
The connections of Sahlan celebrate their triumph.

Al Shaqab Racing's Sahlan bags Gr.3 Prix Daphnis win

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Sahlan, a talented 3-year-old colt, returned to winning ways in style when taking the Gr.3 Prix Daphnis – Samuel Liberman over 1600m at Deauville on Sunday.

The race, for 3-year-olds only, brought together a competitive field of 12 runners.

Trained by Francis-Henri Graffard, ridden by Mickaël Barzalona, and owned and bred by Al Shaqab Racing, the homebred had previously shown his class when beaten just a nose by a smart rival in the Gr.3 Prix de Fontainebleau on his seasonal return.

While things didn't go his way in his next two outings, Sahlan bounced back here to secure a deserved first Group victory.

Restrained towards the rear from the start, Sahlan settled in ninth alongside Tito Mo Cen (Uncle Mo), a long way behind the front-runner and race favourite Scoville, who was setting a strong pace.

As the field bunched up entering the final bend, the leader kicked clear with Madero in pursuit, while Sahlan was still improving gradually, looking for a gap on the outside. Once in the clear, he quickened smartly, storming past his rivals to take the lead inside the final 100 metres, ultimately winning by a length and a half from Ciaran, with Silius (Dubawi) taking third.


Jockey Juan J. Hernandez guides Wathnan Racing's Heredia to victory.

Heredia clinches Yellow Ribbon Handicap crown

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Heredia, the classy six-year-old mare, lit up Del Mar with a brilliant front-running victory in the Gr.2 Yellow Ribbon Handicap over 1700m on Sunday.

Trained in the USA by H. Graham Motion, owned by Wathnan Racing, and guided to glory by Juan J. Hernandez, she proved too strong for her rivals in a field of eight fillies and mares.

A talented performer in the UK when trained by Richard Hannon, Heredia had already won at Gr.3 and Listed level — but this time, she stepped up to claim her first American Group 2 success.

Breaking sharply from the gates, Heredia quickly took the lead, with Liguria (War Front) close behind. The mare set a confident pace while a couple of rivals, including Watchtower (Demarchelier) and Musical Rhapsody (Holy Roman Emperor), were left trailing at the rear.

Heading into the final bend, Mission Of Joy (Kitten's Joy) tried to put pressure on her, but Heredia had plenty left.

She quickened smoothly, pulling clear in the home stretch and crossing the line two and a quarter lengths ahead. Public Assembly (More Than Ready) finished strongly for second, with Watchtower coming from far back to take third.

Liverpool spend big to hold off Arsenal, Man City in title fight


Liverpool coach Arne Slot returns the ball during the Community Shield match against Crystal Palace.

LIVERPOOL: Liverpool have splashed out to defend their Premier League title as champions but face stiff competition from an Arsenal side desperate to shake off their tag as nearly men and a rejuvenated Manchester City.

After storming to a record-equalling 20th English top-flight title in Arne Slot's first season in charge, Liverpool have looked to build from a position of strength during a summer marked by tragedy.

Portuguese forward Diogo Jota was killed in a car accident alongside his brother last month, plunging the club into mourning.

Tributes to Jota will continue throughout the season with "Forever 20" -- his shirt number, which the club have now retired -- printed on Liverpool's jerseys.

The Reds have already spent £260m ($350m) on Florian Wirtz, Hugo Ekitike, Milos Kerkez and Jeremie Frimpong.

However, after the departures of Luis Diaz and Darwin Nunez, they are not yet done in strengthening their forward line and are expected to launch a fresh bid for Alexander Isak, with Newcastle demanding a British transfer record fee for the Swedish striker.

Liverpool's rivals will hope Wirtz and Ekitike take time to adapt to the rigours of the Premier League after shining in Germany's Bundesliga, while there are defensive doubts for Slot's men to answer.

The Reds have already spent £260m ($350m) on Florian Wirtz, Hugo Ekitike, Milos Kerkez and Jeremie Frimpong.

The Dutch coach said his side need to defend better after leaky performances in pre-season were followed by defeat in the Community Shield to Crystal Palace on Sunday after twice blowing the lead.

Can Gyokeres fire?

After finishing second for the past three seasons, Arsenal are longing for their first title in 22 years and have backed Mikel Arteta with another near £200 million investment in the transfer market.

Spanish international Martin Zubimendi will be the new anchor of the midfield, while the signings of Christian Norgaard, Cristhian Mosquera, Noni Madueke and Kepa Arrizabalaga add depth to the squad.

But Arsenal's season is likely to be defined by whether Viktor Gyokeres proves to be the answer to their need for a prolific striker.

The Swede struck 97 times in 102 games during two years at Sporting Lisbon, but the 27-year-old failed to make a breakthrough in the Premier League during his previous experience in England.

After coming up short at Brighton, Gyokeres scored 41 goals in 121 games in England's second tier with Coventry and Swansea.

"He's a player that, when you leave him with the space one against one, he's going to destroy you," said Arteta of his new striker.

City were dethroned last season after an unprecedented run of four consecutive titles as the wheels came off for Pep Guardiola's men without Ballon d'Or winner Rodri.

The Spaniard has been ruled out till September due to a setback in his return from a serious knee injury, but City have refreshed their squad with the additions of Rayan Ait-Nouri, Tijjani Reijnders and Rayan Cherki.

After a first trophyless season since 2016/17, City expect to be back in the fight for the title.

World champions Chelsea

Chelsea were the last side other than City and Liverpool to lift the title back in 2017 and showed they are a coming force once more by winning the Club World Cup in the US last month.

The Blues finished fourth, 15 points behind Liverpool last season, but their transfer policy of investing heavily in scores of young prospects is beginning to bear fruit.

Joao Pedro made an instant impact with three goals in three games at the Club World Cup after a £55 million move from Brighton and could solve Chelsea's need for a world class goalscorer.

Manchester United have transformed their forward line with the signings of Benjamin Sesko, Matheus Cunha and Bryan Mbeumo after finishing 15th last season.

Beating United in the Europa League final was not enough for Ange Postecoglou to keep his job as Tottenham manager and former Brentford boss Thomas Frank has taken over in north London. — ***AFP***

Palace lose appeal against Europa League demotion

PARIS: Crystal Palace's appeal over their demotion from the Europa League to the UEFA Conference League was rejected yesterday by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS).

The London club, who won last season's FA Cup, fell foul of UEFA's rules governing multi-club ownership.

European football's governing body determined that as of March 1, American businessman John Textor had control or influence in Palace and French club Lyon.

It means under UEFA rules they are unable to compete in the same European competition and Lyon held on to the Europa League spot by virtue of their higher league position.

Palace appealed to CAS last month after Textor agreed to sell his 43 percent stake in the Premier League club to New York Jets owner Woody Johnson.

However, that deal was struck well after UEFA's deadline of March 1 for multi-club conflicts to be resolved.

"After considering the evidence, the Panel found that John Textor, founder of Eagle Football Holdings, had shares in CPFC and OL and was a Board member with decisive influence over both clubs at the time of UEFA's assessment date," CAS said in a statement.

"The Panel considered that the UEFA Regulations are clear and do not provide flexibility to clubs that are non-compliant on the assessment date, as CPFC claimed."

Palace, who beat Liverpool on penalties to win the Community Shield after a 2-2 draw at Wembley on Sunday, will enter the UEFA Conference League in the play-off round later this month. — ***AFP***



Atletico Madrid sign Raspadori from Napoli

MADRID: Atletico Madrid have signed Italy forward Giacomo Raspadori **(pictured)** from Serie A champions Napoli on a five-year contract, the La Liga club announced yesterday.

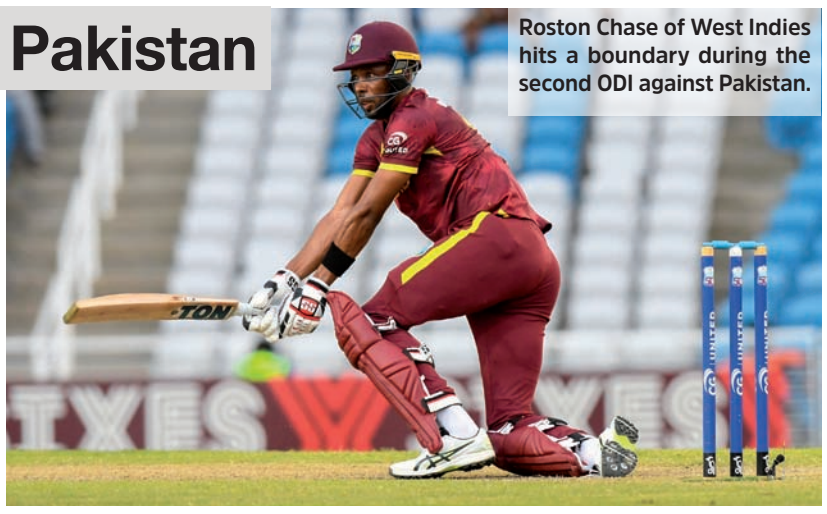
Raspadori, who also won the Scudetto with Napoli in 2023, has joined for 20m euros ($23.2m), according to Spanish media reports.

The 25-year-old scored six goals for Napoli last term in his third season with the club after signing from Sassuolo in 2022.

Atletico, who finished third in La Liga last season, have made several signings this summer as they bid to launch a title challenge.

Raspadori was part of Italy's Euro 2020-winning squad and has scored nine goals in 40 appearances for the national team. — ***AFP***

West Indies level ODI series with Pakistan


Roston Chase of West Indies hits a boundary during the second ODI against Pakistan.

TAROUBA, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO: The West Indies beat Pakistan by five wickets on Sunday as Roston Chase and Justin Greaves led the charge with the bat to level the one-day series between the sides.

Chase had 49 runs and Greaves was not out for 26 with a thrilling selection of fours and sixes in a game shortened by rain delays in Tarouba.

Earlier, West Indies' poor start was steadied by Sherfane Rutherford's 33-ball 45 to put the home side back in the driving seat.

Chase sealed the deal by steering a delivery from Hasan Ali through cover for four and he punched the air in celebration.

"I'm happy with the win. We had to come in and level the series, so very pleased," Chase, who was named man of the match, said.

The decisive third match of the series takes place at the same venue today.

Brief Scores: West Indies 184 for 5 (Chase 49*, Rutherford 45, Hope 32, Mohammad Nawaz 2-17, Hasan Ali 2-35) beat Pakistan 171 for 7 (Hasan Nawaz 36*, Talat 31, Seales 3-23) by five wickets (DLS method) . — ***AFP***

Rose tops Spaun in playoff to claim PGA St. Jude title


Justin Rose of England poses with the trophy.

WASHINGTON: Justin Rose reeled off four straight back-nine birdies to force a playoff then birdied the third hole of sudden death to beat J.J. Spaun for the St. Jude Championship on Sunday as Tommy Fleetwood endured more PGA Tour agony.

England's Rose, the 2013 US Open champion, had six birdies over his last eight holes including the playoff -- climbing up the congested leaderboard with birdies at 14, 15, 16 and 17 in regulation.

His final-round 67 pulled him level with reigning US Open champion Spaun on 16-under par 264 at TPC Southwind -- where overnight leader Fleetwood had a two-shot lead with three holes remaining but faltered with a bogey at 17 in a one-under 69 that left him tied for third with Scottie Scheffler on 15-under 265.

Spaun carded a five-under 65 in the final round, posting back-to-back birdies at 16 and 17 -- where he rolled in a 20-foot putt -- to put himself in the playoff.

"That was an amazing last 90 minutes, really," said Rose, the 45-year-old who finished runner-up to Rory McIlroy in a playoff at the Masters in April.

"Played unbelievable golf coming down the stretch."

Rose claimed his 12th US tour title, and his first since Pebble Beach in 2023.

Rose started the day one shot off the lead and was two-over for the day through nine holes.

His challenge seemed stalled after he followed a birdie at the 10th with a bogey at 12, but a 15-foot birdie at the 14th launched his comeback.

He drained a 10-foot birdie at 15, got up and down from a greenside bunker for birdie at 16 and curled in a 22-foot birdie putt at 17.

His 13-footer for the outright win at the 72nd hole just missed and he and Spaun returned to 18 for the playoff.

Both two-putted for par -- Rose after a tee shot that nearly found the water. They posted matching birdies the next time around -- Spaun drilling a 30-foot putt and Rose making his seven-footer.

They returned to 18 again, this time with a new hole location, and after Rose rattled in his 11-footer, Spaun sent his seven-foot birdie attempt past the cup. — ***AFP***

PGA TOUR ST. JUDE CLASSIC SCORES

264 - Justin Rose (ENG) 64-66-67-67, J.J. Spaun 68-66-65-65
265 - Scottie Scheffler 67-66-65-67, Tommy Fleetwood (ENG) 63-64-69-69
269 - Cameron Young 69-65-71-64
270 - Akshay Bhatia 62-69-70-69, Rickie Fowler 66-69-66-69, Andrew Novak 68-64-67-71
271 - Ludvig Åberg (SWE) 67-67-70-67, Kurt Kitayama 69-63-72-67, Patrick Cantlay 70-67-66-68, Chris Kirk 68-67-66-70, Ben Griffin 66-69-66-70
272 - Jhonattan Vegas (VEN) 69-69-66-68, Kim Si-woo (KOR) 65-69-69-69, Bud Cauley 64-69-70-69



Al Duhail eye AFC Champions League Elite berth in Sepahan SC showdown

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Al Duhail kick off their new season tonight aiming to secure a coveted AFC Champions League Elite berth as they face Iran's Sepahan in a high-stakes preliminary round match at Khalifa International Stadium.

China's Chengdu Rongcheng and Bangkok United of Thailand will also be in action, with the winners of both matches set to join 22 already-qualified teams in the League Stage draw, scheduled for Friday in Kuala Lumpur.

Al Duhail earned their place in the preliminary round after finishing runners-up in the Qatar Stars League behind champions Al Sadd.

Ahead of the new season, the team has undergone a major overhaul. Algerian coach Djamel Belmadi has returned to replace Frenchman Christophe Galtier, and the Red Knights have bolstered their squad with several high-profile signings.

New additions include Cameroonian defender Jean-Charles Castelletto, Italian midfielder Marco Verratti from Al Arabi, Algerian prospect Adil Boulbina and Polish striker Krzysztof Piatek. The team completed their pre-season training camp in the Netherlands, with Belmadi expressing full confidence in his squad's readiness.

"The match is a special challenge, but we have sufficient experience and confidence in our abilities to achieve victory and qualify for the league stage," Belmadi said at yesterday's pre-match press conference.



Al Duhail coach Djamel Belmadi (left) and Sepahan coach Moharram Navidikia speak to the media.

> *We've had strong preparations and are looking forward to winning. It would also give us a boost heading into the new season. Sepahan is a serious team, and we have studied them technically to identify their strengths.*
> ***Djamel Belmadi***
> ***Al Duhail coach***


Al Duhail players during a training session at Khalifa International Stadium on the eve of their match against Sepahan.

"We've had strong preparations and are looking forward to winning. It would also give us a boost heading into the new season. Sepahan is a serious team, and we have studied them technically to identify their strengths."

Midfielder Karim Boudiaf echoed his coach's confidence.

"We are ready for the match, having undergone three weeks of intensive preparations," he said.

"We are on the right track under coach Belmadi, and we are fully aligned with his approach. We aim to win this decisive match, and we have great experience in the Asian Championship."

Both Al Duhail and Sepahan missed out on the last edition of the revamped continental competition. Al Duhail reached the semi-finals in 2022, while Sepahan – aiming for their 15th appearance – were runners-up in the 2007 edition.

Sepahan coach Moharram Navidikia expressed belief in his team's capabilities.

"The match against Al Duhail looks very difficult, but we are confident in our ability to achieve victory. It is one of the most important matches we will play this season," said Navidikia.

"Al Duhail is a good team and has made many changes, but I have great confidence in my players. I am certain they will give their best until the last moment."

Sepahan's Ehsan Hajsafi added: "We have analysed Al Duhail's strengths and weaknesses and are looking forward to using that to our advantage and scoring goals. Our team is in good condition, and our training sessions have been excellent. We are fully prepared, mentally and physically, for tomorrow's match and hope to make our fans proud."

The match is set to kick off at 7pm.

Al Rayyan drawn in Group B of Gulf Club Champions League

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Al Rayyan SC, Qatar's representative in the second edition of the Gulf Club Champions League, have been drawn in Group B, following the official draw held via video conference at the headquarters of the Arabian Gulf Cup Federation in Doha yesterday.

Al Rayyan will face stern competition in Group B, which also features Saudi Arabia's A Shabab, Al Nahda from Oman, and Tadamun of Yemen.

The group promises high-level encounters as clubs from across the region gear up for the regional showpiece.

Group A comprises Zakho of Iraq, Al Ain of the United Arab Emirates, Sitra of Bahrain, and Kuwait's Al Qadisiya.

The tournament is scheduled to run from September 16, 2025, to April 14, 2026, with the top two teams from each group advancing to the semi-final stage.

This second edition of the Gulf Club Champions League comes amid rising interest and regional enthusiasm, following the organisational and technical success of the inaugural edition.

With higher expectations this time around, the tournament is seen as a key step in establishing itself as one of the Gulf region's premier club competitions.

Al Rayyan, with a rich history and strong domestic performance, will be aiming to assert its dominance on the regional stage and secure a deep run in the tournament.

GROUPS

Group A: Zakho (Iraq), Al Ain (UAE), Sitra (Bahrain), Al Qadisiya (Kuwait)

Group B: Al Rayyan (Qatar), Al Shabab (Saudi Arabia), Al Nahda (Oman), Tadamun (Yemen)

RB Mary Lylah shines at Liwa International Stakes

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: RB Mary Lylah secured her first top-level victory in the Gr.1 (PA) Liwa International Stakes – Wathba Stallions, run over 2000m at La Teste yesterday.

The contest, for mares aged four and above, was reduced to just five runners following the late withdrawals of Hajmah and Geneva.

Trained by Alban de Mieulle, ridden by Olivier d'Andigne, and owned by Wathnan Racing, the 5-year-old mare had been below her best on her last two starts in Dubai and Qatar.

However, her record is outstanding: winner of three Gr.2 (PA) races, one Gr.3 (PA), and two Listed contests in America between 1200m and 1700m at three and four years old, followed by two wins in Qatar over 1750m and 2100m.

This victory marks her 11th career success, and now, her first Gr.1 (PA) title.



The connections of RB Mary Lylah pose with their trophies.

Soon settled in rear, RB Mary Lylah travelled in fourth alongside Bianca De Ghazal racing a touch keenly behind the slow pace set by the favourite, Nour Al Maury.

With positions unchanged entering the final turn, the tempo lifted and she was still last of all, but travelling strongly.

Switched to the outside at the 500m mark, she began to close in steadily as the favourite battled for the lead with Norma Al Maury.

Inside the final 200m, Norma Al Maury edged ahead, but RB Mary Lylah was finishing powerfully on the outside, reeling her in to take the lead in the final 75m and win by a quarter of a length. Norma Al Maury was a gallant second, with Bianca De Ghazal staying on for third.

Bred by Diane Waldron (USA), RB Mary Lylah is out of Rich Kinkga (TH Richie), a triple winner in the United States including the Gr.3 (PA) Arabian Stallion Stakes and twice runner-up in the Gr.2 CRE Run Oaks Arabian Distaff Stakes.

She is a half sister to RB Kindle, an eight-time winner in the USA including the Gr.3 (PA) Delaware Park Arabian Juvenile Filly Championship and runner-up in the Gr.1 (PA) Buzz Braunginger Arabian Distaff Handicap, and to RB Kinetic (Baseq Al Khalediah), a dual Gr.3 (PA) winner in the USA.


RB Mary Lylah (front) with Olivier d'Andigne in the saddle race to the finish line.

Barca-Villarreal La Liga match moved to Miami

MADRID: The La Liga match between Villarreal and Barcelona in December was moved to Miami by the Spanish football federation (RFEF) yesterday, pending approval from UEFA and FIFA.

While the Spanish Super Cup has been played abroad, notably in Saudi Arabia, it would be a first for a game in one of Europe's leading domestic leagues.

The RFEF said that it would forward the request to the governing bodies of European and world football to stage the game at Miami's Hard Rock Stadium on Saturday, December 20, in the last round before La Liga's winter break. — ***AFP***

Alcaraz battles as Shelton, Zverev race into third round

CINCINNATI: Carlos Alcaraz fought through a second-set slump to post a "rollercoaster" 6-1, 2-6, 6-3 victory over Damir Dzumhur in his opening match Sunday at the ATP-WTA Cincinnati Open.

The Spaniard, playing his first tournament since losing to Jannik Sinner in the Wimbledon final, raced through the first set but completely lost his way in the second, dropping his serve twice against the 33-year-old Bosnian.

Alcaraz regained his intensity and cut down his errors in the third as a seventh ace took him to a match point that was converted when Dzumhur fired wide.

"It was just a rollercoaster," said the second seed, who was winning his 12th straight match at the Masters 1000 level after taking the titles in Monte Carlo and Rome.


Carlos Alcaraz returns a shot to Damir Dzumhur.

"Lots of good feelings, bad feelings, back to the good ones. I am happy to get the win at the end. I know that I have chances to do better."

Alcaraz committed 44 unforced errors and said conditions in Cincinnati, where he was runner-up in 2023, were always tricky.

Third seed Alexander Zverev found things more straightforward, winning 6-3, 6-3 against US wild card Nishesh Basavareddy in the night session. Zverev needed just 66 minutes to get past Basavareddy, a 20-year-old ranked 109th in the world.

The German put 41 of his 50 first serves in play and didn't face a break point. Basavareddy saved one match point with a blistering service return but Zverev secured the win with his 12th ace.

American Ben Shelton, coming off his first Masters 1000 title in Toronto, eased through 6-3, 3-1 when Camilo Ugo Carabelli retired with a knee injury.

Shelton's early night was a boon after a draining Toronto tournament which only ended on Thursday night.

Sixth seed Alex de Minaur of Australia, the Washington champion, lost to American Reilly Opelka 7-6 (8/6), 6-4.

But another Australian, Adam Walton, secured a first top-50 win of his career with a 6-7 (0/7), 6-4, 6-1 upset of former world number one and 2019 Cincy champion Daniil Medvedev of Russia.

In the women's draw, French Open champion Coco Gauff battled through a tough first set to beat China's Wang Xinyu 6-3, 6-2.

Third seed Jessica Pegula, runner-up last year to Aryna Sabalenka, defeated Kimberly Birrell 6-4, 6-3.

Seventh seed Jasmine Paolini, finalist last season at Roland Garros and Wimbledon, also advanced, beating Maria Sakkari of Greece 7-6 (7/2), 7-6 (7/5). — ***AFP***