

Al Attiyah takes overall Dakar lead as Sanders tops bikes

AL ULA: Qatar's five-time Dakar Rally winner Nasser Al Attiyah moved into the overall lead in the car category, while Australia's defending Dakar Rally motorbike champion Daniel Sanders finished at the top after winning yesterday's second stage at Al Ula in Saudi Arabia.

American Seth Quintero beat his South African Toyota Gazoo Racing teammate Henk Lategan by 1:42 with Saudi's reigning champion Yazeed Al Rajhi in third, but the Qatari star and the Belgian navigator Fabian Lurquin gained a slender seven-second lead in their Dacia from Quintero.

Al Attiyah set only the eighth fastest time, but that result gives him a strong road position for today's loop stage, where navigation will play a key role.

It also marks his first return to the top of the overall standings since securing his fifth Dakar victory in 2023.

"Today was a good day. I am happy with how it went. I stayed calm from the start and avoided any punctures. That is what we need over the next two or three days. We can then find our rhythm. Overall, I am satisfied," Al Attiyah said.


Qatar's Nasser Al Attiyah and navigator Fabian Lurquin of Belgium in action for Dacia Sandriders during Stage 2 of the Dakar Rally 2026. PIC: DAKAR

Dacia's best Dakar result before this came in 2025, when Al Attiyah finished second after Stage 3.

By moving into the overall lead in the 2026 edition, the Qatari has taken the Sandrider to the top of the standings for the first time in the car's short Dakar history.

After yesterday's stage, Guillaume de Mévius sits third in the overall standings at 1 minute 9 seconds, followed by South Africa's Henk Lategan at 1 minute 28 seconds and France's Sebastien Loeb at 1 minute 57 seconds.

Joao Ferreira is sixth at 2 minutes 1 second, with Toby Price seventh at 2 minutes 42 seconds.

The top seven are covered by less than three minutes.

Meanwhile, on two wheelers, the 31-year-old Sanders completed the stage in 4hrs 13mins 37 seconds to cross the line 1min 35s clear of KTM teammate Edgar Canet, who lost time with a couple of minor crashes.

American Ricky Brabec, the 2024 winner, completed the day's podium for Honda. With this 10th stage win in motorsport's toughest challenge, Sanders climbed to the top of the bike standings by half a minute from Canet, winner of the prologue and opening stage, with Brabec 2min 18s back in third.

Today's third stage is a 422km special starting and ending in Al Ula. — ***AGENCIES***

After heavy loss, Al Gharafa aim for strong start to second half of QSL

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Al Gharafa topped the standings at the halfway stage of the Qatar Stars League (QSL) after a commanding start to the season, but a heavy loss to struggling Al Shahania in their last match brought a sudden halt to that momentum and served as a clear wake-up call for Pedro Martins' **(pictured)** side.

The 3-0 defeat against the bottom-placed side last week confined Al Gharafa to eight wins and a draw from 11 matches, with Martins hoping his team can make a strong comeback as the second half of the top flight gets underway today.

Al Gharafa face a tough challenge to retain their lead in the decisive phase of the season, with second-placed Al Shamal four points behind on 21. Defending champions Al Sadd and Al Rayyan – a further point adrift – are also closing in on the leaders.

Martins, who expressed his dejection over the loss to Al Shahania, pointed to a silver lining from the shock defeat as his team prepares to take on Umm Salal at Al Khor Stadium today.

"I have sensed a positive reaction among the players during their preparations. They have shown the desire to forget what happened and restore the team's character and response," Martins told a press conference yesterday.

"Now the match against Umm Salal is important for us. It is going to be a difficult game because Umm Salal are doing well under coach Patrice Carteron, who has succeeded in finding the right balance."




Al Gharafa players during a training session.

"I am confident the players will handle the challenge well and show sharp improvement from our previous match."

Standing 10th with nine points, Umm Salal are aiming to stay away from the relegation zone and move up the standings. They are coming into the clash fresh from a commanding 3-0 victory over Al Ahli.

"The win was a great boost for our campaign," Carteron said yesterday.

"Now we are aiming for a repeat of that performance against Al Gharafa, which will be a tough test for us."


Al Rayyan players gear up for the match against Al Sailiya.

Al Rayyan and Al Sailiya eye points

In today's second match, Al Rayyan and Al Sailiya will square off at the Grand Hamad Stadium.

Al Rayyan, who played out a 2-2 draw against Al Arabi, will be looking to keep up the pursuit of the leaders.

"The first half of the season was fantastic for us, but we must continue working hard to take the top spot. Currently, we are in the top four of the league and leading the QSL Cup and the Gulf Club Champions League," said Al Rayan coach Artur Jorge.

"In the second half, we must try to maintain the same desire and enthusiasm to achieve even more and reach our goals for this season."

Al Sailiya – 11th in the table with eight points – are hoping for a strong start to the second half.

Mirghani Al Zain said his team is ready for the challenge, with their sights set on collecting three valuable points.

"We need to be more focused in the second half, which is starting for us with a tough match against Al Rayyan," said the Al Sailiya coach.

"We have some absences due to suspensions and injuries, but I am confident in the available players to get a positive result from the match," he added.

QSL FIXTURES

Today

Umm Salal vs Al Gharafa
at Al Khor Stadium (5:30pm)
Al Sailiya vs Al Rayyan
at Grand Hamad Stadium (7:30pm)

Tomorrow

Al Ahli vs Al Shamal
at Al Thumama Stadium (5:30pm)
Al Wakrah vs Al Arabi
at Saoud Bin Abdulrahman Stadium (7:30pm)

On Thursday

Al Shahania vs Al Duhail
at Al Khor Stadium (5:30pm)
Qatar SC vs Al Sadd
at Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium (7:30pm)

Real teenager Endrick targets Brazil return from Lyon loan

DÉCINES-CHARPIEU: Brazilian starlet Endrick said yesterday that he hoped his loan switch to Lyon would help spark a return to the national side, in time for the World Cup.

The 19-year-old played just 99 minutes of football for Real Madrid during the first half of this season as he failed to convince the Merengues' new coach Xabi Alonso to show him the kind of faith he enjoyed last season under Carlo Ancelotti.

He played 11 times for Brazil in 2024, the year he moved to Spain from Palmeiras in his homeland, but featured only once in the yellow jersey in 2025.

"My aim is to help Lyon, to play and to win," Endrick told reporters ahead of his likely debut for the Ligue 1 side against Lille in the French Cup this weekend.

"When you're Brazilian, everyone dreams of playing for the national team.

"I haven't been picked recently, but I will do everything to get back in."

Endrick's arrival sparked excitement amongst the Lyon faithful not seen since the arrivals of his compatriot Sonny Anderson in 1999, or French playmaker Yoann Gourcuff in 2010.

"He has immense talent and potential. He's quick and he's able to get in behind and to finish off chances with his goal sense," said Lyon's technical director Matthieu Louis-Jean.

Lyon claimed a 3-1 win at Monaco on Saturday that kept them fifth in the table and just two points off the top four and potential Champions League qualification. — ***AFP***

O'Neill appointed new manager of Celtic

GLASGOW: Celtic have appointed Martin O'Neill as their manager until the end of the season yesterday after the Scottish champions sacked Wilfried Nancy earlier in the day.

"Celtic Football Club can confirm that Martin O'Neill will be joining the club as manager until the end of this season," said a club statement.

"Martin will be supported by Shaun Maloney and Mark Fotheringham as assistants, as well as Stephen McManus, who will join our existing coaches, Gavin Strachan, Stevie Woods and Greg Wallace to oversee first-team matters."

O'Neill, a full-time manager of the Glasgow giants from 2000-2005, stepped aside for Nancy in early December. But the French boss was sacked yesterday after just eight games in charge. — ***AFP***

Amorim sacked by Manchester United after 14-month reign

LONDON: Ruben Amorim was sacked by Manchester United yesterday, bringing a dramatic end to his turbulent 14-month spell as manager of the struggling Premier League giants.

The dismissal of the Portuguese follows growing tensions with Old Trafford bosses, including director of football Jason Wilcox, over recent days.

The club, sixth in the Premier League table after a 1-1 draw at Leeds on Sunday, issued a statement saying Amorim had "departed his role as head coach of Manchester United", thanking him for his service.

"The club's leadership has reluctantly made the decision that it is the right time to make a change," United said in their statement.

Current under-18s coach Darren Fletcher, a former United midfielder and technical director between 2021 and 2024, will take charge of the team against struggling Burnley tomorrow.

The BBC said the club were planning to appoint a caretaker boss for the rest of the season.

Names in the frame for the full-time job include Enzo Maresca, who left Chelsea last week, Crystal Palace boss Oliver Glasner and former England manager Gareth Southgate. Amorim had hinted at deep frustrations on Friday, suggesting he was not being fully backed in the transfer market.

And he made a string of eye-catching comments after Sunday's draw at Elland Road, where he stressed he was United's manager rather than "just the coach".

The Portuguese told the scouting department and Wilcox "to do their job" during a blockbuster end to a post-match press conference that raised major doubts over his future.

And he repeatedly suggested to the media that he would leave when his contract expired in 18 months' time.

But reports yesterday said United's decision to axe their manager was due to the lack of progress rather than a power struggle. The dismissal is a dismal end for Amorim, who won just 25 of his 63 games at United in all competitions during the shortest reign for a permanent manager since David Moyes was sacked just eight months into his tenure in 2014.

He had the worst win ratio (32 percent), the worst goals-conceded-per-game ratio (1.53) and the lowest clean-sheet ratio (15 percent) of any United boss in the Premier League.

Amorim arrived at Old Trafford to replace Erik ten Hag in November 2024 as one of the most sought-after coaches in world football following a successful stint at Sporting Lisbon, where he won two league titles. But he was powerless to stop United's slide to a 15th-place finish in the Premier League - their worst campaign for 51 years - at one stage describing his team as "maybe the worst" in the history of the club. Amorim has been hit by injuries and a number of players are on Africa Cup of Nations duty but he has been criticised for sticking rigidly to his preferred 3-4-3 formation despite evidence it was not the best fit for his players.

His exit leaves the club searching for their seventh permanent manager since the retirement of Alex Ferguson, who left as a Premier League champion in 2013. — ***AFP***


Ruben Amorim

Salah seals AFCON last-16 win for Egypt


Egypt's Mohamed Salah (second left) celebrates scoring his team's third goal against Benin yesterday.

AGADIR: Captain Mohamed Salah scored after 124 minutes to clinch a 3-1 extra-time victory for Egypt over plucky minnows Benin in an Africa Cup of Nations last-16 thriller in Agadir yesterday.

Marwan Attia put the Pharaohs ahead in the second half and Jodel Dossou equalised for the Cheetahs, taking the match to an additional 30 minutes in the southern Moroccan coastal city.

Yasser Ibrahim headed Egypt back in front in the first half of extra time, then Salah broke clear and beat goalkeeper Marcel Dandjinou with a shot from outside the area for his 10th AFCON goal.

Salah, whose goals have helped Liverpool win many trophies, is seeking a first AFCON winners' medal, having twice been a runner-up.

Record seven-time champions Egypt stay in Agadir to face title-holders Ivory Coast or Burkina Faso on Saturday in the quarter-finals.

Benin lacked captain and former Premier League striker Steve Mounie, who had not recovered from an undisclosed illness.

Egypt had a great chance to go in front after only eight minutes through Omar Marmoush, the 26-year-old who joined Manchester City at the beginning of last year from Eintracht Frankfurt.

He darted forward from the Egyptian half, gained possession and stayed ahead of two pursuing defenders only to be foiled by Dandjinou, who blocked the ball with his legs, then grasped it.

When Egypt threatened again soon after, centre-back Yohan Roche rescued Benin, clearing the ball as it was trickling toward the net.

A collision between Mohamed Hamdy and Rodolfo Aloko led to a long delay, which ended with the Egyptian being carried off the field. Ahmed Aboul-Fetouh took his place in midfield.

While Egypt had more possession in the opening half, Benin held their own and it took a superb sliding tackle from Hamdy Fathy to halt a Benin counterattack.

An incident deep in added time illustrated how wary Benin were of Salah. When the captain gained possession just outside the box, he was immediately surrounded by three opponents.

Dandjinou rescued Benin 10 minutes into the second half when he bravely parried a close-range shot from Ramy Rabia after the ball ran loose to the defender following a corner.

As the match passed the hour mark, it began to open up. A Salah attempt to chip the ball into the net was foiled by leaping Dandjinou.

Then, a parry from 37-year-old Egypt goalkeeper Mohamed El Shenawy prevented substitute Dossou giving Benin a shock lead.

Attia ended the goalless stalemate when Marmoush pushed the ball back to the midfielder and, from just outside the box, he side-footed it into the roof of the net.

Benin refused to accept defeat, though, attacked constantly and levelled on 83 minutes through 33-year-old Dossou.

El Shenawy did superbly to palm a Mohamed Tijani cross away from his goal, but the ball fell invitingly for Dossou, and he pushed it into the net.

Egypt regained the lead seven minutes into extra time, and this time Attia was the creator.

He crossed after a short corner and a looping Ibrahim header evaded Dandjinou and landed in the net.

Salah then put the outcome beyond doubt with his third goal of the tournament. — ***AFP***



Little-known Rosenior set for surprise chance at Chelsea

PARIS: Liam Rosenior **(pictured)** is a little-known English coach who looks certain to be thrust into a fierce spotlight as Chelsea's new manager.

If Rosenior becomes the latest coach on the Chelsea carousel to replace the departed Enzo Maresca, he will have benefited from the Blues' owners' multi-club model to earn promotion from Ligue 1's Strasbourg to the upper echelons of the Premier League.

And while he may never have coached in the Premier League, he comes with a glowing reference from former Manchester United and England great Wayne Rooney.

After a short spell in charge of Brighton's under-23s, Rosenior, 41, began his senior coaching career in 2019 at Derby County, first under Philiip Cocu and then as assistant to Rooney.

"He's taken chances, and hopefully that pays off because I think Liam is as good a coach as I've ever worked with," Rooney said on his BBC podcast.

"He was incredible in his coaching ability," added Rooney, highlighting Rosenior's attention to detail.

Rosenior briefly replaced Rooney on an interim basis in 2022 and later that year took over as manager of Hull City in the Championship.

After just over 18 months in charge, he was sacked and in July 2024 was appointed by Strasbourg, the French club who are owned by Chelsea's parent company BlueCo, That link appears to be the main reason the west Londoners are considering Rosenior, given his relative dearth of top-flight experience. Strasbourg are currently seventh in Ligue 1.

But according to Rooney, "he's done his apprenticeship... so he'll have no doubts in his mind that he's capable of doing that job." He would become only the fourth English manager in the current Premier League.

Rosenior, a right back in his playing days, certainly has football in his blood.

His father Leroy was a striker for Fulham, Queens Park Rangers, West Ham and Bristol City and, although born in London, he represented the Sierra Leone national team due to family links.

Liam followed in his father's footsteps, playing for both Bristol City and Fulham during a long career split mostly between the Premier League and Championship.

Leroy also went into management and Liam twice played under his dad, firstly in the Bristol City youth ranks and then in the old Third Division during a brief loan spell at Torquay United when he was 19.

Perhaps surprisingly, though, Leroy was not a pushy parent and always let Liam choose his own path.

Like his father, he represented England at under-21 level, although he never made the switch to Sierra Leone at senior level.

Liam found silverware hard to come by as a player, but did score the clinching second goal for Bristol City in their Football League Trophy success in 2003.

In 2014, he was part of the Hull City team that took an early 2-0 lead over Arsenal in the FA Cup final, only to lose 3-2 after extra time. If he is appointed soon, one of his first tasks as Chelsea manager would be trying to get the Blues past Arsenal in a two-legged League Cup semi-final, with the first leg on January 14. — ***AFP***

Medvedev renews call for early nights at Australian Open

BRISBANE: Daniil Medvedev yesterday renewed his call for the Australian Open to begin its night sessions earlier, after the Russian endured a string of recent post-midnight finishes at Melbourne Park, but admitted there was little chance of it happening.

Medvedev complained that late finishes at the first Grand Slam of the year, which begins on January 18 in Melbourne, were unfair to players, spectators and officials and benefited nobody.

But he conceded that the demands of television broadcasters came first so change would not happen.

"It never will, because TV's controlling everything and I think there is always a reason why it (starts at) 7:00 pm and not 6:00 pm," said Medvedev, who has suffered from matches finishing in the early hours of the morning on his last two Australian Open appearances.

A year ago, Medvedev was beaten by Learner Tien in a Melbourne Park match that finished at 2:55 am.

In 2024, on his way to the final, he beat Finland's Emil Ruusuvuori in a second-round clash that ended at 3:39 am.

"I don't think it will ever change," said Medvedev after his 6-2, 6-3 opening round win over Hungary's Marton Fucsovics at the Brisbane International yesterday.

The Australian Open stages two matches in its evening sessions, which begin at 7:00 pm on the two main show courts, and it has a notorious reputation for finishes well after midnight.

In 2023 three-time Grand Slam winner Andy Murray's five-hour, 45-minute epic against Thanasi Kokkinakis finished at 4:05 am and also led to calls for change.

In 2008, Lleyton Hewitt beat Marcos Baghdatis in an Australian Open match that finished at 4:34 am, the latest finish in Grand Slam history. — ***AFP***


Daniil Medvedev

Gauff shocked as US reach United Cup quarters, Hurkacz stuns Zverev

PERTH: World number four Coco Gauff suffered her first-ever defeat at the United Cup yesterday when she was stunned by Spain's Jessica Bouzas Maneiro 6-1, 6-7 (3/7), 6-0 in a blow to her Australian Open preparations.

But after Taylor Fritz won to level the tie for the United States, Gauff made amends with Christian Harrison in the mixed doubles, beating Ivonne Cavalle-Reimers and Inigo Cervantes 7-6 (7/5), 6-0 to seal a quarter-final spot.

Gauff had won all six of her previous United Cup singles matches for the USA and had a 3-0 record in mixed doubles.

It was the first win over a top-five player for Bouzas Maneiro.

"I know Coco and she's a fighter," the 42nd-ranked Bouzas Maneiro said in Perth.

"She's there all the time in the match, so I knew that I had to be there. Even if you are 3-0 or 4-0 up, you have to be ready." World number four Fritz, who is battling a knee problem, needed more than three hours to beat Jaume Munar 7-6 (7/4), 3-6, 7-6 (8/6).

"I was getting exhausted late in the second set, I had to unload five or six shots just to win a single point," said Fritz, who saved a match point in the third set tiebreak.


Spain's Jessica Bouzas Maneiro reacts to a point against USA's Coco Gauff.

"I started feeling my knee towards the end but it didn't get any worse. It was not bad enough to stop me from playing through." In Sydney, Germany's world number three Alexander Zverev was also on the end of a shock United Cup result, beaten 6-3, 6-4 by Poland's Hubert Hurkacz, who had not played since June because of knee surgery.

"It's been a while since I've been competing. Seven months I've been going through difficult times with the team and it was very challenging," Hurkacz said.

"We went through a long period of time not competing and not knowing when we would be able to be back on court again.

"I was just trying to cherish and enjoy every moment here on the court today."

Former world number six Hurkacz has tumbled to 83rd in the rankings but faced just one break point in his 83-minute victory.

"I was serving quite well. I was finding nice spots, so that's definitely a nice feeling to really have good rhythm on the serve," Hurkacz said.

"Just so pleased with the performance and just also so much fun to see the fans again."

Former world number one Iga Swiatek was forced to battle hard to clinch the tie for Poland with a 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 win over Eva Lys.

Swiatek dug deep to secure the decisive break in the 10th game of the final set to close out victory in just under two-and-a-half hours.

Earlier the Czech Republic knocked out Norway with a 3-0 win in Sydney.

In the later match in Perth, Great Britain play Greece.

The Australian Open starts on January 18. — ***AFP***

Head hits back for Australia after Root's majestic 160

SYDNEY: An imperious Joe Root hit a magnificent 160 to drive England to 384 in the fifth and final Ashes Test yesterday before Travis Head let rip to haul Australia back into the contest with a rapid-fire unbeaten 91.

Root's superb innings, his 41st ton to match Ricky Ponting, was only ended courtesy of a brilliant caught-and-bowled by Michael Neser, who finished with 4-60.

Australia were left to negotiate the final session of day two at a sold-out Sydney Cricket Ground, which they did for the loss of Jake Weatherald (21) and Marnus Labuschagne (48).

By stumps, the hosts had raced to 166-2 with nightwatchman Neser on one alongside Head.

Weatherald, who needed a big score to stave off the critics, again failed to live up to expectations since making his debut at the first Test in Perth.

He was dropped twice in the space of three balls, by Root then Ben Duckett, before Ben Stokes trapped him lbw.

But Head, who like Root has slammed two centuries this series, was in the zone.

He clattered three boundaries off the second over from Matthew Potts, in the side for the injured Gus Atkinson, and there was no let-up, blitzing a quickfire 50 off 55 balls.

Labuschagne was also in good touch, stroking seven boundaries before thick-edging Stokes to Jacob Bethell at gully.

Australia lead the series 3-1 and have already retained the Ashes, with England desperate for another win after victory at the previous Test in Melbourne.


England's Joe Root (centre) hits a shot as Australia's wicketkeeper Alex Carey (right) and captain Steve Smith react on day two of fifth and final Ashes Test in Sydney.

England resumed at 211-3 but lost Harry Brook (84), Stokes (0) and Jamie Smith (46) before lunch.

Will Jacks (27), Brydon Carse (1) and Josh Tongue (0), along with Root, departed in the second session.

The day belonged to Root, who started on 72 and reached an almost chanceless century off 146 balls to reaffirm his status as an all-time great.

The 35-year-old had begun the series under pressure after failing to make a hundred in Australia over three previous Ashes tours.

He snapped the drought with an unbeaten 138 in the day-night Test at Brisbane and his exploits in Sydney drew him level third with Australia's Ponting on the all-time century-makers' list, with 41.

Only India's Sachin Tendulkar (51) and South Africa's Jacques Kallis (45) have scored more Test centuries.

Root and Brook came together with England in trouble at 57-3 on Sunday, with both eyeing big centuries on an ideal batting deck.

But Brook only lasted five balls yesterday, adding six to his overnight 78 before dabbing at a Scott Boland delivery and edging into the safe hands of Steve Smith at slip.

It ended a 169-run partnership, not just England's best of the series but the biggest by either team, surpassing Head and Alex Carey's 162 in Adelaide.

Stokes only survived 11 balls before getting the faintest of edges off Mitchell Starc to Carey.

Jamie Smith lived dangerously and was fortunate to survive after chipping Cameron Green to Labuschagne at cover on 22. He began walking off but replays showed Green overstepped and it was a no-ball.

He added another 24 before medium-pacer Labuschagne bagged him in his first over.

The run rate slowed significantly after lunch when the new ball was taken, but Root persisted, passing 150 for a 17th time, just one behind the legendary Don Bradman and three short of Tendulkar.

He and Jacks put on 52 for the seventh wicket until Jacks sent a leading edge to Green in the gully off Neser. Root was ninth man out and Tongue followed without any addition to the score.

***BRIEF SCORES: Australia** 166 for 2 (Head 91*, Stokes 2-30) **trail England** 384 (Root 160, Brook 84, Neser 4-60) **by 218 runs.** — AFP*