Hadi De Carrere, Loaded Gun kick off H H The Amir Sword Festival in style

Al Ghazali and Casamento dominate the opening day with a triple win at Al Rayyan Racecourse

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The 48th H H The Amir Sword Festival burst into action yesterday as Hadi De Carrere and Loaded Gun delivered standout wins that set the tone for what promises to be four days of thrilling racing.

It was a landmark moment for Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club, celebrating its 50th anniversary by hosting the popular festival for four days for the first time.

Trainer Gassim Al Ghazali and jockey Marco Casamento quickly stamped their authority on the event, each claiming three victories and setting the stage for the action-packed days ahead.

The highlight of the day came when Sheikh Ahmad bin Mohamed bin Faleh Al-Thani-owned Hadi De Carrere capped the evening in style, powering home to win the Purebred Arabian Open Handicap Cup by an astonishing 13 lengths.

The nine-year-old bay appeared at ease from the start of the 1900m race, moving comfortably through the early stages before pulling clear in the home straight. With the final 250m unfolding, he showcased a burst of speed that left rivals trailing, sealing a commanding victory as the opening day drew to a close.



QREC Deputy CEO Ahmed Amanalla Al-Sheebani presented the Purebred Arabian Open Handicap Cup to Sheikh Ahmad bin Mohamed bin Faleh Al-Thani, owner of Hadi De Carrere. PICS: JUHAIM/QREC



QREC Racing Manager Abdulla Rashid Al Kubaisi presented the Thoroughbred Handicap Cup to the connections of Loaded Gun.

Earlier in the penultimate race, Khalid Nasser Al-Attiya-owned Loaded Gun had delivered another win for the duo, taking the Thoroughbred Handicap Cup over 2500m. The five-year-old bay dug deep in a strong field, edging out his rivals by a quarter length.

The Festival began on a high note for Al Ghazali and Casamento when Jungle Monarch opened proceedings with a 2½-length victory in the Thoroughbred Maiden Cup.

Meanwhile, Sweet Fantastic with Szczepan Mazur in the saddle won the Thoroughbred Handicap by over five lengths, while Purebred Arabian Handicap Cup saw Dukhan Alseej under Hamza Laglaoui claiming a 1¼ lengths victory.

Mazur also rode Waajidd to Thoroughbred Novice Cup triumph while Al Natibis Up won the Purebred Arabian Novice Cup with Pierre Charles Boudot in the saddle.

The Festival features a total of 32 races, with the closing day on Saturday set to host the most prestigious contests, highlighted by the H H The Amir Sword and the H H The Amir Trophy, each offering prize money of $2.5m.

48TH H H THE AMIR SWORD FESTIVAL - DAY 1
WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)

Purebred Arabian Open Handicap Cup
Hadi De Carrere, Gassim Al Ghazali, Marco Casamento

Thoroughbred Handicap Cup (85-105)
Loaded Gun, Gassim Al Ghazali, Marco Casamento

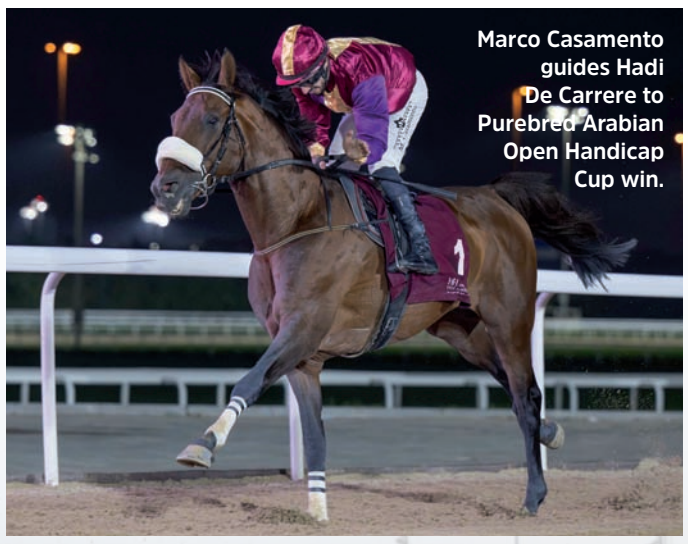
Thoroughbred Handicap Cup (70-90)
Sweet Fantastic, Hamad Al-Jehani, Szczepan Mazur

Purebred Arabian Handicap Cup (0-70)
Dukhan Alseej, Jassim Hamad Al-Atteya, Hamza Laglaoui

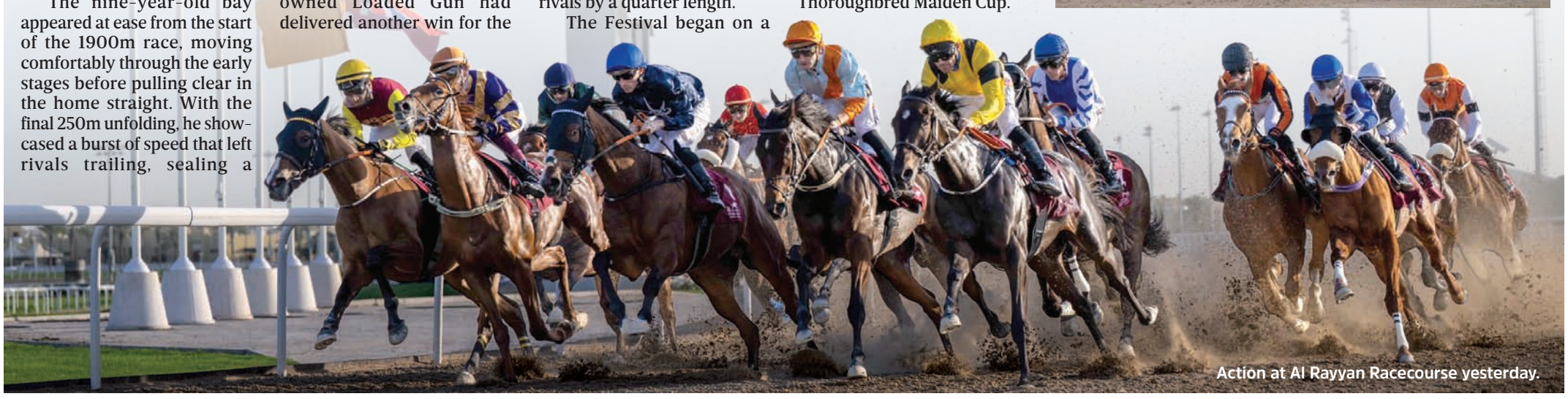
Thoroughbred Novice Cup, 4yo+
Waajidd, Zuhair Mohsen, Szczepan Mazur

Purebred Arabian Novice Cup
Al Natibis Up, Eng. Osama Omer Al-Dafea, Pierre Charles Boudot

Thoroughbred Maiden Cup
Jungle Monarch, Gassim Al Ghazali, Marco Casamento



Marco Casamento guides Hadi De Carrere to Purebred Arabian Open Handicap Cup win.



Action at Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday.

Swiatek fights back to reach quarters, Mboko sets up Rybakina clash

CHINTHANA WASALA
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: World No. 2 Iga Swiatek battled back from a set down to defeat Daria Kasatkina yesterday to stay on course for a fourth Qatar TotalEnergies Open title, advancing to the quarter-finals in Doha.

The top seed, Swiatek recovered from a set down to overcome a stiff challenge by the Russian-born Australian with a score of 5-7, 6-1, 6-1 in a two-hour and 17-minute affair at the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex.

"It wasn't an easy match," Swiatek said after the win over the World No.61 Kasatkina.

"Even in the second and third sets, I had to do a lot to win rallies against Daria. I think I gave her more chances. She used the slower surface here and she was going for it more compared to the last matches," Swiatek said.

"I felt like I could have done more in the first set. I didn't really adjust well to the colder conditions and the wind. For sure, it's a lesson for the next days."

Swiatek, who lifted the Doha title three consecutive times from 2022 to 2024, has now reached the quarter-finals for the fifth time in her career. Only Petra Kvitova, Caroline Wozniacki and Agnieszka Radwanska have better records than her, reaching the last eight in Doha six times each.

Swiatek will now face Greece's Maria Sakkari, the former world No. 3, who advanced after cruising past France's Varvara Gracheva 7-5, 6-0.

"Iga is very solid but at the same time she's very aggressive," Sakkari said of her next opponent.

"She moves the ball really well. She moves very well on the court. She doesn't give you many errors. So it's going to be a huge challenge for me. When we played last year here, it was an easy score but it wasn't an easy match," Sakkari recalled.

No.2 seed Elena Rybakina also progressed, overcoming China's Qinwen Zheng 4-6, 6-2, 7-5 in their third round match, which lasted almost two and half hours last night.

Earlier, Canadian World No. 13 Victoria Mboko and Russian Mirra Andreeva, ranked seventh, faced off for the second time this season.

They first met in last month's Adelaide International final, where the 18-year-old Russian prevailed in straight sets, but it was the Canadian No. 10 seed who succeeded this time in Doha.



Poland's Iga Swiatek hits a return against Australia's Daria Kasatkina. (AFP)

Mboko, aged 19, won 6-3, 3-6, 7-6(5) in 2 hours and 10 minutes in a tense tie-break, marking a growing rivalry between two of the WTA Tour's brightest young talents.

"I think we both were pretty tired when it came to the tie-break. I think I felt like I was lucky enough to have some good shots in the great moments," Mboko said.

Mboko will next face Rybakina for a place in the semi-finals. Last year's runner-up, Jelena Ostapenko of Latvia also advanced, beating Colombia's Camila Osorio 6-3, 6-1 to set up a last-eight tie with Elisabetta Cocciaretto.Italy's Cocciaretto edged Ann Li of the United States 7-6(7-5), 5-7, 6-4 in a tight three-set battle. Karolina Pliskova was forced to retire injured just 38 minutes into her contest against Karolina Muchova, bringing an early end to their clash.

Djokovic withdraws from Qatar Open citing 'fatigue'

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: World No.3 Novak Djokovic has withdrawn from next week's Qatar ExxonMobil Open, citing strong fatigue, the Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel and Badminton Federation said in a social media post yesterday.

The 24-time Grand Slam champion's decision comes 10 days after his defeat to world No.1 Carlos Alcaraz in the Australian Open final. Prior to their final in Melbourne, the 38-year-old Serbian had battled past world No.2 Jannik Sinner in a semi-final that stretched beyond four hours.

In the absence of the two-time Doha title winner, Alcaraz and Sinner will headline the ATP 500 event as the top two seeds.

Djokovic had won consecutive titles in 2016 and 2017, and holds a 15-3 win-loss record in Doha. He is expected to resume his campaign in March at the Indian Wells Masters.

Amir Cup: Al Duhail target quarter-final spot as Round of 16 begins

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Al Duhail will look to secure a place in the quarter-finals when they face Al Waab at Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium today as the Round of 16 of the Amir Cup gets under way.

In the other match today, Al Wakrah take on Al Sailiya at Hamad Bin Khalifa Stadium, with the knockout stage set to continue until Sunday. Al Duhail assistant coach Fares Bouzid stressed the importance of maintaining full focus against their opponents.

"This is a crucial match in a tournament that means a great deal to Al Duhail, and we must give everything to win the title. We've prepared thoroughly and expect a tough match," he said at yesterday's pre-match press conference.

"We've studied Al Waab closely, understand their strengths and weaknesses, and will fight with full focus and determination to secure qualification."

Second Division side Al Waab advanced to the Round of 16 after defeating Lusail in the preliminary stage.

ROUND OF 16 FIXTURES

Today
Al Duhail vs Al Waab at Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium (4:30pm)
Al Wakrah vs Al Sailiya at Hamad Bin Khalifa Stadium (7:15pm)

Tomorrow
Al Shamal vs Qatar SC at Grand Hamad Stadium (4:30pm)
Al Shahania vs Al Arabi at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium (7:15pm)

On Saturday
Al Gharafa vs Al Kharaitiyat at Hamad Bin Khalifa Stadium (4:30pm)
Al Rayyan vs Al Khor at Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium (7:15pm)
Al Sadd vs Al Markhiya at Grand Hamad Stadium (7:15pm)

On Sunday
Al Ahli vs Umm Salal at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium (7:15pm)

Al Waab coach Ahmed Abdelsalam Mohamed said his team is ready to rise to the challenge.

"We're looking forward to delivering our best performance against Al Duhail. The team is fully prepared, and we aim to show a level worthy of this highly competitive tournament," he said.

Meanwhile, Al Wakrah, currently sixth in the Qatar Stars League, are aiming for a strong showing in the prestigious competition.

"We're excited to perform well in a competition that means a lot to us and everyone involved, and we are striving to win the title, even though we know it will be very difficult with so many strong teams," said Al Wakrah coach Vicente Moreno.

Al Sailiya are a distinguished side with good players and a good coach, but we are ambitious and determined to compete strongly and fight for the trophy."

Al Sailiya coach Mirghani Al Zain said his side is eager to make the most of their opportunity in the tournament.

"We are preparing to compete in a tournament that is dear to everyone's hearts. The players are striving to give their best, and despite the difficulty of our situation, we are determined to seize the opportunity to qualify for the next round," said the coach.



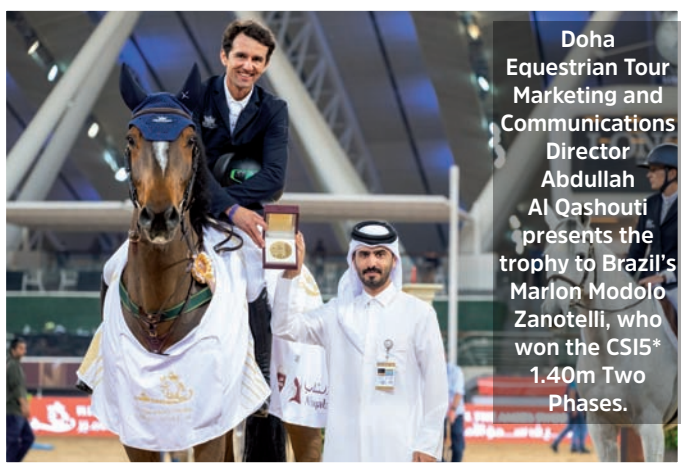
Steiner shines on opening day at Al Shaqab

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA



Switzerland's Nadja Peter Steiner and mare Nice Van'T Zorgvliet in action yesterday. RIGHT: Assistant Deputy Director of Doha Equestrian Tour Sheikh Talal bin Khalid Al Thani hands the trophy to CSI5* 1.50m Faults & Time winner Steiner.




Doha Equestrian Tour Marketing and Communications Director Abdullah Al Qashouti presents the trophy to Brazil's Marlon Modolo Zanotelli, who won the CSI5* 1.40m Two Phases.

DOHA: Switzerland's Nadja Peter Steiner claimed opening-day honours at H H The Amir's Sword showjumping and dressage spectacle, winning the feature event at Al Shaqab's Longines Outdoor Arena yesterday.

Riding 13-year-old mare Nice Van'T Zorgvliet, Steiner produced a flawless round over a challenging CSI5* 1.50m Faults & Time course, stopping the clock at 66.42 seconds to take the victory.

She edged USA's Kristen Vanderveen, who rode 12-year-old gelding Bull Run's Jireh to a second-place finish in 66.92 seconds.

Brazil's Marlon Modolo Zanotelli on Dorette Old completed the podium in 67.67 seconds, securing his second top-three finish of the day.

"I am very proud of my mare. She is such a fighter," Steiner said after her win.

"It was a tough course with not many clearances in the end and I am very happy with the win. It's amazing to win here and it's been a pleasant stay since the start of the year," added the Swiss rider, who also competed across four tours of the inaugural H H The Father Amir's Prix last month.

Earlier at the Outdoor Arena, Zanotelli partnered with mare Merciminka to win the CSI5* 1.40m Two Phases, clocking 22.25 seconds in the second phase.

USA's Kristen Vanderveen on Starbucks 27 finished second in 23.02 seconds, while Italy's Emanuele Gaudiano on Vasco 118 took third in 23.32 seconds.

In dressage at the Longines Indoor Arena, Morocco's Youssef Essamlali, riding Jazz Parra, topped the CDN Preliminary Freestyle. USA's Haajerah Khan on Chantal M placed second, while Qatar's Shka. Shaikha Al-Thani, aboard Fenouil-F.M., finished third.

Qatar's Hamad Nasser S A Al Marri (Sandro Girl) won the CDN Preliminary Freestyle (Juniors), followed by compatriots Hadi Nasser H Sh Al Hajri (Cordian Z) and Moza Hamza M A Al Kuwari (Lippo) in second and third places respectively.

Today's programme at the four-day event stretches across nine classes from one-star to five-star, highlighted by three three-star World Cup qualifying rounds, alongside a local 60cm class and an international dressage event.

The H H The Amir's Sword championship is the fifth stop on the Doha Equestrian Tour 2026, which kicked off with the H H The Father Amir Cup.

The four-week series ended with Britain's Scott Brash crowned Grand Prix winner in the five-star category and topping the overall standings with 199 points, ahead of Harry Charles (114) and France's Meghann Mousonnier (113).

In the one-star category, Qatari riders lead the way, with Saad Ahmed Al Saad first on 49 points and Hussein Saeed Haidan second on 43.


beIN Sports Chairman Nasser Al Khelaifi and IOC President Kirsty Coventry during the agreement signing ceremony.

beIN secures exclusive MENA broadcast rights for Milano Cortina 2026 and LA28 Olympic Games

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: beIN Media Group (beIN), the leading global sports, entertainment, and media organisation, has secured exclusive, multi-platform broadcast rights across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) for the XXV Olympic Winter Games Milano Cortina 2026 and the Games of the XXXIV Olympiad in Los Angeles 2028, as well as the Youth Olympic Games taking place in 2026 and 2028.

The agreement was signed today in Milan and builds on more than a decade of partnership between beIN and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), founded on trust, shared values and sustained long-term investment in sport. Going beyond broadcast rights, the relationship reflects a joint commitment to strengthening the Olympic Movement and expanding its reach, impact and influence across the MENA region.

beIN Group CEO Yousef Al-Obaidly said: "The Olympic Games represent the pinnacle of global sport and culture, and we are proud to continue our long-standing, trusted partnership with the IOC, bringing the Games to millions of viewers across the MENA region. For more than a decade, beIN has been a committed partner of the IOC, delivering the Olympic Games to audiences while elevating the stories that define the Olympic Movement. Securing the rights to Milano Cortina 2026 and LA28 reflects our long-term commitment to the Games and our continued work with the IOC to expand their reach, impact and positive influence worldwide."

IOC President Kirsty Coventry said: "We are pleased to continue our partnership with beIN MEDIA GROUP in the Middle East and North Africa, and I'd like to thank the beIN team for all their support. Through its extensive reach and sports broadcast expertise, beIN is a leader in its industry and plays an important role in bringing the Olympic Games to millions of fans across the region."

Under the agreement, beIN Sports and its OTT platform, TOD will deliver extensive coverage featuring live competition, highlights, and original programming, all designed to engage audiences throughout the region and elevate sports broadcasting standards.

Exposito's late strike rescues Al Ahli against Sepahan

THE PENINSULA


Al Ahli's Erik Exposito (right) celebrates after scoring a goal.

DOHA: A late Erik Exposito goal saw Al Ahli SC hold Foolad Mobarakeh Sepahan SC to a 2-2 draw in their AFC Champions League Round of 16 first leg at Al Thumama Stadium yesterday.

The Spaniard's stoppage-time equaliser came minutes after Sepahan were reduced to 10 men following Omid Norafkan's red card, leaving the tie finely balanced ahead of next week's return leg at the same venue.

Sepahan threatened first in the 11th minute when Arya Yousefi delivered a cross that Mohammed Mehdi Lofti headed just wide. The Iranian side capitalised on their next opportunity nine minutes later, with Lofti feeding Ehsan Hajisafi, whose low cross was swept home by Ricardo Alves for the opener. Al Ahli responded in the 28th minute through a swift break led by Sekou Yansane, who released Exposito inside the box.

Exposito's first-time pass found Michel Vlap, who side-footed home for his fifth goal of the campaign. Al Ahli almost took the lead in the 41st minute when Exposito crossed for Yansane, but his volley was pushed away by Sepahan keeper Seyed Hossein.

Sepahan regained the lead in the seventh minute of first-half added time as Arash Rezavand met Lofti's cross with a downward header that left Al Ahli goalkeeper Yazan Alsheikh with no chance.

The second half was scrappy, with Sepahan adopting a defensive stance while Al Ahli probed, including a Yansane strike in the 57th minute that was comfortably saved. Norafkan's dismissal in the 90th minute for a foul on Suhaib Gannan opened the door for Al Ahli. Gannan's effort in stoppage time was blocked by Hossein, but Exposito was quick to react and steer the rebound home. A VAR review of a scramble involving Exposito and Milad Zakipour did not result in a penalty, and the match ended in a stalemate.

Philippine, Lebanese schools set up Mini World Cup final

THE PENINSULA


Action during the Mini Basketball World Cup.

DOHA: The Philippine School and the Lebanese School qualified for the final of the 2025-2026 Mini Basketball World Cup after securing impressive semi-final victories over GEMS American Academy and Universal Academy, respectively, at the Qatar Basketball Federation (QBF) courts.

The first semi-final saw the Philippine School sealing a 69-53 victory to confirm its place in the final, while the Lebanese School claimed a dominant 66–31 win to reach the championship match. The third-place playoff between Universal Academy and GEMS American Academy is scheduled for today at the QBF courts.

The Lebanese School will face the Philippine School in the final on April 30 at Aspire Academy Arena, coinciding with the closing ceremony of the School Olympic Program season. Based on the final standings of the 2025–2026 season, each participating school in the second edition of the mini tournament (2026–2027) will have the opportunity to select the jersey of one of the national teams qualified for the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027.

A total of 32 secondary schools from across Qatar took part in the championship.

The Mini Basketball World Cup represents a pioneering initiative that combines both sporting and educational dimensions. It is being staged for the first time in the Middle East and North Africa under the supervision of the International Basketball Federation (FIBA), in cooperation with the Qatar Basketball Federation and the Qatar School Sports Federation, using a modern competitive format inspired by the atmosphere of the upcoming FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027.

The championship forms part of the Schools Olympic Program for the 2025–2026 and 2026–2027 seasons, reflecting an integrated vision that blends competitive excellence with educational values, contributes to building a sports-educated generation, and strengthens the role of sport as a bridge for human connection and friendship among nations.

South Africa pip Afghanistan in double super over T20 thriller; Australia, West Indies win


Afghanistan's Rahmanullah Gurbaz (left) reacts after his team's loss against South Africa.

AHMEDABAD: South Africa prevailed in a double super over thriller as Afghanistan came up agonisingly short of a famous victory after their T20 World Cup clash ended in a tie yesterday.

Afghanistan were 187 all out after South Africa scored 187-6 in Ahmedabad. The teams were tied again after a breathless first super over saw them both score 18, before South Africa won off the final ball of a heart-thumping second sudden-death showdown.

After South Africa bludgeoned 23 from their second super over and Afghanistan lost a wicket off the second ball of theirs, Rahmanullah Gurbaz was left needing four sixes off four balls for an unlikely victory. Gurbaz launched Keshav Maharaj into the crowd three times with some huge blows. A wide off the fifth ball meant Afghanistan still needed six to win but now a four would send it to a third super over. With nerves jangling and pulses racing, the left-arm spinner held his nerve to bowl a wide yorker that saw Gurbaz smack into the grateful hands of Davis Miller at point as he looked to hit a boundary.

It was South Africa's second win in as many matches in Group D to be placed second behind toppers New Zealand. A few minutes earlier, after Gurbaz scored a brilliant 42-ball 84 in the chase, Afghanistan had needed 13 off the last over of the match to win with one wicket in hand.

After Kagiso Rabada bowled two no balls and a wide and Noor Ahmad hit a six, Afghanistan needed two to win off three balls. But Noor was run out going for the winning second run with the scores level. South Africa pace bowler Lungi Ngidi was named player of the match after his 3-26 in four overs.

Quinton de Kock (59) and Ryan Rickelton (61) were the manstays of South Africa's innings as they put on 114 for the second wicket.

Australia cruise past Ireland

Australia cruised to a dominant 67-run opening T20 World Cup win over Ireland in Colombo yesterday. Australia made 182-6 after stand-in captain Travis Head won the toss and elected to bat and then bowled Ireland out for 115 at the R. Premadasa stadium. Josh Inglis made 37 off 17 balls, while Marcus Stoinis top scored with 45. Matt Renshaw made 37.

Nathan Ellis, who had been nursing a hamstring injury in te run-up to the tournament, bowled brilliantly to take 4-12 while spinner Adam Zampa took 4-23 as Ireland were dismissed in 16.5 overs.

Motie spins West Indies to win over England

Meanwhile, in Mumbai, left-arm spinner Gudakesh Motie tore the heart out of England's much-vaunted middle order yesterday as the West Indies won by 30 runs. The West Indies scored 196-6 largely thanks to Sherfane Rutherford's brutal unbeaten 76 and some late hitting from Jason Holder.

In reply England were all out for 166 in 19 overs.

BRIEF SCORES

South Africa 187 for 6 (Rickelton 61, Omarzai 3-41) **beat Afghanistan** 187 (Gurbaz 84, Ngidi 3-26) **in the second super over.**

West Indies 196 for 6 (Rutherford 76*, Rashid 2-16) **beat England** 166 (Curran 43*, Motie 3-33, Chase 2-29) **by 30 runs.**

Australia 182 for 6 (Stoinis 45, Inglis 37, Renshaw 37) **beat Ireland** 115 (Dockrell 41, Ellis 4-12, Zampa 4-23) **by 67 runs.** — *AFP*