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Qatar will bounce back in next matches, says goalkeeper Abunada



THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Goalkeeper Mahmoud Abunada **(pictured)** remained composed and optimistic despite Qatar's dramatic 1-0 defeat to Palestine in their FIFA Arab Cup opener on Monday, insisting the team will respond strongly in the coming matches.

The loss came in the most painful way possible – a stoppage-time own goal – after Qatar had controlled much of the Group A clash.

"We lost the match on very small details," Abunada said after the defeat.

"We have two matches left, and we'll take what happened today as a lesson. What matters is that we stay positive."

Qatar had dominated possession at Al Bayt Stadium, pushing Palestine deep with waves of attacks. Ahmed Fathy fired an early warning, Mohammad Al Mannai tested Rami Hamada from distance, and Akram Afif constantly created pockets of space.

The introduction of Edmilson Junior after the break added further spark, with his pressing and deliveries nearly unlocking the Palestinian defence.

Mohammed Muntari came close with a towering header, only to be denied by a superb Hamada save.

But despite the pressure, Palestine held firm. Their resilience was rewarded deep into stoppage time when a late corner led to a dramatic twist – Sultan Al Brake's attempted clearance spun into his own net, leaving Abunada helpless and Qatar stunned.

"Everyone was upset, but the solution is to work harder and improve. InshaAllah, we will perform better in the next matches," Abunada added.

Only then did he turn his message to the supporters, who filled the stands.

"I thank every fan who came. We need you with us in every match. InshaAllah we will make you happy and go far."

From the bench, fellow goalkeeper Meshaal Barsham watched the tense battle unfold.

"It was a difficult match with many injuries and a lot of pressure," he said.

"Palestine are organised and fought until the last moment. But we are capable, and Insha Allah, we will qualify [for quarter-finals]."

Barsham also pointed to the squad's depth. "We have solutions in every match. We have players who can change things. The pressure affected us today, but we have what it takes."

His outlook was clear: "Next we face Syria, and InshaAllah we will win. Then we'll beat Tunisia and qualify."

Qatar will meet Syria tomorrow at Khalifa International Stadium.



Al Dawsari's double assist powers Saudi Arabia in thriller against Oman



Salem Al-Dawsari was named Player of the Match. PIC: X/@SaudiNT

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Saudi Arabia fended off Oman 2-1 in a thrilling Group B clash to kick off their FIFA Arab Cup campaign with a victory at Education City Stadium yesterday.

It was a high-octane match from start to finish, with both teams creating plenty of action. Feras Albrikan gave Herve Renard's Saudi Arabia the lead in the 55th minute after a goalless but absorbing first half.

Ghanim Alhabashi equalised for Carlos Queiroz's Oman in the 70th minute, before substitute Saleh Al-Shehri scored the winner for the Green Falcons seven minutes later.

Captain Salem Al-Dawsari, who was phenomenal throughout, provided the assist for both Saudi goals.

"We achieved the win by imposing clear superiority. We created chances, threatened constantly, and deserved the result," Al-Dawsari said.

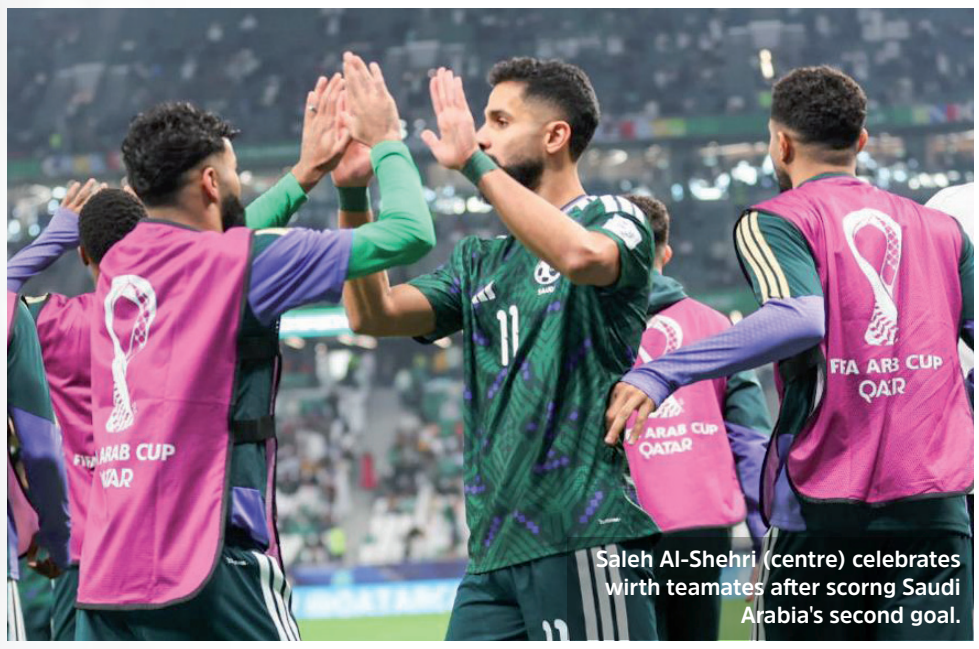
"This victory will be an important motivation for us in the rest of the tournament, and missing easy goals doesn't bother me."

Coach Renard said Saudi Arabia will continue to fight with the same spirit.

"We faced a tough and experienced team, and we succeeded in achieving victory thanks to our experience. We will continue our journey until we win the title," he said.

The game began at a fast pace, with Al-Dawsari heading wide from a looping cross from the right as Saudi Arabia looked to make early inroads. Oman's first attempt came shortly after the 15th minute, when Ali Al-Busaidi's angled strike from a set-piece on the right narrowly missed the target.

Saudi Arabia continued to press, but Oman's defense remained resolute. Oman also enjoyed some good possession spells in the fast-paced first half, yet Saudi Arabia largely controlled the tempo.



Saleh Al-Shehri (centre) celebrates wirth teamates after scorng Saudi Arabia's second goal.

Mohammed Kanno's shot from outside the box was stopped by Oman goalkeeper Ibrahim Al-Mukhaini with a diving effort just after the half-hour mark. Al-Mukhaini then denied Saleh Abu Alshamat from close range, keeping the score level.

Oman responded with Nasser Alrawahi's powerful long-range effort, which Saudi goalkeeper Nawaf Alaqidi saved, and Issam Alsabhi's follow-up goal was ruled offside as an absorbing first half ended in a stalemate.

Al-Busaidi's curling strike from the right threatened to find the net early in the second half, but Alaqidi rose well to palm it away.

Saudi Arabia then quickly responded, with Saleh Abu Alshamat unleashing a powerful long-range shot that went over the bar. Aiman Yahya also tried his luck with an angled effort from Al-Dawsari's assist, but it sailed high.

Al-Dawsari finally helped his side break the deadlock. The Asian Player of the Year delivered a perfect cross to Albrikan, who rose to head the ball into the right corner from close range.

Oman fought relentlessly, while Saudi Arabia relied on quick counter-attacks. Alaqidi punched away Ahad Almashaikhi's free kick, but Oman eventually equalised from a corner, with Thani Alrushaidi heading the delivery to Alhabashi, who calmly slotted home the leveller.

Al-Dawsari continued to threaten, hitting wide at one point, but he also played a key role in Saudi Arabia regaining the lead. Picking up a long ball, he found Al-Shehri, who scored from a precise cross to put his side ahead again.

Al-Dawsari nearly scored himself when his shot struck the right post, and he later failed to beat Oman's goalkeeper in a one-on-one chance. Nevertheless, Saudi Arabia held on to secure full points from a thrilling encounter.

Saudi Arabia will next face Comoros on Friday, while Oman meet Morocco on the same day.

RESULTS
Morocco 3-1 Comoros
Saudi Arabia 2-1 Oman
Egypt 1-1 Kuwait

TODAY
Jordan v UAE
Al Bayt Stadium (20:00)
Algeria v Sudan
Ahmad bin Ali Stadium (15:00)
Iraq v Bahrain
Stadium 974 (17:30)

TOMORROW
Palestine v Tunisia
Lusail Stadium (17:30)
Syria v Qatar
Khalifa International Stadium (20:00)

Magdy's late penalty earns Egypt draw with Kuwait

CHINTHANA WASALA
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Egypt salvaged a point after holding Kuwait to a 1-1 draw in their FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025 Group C match at the Lusail Stadium yesterday.

Mohammad Daham scored the opener for Kuwait and Egypt missed a penalty before Mohamed Magdy converted a late spot kick.

The result keeps both teams in the hunt for a knockout place in the group which also includes Jordan and the UAE.

Egypt pushed hard from the kickoff, with Kuwait goalkeeper Suod Al Houshan being forced to work hard.

Ghanam Mohamed's attempt from a sharp strike from distance was saved in the top centre in the opening minute, while Mohamed Elneny was denied three minutes later. Yassin Marei and Ragab Nabil then sent headed attempts over the bar as Egypt controlled possession and territory within six minutes.

Kuwait also threatened in the 29th minute, with Mohammad Daham's precise free-kick which was deflected by Yousef Nasser.

Egypt soon earned a penalty when Abdulwahab Alawadhi brought down Islam Issa in the 36th minute, but Amr ElSoleya's spot kick went wide. Al Houshan then denied Egypt again in the 45th minute when he pushed away Elneny's effort.

Egypt maintained pressure after the break. Mohamed Sherif of Egypt missed another opportunity in the 59th minute before Kuwait's Nasser Faleh's attempt flew wide.

Kuwait finally struck in the 64th minute.

Mohammad Daham swung in a corner kick and Fahed Al Hajri rose high to head the ball into the top right corner, giving the Blues lead.

Kuwait nearly extended the lead in the 81st minute through Daham who was set up by substitute Eid Al Rashidi, before it was saved by Egypt custodian Mojamed Bassam.

Two minutes later, Al Houshan received a second yellow card for fouling Marwan Hamdy, and Egypt made the best out of the opportunity. Mohamed Afsha sent substitute keeper Sulaiman Abdulghafour the wrong way to level in the 83rd minute.

Egypt pressed for a winner in the closing minutes, but Kuwait held firm to secure a point from a demanding contest to snatch a point in front of 24,632 spectators at the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 final venue.

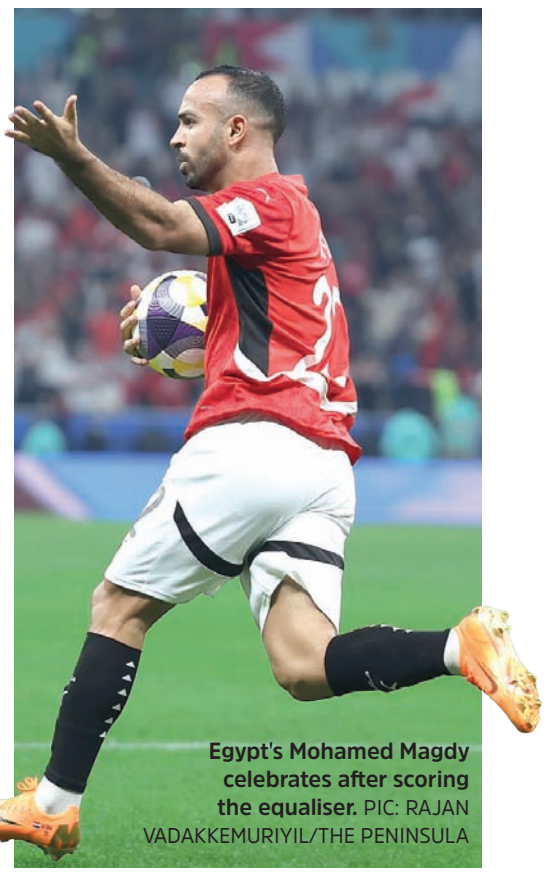
Despite the draw, Abdulghafour was happy with the point earned.

"Thank God. We took a point. Our ambition was to win. It was clear that the players stayed focused for the full ninety minutes. But small details decided it at the end with the penalty," Abdulghafour said in a post match interview.

"We were playing against Egypt, one of the best Arab teams and a top African side. Everyone knows the strength of the Egyptian national team. I do not care if it is their first team or second team. Their players are at a high level. Many play in Africa and Europe. We know them well, but we still came into the match aiming for victory," Abdulghafour said.

"We played a very good match with strong organisation. Egypt did not create many real chances, even though they were the better team in terms of numbers and statistics," Abdulghafour said.

Kuwait meet Jordan on Saturday in their second group clash, while Egypt face the UAE on the same day.



Egypt's Mohamed Magdy celebrates after scoring the equaliser. PIC: RAJAN VADAKKEMURIYIL/THE PENINSULA

Morocco outclass Comoros to make winning start


Morocco's Karim El Berkaoui celebrates after scoring his team's third goal.

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Title-contenders Morocco showcased a fiery first-half performance to beat qualifiers Comoros 3-1 in Group B at Khalifa International Stadium, kicking off the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025 on a strong note.

Morocco sealed the match in the first half, with Soufiane Bouftini giving them the lead in the fifth minute, followed by goals from Tarik Tissoudali (11th minute) and Karim El Berkaoui (45+4 minutes).

Bouftini rose to meet a cross with a powerful header, while a deflected strike from Tissoudali had debutants Comoros reeling. A diving header from El Berkaoui in first-half stoppage time extended Morocco's advantage.

As Comoros showed in their play-off win against Yemen, they are never fully out of a match. The tournament debutants pulled one back through a Mohamed Boulacsout own goal in the 56th minute, but that was as close as they came.

Morocco also had a late penalty appeal turned down after a VAR review, yet they made an impressive start to their Arab Cup campaign.

"A win is extremely important in opening matches, and the game against Comoros was not easy. I thank the players for their strong performance," Morocco coach Tarik Sektioui said.

"Comoros wanted to come back in the second half, while we tried to keep a clean sheet and rely on counter-attacks to score more goals. We had scoring opportunities, and the referee denied us a clear penalty kick."


Morocco players celebrate a goal yesterday.

The Atlas Lions will now meet Oman on Friday at Education City Stadium.

Comoros coach Hamada Jambay hopes for an improved performance when his team returns to action the same day against Saudi Arabia at Al Bayt Stadium.

"We made a number of mistakes against Morocco and conceded three early goals, making it difficult for us to come back in the match," he said after the defeat.



It is an honour for Egypt to play in Arab Cup: Hassan

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: With the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025 underway, Egyptian national team player Mahmoud 'Trézéguet' Hassan **(pictured)** is proud of Qatar's leading role in bringing recognition to the region in the world of sports.

"The world witnessed Qatar's exceptional hosting capabilities during the World Cup in 2022. It was a historic achievement not just for the country, but for the region. Now with the Arab Cup, all eyes are on Qatar once again, as Arab football takes centre stage," said Egypt's prolific striker, whose goal scoring style earned him the nickname 'Trézéguet', after former French footballer David Trézéguet.

Egypt has been placed in Group C in the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025, alongside Jordan, UAE and Kuwait. The Pharaohs will look to improve on their last showing, when they finished fourth, after narrowly losing to hosts Qatar in a penalty shootout at the FIFA Arab Cup held in 2021.

"The Arab Cup is an incredible tournament. It is an honour for Egypt to play in this prestigious competition. Every match is an opportunity for the team to showcase its strength, and I am sure they are ready to give it their all and make our fans proud," said Hassan, who also plays as a midfielder for Egyptian powerhouse, Al Ahly. His prolific club careeralso included playing for top European clubs, such as the English Premier League side Aston Villa, and Qatar's Al-Rayyan SC.

Hassan marked his debut with the Egyptian national team in 2014, helping the team reach the African Cup final in 2017 and 2023. Most recently, he made a notable impact in the 2026 World Cup qualification campaign, scoring five goals and helping Egypt secure a spot at the prestigious tournament.

"There is no greater feeling than wearing the national team jersey, with-millions of Egyptian fans cheering for you. Playing for Egypt is an honour. I look forward to every match as though it is my first," said Hassan, who has made 86 appearances for his national team, scoring a total of 22 goals to date.

"Playing in Qatar is a wonderful experience for any player. They will be playing on World Cup stadiums, which makes this tournament all the more special."

Bougherra wary of 'surprises' as Algeria open Arab Cup title defence against Sudan

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Four years after Algeria famously lifted the FIFA Arab Cup, coach Madjid Bougherra is back in Qatar leading the Desert Foxes as they begin their title defence.

Algeria defeated Tunisia 2-0 in extra time of a tense final, and now they will open their campaign for a second consecutive crown against Sudan in an all-African Group D clash at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium.

"I'm very happy to return to Doha for the Arab Cup, four years after winning the last edition here. We're fully prepared to compete in the best possible way," Bougherra told a pre-match press conference.

Placed 35th in the FIFA rankings, Algeria - despite missing several stars in Qatar - are still a force to be reckoned with, boasting the likes of Yacine Brahimi, Adil Boulbina and forward Islam Slimani.

Up against the 2026 World Cup-bound side in their opener are 118th-ranked Sudan, but Bougherra is not taking them lightly.

"We saw Palestine and Syria win, so surprises can happen," he said, referring to the identical 1-0 victories over pre-tournament favourites Qatar and Tunisia respectively on the opening day.

"In tournaments like this, every team is a contender. That doesn't pressure us - we are ready and the players must stay focused. We know Sudan well; we faced them in the last African Nations Championship. The difficult situation in their country gives them extra motivation to fight for their people."


Algeria players prepare for match against Sudan.

Forward Boulbina, familiar with Qatar pitches from his time with Al Duhail, agreed with the coach.

"We're entering the tournament with full intensity. There are no big or small teams here," he said.

"Facing Sudan will be tough. Everyone wants to beat us as defending champions, but we're ready and well-prepared."

Sudan will enter the match brimming with confidence after a 2-1 comeback victory over Lebanon - despite being down in the 24th minute - in the qualifiers in Doha last week.

Sudan coach Kwesi Appiah said his team is looking forward to a strong performance in the tournament.

"The Arab Cup is very important for our team and for the Sudanese people. We must take this opportunity and deliver strong performances," he said yesterday.

"We want a strong start against Algeria, whom we respect. We're not here just to participate; we aim to go as far as possible and make our people proud."


Algeria coach Madjid Bougherra

Sudan midfielder Ammar Taifour also expressed confidence in a strong display. "We're happy to be in Qatar for the Arab Cup, and we believe we can compete and get results," he said.

"We're excited for the tournament. Whoever the opponent is, we'll try to beat them, and we aim to win the title to bring joy to our people."

Iraq, Bahrain set to clash at Stadium 974

Later in Group D, Iraq will take on Bahrain at Stadium 974 eyeing a winning start in the tournament.

Iraq recently defeated the UAE to advance to the FIFA World Cup Play-off Tournament, with coach Graham Arnold hoping to use the Arab Cup as valuable preparation.

"We want to use the Arab Cup to prepare as strongly as possible for the World Cup play-off in March. We're determined to give our best before the qualifier, and I'm confident the players will perform well and make the Iraqi fans in Qatar proud," said Arnold.

Bahrain sealed their group stage berth after defeating Djibouti 1-0 in the qualifiers.

Coach Dragan Talajic hopes his team can continue their winning run.

"We're ready and excited to face Iraq, and we'll give our best for Bahrain. We respect Iraq they have developed and I hope they qualify for the World Cup finals," said the coach.

Upbeat Jordan ready to take on UAE in Group C

CHINTHANA WASALA
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Jordan head coach Jamal Sellami said his players are ready for a strong start when they face the UAE in their FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025 Group C opener at Al Bayt Stadium today.

Jordan will enter today's fixture with high ambitions after securing a ticket to the World Cup, while the UAE will look to make amends after being eliminated from the 2026 World Cup qualifiers.

Sellami said the squad arrived in Doha in high spirits after their historic qualification for the FIFA World Cup 2026.

"We arrived in Doha with great ambition. We are prepared and the morale is high after qualifying for the World Cup," the Jordan coach said at the pre-match press conference.

He stressed that Jordan will stick to a step-by-step approach. "We deal with one match at a time. Our focus now is on the first match against the UAE who showed strong form in the World Cup playoff," Sellami said.


Jordan players take part in a training session.

> *We arrived in Doha with great ambition. We are prepared and the morale is high after qualifying for the World Cup.*
> ***Jamal Sellami***
> ***Jordan head coach***

Jordan will be without six key players for various reasons. Despite those absences, Sellami backed his squad to deliver.

"Even with six key players missing, I have full confidence in the rest of the squad to perform at a high level," he said.

On the opposite bench, UAE coach Cosmin Olaroiu predicted a difficult contest against a team he described as one of Asia's rising forces.

"Facing Jordan will not be easy. They are a developed team which has been producing strong performances and notable results," Olaroiu said.

He pointed to Jordan's recent record as proof of their progress.

"Jordan reached the Asian Cup final and qualified for the World Cup. We respect them, but we are fully ready for this match," he said.

Olaroiu also reflected on the UAE's exit from the World Cup playoff, after two narrow games against Iraq.

"Exiting the World Cup playoff was not a failure. We played very well against Iraq but luck was not on our side," he said, adding that belief in his squad remains strong.

"My confidence in my players remains intact."

Looking ahead to the Arab Cup campaign, Olaroiu said the opening fixture could set the tone in Group C.

"We want a strong start in the Arab Cup. The opening match is important for the rest of our journey," he said.



IOC president calls for end to 'finger-pointing' in doping fight

SEOUL: International Olympic Committee president Kirsty Coventry **(pictured)** and her World Anti-Doping Agency counterpart yesterday called for unity in the fight against performance-enhancing drugs following a fracture with the United States.

"Too often we've seen energy spent on division, finger-pointing and competing agendas," Coventry told WADA's World Conference on Doping in Sport, being held this week in the South Korean city of Busan.

"It has been difficult to watch this divide within our community." Her comments came nearly 18 months after an internal investigation cleared WADA of pro-China bias.

The agency was rocked by a scandal involving 23 Chinese swimmers who were cleared of intentionally doping after testing positive for a banned heart drug in 2021.

Chinese investigators absolved the swimmers -- some of whom went on to win Olympic gold in Tokyo that year -- of wrongdoing, saying that the athletes had been exposed to the drug via a contaminated hotel kitchen.

WADA opted not to independently investigate the matter, sparking criticism, especially from the United States and its anti-doping organisation, USADA.

Following WADA's decision, the US government withdrew $3.6 million in funding, resulting in the removal of US representatives from the body's executive committee.

"There is only one fight that we should be fighting -- and that is the fight against doping," Coventry told the gathering in Busan.

"But instead, at times, we have been turning on each other. The only people who benefit from this disunity are the drugs cheaters." Taking a similar line, WADA president Witold Banka did not reference any one country by name but said that "some voices have chosen confrontation over cooperation, speaking as if their nations or institutions stand above others, as if only they acted with integrity".

He added: "To those who behave as though they come from 'better' systems, expecting the world to follow their personal crusades, we say respectfully but firmly: no.

"Anti-doping does not belong to one nation or one personality." — ***AFP***

Deeper Arsenal squad helping with 'worst' injuries: Arteta

LONDON: Mikel Arteta said Arsenal's deeper squad was helping the Premier League leaders cope with their "worst" run of injuries as he prepares for today's match against Brentford.

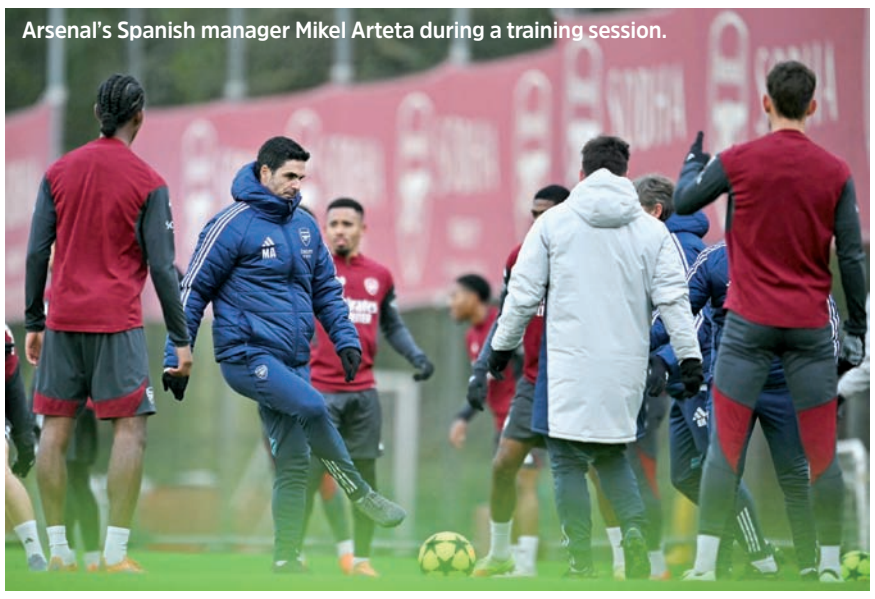
Gabriel Jesus, Viktor Gyokeres, Noni Madueke, Gabriel Martinelli and Martin Odegaard have recently returned from injury but Gabriel Magalhaes and Kai Havertz face weeks more on the sidelines.

Winger Leandro Trossard and defender William Saliba are doubts to face Brentford but Arsenal manager Arteta said yesterday he expected them back "within days".

Arsenal were also badly hampered by injuries last season, with their lack of forward options blamed for an inability to challenge Liverpool for the Premier League title.

"This season has been the worst in some areas, especially in the front line, and now what's happening with the back line," Arteta told reporters.

"But we learn and we were able to put together a squad that is much more reliable and has more options.



Arsenal's Spanish manager Mikel Arteta during a training session.

"We learned from the past as well that we have to use players in different positions and they have to be able to fulfil different roles if we want to compete at this level and the example of Mikel (Merino) is the best one, probably." The Spain midfielder, who arrived from Real Sociedad in 2024, was regularly used as a striker last season, scoring nine goals in all competitions.

During the summer transfer window Arsenal made major reinforcements, bringing in Martin Zubimendi, Christian Norgaard, Cristhian Mosquera, Eberechi Eze, Madueke and Gyokeres.

Those extra resources have given Arteta more options and they have opened up a five-point lead over second-placed Manchester City at the top of the Premier League.

Saliba missed Sunday's 1-1 draw at Chelsea having suffered a knock in training.

"He had a little niggle, so I think it's going to be a matter of days, so let's see if he's able to be there tomorrow (against Brentford)," Arteta said.

Trossard was another player who missed the match at Stamford Bridge but Arteta said the winger would also be back "in a matter of days".

Arteta urged fans at the Emirates on Wednesday to give full-throated support to his team against 10th-placed Brentford.

"Everybody at the Emirates to go again and beat Brentford," he said. "It's vital, massive." — ***AFP***

Sri Lanka to play T20 series against Pakistan

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka will host a three-match T20 series against Pakistan in January, the cricket board announced yesterday.

Sri Lanka Cricket said all three matches will take place at Dambulla, starting on January 7.

The second match will be held two days later, with the final on January 11.

Sri Lanka is currently grappling with the aftermath of Cyclone Ditwah, which caused widespread flooding and mudslides that killed 410 people and affected over 1.5 million more.

Pakistan's last T20 tour of Sri Lanka was 10 years ago, when they played two matches -- both won by the vistors -- at the Premadasa Stadium in Colombo. — ***AFP***



West Indies' Justin Greaves celebrates the wicket of New Zealand's Tom Latham yesterday.

New Zealand 231-9 as West Indies exploit bowler-friendly wicket

CHRISTCHURCH: New Zealand reached 231-9 at stumps on a rain-shortened day one of the first Test against the West Indies yesterday after Justin Greaves triggered a middle-order collapse with the wicket of Kane Williamson.

New Zealand tumbled from 94-1 to 148-6 on a bowler-friendly wicket after Williamson was dismissed for 52, his 38th Test half-century.

Michael Bracewell and Nathan Smith arrested the slide with a 52-run stand for the seventh wicket. Smith eventually fell for 23 and Bracewell for 47.

After Matt Henry went for eight, Zak Foulkes and Jacob Duffy were both on four when bad light stopped play after 70 overs of a truncated day.

Bracewell and Smith's partnership was the second face-saving stand for New Zealand after Williamson and Tom Latham put on 93 following the dismissal of Devon Conway on the third ball of the Test.

Bracewell rated the day "pretty even" given the nature of the wicket.

"It ebbed and flowed throughout the day and I think we'd be pretty happy with where we got to at the end of the day," he said.

"It was a little bit 'old school' West Indies.

"You grow up hearing about the fast bowlers of the West Indies and it was certainly that today. It was an exciting challenge. — ***AFP***

Weight of history against England in pink ball Gabba Ashes Test

BRISBANE: England head into tomorrow's day-night second Ashes Test against pink-ball masters Australia needing a rare victory at Brisbane's Gabba to get back into the five-match series.

Travis Head's whirlwind century as a makeshift opener carried Australia to an eight-wicket victory inside two days in Perth as they went 1-0 up.

The hosts are again without captain Pat Cummins and fellow quick Josh Hazlewood, leaving swing king Mitchell Starc, who is expected to be a force in humid Brisbane under lights, to carry the attack.

England, who capitulated in four frantic hours in Perth from a winning position, cannot afford to slip 2-0 down with three matches to play if they are to have realistic hopes of regaining the urn.

They will be without their own pace spearhead, Mark Wood, who is nursing a knee injury.

He was replaced by off-spinner Will Jacks, who will bolster the batting, in an otherwise unchanged team named Tuesday.

Captain Ben Stokes says England have moved on from Perth and are not scarred by past results but they face a formidable weight of history in Brisbane, where they have been holding extra training sessions this week.

England have not won a Test in Australia since their 2010-11 tour, losing 14 and drawing two.

Moreover, they have not triumphed at the Gabba for 39 years and have lost all three previous day-nighters against the hosts.

Australia thrive under lights, winning 13 of the 14 pink-ball Tests they have played worldwide, but England will take encouragement from the sole defeat coming at the Gabba against the West Indies a year ago.



England's Ben Stokes bowls during a training session at The Gabba in Brisbane.

"On an evening it does seem to do a little bit more, especially if you have a slightly newer ball," said England fast bowler Brydon Carse after a night session in the nets yesterday.

Steve Smith captains Australia, who must decide how to fill the opening slot vacated by Usman Khawaja who was ruled out Tuesday after failing to recover from back spasms suffered in Perth.

Head is likely to again move up alongside Jake Weatherald, with seaming all-rounder Beau Webster coming into the side at number six with Cameron Green moving up to five.

Marnus Labuschagne filled in as an opener for Khawaja in the first innings at Perth.

"It's just game-by-game, and you work out what's your best team and how does it best work for the game," said Labuschagne.

Australia also have the option of bringing in Josh Inglis to open, leaving Head at number five where he would not have to face a new pink ball under lights.

Head, who stunned England with a match-winning 123 from 83 balls, said he would be ready to move up again, adding that fixed batting orders were "slightly overrated".

"The traditionalists will say that's how it's got to be," Head said.

"It's ever evolving and we'll see where we get to. I feel I can play in any role."

Australia squad: Steve Smith (capt), Scott Boland, Alex Carey, Brendan Doggett, Cameron Green, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Marnus Labuschagne, Nathan Lyon, Michael Neser, Mitchell Starc, Jake Weatherald, Beau Webster England team: Ben Duckett, Zak Crawley, Ollie Pope, Joe Root, Harry Brook, Ben Stokes (captain), Jamie Smith, Will Jacks, Gus Atkinson, Brydon Carse, Jofra Archer. — ***AFP***

Khawaja out of second Ashes Test with injury

BRISBANE: Australia opening batsman Usman Khawaja was yesterday ruled out of the second Ashes Test against England with the back injury he suffered during the Perth opener.

The veteran had back spasms and failed to open in the first Test victory.

He was replaced for the second innings by Travis Head, who blasted a match-winning century.

It leaves Khawaja's international future in doubt. He turns 39 later this month.

"Khawaja will remain with the team to continue his rehabilitation. He has not been replaced in the squad," said Cricket Australia ahead of Thursday's day-night encounter at Brisbane's Gabba.

Khawaja batted for 30 minutes in the practice nets on Tuesday evening but the left-hander appeared to be in discomfort.

Head will be favourite to be deployed as makeshift opener in Khawaja's absence.

He opens in white-ball cricket and said he would be happy to face the Test new ball again after his whirlwind 123 off 83 balls at Perth took Australia to an eight-wicket victory.

If Head does move up, seaming all-rounder Beau Webster is likely to come in at number six, with Cameron Green occupying Head's usual fifth slot in the batting order. — ***AFP***

Spain overpower Germany to win second women's Nations League

MADRID: Spain defended their women's Nations League title with a 3-0 second leg win over Germany yesterday, following a goalless draw last week.

Claudia Pina's second-half brace, either side of a Vicky Lopez strike, secured 2023 World Cup winners Spain a third international trophy.

A record crowd on home soil for Spain of 55,843 at Atletico Madrid's Metropolitano Stadium watched Sonia Bermudez's side claim the first silverware of the new coach's reign.

Spain were shorn of three-time Ballon d'Or winner Aitana Bonmati after she fractured her leg on Sunday in training, but swept to victory with a convincing display in the capital.

The Euro 2025 runners-up relied on goalkeeper Cata Coll to keep their hopes alive during the first leg in Kaiserslautern but dominated Christian Wueck's visitors in the decisive second leg. Esther Gonzalez fired narrowly wide early on and Ann-Katrin Berger saved Alexia Putellas's header.

Coll fielded two Germany efforts from distance, but Spain were in control.

Arsenal playmaker Mariona Caldentey could have scored twice in the first half, but volleyed over when well placed and punted another effort straight at Berger.

The best chance of the first half fell to Germany's Nicole Anyomi just before the break, but she dragged her shot narrowly wide. The visitors started the second half strongly, too, before Pina fired Spain ahead in the 61st minute.

The Barcelona forward exchanged passes with Caldentey before drilling home from the edge of the box. Berger got a hand to her shot and could have kept it out. Her teenage Barca teammate Lopez grabbed the second with a delicious curling shot past Berger seven minutes later, having come close with a similar effort in the first half which dipped just over.

Pina wrapped up Spain's triumph with a fine solo goal, winning the ball back just inside Germany territory, driving forward and firing spectacularly into the top corner from distance. — ***AFP***



Spain's players celebrate with the trophy.