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# Alcaraz fights back to book Rublev semi-final

CHINTHANA WASALA  
THE PENINSULA

**DOHA:** World No.1 Carlos Alcaraz extended his strong start to the 2026 season with a hard-fought 6-7(1), 6-4, 6-3 victory over Karen Khachanov to book a Qatar ExxonMobil Open semi-final clash against title-holder Andrey Rublev yesterday.

Alcaraz recovered from a tight opening-set loss to seal his maiden last-four appearance in Doha as he improved his record to 10-0 for the season, also extending his flawless record against the Russian Khachanov to 6-0.

"It was a really close and tight match," Alcaraz said after the two-hour, 27-minute contest.

"I feel exhausted, that's for sure. I'm just happy and proud of the way I played. I think I just played a really good level, consistently good throughout the whole match. I think he had started to play well, and was playing such great points and such great tennis when it matters. It was a tough one, a pretty close one, but just really happy that I got it at the end," Alcaraz said during his post-match press conference at the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex.

"In the first set, I had a few break points and I couldn't make them. One set point and I couldn't make it, so it was really tough," Alcaraz said.

"I think Karen was playing great, but I knew I'd had my chances. I just didn't take them in the first set, so it was time to

Spain's Carlos Alcaraz hits a return against Russia's Karen Khachanov. (AFP)



keep going and try to keep fighting. Wait for my chances and try to take them in the second set. I'm just really proud of the way that I fought."

Both players let three break points slip in a series of fierce exchanges in the first set.

Khachanov dominated the breaker, opening a 6-1 lead and taking the set on his third set point.

Alcaraz responded in the second set, breaking to 15 in the fifth game to level the match.

He broke again at 2-2 in the deciding set to take control before securing another break in the ninth game to book his place in the semi-finals.

Earlier, Russian fifth seed Rublev kept his title defence on track after a 6-3, 7-6(2) victory

over Stefanos Tsitsipas to book his place in the semi-finals.

The World No.14 produced a composed display in the key moments to stretch his unbeaten run in Doha to eight matches as he reached the last-four without dropping a set in Doha this time.

Rublev, the Doha champion in both 2020 and 2025, saved all five break points he faced against Tsitsipas yesterday, sealing the victory in 96 minutes in their first meeting since 2022.

Rublev said a few points made the difference against Tsitsipas.

"He also had break points in the first set. I manage to have one break point and to make it. He had a couple of

opportunities, and he didn't make it. So I guess that was the case in the first set," Rublev said.

"Both of us, we like to take the forehand and dictate. So it was this type of match, who will take the forehand first, and will start to dictate," the 28-year-old said.

"Second set was, again, little details that, in important moments, especially in a tie-break, I played really well. That was the difference," Rublev, who will now make his fifth semi-final appearance in nine visits to Doha, said.

With the third semi-final between Alcaraz and Khachanov still in progress on the centre court, Rublev hinted that a possible clash against the

## QUARTER-FINALS

Carlos Alcaraz (ESP x1) bt Karen Khachanov (RUS x7) 6-7(3), 6-4, 6-3

Andrey Rublev (RUS x5) bt Stefanos Tsitsipas (GRE) 6-3, 7-6(2)

Arthur Fils (FRA) bt Jiri Lehecka (CZE x8) 6-3, 6-3

cruised past Czech Jiri Lehecka 6-3, 6-3 to advance.

Despite making it look easy, Fils said the match was a tough affair.

"It was not easy. Maybe we see the score 6-3, 6-3, people think, okay, one break each set. No, it was very tough. Tough condition as well. It was cold and a bit windy, so not easy to do a lot of winners," Fils said after the match.

"But pretty happy with the way I stayed focused during the match. I think we did a great job, so, yeah, we have to keep going like this," said Fils.

top-ranked Spaniard will be a huge challenge.

"Of course it's going to be super difficult. What else to say? It's going to be a good challenge for me to see "I don't know how I approach it. I just try to do my best when I'm playing against them (players like Sinner and Alcaraz). Try to be focused. With them, if you lose a little focus, the match is done, and that's it," Rublev said.

In the day's first quarter-final, Frenchman Arthur Fils

Russia's Andrey Rublev in action against Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas.



# Al Sadd aim to stay clear, Al Gharafa eye comeback

FAWAD HUSSAIN  
THE PENINSULA

**DOHA:** Defending champions Al Sadd SC will aim to protect their narrow lead at the top of the Qatar Stars League (QSL) when action resumes this weekend, while Al Gharafa SC look to bounce back after surrendering first place.

The Wolves climbed to the summit with a commanding 4-0 victory over Al Shahania SC, moving to 32 points - just one ahead of Al Gharafa, who slipped to second following a shock 1-0 defeat to Al Sailiya SC.

Al Sadd face sixth-placed Al Wakrah SC (22 points) on Sunday, while Al Gharafa take on third-placed Al Shamal SC (28 points) in a crucial clash the same day.

Star forward Akram Afif, who struck a hat-trick and provided an assist in the win over Al Shahania, underlined the champions' determination after eight consecutive league victories propelled them to the top.

"We reached the top after a lot of hard work and a strong run of results," Afif said.

"Winning eight straight matches is not easy. Being at the

top is important, especially since Al Sadd are always among the favourites for the title."

Ramadan schedule under way  
The round begins tonight with two fixtures under the 9:30pm Ramadan kick-off schedule. Al Shahania meet Qatar SC at Al Khor Stadium, while Al Sailiya host Umm Salal SC at Grand Hamad Stadium.

Seventh-placed Qatar SC (21 points) are seeking a return to form after a bright start to the campaign, while bottom side Al Shahania are fighting to avoid relegation.

"It's a league that demands stamina. Every match is tough," said Al Shahania assistant coach Pejman Montazeri.

"We are treating the remaining games like cup finals and focusing fully on Qatar SC."

Ninth-placed Al Sailiya (15 points) hope to build on their morale-boosting win over Al Gharafa when they face Umm Salal, who sit 11th on 12 points.

"The match will be difficult against a direct rival," said Al Sailiya coach Mirghani Al Zain.

"We need the points to improve our position."

Umm Salal coach Ruben Albes echoed the urgency.



Al Sadd go into the round with a one-point lead over Al Gharafa at the top of the table.

"This is one of our toughest matches. We want a positive result to reduce the gap and move away from the relegation zone," he said.

Elsewhere, Al Duhail SC (20 points), currently eighth, meet fifth-placed Al Arabi SC (23 points) on Saturday, while fourth-placed Al Rayyan SC (25 points) take on 10th-placed Al Ahli SC (15 points) as the title race and relegation battle intensify.

## QATAR STARS LEAGUE FIXTURES

WEEK 16 (Kick-off at 9:30pm)

### TODAY

Al Shahania vs Qatar SC at Al Khor Stadium  
Al Sailiya vs Umm Salal at Grand Hamad Stadium

### TOMORROW

Al Duhail vs Al Arabi at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium

### ON SUNDAY

Al Rayyan vs Al Ahli at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium  
Al Wakrah vs Al Sadd at Saoud Bin Abdulrahman Stadium  
Al Gharafa vs Al Shamal at Thani Bin Jassim Stadium

## Second phase of Women's League gets underway

THE PENINSULA

**DOHA:** The second phase of the 2025-2026 Women's Basketball League, overseen by the Qatar Basketball Federation, tips off on this evening, following a competitive first phase that showcased rising team standards and intensified rivalries.

The opening round features two key matchups: Al Gharafa faces Al Adaam, aiming to extend their winning streak, while Al Khor meets Al Shamal in a crucial clash. Both games start at 9:00 p.m. at Federation Halls 1 and 2.

Al Gharafa dominated the first phase, collecting six points from three matches. Their campaign included a nail-biting 62-61 victory over Al Adaam, a commanding 71-52 win against Al Khor, and a tactical 55-49 triumph over Al Shamal, marked by disciplined defense and sharp execution in decisive moments.

Al Shamal, finishing the first phase as runners-up with four points, opened with a strong 85-71 win over Al Khor but slipped against Al Adaam (50-63) and narrowly lost to Al Gharafa.

The team now aims to regain momentum and challenge the leaders in the second phase.



A file photo of action during a Women's Basketball League match.

# Katara International Ramadan Open Chess tourney begins

THE PENINSULA

**DOHA:** The Katara International Ramadan Open Classical Chess Championship will begin today at Hall 15 of Katara Cultural Village, with 86 players set to compete in a nine-round Swiss format event.

Organised by the Qatar Chess Association (QCA), the tournament will run until March 1. Each round will be played with a time control of 45 minutes plus a 30-second increment per move.

The opening round gets under way tomorrow as players across various age groups vie



for honours in one of the federation's key annual events.

This year's edition features a strong field, including several

players listed on the FIDE rankings, adding further depth and competitive quality to the championship.

QCA President Mohammed Al Mudahka expressed his satisfaction at the continued staging of the tournament, describing it as one of the federation's flagship competitions.

He confirmed that the organising committee has completed all logistical preparations for the start of play.

Al Mudahka underlined the importance of the event in providing valuable international exposure for local players, particularly through competition against rated opponents.

He also thanked the Katara

Cultural Village Foundation for its ongoing support, stressing the federation's commitment to maintaining strong partnerships and ensuring the tournament remains a fixture on the annual calendar to strengthen national team preparations.

The championship carries a total prize fund of QR25,000. The winner will receive QR5,000, with prizes awarded to the top ten finishers.

Special awards will also be presented to the best Qatari players in various age categories, in addition to dedicated prizes for players from the federation's training centre.

# Brash sets pace as CHI Al Shaqab opens in style

THE PENINSULA

**DOHA:** British rider Scott Brash topped the CSI5\* 1.50m Faults & Time class as the 13th edition of CHI Al Shaqab Presented by Longines Doha 2026 began at Al Shaqab on Wednesday evening.

The championship, the sixth leg of the Doha Equestrian Tour 2026, features 303 riders and 469 horses from 40 nations competing for a total prize purse exceeding €1.3m across show-jumping, dressage and para-dressage.

Brash delivered the fastest clear round of the day aboard Hello Jefferson, clocking 64.10 seconds to lead the feature event on the opening day of the four-day competition. Germany's Janne Friederike Meyer-Zimmermann finished second on Iron Dames High Level (67.19secs). Brazil's Marlon Modolo Zanotelli on Charly Heart and France's Megane Moissonnier on Qoup de Coeur de Muze shared third place with 67.76 seconds.

France's Lara Tryba won the CSI5\* 1.40m Two Phases class on Flash de Talma with times of 48.80 and 27.94 seconds. Qatar's Salman Mohammed Al Emadi took second on Wathnan Toblerone (51.83 & 28.32secs), while Türkiye's Hasan Senturk was third on Quinti Von Hof (50.60 & 28.52secs).

Senturk later claimed the CSI3\* 1.40m Two Phases aboard Diams Brimbelles Z (50.28 & 27.37secs). Qatar's Sultan Salem Al Naemi finished second on Energika des Neyes (50.62 & 27.97secs), with Austria's Max Kuhner third on Eic Up Too Jacco Blue (48.04 & 28.16secs).

Jordan's Ibrahim Hani Bisharat topped the CSI\* Special Two-Phase 1.35m with Corona Irw (34.89 & 33.35secs). France's Jean Francois



The podium winners of the CSI5 1.50m Faults & Time class, the feature event on opening day, pose for a photo.

Rondoux was second on Inter-Larus (37.83 & 35.43secs), while Bahrain's Hussain Mohamed Dadalla placed third on Elite (36.78 & 35.63secs).

In the CSI1\* 1.20m Faults & Time, Saudi Arabia's Abdulrahman Almutawaa won on Inouie du Nenuphar (58.08secs), ahead of compatriot Abdullah Ibrahim Abdullah on F'Un Chassagne (58.54secs) and Egypt's Fatima Mohanad Alkishawi on Quintalou (58.96secs).

Deputy Tournament Director Mohammed Jaber Al Khayarin said the event continues to strengthen its standing on the global equestrian calendar, highlighting the high technical and organisational standards of this year's edition.

"We are proud to launch a new edition of the Al Shaqab International Championship amidst this large international presence of riders and horses.

This reflects the growing confidence in Qatari organisation and Al Shaqab's ability to deliver a championship of the highest international standards. This



France's Lara Tryba clinched win in CSI5 1.40m Two Phases on Flash de Talma.



British rider Scott Brash aboard Hello Jefferson in action.

year, we have ensured the highest levels of technical and logistical readiness to guarantee an outstanding competitive experience for all participants," he said.

Competition continued with 12 classes yesterday, headlined by the three-star para-dressage Grand Prix.

Today's schedule features the CSI5\* 1.50m Faults & Time, CSI3\* Jump & Drive 1.30m, CSICh-B 1.10m Jump-Off Group VII qualifier, CDI1\* Intermediate I Freestyle and the CDI5\* Soundcheck among other events.

Tomorrow will be the peak day, with multiple headline finals across disciplines: the CDI5\* Grand Prix Special, the CPEDI3\* Para Grand Prix Freestyle\*, and the CDI5\* CHI Al Shaqab Grand Prix Freestyle presented by Longines.

In show jumping, the day culminates in three Grand Prix showdowns: CSI1\* Grand Prix 1.30m (Jump-Off), CSI3\* Grand Prix 1.50m (Jump-Off), and the feature class CSI5\* CHI Al Shaqab Grand Prix presented by Longines 1.60m (Jump-Off).

## Return To Senders clinches Al Jumayliyah Cup

THE PENINSULA

**DOHA:** Return To Senders returned to winning form in the seventh race on Wednesday night, claiming the Al Jumayliyah Cup over 1700m for 4-year-old and older Thoroughbreds at Al Rayyan Racecourse.

The nine-year-old bay, owned by Al Eida Racing and trained by Gassim Al Ghazali, produced a powerful finish to sweep past his rivals in the final 200m and secure a decisive four-length victory under Marco Casamento, completing a double for the trainer-jockey duo on the card.

Drawn wide in barrier 9, Return To Senders settled just behind the early leaders as Coco Jack set the pace, chased by Mobilise, Assertively, Local Law and Upton Park. The field maintained a steady tempo into the home turn.

In the straight, Upton Park, representing Mohammed Abdulhadi Al-Hajri and trained by Ibrahim Saeed Al Malki, surged to the front and briefly looked set to win. But Return To Senders responded with a decisive burst of speed, overtaking him inside the final 200m to claim the trophy.

Upton Park held second



The connections of Return To Senders celebrate their win. PICS: Juhaim/QREC

under Faleh Bughenaim, while Smart Contender, ridden by Abdulla Rashid Al-Hajri for owner and trainer Nasser Owaida Salem Al Hajri, completed the podium.

Across the seven-race card, highlights included Al Bayyin Grine breaking his maiden in the opener, Ta'hoos Al Shahania powering home from the back, Mysteryofthesands delivering a devastating turn of foot, Moharb asserting dominance, AJS Najma front-running impressively, and Sussex showcasing stamina and authority.



Marco Casamento rides Return To Senders during the feature for Al Jumayliyah Cup.

**52nd Al Rayyan Meeting  
Al Jumayliyah Cup**  
WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)

**Al Jumayliyah Cup, 4yo+  
Thoroughbreds**  
Return To Senders, Gassim Al Ghazali, Marco Casamento  
**Purebred Arabian Premium  
Maiden Plate**  
Al Bayyin Grine, Hamad Al-Jehani, Jefferson Smith  
**Local Purebred Arabian  
Handicap (0-65)**  
Ta'hoos Al Shahania, Rudy Nerbonne, Mohammed Hassan Ali Alabdulmalik  
**Thoroughbred Handicap  
(0-75)**  
Mysteryofthesands, Mohammed Al Ghazali, Salman Fahad Al-Hajri  
**Local Thoroughbred  
Handicap (0-65)**  
Moharb, Gassim Al Ghazali, Marco Casamento  
**Local Purebred Arabian  
Fillies & Mares Handicap  
(70-90)**  
AJS Najma, M.H.K Al Attiyah, Szczepan Mazur  
**Thoroughbred Handicap  
(70-90), 4yo+**  
Sussex, M.H.K Al Attiyah, Szczepan Mazur

## Milan claims sprint honours at UAE Tour

**PARIS:** Jonathan Milan (pictured) beat Ethan Vernon and his own younger brother Matteo Milan in a bunch sprint on stage four of the UAE Tour yesterday.

"This is the first time I've raced with my brother. And it's a podium finish in a World Tour race. I'm very happy and proud because it means a lot to him," said the winner.

Milan's Lidl-Trek team had to fight hard to get into a winning position, catching a long escape just 250m from the finish line.

Another Italian Antonio Tiberi retained the overall lead with Saturday's Queen stage which culminates atop the Jebel Mobrah mountain on the horizon.

Tiberi took the red jersey on Tuesday on the Tour's first mountain climb as then leader Remco Evenepoel suffered something of a meltdown losing around two minutes.

The Italian from Bahrain-Victorious maintains a 21-second lead over Mexican Isaac Del Toro and a one-minute lead over Colombian Harold Tejada. Today's stage five is a 166km run around Dubai and should also result in a bunch sprint. — **AFP**



## Arteta tells faltering leaders Arsenal to harness Wolves 'pain' against Spurs

**LONDON:** Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta has urged his side to use the "pain" of a shock 2-2 draw with Wolves when they look to revive their Premier League title challenge against arch-rivals Tottenham Hotspur.

The Gunners were on course for a routine win on Wednesday after goals from Bukayo Saka and Piero Hincapie put them 2-0 up at Molineux.

But bottom of the table Wolves hit back through Hugo Bueno and Tom Edozie.

The draw left Arsenal, bidding to end a 22-year-wait to be crowned champions of England again, just five points clear of second-placed Manchester City.

It was the second match in a row where Arsenal had dropped points following a draw with Brentford and meant they have now won just twice in their last seven league games.

City, who have a game in hand, twice chased Arsenal down to win the Premier League in both the 2022/23 and 2023/24 seasons and their April clash with the Gunners could prove pivotal to the title race.

But Arteta said: "I'm going to be the first one to be close with them (the players) because it has nothing



**"If you are at the top you have to win and win, that's nothing new."**  
**Mikel Arteta**  
**Arsenal manager**

to do with attitude or desire, it is completely the opposite.

"It's part of football. Where it could've gone wrong today, it went wrong.

"If you look at the way we conceded the two goals today without conceding any other situations, it is very rare but it happens. And it happened for a reason and we need to react.

"If you are at the top you have to win and win, that's nothing new."

Arsenal are away to struggling Tottenham in a north London derby on Sunday, with Arteta saying: "We need to go through the pain and go through it looking in the mirror and understand what the game requires now and the next action is Sunday. We need to keep all that in our tummies to show it on Sunday."

Meanwhile Saka told Arsenal.com: "It's pretty flat. We're pretty disappointed with the result, it's the only way to describe it.

"I think it's a game of two halves. In the first half we started so well but in the second half we dropped the level and got punished for it."

Looking ahead to the derby match, the England international added: "It was already a big game and now it's still a big game...It's still in our control so we just need to focus on that, fix the issues we're having now and get back to winning ways." — **AFP**

## Real submit evidence in Vinicius racism probe

**MADRID:** Real Madrid said it had provided "all available evidence" to UEFA yesterday in support of their Brazilian star Vinicius Junior's complaint of racist abuse during this week's Champions League clash at Benfica.

Tuesday's first leg of the knockout phase play-off tie in Lisbon was stopped for 10 minutes after Vinicius told the referee Benfica's Gianluca Prestianni had racially abused him during a confrontation.

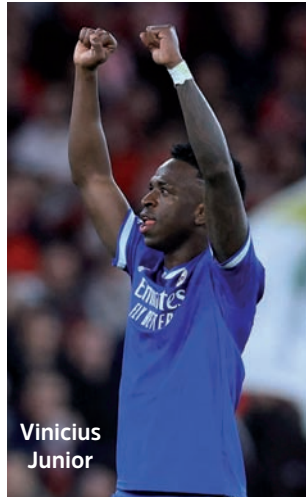
The Argentine midfielder, who covered his mouth during the argument after Vinicius had celebrated a goal dancing in front of the home fans, denies the allegation.

UEFA announced on Wednesday it would investigate "allegations of discriminatory behaviour" as a furor broke out, with teammates rushing to back Vinicius, who has repeatedly suffered racist abuse since joining Real in 2018.

Real Madrid "has submitted all available evidence to UEFA regarding the incidents" during the Benfica game, which witnessed "unacceptable episodes of racism", the club said in a statement.

"Real Madrid appreciates the unanimous support, backing, and affection that our player Vinicius Jr. has received from all areas of the global football community."

Benfica issued a statement on Wednesday backing Prestianni and speaking of a "defamation campaign" against him, while manager Jose Mourinho questioned Vinicius's celebration. — **AFP**



Vinicius Junior

# MotoGP dumps Phillip Island for Adelaide street circuit

ADELAIDE: Australia's Phillip Island will host its last MotoGP this year after nearly three decades with organisers yesterday announcing the race will move to a street circuit in Adelaide from 2027.

The event has been held at the picturesque and often wind-swept waterfront circuit some two hours outside of Melbourne since 1997, but its contract expires this year.

Promotor MotoGP Sports Entertainment - formerly known as Dorna - wanted to broaden its appeal and shift it to Melbourne's Albert Park, which hosts the opening race of the Formula One season in early March.



But the Victorian state government was adamant it should remain at "iconic and much loved" Phillip Island, where it is a major boost to the local economy with more than 90,000 fans flocking there last year.

With negotiations breaking down, South Australia stepped in and secured the race for six years from 2027 in Adelaide -- the first MotoGP to be held in a city?centre location.

Adelaide marks a major milestone in the evolution of our championship," said MotoGP Chief Sporting Officer Carlos Ezpeleta. "This city has a world?class reputation for hosting major

sporting events, and the opportunity to design a purpose?built circuit in the city streets is something truly unique in our sport."

South Australia state Premier Peter Malinauskas called it a "major coup" for Adelaide.

"We back major events that deliver a strong economic return, and MotoGP does exactly that," he said. "MotoGP is growing globally at record pace -- and Adelaide will now be a key part of that growth story."

Adelaide previously hosted the Australian Formula One Grand Prix until it lost to the event to Melbourne in 1995. — **AFP**

# Pakistan hockey chief resigns after 'shabby' Australia tour

ISLAMABAD: Pakistan's hockey chief resigned yesterday, a day after the prime minister ordered an inquiry into a shambolic tour of Australia that saw the national team scrubbing dishes in a guest house.

Tariq Bugti, who headed the Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF), stepped down following complaints by national team players in last week's whitewash tour, and after premier Shehbaz Sharif launched a probe.

While cricket is hugely popular in Pakistan, field hockey is the country's national sport.

But Pakistan -- three-time Olympic champions and four-time World Cup winners -- have plummeted to as low as 14th in the international rankings.

Team captain Ammad Butt slammed the PHF, blaming the body for not paying for a hotel, with players forced to wash their clothes and dishes at what they deemed sub-standard accommodation in Hobart, Tasmania.

Ahead of the Australia tour, players boycotted a training camp over non-payment of a daily allowance of \$110 -- their only income with no match fees or central contracts.

Butt said when the players landed in Sydney en-route to Hobart for the second round of their Pro League fixtures, they had to roam the streets with no hotel to stay in.

"The players had to prepare their breakfast, do dishwashing and wash clothes. In this situation what kind of performance could a player produce for the team?"

Pakistan have lost every one of their eight matches in the Pro League, losing 3-0 and 3-2 to Australia and 5-2 and 3-1 to Germany -- all in Hobart. — **AFP**

# Zimbabwe unbeaten in T20 World Cup after win over Sri Lanka; West Indies crush Italy

COLOMBO: T20 World Cup surprise package Zimbabwe beat Sri Lanka by six wickets in Colombo yesterday to finish the group stage unbeaten and carry some winning momentum into the Super Eights.

Chasing 179 they finished 182-4 with three balls to spare against the co-hosts at the R. Premadasa stadium in Colombo.

Ranked 11th in the world, Zimbabwe upset former champions Australia last week.

They also beat Oman and shared the points when their game against Ireland was washed out on Tuesday.

Zimbabwe needed a tricky 65 off 36 balls when captain Sikandar Raza blasted 20 off an over from leg-spinner Dushan Hemantha, including two sixes and a four, to swing the match.

Raza and Brian Bennett added 69 off 40 deliveries for the third wicket and though Raza fell in the 19th over for 45, Zimbabwe eased to their target.

Opener Bennett batted through the innings to be 63 not out. Needing eight off the final over, Tony Munyonga clubbed Maheesh Theekshana's first ball for six to calm any Zimbabwe nerves before Bennett hit the winning boundary.



It was Zimbabwe's second highest successful run chase in T20 internationals.

After opting to bat first, Pathum Nissanka held Sri Lanka's innings together again.

Nissanka had become the first centurion of the tournament against Australia on Monday and he followed that up with a solid 62 off 47 balls.

It was his seventh fifty in T20 World Cups, equalling Mahela Jayawardene for the

most by a Sri Lankan. Sri Lanka open their Super Eights campaign against England in Kandy on Sunday, while Zimbabwe will face the West Indies in Mumbai on Monday.

**West Indies beat Italy to tune up for Super Eights**

Earlier, the West Indies tuned up for the Super Eights in perfect fashion with a comfortable 42-run victory over Italy in their final group match in Kolkata.

After being asked to bat, the West Indies captain Shai Hope scored 75 off 46 balls with four sixes to help his side post 165-6 in the dead rubber Group C clash.

They then easily defended the total by bowling out Italy for 123 off 18 overs.

**Zadran, Nabi help Afghanistan to consolation win**

Opener Ibrahim Zadran struck an unbeaten 95 to help Afghanistan to a crushing

82-run win over Canada in Chennai and cap off an otherwise disappointing T20 World Cup on a high.

Zadran hit seven fours and five sixes in his 56-ball knock to steer Afghanistan to 200-4 after being invited to bat first in Chennai.

Afghanistan bowlers led by veteran spinner Mohammad Nabi, with his T20 best figures of 4-7, kept Canada down to 118-8 for their second win in the 20-team tournament.

2024 semi-finalists Afghanistan failed to reach the Super Eights stage after New Zealand secured the other qualification spot from Group D, which was topped by South Africa.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**Zimbabwe** 182 for 4 (Bennett 63\*, Raza 45, Hemantha 2-36) **beat Sri Lanka** 178 for 7 (Nissanka 62, Rathnayake 44, Cremer 2-27, Evans 2-35) **by six wickets.**

**West Indies** 165 for 6 (Hope 75, Kalugamage 2-25, B Manenti 2-37) **beat Italy** 123 (B Manenti 26, Joseph 4-30, Forde 3-19, Motie 2-24) **by 42 runs.**

**Afghanistan** 200 for 4 (Zadran 95\*, Atal 44, Jaskaran 3-52) **beat Canada** 118 for 8 (Thaker 30, Nabi 4-7) **by 82 runs.** — **AFP**

# Russian Filippov wins first medal at Milan-Cortina Games for individual neutral athletes

BORMIO: Russian Nikita Filippov won the first medal at the Milan-Cortina Games for individual neutral athletes when he claimed silver in the men's ski mountaineering sprint in Bormio yesterday.

Filippov finished 1.52sec off Spain's gold medallist Oriol Cardona Coll, who won in 2min 34.03sec.

Thibault Anselmet of France took bronze (+2.31) in the event's debut at the Winter Games.

The Swiss pair of Arno Liethaa and Jon Kistler had led up the initial gruelling 65-metre climb.

But Cardona Coll showed all his experience to fight back and surge into the lead in an astonishing display of stamina and technical nous on the transition.

Filippov moved into second as the Swiss faded and tracked Cardona Coll down through the finish line. It was a first medal for the 20-strong team of Russian and Belarusian athletes listed as 'AIN', meaning they are competing under a neutral flag.

Athletes from Russia and Belarus have faced bans from international competition since Russian forces invaded Ukraine in February 2022. Filippov and his AIN teammates have been allowed to compete at these Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics under a neutral banner having met strict conditions.

Those included competing under a neutral flag, taking part only in individual events and undergoing checks to prove that they did not actively support the war in Ukraine or have any links with the army.

The same conditions applied to the 2024 Paris Summer Olympics at which 15 Russians and 17 Belarusians competed, winning a combined five medals. — **AFP**

FROM LEFT: Spain's Maria Costa Diez, Switzerland's Marianne Fatton, USA's Anna Gibson, Norway's Ida Waldal, France's Emily Harrop and Spain's Ana Alonso Rodriguez compete in the women's sprint ski mountaineering.



# Cardona Coll, Fatton win ski mountaineering sprint golds

BORMIO: Spain's Oriol Cardona Coll and Switzerland's Marianne Fatton bagged the first two Olympic golds on offer in ski mountaineering in Bormio yesterday in the event's debut at the Winter Games.

The men's sprint also saw Russian Nikita Filippov win the first medal at the Milan-Cortina Games for individual neutral athletes when he claimed silver.

Filippov finished 1.52sec off Cardona Coll, who won in 2min 34.03sec for Spain's first Winter Olympic gold since Francisco Fernandez Ochoa won the men's alpine skiing slalom at the 1972 Games in Sapporo, Japan.

Thibault Anselmet of France took bronze (+2.31) in the skimo sprint, an adrenaline-packed event requiring athletes to negotiate uphill climbs on ski and foot before descending by ski.

The Swiss pair of Arno Liethaa and Jon Kistler had led up the initial gruelling 65-metre climb in heavy

snow in northern Italy. But Cardona Coll showed all his experience to fight back and surge into the lead in an astonishing display of stamina and technical nous on the opening transition.

Filippov moved into second as the Swiss duo faded and tracked Cardona Coll down through the finish line.

It was a first medal for the 20-strong team of Russian and Belarusian athletes listed as 'AIN', meaning they are competing under a neutral flag.

Athletes from Russia and Belarus have faced bans from international competition since Russian forces invaded Ukraine in February 2022.

Filippov and his AIN teammates have been allowed to compete at these Milan-Cortina Winter Olympics under a neutral banner having met strict conditions.

Those included competing under a neutral flag, taking part only in individual

events and undergoing checks to prove that they did not actively support the war in Ukraine or have any links with the army.

The same conditions applied to the 2024 Paris Summer Olympics at which 15 Russians and 17 Belarusians competed, winning a combined five medals.

In the women's sprint, Fatton clocked a winning time of 2min 59.77sec on the Stelvio course, depriving France's four-time World Cup champion Emily Harrop by 2.38sec.

Spain's Ana Alonso Rodriguez claimed bronze, 10.45sec down on Fatton's pace. Harrop, a four-time World Cup overall champion, had been hot favourite, but she paid the price for a slow second transition.

After an initial ascent, Harrop was neck-and-neck with Fatton as the pair took off their skis to climb a stairway on foot. — **AFP**

# McIlroy aims to eliminate 'big numbers' in pursuit of first Riviera crown

LOS ANGELES: Rory McIlroy will try to keep the birdie bandwagon rolling and eliminate the "big numbers" that doomed his Pebble Beach bid as he vies for a first Genesis Invitational title at Riviera this week.

Neither world number one Scottie Scheffler nor second-ranked McIlroy has managed to win at the historic Riviera Country Club course in Pacific Palisades that is celebrating its centenary this year.

Northern Ireland star McIlroy will be making his second US tour start of the season after a tie for 14th at Pebble Beach, where three double bogeys and a triple bogey featured on his scorecards.

"I think I'm just sort of working through that first little bit of the year where you're trying to shake a little bit of rust off and you're trying to find your footing a little bit and where your game is," McIlroy said Wednesday. "Felt like I learned quite a bit about my game last week, played well for a lot of it."

"Obviously made some big numbers which kept me from being right in contention on Sunday, but I feel like there's enough good in there to be encouraged going into this week."

"Obviously (Riviera) presents a different challenge in itself, but I think the fact that I'm hitting a lot of good shots and hitting it close and converting a lot of putts, that has to give me confidence for not just this week but going forward." Scheffler has come up empty in half a dozen starts at Riviera.

The world number one has one title under his belt this year, at La Quinta in January, but slow starts at Phoenix and Pebble Beach proved too much to overcome.

Scheffler, however, won't be burdened by what-ifs.

"The great thing about golf is oftentimes we just get to show up the next week and start all over and compete again," said Scheffler, who appreciates the old-school challenge of The Riv.

"I think it's an interesting golf course because there's not really many hazards. There's not really too much out of bounds that comes into play," he said.

"When you look at this golf course and you look at it on paper, it seems kind of easy. Then you start playing it and you're like, hit a ball in the rough on two and you're like, 'Man this hole is kind of hard.'

Defending tournament champion Ludvig Aberg is also in the odd position of chasing a first Riviera win, because the event was moved to Torrey Pines last year because of the devastating wildfires that affected Pacific Palisades. — **AFP**



Rory McIlroy