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Hosts Qatar held as Khribin's late stunner snatches a point for Syria

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Omar Khribin smashed a sensational late equaliser with a powerful strike from outside the box to earn Syria a dramatic 1-1 draw against hosts Qatar at Khalifa International Stadium yesterday.

The draw leaves Qatar's Arab Cup hopes hanging by a thread. With just one point from two matches, they must now beat Tunisia by a big margin in their final group game on Sunday and hope the other result go their way. Palestine and Syria, both leading Group A with four points, face off in a simultaneous match.

After an opening defeat to Palestine, Qatar sought goals relentlessly and substitute Ahmed Alaaeldin finally handed them the lead in the 77th minute, sending the passionate home crowd into ecstasy. But Khribin crushed their joy in the 90th minute with a stunning, unstoppable strike from outside the box, securing a point for Syria.

"All I can say is that it's football. I think our level of play was far better than what it was against Palestine in the opening match," Qatar coach Julen Lopetegui said after the match.

"We did everything you need to do to win a game, but it's football. A very big sorry to all our fans but today I feel we did a lot of things right. We had many chances. There was also a penalty for us, but I can't understand how VAR changed the decision because it was very clear," he said.


Qatar players celebrate after Ahmed Alaaeldin (left) scored a goal.

"I don't have the words. But for my players, we have to learn to defend a bit better until the last minute. And when they score like that, what can you say? We now have to be ready for the next match."

Lopetegui made several changes to the starting line-up, and the Asian champions would have emerged victorious had they converted the chances they created.

The home side dominated the match, particularly in attack. They came out firing, immediately pushing Syria back in search of an early breakthrough. Mohammed Waad tried a long-range effort but sent it over the bar, while goalkeeper Meshaal Barsham – starting in place of Mahmoud Abunada – displayed sharp reflexes to cut out a dangerous Syrian counter and block a threatening cross.

Qatar's early pressure nearly paid off in the 10th minute when Mohammed Al Mannai found himself unmarked at the first corner, only to steer Akram Afif's delivery wide. Moments later, Homam Al Amin drove into the box but dragged his angled strike past the far post. Syria responded with a chance of their own when Abdullah Alshami failed to connect with a set-piece delivery, capping a frantic first 15 minutes filled with opportunities at both ends.

Qatar continued pressing, and Jassim Gaber registered the first shot on target, though his effort from outside the box was easily held by Syrian goalkeeper Elias Hadaya.

Syria grew into the half, with Khribin emerging as a constant threat. His first attempt was deflected wide, and in the 22nd minute he came close again, lifting the ball over the advancing Barsham, only for Waad to race back and brilliantly divert the ball off the line.

Qatar hit back immediately on the counter. Edmilson Junior, starting after coming off the bench against Palestine, led the break before Tarek Salman smashed a shot into the side netting.

Homam remained heavily involved, first sending a header over the bar and then striking the left post after a superb through-ball from Afif. The Qatar captain continued to influence play, again finding Homam whose difficult volley flew over around the half-hour mark. Qatar kept up the pressure, with Abdulaziz Hatem lifting an effort over the bar from another Afif assist, as a pulsating first half ended goalless.

The second half resumed in similar fashion. Early on, Edmilson's shot was blocked by Hadaya, and Afif's brilliant spell from the edge of the box went just wide. Qatar came agonisingly close to taking the lead when Afif set up Hatem, whose close-range strike was superbly blocked by defender Ahmad Faqa.

> *We did everything you need to do to win a game, but it's football. A very big sorry to all our fans but today I feel we did a lot of things right. We had many chances. There was also a penalty for us, but I can't understand how VAR changed the decision because it was very clear.*
> ***Julen Lopetegui***
> ***Qatar coach***

Qatar thought they had got the breakthrough when Homam was brought down by Zakaria Hannan, but VAR intervened and ruled out the penalty just before the hour mark, leaving Lopetegui frustrated. With 20 minutes remaining, he brought on fresh legs in Alaaeldin and Sultan Al Brake for Gaber and Homam.

The breakthrough finally came when Alaaeldin rose highest to head Edmilson's precise cross into the left corner. Syria responded quickly, with substitute Simon Amin's shot deflected by a defender, before Afif, applauded for his inspiring display, was replaced by Lucas Mendes.

However, Khribin struck again with a sensational curling effort from outside the box into the top-right corner, restoring parity for Syria. The striker had also scored a stunning free-kick winner against Tunisia in the previous match. Qatar pressed relentlessly in the closing minutes, but Hadaya produced a spectacular save to tip Al Mannai's ferocious effort over the bar, ensuring the points were shared in a pulsating encounter.

FIFA ARAB CUP QATAR 2025

Palestine fight back to secure thrilling draw against Tunisia

CHINTHANA WASALA
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Palestine produced a brilliant fightback to secure a 2-2 draw against Tunisia in their FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025 Group A clash yesterday.

Amor Layouni put Tunisia ahead in the 16th minute, then Firas Chaouat added their second early in the second half before Hamed Hemdan pulled one back for Palestine and Zaid Qunbar struck an 85th minute equaliser in a thrilling encounter at the Lusail Stadium.

The victory lifted Palestine's tally to four points from two matches. They are now well placed to reach the quarter-finals and will aim to finish the job against Syria on Sunday.

Tunisia looked stronger than their counterparts earlier on.

Palestine goalkeeper Rami Hamada did well to stop a close-range header from Firas Chouat off a corner in the 10th minute. Six minutes later, he was finally beaten.

Chouat's powerful header was pushed out by Hamada, who then blocked a second effort after the ball ricocheted off Ferjani Sassi. The ball fell to Layouni, who shot it into the net to score the opening goal.

Palestine, who had stunned hosts Qatar 1-0 in their first game, almost hit back in the 37th minute. Hamed Hamdan delivered a cross from the left, but Saleh Mohammed, under pressure from goalkeeper Aymen Dahmen, could not convert it to a goal.

Tunisia doubled their advantage six minutes after the restart.

Ali Ben Romdhane clipped a pass to Chouat, who finished from close range to apply more pressure on the Palestine team.

Hamdan dragged Palestine back into the contest in the 61st minute with a low drive from the edge of the box after Tunisia failed to clear a corner. Palestine kept pushing hard and were rewarded five minutes from time, when Mohammed took a quick free-kick. The ball fell to Qunbar, who hammered in the equaliser to complete a superb comeback which lifted their chances of making it to the knockout stage.

Al Gharafa midfielder Sassi was one of the Tunisian players who looked highly disappointed after the draw.

"This is football. Against Palestine, we were not at our level. Today we were much better than them. We did everything you have to do to win a match, but it is football," Sassi said.

"They had one real shot in that moment, after a short clearance, and it was a big blow for my players. A big blow for all our fans. I am very sorry for them because today I feel we did a lot to win the match. We created many chances," Sassi said.

"Even with that, I have no criticism for my players. We only have to manage the last minutes a bit better. But when you concede a goal like this, what can you say? Now we have to be ready for the next match," Sassi added.


Palestines' Zeid Qunbar celebrates after scoring the equaliser.

Tunisia next face the Asian champions Qatar in a must-win Group A match on Sunday. With Palestine and Syria already above them in the standings, only a win can improve their chances of advancing to the quarter-finals.

RESULTS
Palestine **2-2** Tunisia
Syria **1-1** Qatar
TODAY
Oman v Morocco
Education City Stadium (17:30)
Comoros v Saudi Arabia
Al Bayt Stadium (21:30)
TOMORROW
Kuwait v Jordan
Ahmad bin Ali Stadium (14:00)
UAE v Egypt
Lusail Stadium (21:30)
Bahrain v Algeria
Khalifa International Stadium (16:30)
Sudan v Iraq
Stadium 974 (19:00)

Qatar to discover group opponents at World Cup draw in Washington today

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar will discover their FIFA World Cup 2026 Group Stage opponents today when the final tournament draw takes place in Washington DC, marking another major milestone for the Asian champions after securing a historic qualification.

The 2026 World Cup will take place in the United States, Canada and Mexico from June 11 to July 19, with 48 teams in contention for the first time in the history of the global showpiece.

The draw, hosted at the John F. Kennedy Memorial Center for the Performing Arts, will split the finalists into 12 groups of four.

Qatar sealed their spot after topping Group A in the fourth round of Asian qualifiers ahead of Oman and the UAE. It will be their second straight World Cup appearance and the first reached through the traditional qualifying path after hosting FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

FIFA has placed the qualified teams into four seeding levels based on the world ranking issued on November 19. The three host nations are assigned to the first pot regardless of their ranking, while the remaining teams are distributed across the other pots according to their ranking.

Qatar go into the draw from the third pot, alongside Norway, Panama, Egypt, Algeria, Scotland, Paraguay, Tunisia, Ivory Coast, Uzbekistan, Saudi Arabia and South Africa.

That means they will avoid these teams in the group stage.

The first pot includes the best teams in the current FIFA rankings, title holders Argentina, former champions France, Germany, Brazil, England and Spain, along with the three host nations.

The second pot includes Croatia, Morocco, Colombia, Uruguay, Switzerland, Japan, Senegal, Iran, South Korea, Ecuador, Austria and Australia.



Final preparations are made as FIFA World Cup 2026 Final Draw signage is displayed outside the Kennedy Center yesterday.

The fourth pot features Jordan, Cape Verde, Ghana, Curacao, Haiti and New Zealand, plus four European play-off winners listed as teams A, B, C and D, and two more sides from the intercontinental play-offs.

The draw ceremony gets started at 12 p.m. ET (8:00pm Qatar time) today, and will be co-hosted by supermodel Heidi Klum, comedian Kevin Hart and actor and producer Danny Ramirez. The draw will be conducted by former Manchester United and England defender Rio Ferdinand, who will be joined by broadcaster Samantha Johnson and a host of sporting greats, including Tom Brady, Wayne Gretzky, Aaron Judge and Shaquille O'Neal.

2026 WORLD CUP DRAW POTS

POT 1: Canada, Mexico, USA, Spain, Argentina, France, England, Brazil, Portugal, Netherlands, Belgium, Germany

POT 2: Croatia, Morocco, Colombia, Uruguay, Switzerland, Japan, Senegal, IR Iran, Korea Republic, Ecuador, Austria, Australia

POT 3: Norway, Panama, Egypt, Algeria, Scotland, Paraguay, Tunisia, Côte d'Ivoire, Uzbekistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, South Africa

POT 4: Jordan, Cabo Verde, Ghana, Curaçao, Haiti, New Zealand, European Play-Off A, B, C and D, FIFA Play-Off Tournament 1 and 2 **

PLAY-OFFS **
Uefa Play-off A: Italy, Wales, Bosnia-Herzegovina, N. Ireland
Uefa Play-off B: Ukraine, Poland, Albania, Sweden
Uefa Play-off C: Turkey, Slovakia, Kosovo, Romania
Uefa Play-off D: Denmark, Czech Rep., Rep.of Ireland, N. Macedonia
Fifa Play-off 1: DR Congo, Jamaica, New Caledonia
Fifa Play-off 2: Iraq, Bolivia, Suriname



Confident Saudi Arabia take on Comoros; Morocco eye 'crucial' win against Oman

Saudi Arabia fought hard for a 2-1 victory over Oman in their thrilling opening match, and now they are setting their sights on another three points at Al Bayt Stadium tonight.

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA


Saudi Arabia are looking to reach the quarter-finals at Al Bayt Stadium tonight.

DOHA: An in-form Saudi Arabia side is aiming for a second consecutive victory in Group B of the FIFA Arab Cup as they face Comoros today, while Morocco look to maintain its place at the top of the group in a key clash against Oman.

Saudi Arabia fought hard for a 2-1 victory over Oman in their thrilling opening match, and now they are setting their sights on another three points at Al Bayt Stadium tonight.

"We are looking forward to securing our quarter-final berth before our final group match against Morocco," Saudi Arabia's Saleh Al-Shehri, who scored a winning goal against Oman, said at a press conference yesterday.

"We are improving and all the players are looking to give their best."


Morocco players take part in a training session.

Saudi Arabia's assistant coach Francois Rodrigues, however, warned the match will not be easy.

"It will be a tough match because our opponents are a good team with good players but we will be ready. The team is determined to reach far in the tournament," he said.

Comoros, who qualified for the group stage after beating Yemen, suffered a 3-1 defeat to Morocco in their opening match, conceding all the goals in the first half.

Comoros coach Hamada Jambay hoped his team will come up with improved performance against the Saudis.

"We have worked on rectifying our mistakes in the first match," he told a pre-match press conference.

"We didn't start the match well against Morocco but we improved in the second half. We are ready as the players have shown a lot of improvement in our training sessions. They will do their best to come up with a desired result in the tough match," said Jambay.

Oman look to bounce back

Earlier in Group B, Morocco will meet Oman at Education City Stadium, eyeing early progression to the knockout stage.

Morocco are leading the group on better goal difference with coach Tarik Sektioui expressing his confidence despite injury challenges.

"We have suffered from injuries and lack of readiness but we understand the responsibility of defending the reputation of Moroccan football. We will go for a win which will be crucial in taking us to the quarter-finals," said Sektioui.

However, Oman, under veteran Portuguese coach Carlos Queiroz, are plotting their own victory to keep their hopes alive after a loss against Saudi Arabia.

"We respect the strength and potential of the Moroccan national team. We will give our best to achieve victory," said Queiroz.

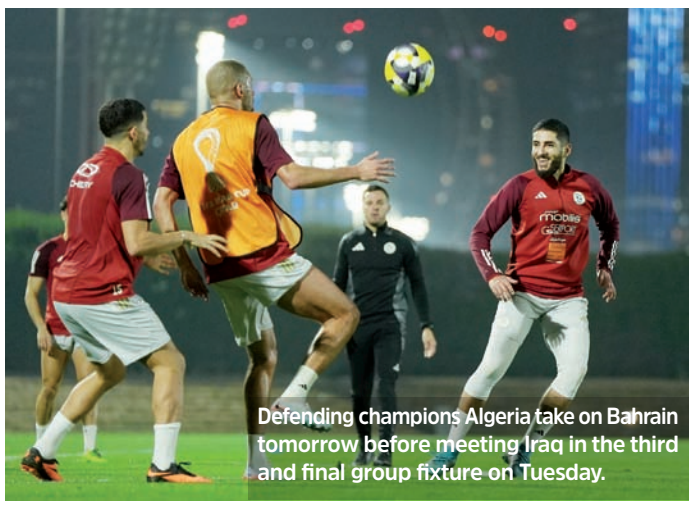
"Our preparation for the match went well and we are seeking full points that will give us confidence to move forward in the tournament," he added.

Oman star Abdullah Fawaz, said: "Our eyes will remain on tomorrow's points and continuing the competition because we need mental focus and readiness to secure the victory, and we have prepared everything accordingly in order to win."

> *We respect the strength and potential of the Moroccan national team. We will give our best to achieve victory. Our preparation for the match went well and we are seeking full points that will give us confidence to move forward in the tournament.*
> ***Carlos Queiroz***
> ***Oman coach***

Algeria feeling positive pressure in title defence

THE PENINSULA


Defending champions Algeria take on Bahrain tomorrow before meeting Iraq in the third and final group fixture on Tuesday.

DOHA: The FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025 continues to hand out lessons in the unpredictability of football. In the latest, defending champions Algeria – who have qualified for the FIFA World Cup 2026 and boast a rich legacy in both African and Arab football – found themselves in a tricky spot against Sudan, who exited the last edition of the tournament in the group stage.

In front of 37,000 spectators, the Fennecs turned in a strong display, creating the majority of chances in the first half, but they were forced to battle fiercely to preserve a point in the second after Adam Ounas was shown a second yellow card four minutes into first-half stoppage time.

It goes to show that Algeria's title defence will be anything but straightforward, given the rise in standards across all the participating teams. That will not, however, deter them from chasing more successes for the supporters backing them so passionately, both in the stands and back home.

Star man Adil Boulbina – who was last season's top scorer in the Algerian league with Paradou AC and now leads all scorers this season in the AFC Elite Champions League – spoke with *FIFA* after the encounter. He described the pressures on the team as title holders as something that will push Algeria to fight harder and prepare properly for every match.

"Holding the title puts extra pressure on us, but it's positive pressure, I think," he said.

"We know every match will be played at a high tempo and demand a huge physical effort. Every opponent will give everything they've got, and in turn we'll prepare well for each match and study our opponents' weaknesses to get wins."

Boulbina's view was shared by star Islam Slimani, who has enjoyed a long career in Algerian and European football, including stints with Leicester City and Newcastle United in the English Premier League. Speaking from his extensive on-pitch experience, Slimani told FIFA after the match that the standards in this year's Arab Cup are exceptionally high.

"Everyone's at a high level in this tournament. We've seen surprises in the opening matches," he said. "All the teams have improved and developed, and they all want to win the title."

Given the difficulties Algeria faced in the second half, the draw with Sudan was not a bad result, even though head coach Madjid Bougherra's men always have their sights set on victory. Boulbina summed up the situation:

"It was a tough match," he said. "We missed easy chances in the first half, and then we were at a numerical disadvantage in the second half. We could've won today, but we've still taken a point, and that's valuable. We know every team will fight when they play us because we're the defending champions."

Algeria's next group-stage match will be against Bahrain on Saturday, December 6. Then they face Iraq, who beat Bahrain 2-1, in the third and final group fixture on Tuesday, December 9.


Sudan will take on Iraq tomorrow, before concluding their group-stage matches against Bahrain on Wednesday.

Sudan show their resolve

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Undoubtedly, facing the title-holders in a tournament opener is going to ramp up the pressure, and Algeria's pedigree in African and Arab football, along with their impressive FIFA World Cup history, make them a complex challenge for any competitor. Nevertheless, it seems that Sudan were not cowed in the first round of the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025.

James Kwesi Appiah's men spared no effort in the first half, standing firm against the champions' early surge and drive to dominate the proceedings, and refused to concede a goal. They gradually found their feet in the match, drawing energy from their magnificent fans who packed the stands at Ahmed bin Ali Stadium in Al Rayyan. Then came an Algerian dismissal, which paved the way for Sudan to take full control of the second half.

Sudan goalkeeper Mohamed Al Nour was one of the men who came to the rescue at touch moments in the first half. The 25-year-old's brilliance earned him a well-deserved Player of the Match award, although he was quick to spread the credit around.

"Our ambition was to win. Every player put in a fantastic performance, and we hope to be victorious next time," he told FIFA after the match.

"The coach gave us the right instructions in the second half to secure a victory, but we didn't succeed. For now, we hope to qualify to play on."

He also spoke about the Player of the Match award, promising his country's fans more progress on a collective level. "God helped me deliver a good performance, and I hope I can help my team in the coming matches and deliver my best. To our fans, I say: Stay tuned for the upcoming matches – the Falcons of Jediane are coming, God willing."

Al Nour was not the only standout. Ahmed Tabanja, the left-back, also showed his resolve and injected vitality and momentum into his country's second-half charge with his skill on the ball. Afterward, he acknowledged the difficulty of the opposition.

"A tough match against Algeria, the title holders," he said. "We want to deliver our best in the next match and follow the coach's instructions to get the win. Facing the champions motivated us to give everything on the pitch, especially with Algeria also being one of Africa's top teams."

Victory may have eluded Sudan against Algeria, but the draw will sharpen their focus against Iraq tomorrow.

They will be looking to wrestle the top spot in the group from the Lions of Mesopotamia who lead the pack with three points, before concluding their group-stage matches against Bahrain on Wednesday, December 9. (FIFA)

Iraq stars look to make World Cup case

THE PENINSULA


Iraq beat Bahrain 2-1 in their Group D opener on Monday.

DOHA: Against a familiar foe it was a solid start, as Iraq avoided the first-up FIFA Arab Cup jitters that have struck several heavyweights in Qatar to down Bahrain 2-1 in their Group D opener.

In one sense, it's the start of a possible half a dozen matches to clinch the regional title but in another, it's part of a longer journey towards what would be just a second appearance at the FIFA World Cup.

Graham Arnold's side are missing several of the stars that helped secure victory over United Arab Emirates in the fifth round of AFC preliminaries that booked their place in the Play-Off Tournament. Those that are present in Qatar though know that the Arab Cup offers perhaps one final chance to stake a claim for a place on the flight to Mexico next March.

One of those is Hasan Abdulkareem who starred on the right wing for Iraq in the win over Bahrain, and who is desperate to parlay Arab Cup impression into Play-Off retention.

"I'm so pleased that the coach has trusted me to be here and it's such a huge motivation. I want to show Iraqi fans, and show the world what I can do," he said.

"Given that the coach has empowered me and sees my potential I will do everything that I can to repay that faith and trust.

"Of course the three points is very important and the performance was also good so it was what we wanted. Our main goal though is the qualifiers for the World Cup and that's why we are here, to prepare ourselves for those matches."

On the books of Iraqi Stars League outfit Al Zawra'a, Abdulkareem is one of the majority of the Arab Cup squad that plies their trade in the local league. The 26-year-old is thrilled that Arnold has taken the time to scout local talent and hand them a chance to impress, as he explains to *FIFA*.

"Most of us are playing in the Iraq Stars League and I'm here to show the coach what I can do. I like to dribble, to take players on and the coach also likes me to go one-on-one with players," he said. "This is the kind of football I enjoy and I want to show what I can do."

Glory Of The Stars shines again with Lusail Cup win

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Glory Of The Stars continued her flawless campaign with a stunning display in the Lusail Cup for 3YO+ Thoroughbred fillies and mares over 1200m at Al Uqda Racecourse yesterday.

The five-year-old bay mare, owned by Eng. Hassan Ali Alabdulmalik and trained by Debbie Mountain, appeared to have plenty to do when still at the back of the field approaching the final 300m. But she produced a powerful late surge down the outside, and under a perfectly judged ride from Jefferson Smith, she swept past her rivals to win decisively by 1¼ lengths, sealing her second straight victory of the season.

The winning connections were presented their trophies by Rashid Saed Adiba, Head of Racing Operations at the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club.

Earlier in the card, Sun Amer, trained by Bader Al Balushi and ridden by Soufiane Saadi, delivered a strong front-running performance to take the Purebred Arabian Conditions race. In the Purebred Arabian Handicap (70–90), Nah'ash Al Shahania, saddled by Rudy Nerbonne and partnered by Lukas Delozier, proved too sharp for the field, finishing with authority to claim a well-earned victory.



Jefferson Smith guides Glory Of The Stars to Lusail Cup victory. PIC: JUHAIM/QREC

The meeting also featured several competitive races for emerging talent. Court Poet, trained by Nayef Batal Al-Otibi and ridden by Maikon De Souza, impressed in the Thoroughbred Novice Plate, showing speed and maturity to pull clear in the closing stages.

In the Local Thoroughbred Handicap (0–50), Achika produced a determined effort for trainer Yousef Al-Jumaily, guided home by Fayos Martin Borja. The Purebred Arabian Handicap (50–70) saw Awamir, representing trainer Zuhair Mohsen and jockey Pierre Charles Boudot, dominate with a confident and well-timed run.

19TH AL UQDA RACE MEETING
LUSAIL CUP
WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)

Lusail Cup - Thoroughbred
Glory Of The Stars, Debbie Mountain, Jefferson Smith
Purebred Arabian Conditions
Sun Amer, Bader Al Balushi, Soufiane Saadi
Purebred Arabian Handicap (70-90)
Nah'ash Al Shahania, Rudy Nerbonne, Lukas Delozier
Thoroughbred Novice Plate
Court Poet, Nayef Batal Al-Otibi, Maikon De Souza
Local Thoroughbred Handicap (0-50)
Achika, Yousef Al-Jumaily, Fayos Martin Borja
Purebred Arabian Handicap (50-70)
Awamir, Zuhair Mohsen, Pierre Charles Boudot
Thoroughbred Rated Maiden Plate
Corpus Juris, Gassim Al Ghazali, Marco Casamento

The action got underway with the Thoroughbred Rated Maiden Plate, where Corpus Juris, trained by Gassim Al Ghazali and ridden by Marco Casamento, broke through stylishly to seal his first career win.

Khalifa and Nasser clinch victories at Hathab


The podium winners of Silver round were honoured by Tournament Director Abdullah Mohammed Al-Marri.

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Khalifa bin Joaan bin Hamad Al-Thani captured the Amateur class title, while Nasser Al-Ghazali claimed top honours in the Silver round as the eighth leg of the Longines Hathab – Qatar Equestrian Tour kicked off yesterday at Al Shaqab.

Khalifa delivered a standout performance aboard Zion, clocking an impressive 54.36 seconds to secure first place. Mariam Abdulkarim Abdul followed closely with a time of 54.89 seconds on Beyonce, while Hamad Nasser Al-Marri finished third in 55.15 seconds riding Jumbo. The top three riders received their awards from Mohammed Saleh Al-Marri, Chairman of Hathab's Facilities and Logistics Committee.

The Silver Round proved equally competitive, with Al-Ghazali posting a swift 26.85 seconds on Dexter to claim victory. Mohammed Abdullah Jumaa secured second place in 27.00 seconds on Viahibe, and Khalid Al-Hadi rounded out the podium with a time of 27.65 seconds riding Doremi. The winners were honoured by Tournament Director Abdullah Mohammed Al-Marri.



The podium winners of Amateur class celebrate on the podium.

AGCFF U-23 Gulf Cup Qatar 2025 gets underway

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The AGCFF U-23 Gulf Cup Qatar 2025 kicked off at Aspire Zone, with Yemen claiming a 2-1 win over Iraq in the opening match of the tournament. Meanwhile, UAE beat Oman 2-0in the second match of the opening day.

The tournament is taking place in Qatar from December 4–16, bringing together rising U-23 football stars from across the region to compete for the prestigious title. This is the first time the competition is being held under the auspices of the Arab Gulf Cup Football Federation (AGCFF).

The tournament features eight teams, divided into two groups. Group A features hosts Qatar, playing alongside Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Kuwait. Group B includes Iraq, UAE, Oman, and Yemen.


Action during the match between UAE and Oman.


Iraq and Yemen players in action.

Hosts Qatar will play their first match on 5 December,14:45 against Kuwait, while Saudi Arabia will take on Bahrain at 15:00 at Aspire Zone.

The group stage will see a total of 14 matches played across two state-of-the-art pitches at Aspire Zone, that has most recently served as a venue for a historic edition of the FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2025.

The Final will take place on 16 December at the iconic Stadium 974, the first fully demountable covered football stadium in FIFA World Cup history that hosted matches during the historic tournament in 2022.

The AGCFF U-23 Gulf Cup Qatar 2025 serves as part of an exhilarating football calendar in Qatar, which also includes the FIFA Arab Cup Qatar 2025, as well as the FIFA Intercontinental Cup Qatar 2025, reflecting Qatar's ongoing capability to host world-class sporting events.



Norris rejects idea of team loyalty before Formula 1 title showdown

ABU DHABI: Lando Norris **(pictured)** yesterday rejected the idea of asking title rival and McLaren team-mate Oscar Piastri to support him this weekend in the decisive season-ending Abu Dhabi Grand Prix even if it is the only way he can beat Red Bull's Max Verstappen to the title.

The 26-year-old Briton, who holds a 12-point lead on four-time champion Verstappen and a 16-point advantage on Piastri, said he would welcome help in certain scenarios, but would not seek it -- because it was not how he, personally, felt about it.

He and Piastri made clear that McLaren had not discussed team orders for the race and would continue racing under 'papaya rules' that encourage them to race each other with equal team backing.

"I don't think I would ask for it because - and I don't know -- it's up to Oscar, if he would allow it," Norris told reporters before Sunday's showdown.

"I don't think it's necessarily down to me.

"It's the same if it's the other way around. Would I be willing to or not? Personally, I think I would -- just because I feel like I'm always like that and that's just how I am."

The three drivers sat together answering questions of which some focused on the possibility that if Verstappen was leading with Piastri third and Norris fourth, it would mean the Dutchman took his record-equalling fifth consecutive title unless the two McLaren men swapped positions.

"I'm not going to ask it," he continued. "I don't want to ask it because I don't think it's necessarily a fair question, but at the same time if that's how it ends and Max wins, then well. That's it.

McLaren team chief Andrea Stella said they had no plan to change their approach as they aim to secure the drivers' title and complete a first double since Mika Hakkinen in 1998.

"I think for us it is important that we are in a condition to beat Verstappen with one of our drivers," said Stella, having guided the team a second consecutive constructors' title with months to spare. — ***AFP***

Root's first ton in Australia guides England to 325-9 despite Starc heroics

BRISBANE: Joe Root finally scored his maiden Test century in Australia on his fourth Ashes tour to guide England from a precarious 5-2 to 325-9 at stumps after a pulsating first day of the second Ashes Test in Brisbane yesterday.

Mitchell Starc became the most successful left-arm fast bowler in history as he claimed 6-71, but the opening sessions of the day-night contest were dominated by Root, who scored a masterful 135 not out.

Number 11 Jofra Archer thrilled the travelling army of fans as he smashed a career-best unbeaten 32 off 26 balls with two sixes to provide some late fireworks.

His unbroken 10th-wicket partnership of 61 with Root was a record for England at the Gabba.

The world's top-ranked batsman, Root had failed to reach triple figures on three previous Ashes tours.

But the man who is second on the all-time run-scoring list behind only Sachin Tendulkar silenced the critics who said he couldn't be considered a true batting great until he had made a century in Australia.

Coming to the crease in the third over at 5-2 with Starc swinging the new pink ball, he embarked on an epic knock, bringing up his century with a leg glance to the fine leg boundary off Scott Boland.

Starc's six wickets moved him to 418 in Tests, surpassing Pakistan great Wasim Akram's 414 as the most prolific left-arm paceman in Test history.

"Wasim's still the pinnacle, I think he's still better than me," said Starc.

Starc again was the destroyer at the top of the order, removing Ben Duckett in his first over and Ollie Pope in his second to reduce a shell-shocked England to 5-2.

But unlike in the first Test defeat in Perth, England showed some grit with a 117-run partnership between Root and Zak Crawley, who made 76.

Both teams wore black armbands in memory of former England batsman Robin Smith, who died unexpectedly this week.

Australia, who won the opening Test inside two days, went into this match without regular skipper Pat Cummins.

He had been rumoured to be making an early return from a back injury, but instead the hosts sprung a major surprise by leaving out off-spinner Nathan Lyon for seamer Michael Neser.

It was the first time in almost 14 years that Australia played a Test at home without a frontline spinner.



England's Joe Root (left) celebrates his maiden century on Australian soil.

Duckett was first to go on the last ball of Starc's first over, nicking a full ball to Marnus Labuschagne at first slip for a golden duck.

Pope then chopped on a wide delivery he could have left alone to leave England wobbling. Crawley and Root survived an examination from the Australian attack and began to take advantage as the wicket flattened.

Root shared important partnerships with Harry Brook (31), Ben Stokes (19) and Will Jacks (19) as England played more conservatively than they had in the first Test.

Root brought up his half-century off 83 balls, shortly after England had reached 150.

Starc was the only Australian bowler who looked threatening, but Boland did produce the ball of the day -- bowling Jamie Smith for a duck with a beautiful delivery which cut back from outside off stump.

England had slipped from 210-4 to 211-6 before off-spinner Jacks justified his inclusion to bolster the batting with some positive stroke play before an expansive drive to Starc brought his downfall England were 251-7 which quickly became 264-9 as Gus Atkinson and Brydon Carse came and went to a rampant Starc under the lights.

Just when it looked like England would fold, Archer and Root went on the attack.

Pace bowler Archer hit two towering sixes and Root joined the fun with a reverse scoop off Boland that cleared the ropes at third man.

Brief Scores

England *325 for 9 (Root 135*, Crawley 76, Starc 6-71)* ***vs Australia.***
— AFP