziz Al Sulaiti, who lined up for Qatar at the 2005 instalment of the FIFA U-17 World Cup, and Julian Draxler, who lifted the 2014 FIFA World Cup with Germany.

This year's ground breaking edition of the tournament kicks off on November 3, with the state-of-the-art Aspire Zone complex to be its beating heart.

The centralised hub of football history will foster a festival atmosphere over the 25-day competition, creating an inspiring environment for the teams to excel and a family-friendly experience for fans to enjoy, serving up a unique blend of fun activities, global flavours and world-class football.

All of the participating teams will harbour ambitions of turning out at Khalifa International Stadium on 27 November, when one of the jewels of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 will provide a stunning backdrop to the final and the stage on which the U-17 World Champions will be crowned.

The draw follows last week's launch of the Official Emblem, with a series of further tournament milestones set to be reached in the coming weeks and months.

The registration process for the Qatar 2025 FIFA Volunteer Programme, which encompasses both tournaments, will be launched at an event to be held in Doha on Tuesday.

Qatar announces six venues for Arab Cup



DOHA: CEO of the Football Tournaments Organising Committee Jassim Abdulaziz Al Jassim **(pictured)** yesterday announced that the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025 will take place across the six World Cup stadiums of Lusail, Al Bayt, Khalifa International, Ahmad Bin Ali, 974, and Education City.

During a media roundtable discussion, Al Jassim revealed that the tournament's opening match is scheduled for December 1, 2025, at Al Bayt Stadium, while Lusail Stadium will host the final on December 18, 2025.

Expectations for high-quality competition and strong fan engagement are high, as participating Arab teams are expected to field their best players, benefiting from the timing of the tournament, which aligns with mid-season breaks in various domestic leagues.

The December 18 final will not conflict with the African teams participating in the Africa Cup of Nations in Morocco, which starts three days later.

According to Al Jassim, discussions were held with Morocco's Football Federation to coordinate scheduling, adding that selection of six stadiums that hosted matches during the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 reflects the anticipated strong fan turnout, ensuring the smallest venue can accommodate at least 40,000 spectators.

The record-breaking attendance at the AFC Asian Cup 2023, 1.5 million fans, further supports this decision.

The organising committee is finalising a major promotional campaign, with discussions about a potential Arab tour for the tournament trophy in November 2025.

Al Jassim described the Arab Cup as a significant regional gathering, expected to recreate the vibrant atmosphere of the 2022 World Cup and the 2023 Asian Cup, particularly with Qatar's mild weather in November and December, allowing fans to enjoy various accompanying events.

Additionally, talks with FIFA are ongoing regarding the scheduling of the next FIFA Arab Cup in Qatar, planned for 2029.

Al Jassim also touched on the FIFA U-17 World Cup, which Qatar will host from November 3 to 27, 2025, confirming that Aspire Academy stadiums will hold the matches, with the final set to take place at Khalifa International Stadium. — ***QNA***

Haidan and Haya shine at Al Shaqab League

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Hussain Saeed Haidan clinched his second successive Al Shaqab Champions (130cm) CSI1* class title with a commanding performance in the penultimate round of the Al Shaqab National Show-jumping League, which concluded yesterday at the Longines Indoor Arena at Al Shaqab.

Hussain stole the spotlight aboard D Saucedo, delivering a flawless round in 48.73 seconds to top the leaderboard and claim the lion's share of the QR70,000 prize pool, taking home QR17,500.

Finishing second was Bader Alfard on Pepper Van 'T Winnenhof, who also posted a clear round and clocked 50.79 seconds. Mohammed Saeed Haidan rounded out the podium with a solid ride on Viahipi d'Auzay in 51.03 seconds.

Meanwhile, Haya Khalid Al-Hitmi delivered a composed and confident performance to win the Junior Champions 115cm class. Riding the 12-year-old KWPN mare Hustique, al-Hitmi produced two faultless rounds, clocking 29.25 seconds in the first and 30.45 seconds in the second to top the class and take home QR8,750.


Hussain Saeed Haidan celebrates aboard D Saucedo after his victory.


Haya Khalid Al-Hitmi, riding the 12-year-old KWPN mare Hustique, won the Junior Champions 115cm class.

Hot on her heels was Abdulla Khalid Al-Julandani, who also went double clear on Irschi. He finished second with times of 28.96 and 30.63 seconds, earning QR 7,000. In third place was Ibrahim Khalid Al Kuwari on Flexy Bel Z, as the pair posted clear rounds in 29.34 and 31.38 seconds, securing QR5,250 for their effort. In the team competition, Al Adeed claimed the top podium place followed by the Kahil Team and Gazal Team.

Abdulaziz Hamad Al-Kaabi emerged victorious in the Amateur Class (90cm). Partnering the experienced mare Vahine de Curaine, Al-Kaabi clocked 28.80 and 21.70 seconds to emerge victorious. Mohammed Faisal Al-Marri and Dusty also posted a double clear rounds in 28.20 and 21.74 seconds to finish second. Yousuf Abdulrahman Al-Muftah rounded off the top three aboard Kroaat Van Orchid in 27.26 and 21.83 seconds.

The Introductory 60cm class was won by Mansour Salem Al-Naemi, ahead of Rita Jabbour and Ahmad Fahad Al-Thani. Rounding out top six were Salha Khalid Al-Obaidli, Khalid Saoud Al-Khater and Nawar Talal Al-Otaibi.


Real Madrid's coach Carlo Ancelotti (left) and Real Madrid's Luka Modric wave to fans at the end of the match yesterday.

Alex Marquez beats brother Marc in British MotoGP sprint

SILVERSTONE: Alex Marquez took the family bragging rights over older brother Marc in the British MotoGP sprint race at Silverstone yesterday.

Fabio Di Giannantonio (Duvati-VR46) took third at the seventh race weekend of the 2025 season with Marco Bezzecchi (Aprilia) in fourth.

Alex Marquez, on a Ducati satellite Gresini bike, finally topped the podium after finishing second in all six previous Saturday sprints.

It moved the Spaniard to within 19 points of Marc Marquez ahead of Sunday's main event.

"We did everything in the best possible way, even if the start wasn't the best," said the winner of the 10-lap dash who set off from second on the grid.

Marquez senior, who qualified in fourth and led the sprint early on, said: "I took risks on the first lap because from the second row on the grid, it was the right thing to do".

"Then I made a mistake (on the second lap) which played into the hands of Alex," added the six-time elite class champion.

Former two-time world champion Francesco Bagnaia (sixth on Saturday), the Ducati factory teammate of Marc Marquez, is placed third in the standings, 56 points off the lead. France's Fabio Quartararo, who had earlier taken his third successive pole with a new Silverstone lap record, had to settle for seventh on his Yamaha. His compatriot, Johann Zarco, came in fifth after his Le Mans heroics when he became the first home rider to win the French MotoGP since 1954 a fortnight ago. — ***AFP***



BK8 Gresini Racing MotoGP team's Spanish MotoGP rider Alex Marquez (left) leads Ducati Lenovoi Team's Spanish MotoGP rider Marc Marquez during the sprint race.

BRITISH MOTOGP SPRINT RESULT (Top 10)

1. Alex Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 19min 53.657sec, 2. Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati) at 3.511sec, 3. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 5.072, 4. Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Aprilia) 5.658, 5. Johann Zarco (FRA/Honda-LCR) 6.707, 6. Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati) 7.057, 7. Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) 7.231, 8. Pedro Acosta (ESP/KTM) 9.186, 9. Jack Miller (AUS/Yamaha-Pramac) 9.923,10. Luca Marini (ITA/Honda) 10.206

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP STANDINGS (Top 10)

1. Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati) 180 pts, 2. Alex Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 161, 3. Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati) 124, 4. Franco Morbidelli (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 85, 5. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 81, 6. Johann Zarco (FRA/Honda-LCR) 77, 7. Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) 59, 8. Fermin Aldeguer (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 48, 9. Pedro Acosta (ESP/KTM) 48, 10. Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Aprilia) 44

Mbappe double as Real Madrid wave goodbye to Ancelotti and Modric

MADRID: Kylian Mbappe virtually wrapped up the European Golden Shoe award with a brace as Real Madrid beat Real Sociedad 2-0 yesterday, on an emotional home farewell to Carlo Ancelotti and Luka Modric.

The Italian is leaving to coach the Brazilian national team, drawing a curtain on his second spell at the club where he won a 15 trophies during a total of six years in charge.

Croatian midfielder Modric will play at the Club World Cup for Madrid but this was his final game at the Santiago Bernabeu. He was given a guard of honour when replaced late on.

Madrid fans displayed banners showing their affection for Modric and Ancelotti and sang both names on an emotional afternoon for Los Blancos.

It was a profitable one too for Mbappe, who scored twice to take the lead in the Golden Shoe standings from Sporting Lisbon's Viktor Gyokeres.

Madrid finish the season second in La Liga, behind champions Barcelona, who also beat them in the Copa del Rey and Spanish Super Cup finals. — ***AFP***

Calderano makes history, faces Chuqin in final at Worlds

CHINTHANA WASALA
THE PENINSULA



Liang Jingkun and Hugo Calderano put on a captivating show in Doha. PIC: ITTF

DOHA: Brazil's Hugo Calderano set up a blockbuster ITTF World Table Tennis Championships Finals gold medal clash with World No.2 Wang Chuqin of China in Doha yesterday.

After overcoming China's Liang Jingkun 4-3 (15-13, 11-7, 8-11, 11-8, 3-11, 7-11, 11-9) in a thrilling semi-final at the Lusail Multipurpose Hall, Calderano secured his maiden appearance in the men's singles title-clash.

The world No. 4 also became the first Latin American to play in a singles title clash in the event's 98-year history.

"Liang is a fighter," Calderano said after the game which took one hour and 15 minutes to finish.

"I played at my best from the beginning to the end. Of course he is strong, he can react [fast], he gets better every year. Somehow, in the last set I was losing, but I knew I would win. I scored 10 consecutive points. When he scored the first point after that, the magic ended. But I managed to hold on," Calderano said in a TV interview.

Calderano's opponent Chuqin advanced after taking sweet revenge for his Paris 2024 defeat to Sweden's Truls Moregardh.

Despite suffering an early setback, the Chinese two-time Olympic gold medallist and eight-time world champion roared to seal a 4-1 (5-11, 11-8, 11-2, 12-10, 12-10) win in 45 minutes.

"I didn't find my rhythm until the second set," Chuqin said.

"Moregard did very well and pressured me throughout the game," Chuqin, who later teamed up with compatriot Sun Yingsha to win his eighth World title, said.

Moregard admitted he could not cope with the level of the Chinese superstar despite winning the opening game.

"I think he played quite passive in the first set. He was not there mentally, and I took advantage of it," Moregard said.

"He just raised this level to a very high one and I couldn't keep up with it. So in the end, he was just a better player."



China's Wang Chuqin (left) and Sun Yingsha pose with their trophies after winning the mixed doubles title. XINHUA

Chuqin, Yingsha strike mixed gold

Meanwhile, Chuqin and Yingsha beat Japan's Maharu Yoshimura and Satsuki Odo 3-1 (11-7, 11-8, 7-11, 11-8) in the mixed doubles final to own the first piece of silverware at Doha 2025.

"Our rivals posed a great threat with cohesion and tactics even if they are both right-handed," Yingsha said after lifting her third consecutive mixed doubles World title with Chuqin.

"We trusted each other when the scores were close. We shared the same determination to make it three in a row," Yingsha, who is now an eight-time world champion, said.

Yingsha reached her second final after defeating Japan's Mima Ito 4-0 (11-7, 11-5, 11-9, 11-4) in yesterday's semi-final.

"I had perfect execution of strategy for this game," Yingsha, who will take on Wang Manyu in an all-Chinese final today.

Manyu, seeded second, defeated compatriot and 3rd seed Chen Xhingtong in straight games 11-8, 11-8, 11-2, 11-8 in 36 minutes.

Manyu also marched into the women's doubles final, partnering with Kuai Man.

They brushed aside Japan's Miwa Harimoto and Miyuu Kihara 11-8, 11-6, 11-5 to book a meeting with Austria's Sofia Polcanova and Romanian partner Bernadette Szocs. Polcanova and Szocs 3-2 (11-5, 8-11, 11-8, 9-11, 9-11, 11-9) as the Doha 2025 set for one more day filled with blockbuster encounters.

Norris shrugs off gremlins with record lap for Monaco pole

MONACO: Lando Norris shrugged off his gremlins and revived his world championship bid yesterday when he became the fastest driver in the history of the Monaco Grand Prix to claim pole position for today's classic race.

Driving with impeccable judgement, pace and purpose, the 25-year-old Briton clocked a best lap in one minute and 9.954 seconds to outpace local hero and last year's winner Charles Leclerc of Ferrari by 0.109.

It was the first time any driver had lapped the sinuous barrier-lined Mediterranean street circuit in less than 70 seconds and came only seconds after Leclerc had appeared to have secured his fourth Monaco pole position.

For Norris it was his first Monaco pole, his second this year and the 11th of his career - and a critical advantage for the slowest and shortest circuit of the season where only 10 drivers have won from lower than third on the grid since 1950.

While a disappointed Leclerc lamented traffic that hampered his first flying run, affecting his overall rhythm, Norris was buoyant after ending a dismal run in qualifying and falling 13 points behind McLaren team-mate Oscar Piastri in the drivers' title race.

"The team has done a fantastic job so thank you to everyone here and back at the factory," he said. "These days don't come easy and I am proud to give something back to them.

"It's been a long time coming. I feel good and I don't think you realise how good this feels with quite a few struggles over the last couple of months, especially here in Monaco. It's a beautiful place and the hardest track probably to do it.

"Up against the home-town hero (Leclerc), I'm very proud of the whole team so I am pleased after all the hard work in the last few months."

Norris's McLaren team-mate and championship leader Oscar Piastri was third ahead of seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton in the second Ferrari, four-time champion Max Verstappen of Red Bull and remarkable rookie Isack Hadjar of RB.

Norris agreed that his mentality had been a key part of his success after admitting to self-doubts in recent weeks.

FORMULA ONE: MONACO GRAND PRIX GRID

Front row: Lando Norris (GBR/McLaren), Charles Leclerc (MON/Ferrari)
2nd row: Oscar Piastri (AUS/McLaren), Max Verstappen (NED/Red Bull)
3rd row: Isack Hadjar (FRA/RB), Fernando Alonso (ESP/Aston Martin)
4th row: Lewis Hamilton (GBR/Ferrari), Esteban Ocon (FRA/Haas)
5th row: Liam Lawson (NZL/RB), Alex Albon (THA/Williams)
6th row: Carlos Sainz (ESP/Williams), Yuki Tsunoda (JPN/Red Bull)
7th row: Nico Hulkenberg (GER/Sauber), George Russell (GBR/Mercedes)
8th row: Kimi Antonelli (ITA/Mercedes), Gabriel Bortoleto (BRA/Sauber)
9th row: Pierre Gasly (FRA/Alpine), Franco Colapinto (ARG/Alpine)
10th row: Lance Stroll (CAN/Aston Martin), Oliver Bearman (GBR/Haas)

"Honestly, that's the tricky part and to consistently find a lap time because you know it's what the others are going to be doing and improving more and more.

"You've got to take a similar amount of risks, but when you get to Q3, the final lap is just about who can risk a little bit more and commit a little bit more.

"It was a nice and well put together lap and it feels very good when you cross the line and you know it's all paid off."

He said he had not considered the mandatory two pit-stops strategy required today.

"Honestly, at the minute, I have no idea. I'm going to enjoy today and I've worked hard for today. I'm happy with qualifying and I'm going to live the moment a little bit and then I will focus on tomorrow."

Team-mate Piastri, who leads him by 13 points after seven of this year's 24 races, admitted he had endured a messy two days of practice and qualifying.

"I think I've hit more walls this weekend than I have in my whole career so it's been untidy. I've been struggling to get into the groove a little bit and I think in qualifying I was much happier with things and I felt pretty good.

"We've been doing some digging this weekend and to come out with this result is a decent effort." — *AFP*



Pole sitter McLaren's Lando Norris (right) is presented with the Pirelli Pole Position Award from Lee Jung-jae yesterday.



PSG's Marquinhos raises the trophy as he celebrates with teammates after winning French Cup final yesterday.

PSG beat Reims to win French Cup

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain warmed up for their Champions League final showdown with Inter Milan by winning the French Cup yesterday as Bradley Barcola scored twice in a comfortable 3-0 win against Reims.

Barcola netted two goals in the space of four minutes early on to quickly extinguish whatever hopes Reims had of causing an upset at the Stade de France, and Achraf Hakimi added another goal before half-time.

It was exactly the kind of smooth preparation coach Luis Enrique would have been hoping for ahead of the season-defining game against Inter in Munich next weekend, when PSG will be hoping to win the Champions League for the first time.

However, one minor issue to come out of the evening was the late withdrawal from the team of Khvicha Kvaratskhelia.

The Georgian winger was replaced in the starting line-up by Desire Doue and returned home early due to a headache, according to a source close to the team.

PSG's victory, watched by a crowd of over 77,000 at the national stadium, allowed them to complete a clean sweep of the domestic honours for the second time in as many seasons since Luis Enrique became coach in 2023.

They added the French Cup to the Ligue 1 title as well as the Champions Trophy, France's equivalent of a Super Cup.

PSG have now won the French Cup a record 16 times, including eight times in the last decade. The next most successful club in the history of the competition are Marseille, who won the last of their 10 titles in 1989.

Reims were appearing in their first French Cup final since 1977 and were looking to win the trophy for the third time, with their last success coming during their glory days in the 1950s.

They held PSG to draws twice during the league campaign but any prospect of them winning this time probably ended a week ago.

That was when they slumped into the relegation play-off place on the final night of the Ligue 1 campaign, forcing them into a two-legged tie against second-tier Metz which they must win to remain in the top flight next season.

The first leg of that tie ended in a 1-1 draw on Wednesday, and Reims must now prepare for the decisive return match at home next Thursday.

PSG wasted little time in putting their struggling opponents to the sword as Barcola's quickfire brace effectively decided the final before the midway point in the first half.

Doue's through-ball sent Barcola in behind to open the scoring in the 16th minute, and Doue then latched onto a Marquinhos pass before squaring for Barcola to tap in and make it 2-0 on 19 minutes.

The double took Barcola to 21 goals for the season in all competitions, a tally bettered only in the PSG squad by Ousmane Dembele with 33.

They had chances to score again in this one-sided contest before Hakimi made it 3-0 two minutes prior to the interval, arriving at the back post to cushion in a Barcola cross, finishing off a great move.

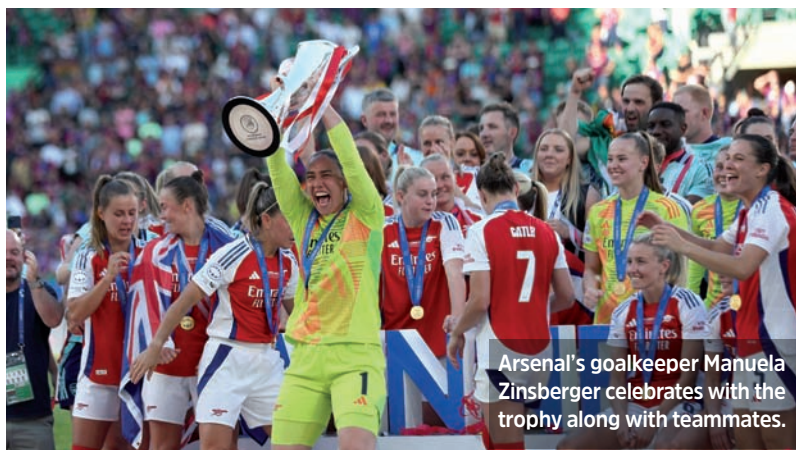
That was the end of the scoring as Luis Enrique -- who gave Matfey Safonov a start in goal ahead of Gianluigi Donnarumma -- took the chance to ring the changes after the break.

However, Barcola was only a denied a hat-trick by a good save from Reims goalkeeper Yehvann Diouf, who also turned a Dembele cross-cum-shot onto the post. — *AFP*

Arsenal win women's Champions League

LISBON: Arsenal produced a shock 1-0 victory over Barcelona to win the women's Champions League yesterday in Lisbon, with Stina Blackstenius' goal earning the Gunners their second European crown against the odds.

The Swedish striker's drilled effort in the 74th minute allowed Renee Slegers' team to dethrone a feted Barcelona side who had won the trophy three times in the previous four seasons. Arsenal, back in the final for the first time since lifting the trophy in 2007, outplayed Barca in the first half and staved them off in the second, before Blackstenius struck on the counter-attack. — *AFP*



Arsenal's goalkeeper Manuela Zinsberger celebrates with the trophy along with teammates.