Muaither stun Al Arabi to set up QSL Cup final with Al Rayyan

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA


Muaither players celebrate their victory.

DOHA: Goalkeeper Majed Abdullatif emerged as the hero as Second Division side Muaither stunned Al Arabi 3-2 in a penalty shootout after a thrilling 3-3 draw to reach the QSL Cup final for the first time in their history.

Muaither impressed throughout the semi-final at Thani bin Jassim Stadium but were denied victory in regulation time by a dramatic last-gasp equaliser from Alexis Perez, which forced the match into penalties.

Abdullatif, outstanding all evening, rose to the occasion in the shootout, producing diving saves to deny Jordan Veretout, Isaac Lehadj and Rodri to seal a famous victory.

Muaither had a setback of their own in the shootout, with Mohamed Saeed Ibrahim saving Mohamed Rabie's effort.

Muaither will now face Al Rayyan SC in the final scheduled on April 17 at Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium. Al Rayyan advanced after edging Umm Salal SC 17-16 in a marathon shootout following a 3-3 draw in the first semi-final on Saturday.

The match began at a blistering pace, with three goals inside the opening 11 minutes. Joao Pedro Daros put Al Arabi ahead in the seventh minute, heading in from close range after a pinpoint cross from Rodri.

The lead lasted just a minute, as Etyan Morales equalised with a composed finish from inside the box after being played through by Abdulmajid Anad.

Fouad Saleh then fired Muaither ahead in the 11th minute, slotting home from a tight angle following a clever through ball from captain Albert Ramis Luque.

Al Arabi pushed for equaliser, with Wassem Keddari off target from a promising position, while Salem Reda dictated attacking play.

At the other end, Ibrahim produced a key save to deny Luque's powerful long-range effort as Muaither threatened on the counter.

Pablo Sarabia, fresh from a brace in the quarter-final against Al Waab, missed a good chance after being set up by Rodri.

Muaither extended their lead just before half-time when Ibrahim brought down Morales in the box. Luque converted the penalty with a low finish into the left corner to make it 3-1 at the break. Sarabia reduced the deficit six minutes into the second half, rising highest to head home Rodri's cross from the right.

Al Arabi continued to press, with Sarabia going close again, only for Abdullatif to produce a superb punch to keep the ball out. Rodri remained at the heart of the attack and created another opening for Lehadj, but the substitute was denied by a timely sliding block.

Abdullatif then made crucial saves to deny both Rodri and Veretout, preserving Muaither's advantage.

However, he had no answer to Perez, who fired a powerful left-footed strike from inside the box in eighth minute of stoppage time to level the match at 3-3 and force penalties.

Muaither held their nerve in the shootout, with Abdullatif's heroics sealing a historic place in the final.

Cherif soars to 5-star Grand Prix victory, clinches Al Shaqab Cup

THE PENINSULA



Qatar Olympic Committee Second Vice President and a member of the Al Shaqab Board of Directors Dr. Thani bin Abdulrahman Al Kuwari crowned the podium winners of the CSI5* 1.60m Grand Prix event.

DOHA: Qatar-based French rider Cyrine Cherif claimed victory in the prestigious CSI5* Grand Prix Two Rounds with Jump Off 1.60m event, clinching the Al Shaqab Cup yesterday.

Riding the 10-year-old bay gelding Triple T Calamando Blue at Longines Outdoor Arena, Cherif delivered a flawless performance, finishing the jump-off in 42.51 seconds to surpass Qatar's Faleh Suwead Al Ajami.

Only two riders advanced to the decisive jump-off stage after the initial two rounds, and Cherif's win earned her €81,250 in prize money.

Al Ajami was swift in the jump-off, recording 40.99 seconds, but incurred four penalties on the course, which relegated him to second place with a €65,000 reward.

America's Kristen Vanderveen, aboard Bull Run's Jireh, secured third place after completing the second round in 53.82 seconds, having picked up one penalty in the first round. Vanderveen added €48,750 to her earnings.

"It's a dream come true. I am still soaking in and I can't believe that I have won," Cherif said in a post-event press conference.

"I had the same horse from start to end through the week and I am delighted with the victory."

Assistant Tournament Director Sheikh Talal bin Khaled Al Thani thanked the riders, organisers and the media for making the event a success.

"We had over 150 riders from 22 countries participating. The event was held with spectator attendance as per the national guidelines," he said.

Earlier, Jordan's Nasouh Kayali claimed victory in the CSI3* Grand Prix with Jump Off 1.50m aboard Figueras de Laume, completing a double clear round in 55.73 seconds. Austria's Gerfried Puck finished second on Idiaal Special H.J. with four faults in 49.99 seconds, while South Africa's Matthew Morrison took third riding Quebec with one fault in 85.51 seconds in the first round.

Earlier at Longines Outdoor Arena, Vanderveen topped the CSI5* Faults & Time 1.50m aboard Starbucks 27, delivering a clear round in 66.99 seconds.

Qatar's Bassem Mohammed finished second on Wathnan Charly Brown in 74.46 seconds, while Egypt's Zain Shady Samir claimed third riding Le Boss in 75.52 seconds.

In the CSI1* Grand Prix 1.35m at Longines Indoor Arena, Qatar's Khalid Jassim Al Suwaidi emerged victorious riding E.T's Queeny Z with a double clear in 35.01 seconds. Hussain Said Haidan followed closely in second on D Saucedo in 35.26 seconds, while Mohammed Jassim Al Thani completed all-Qatari podium aboard Hazel de Luxe in 36.21 seconds.

Qatar's Mohammed Yousef Al Jaber claimed victory in the CSIY-B CSIY 1.30m Jump Off aboard Christa 27, delivering a double clear round in 34.98 seconds. Bahrain's Sultan Abdulaziz Mayoof Alromaihi on Johelys de Fondcombe finished second in 39.15 seconds with four faults, while Qatar's Haya Khalid Al Hitmi secured third riding Tom Ford in 40.03 seconds with eight faults.

In the CSI3* Accumulator 1.40m, Kuwait's Hussain Alkharafi topped the standings on Gk C'Est Un Reve with 65 points in 50.97 seconds. Qatar's Saad Ahmed Al Saad aboard Gary de Cerisy took second in 53.14 seconds, while his compatriot Mohammed Khalifa Al Baker placed third on Emiro Delle Sementarecce in 55.05 seconds, both also on 65 points.


Cyrine Cherif celebrates astride Triple T Calamando Blue.

Ghanim Nasser Al Qadi led a Qatari victory in the CSI3* Faults & Time 1.30m, guiding Mukaynis to a clear round in 64.54 seconds. Saudi Arabia's Khaled Abdulaziz Al Eid on Amazing vh Keizershof Z finished second in 66.64 seconds, while Germany's Frederike Staack took third aboard Wathnan Popeye in 67.89 seconds.

Meanwhile, Ahmad Jassim Al Suwaidi won the CSI1* Accumulator 1.20m on Power Girl Jmg with 65 points in 44.43 seconds. Saudi Arabia's Khalid Al Hadi on DSP Cessy placed second in 47.21 seconds, while Sultan Salem Al Naemi finished third aboard Cethys de Vernay in 47.46 seconds. Riders will now prepare for the Qatar Equestrian Federation Cup – part of Doha Equestrian Tour - to be held from April 2 to 4.


Assistant Tournament Director Sheikh Talal bin Khaled Al Thani with the podium winners of the CSI3* Grand Prix with Jump Off 1.50m event.

Antonelli wins in Japan to become youngest F1 championship leader

SUZUKA: Mercedes' Kimi Antonelli won the Japanese Grand Prix yesterday for his second straight victory, as the 19-year-old Italian became the youngest driver in Formula One history to lead the world championship standings.

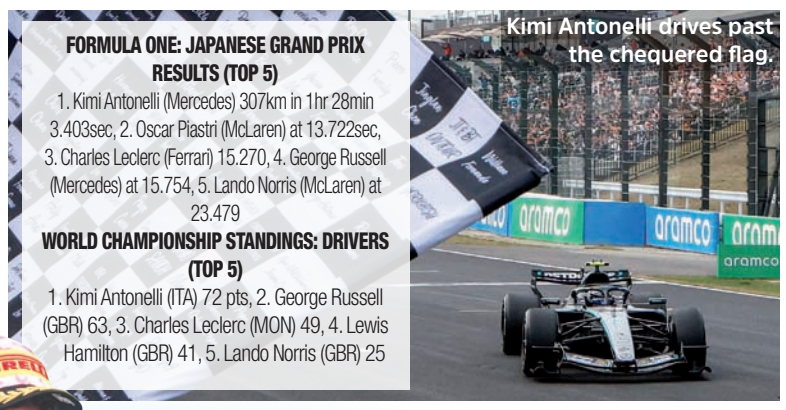
Antonelli took advantage of a mid-race safety car to leapfrog into the lead after a dreadful start from pole position and led home McLaren's Oscar Piastri by 13.722sec with Ferrari's Charles Leclerc a further 1.548sec back in third.

FORMULA ONE: JAPANESE GRAND PRIX RESULTS (TOP 5)

1. Kimi Antonelli (Mercedes) 307km in 1hr 28min 3.403sec, 2. Oscar Piastri (McLaren) at 13.722sec, 3. Charles Leclerc (Ferrari) 15.270, 4. George Russell (Mercedes) at 15.754, 5. Lando Norris (McLaren) at 23.479

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP STANDINGS: DRIVERS (TOP 5)

1. Kimi Antonelli (ITA) 72 pts, 2. George Russell (GBR) 63, 3. Charles Leclerc (MON) 49, 4. Lewis Hamilton (GBR) 41, 5. Lando Norris (GBR) 25


Kimi Antonelli drives past the chequered flag.

He whooped with delight as he crossed the line at Suzuka, telling his team "the pace was unbelievable today".

He moved up to 72 points and leads the championship by nine points after three races, building on the first grand prix win of his career two weeks ago in China. His Mercedes teammate George Russell finished fourth to drop to second in the championship standings on 63 points. Leclerc is third on 49. Russell battled Piastri for the lead over the first half of the race but pitted just before the safety car which dropped him out of contention for the win. Piastri secured second in his first grand prix start of the season, after crashing on his way to the grid in the opener in Australia and missing the race in China because of a technical problem.


Mercedes' Italian driver Kimi Antonelli celebrates on the podium.

Piastri led for the first half of the race before the safety car gave Antonelli his chance.

McLaren's world champion Lando Norris was fifth ahead of Ferrari's Lewis Hamilton and Alpine's Pierre Gasly. Red Bull's four-time world champion Max Verstappen, the winner in Japan for the past four years, was eighth after starting from 11th on the grid.

Antonelli had become the youngest pole-sitter in F1 history in China and again was at the head of the grid. But he suffered a shocking start and was down in sixth by the first corner. Piastri took the early lead ahead of Leclerc, with Norris, Russell and Hamilton all sweeping past Antonelli.

The young Italian had made up some of the last ground when a crash by Haas driver Ollie Bearman brought out the safety car during the pit stop window.

Piastri had already pitted but Antonelli was able to dive in for fresh tyres moments after the safety car was deployed and emerged in front of the Australian, a stroke of luck that effectively won him the race. Formula One now takes an extended break until the Miami Grand Prix on May 3.— *AFP*

US lose 5-2 to Belgium in rude awakening for World Cup hosts

ATLANTA: The United States were routed 5-2 by Belgium on Saturday in a humbling defeat for Mauricio Pochettino's team as they prepare to co-host this summer's World Cup.

The thrashing comes as a brutal reality check for the Americans, who have high hopes of a deep run in the upcoming tournament but were found severely lacking once again when facing top European opposition.

Just 75 days before the World Cup kicks off, the Americans took an early lead against the world's ninth-ranked team, with Weston McKennie slotting in to the delight of a packed 67,000 Atlanta crowd.

But any hopes of a statement victory were dashed as the Belgians swiftly came to life, with a deluge of goals from Zeno Debast, Amadou Onana, and Charles De Ketelaere, and a brace from substitute Dodi Lukebakio.

Patrick Agyemang grabbed a late consolation for the US, who play Portugal in another high-profile friendly Tuesday before Pochettino announces his final squad in May.

Long seen as minnows at the international level of soccer, the US hired former Tottenham and PSG coach Pochettino to oversee an increasingly star-studded roster. — *AFP*

Sabalenka sinks Gauff to seal second straight Miami Open title victory

MIAMI: Aryna Sabalenka won her second straight Miami Open title yesterday beating Coco Gauff 6-2, 4-6, 6-3 to complete a "Sunshine Double" Indian Wells-Miami sweep.

The world number one from Belarus, fresh off her first triumph in the California desert, became the fifth woman -- and the first since Iga Swiatek in 2022 -- to win both of the elite early season hardcourt WTA 1000 titles.

"It means a lot," Sabalenka said after joining Poland's Swiatek, German great Steffi Graf, Belgian Kim Clijsters and fellow Belarusian Victoria Azarenka on the list of women to win both titles in the same year.

"My goal always been to put my name in the history, and I just did it." Sabalenka underscored her WTA dominance in a season in which her only defeat to date was her Australian Open finals loss to Elena Rybakina -- who she went on to beat in the Indian Wells title match and in the semi-finals here.

She handed Gauff her first career defeat in a hardcourt final.

The American had won her first nine, including a triumph over Sabalenka in the 2023 US Open championship match.

Gauff had also beaten the Belarusian for the title on the red clay of Roland Garros last year.

So Sabalenka said she wasn't surprised to see Gauff dig in, even after the Belarusian pocketed the first set with a ruthless display of power and precision.

She broke Gauff to open the match and, after Gauff saved three break points in a gritty fifth game, broke the American again in the seventh before serving it out in 37 minutes without facing a break point herself.

In a tense second set, Gauff's first break point chance -- from a blistering backhand passing winner in the second game -- sparked a jubilant reaction from the crowd at Hard Rock Stadium, home of the NFL's Miami Dolphins that is just about an hour away from Gauff's Delray Beach home.

But Gauff couldn't convert, slamming a forehand into the net on the next point as Sabalenka held.

It needed another gutsy hold from Gauff to keep it on serve in the fifth game.

Up 40-0, she wasted three game points with a pair of errors off the ground and a double fault then had to save a break point before taking the game.

But Gauff was finding more depth on her returns and broke Sabalenka for the first time to take the second set.

And the third set, again, was virtually all Sabalenka.

She broke to open the final frame and broke again when Gauff sailed a backhand long on Sabalenka's first match point.

Gauff was also feeling grateful after a rocky March that saw her withdraw from her third-round match at Indian Wells with a nerve issue that caused "scary" pain in her left arm.

She had said after a dominant semi-final win over Karolina Muchova that she was making progress with the inconsistencies in her serve and forehand, although seven double faults hurt her cause against Sabalenka.

And after considering skipping the event, the 22-year-old was thrilled to reach the final for the first time. — *AFP*



Aryna Sabalenka poses with the Butch Buchholz trophy after winning the Miami Open women's singles title.

Vingegaard claims Tour of Catalonia title

BARCELONA: Jonas Vingegaard triumphed at the Tour of Catalonia yesterday as he continued his strong start to the season, while Brady Gilmore sprinted to a surprise stage seven victory.

Vingegaard topped the general classification one minute 22 secs ahead of France's Lenny Martinez and a further eight seconds before German Florian Lipowitz.

Australian cyclist Gilmore, racing with former Barcelona football great Andres Iniesta's NSN team, edged out Dorian Godon and Remco Evenepoel over the line in a thrilling bunch sprint finale.

Yesterday's 95 kilometre final stage took in seven circuits of Montjuic in Barcelona, where the Tour de France will start in July.

Vingegaard, who was the race favourite in his first participation, took control in the Pyrenees with stage five and six solo victories.

The Dane, who also won two stages and the overall title at Paris-Nice earlier this month, is planning a Giro d'Italia and Tour de France double assault later in the year.

"We won two stages and now the GC, it's been a really good week and we're super happy with it, I'm super happy with it," said Vingegaard.

"It's been an amazing start to the year for me and I hope I can keep it going." Vingegaard has six victories from just two weeks of racing this season.

"I feel very good at the moment, my shape is very good, (but) not the very best yet -- we made a plan this year to progressively get better over the year. I'm pretty sure I still have more in me." Godon, who won two sprint stages in the race, seemed set to grab a third but Gilmore edged him over the line.

Doubleb Olympic champion Evenepoel, who crashed earlier in the week and then cracked on the first uphill finish to scupper his chances of overall victory, frequently tried to attack but the Belgian Red Bull rider had to settle for third on the day's podium. — *AFP*



Jonas Vingegaard celebrates with his child on the podium.



Aprilia Racing's Spanish rider Jorge Martin in action.

Martin moves top of MotoGP standings with US sprint win

AUSTIN: Jorge Martin overtook Francesco Bagnaia on the final lap to snatch victory in the sprint race at the United States Grand Prix and take the MotoGP championship lead on Saturday.

The Aprilia rider came from seventh on the grid to win a dramatic sprint in which Marco Bezzecchi crashed out and Marc Marquez also slid off the track, taking pole-sitter Fabio Di Giannantonio with him.

Bezzecchi, who led Martin by 11 points in the riders' standings heading into the weekend, was running in second place before crashing. Martin edged one point ahead of his teammate heading into yesterday's main race at the Circuit of the Americas.

"I'm so happy, it's the first time I've won here in MotoGP, it's fantastic," said Martin after a record-extending 17th sprint win in MotoGP, but first with Aprilia.

"It was risky to choose the medium tyre, but it paid off. This victory means a lot to me, thank you so much to my team who did a great job."

Reigning world champion Marquez, starting from sixth place, crashed on the opening lap and took out Di Giannantonio.

Bagnaia led for most of the sprint but failed to close it out as Martin, the 2024 world champion, scythed his way through the field.

Bezzecchi, who has won the last four MotoGP main races dating back to last season, failed to finish for the second time in three sprint races this campaign.

Spanish youngster Pedro Acosta stayed out of trouble to finish third. — *AFP*

PSL: Hasan and Shamyl strike fifties to propel Gladiators past Kingsmen

LAHORE: Hasan Nawaz and Shamyl Hussain **(pictured)** struck half-centuries, while Abrar Ahmed starred with the ball, as Quetta Gladiators opened their Pakistan Super League 11 campaign with a 40-run win over Hyderabad Kingsmen at Gaddafi Stadium yesterday.

Chasing 175, Hyderabad suffered early blows as Alzarri Joseph dismissed Saim Ayub (8) in the first over and Abrar removed Maaz Sadaqat for a duck, later claiming Usman Khan (14). Syed Saad Ali fell to Usman Tariq, and skipper Marnus Labuschagne was caught by Saud Shakeel for 23, leaving Hyderabad 57 for five.

Hassan Khan's 31 off 19 balls shared a 48-run stand with Muhammad Irfan Khan (33) but once dismissed by Ahmed Daniyal, Hyderabad folded for 134. Abrar finished with 3-23 and Daniyal 2-13.

Earlier, Hasan (53) and Shamyl



(54) rebuilt Quetta's innings with an 89-run third-wicket stand, supported by Tom Curran's late 31 off 18. Riley Meredith took 3-38.

Kings beat Qalandars

Karachi Kings overcame Lahore Qalandars in a tense, low-scoring encounter, clinching victory in the final over after Abbas Afridi smashed Haris Rauf for a boundary and a six off successive balls. The target equation swung sharply from 14 off six to nine after Qalandars were penalised for ball tampering.

Pursuing 129 on a sluggish, two-paced track, Kings faltered early as Shaheen Shah Afridi (4-0-18-4) dismissed David Warner and Salman Agha in quick succession, reducing them to 18/2. Saad Baig and Muhammad Waseem then rebuilt the innings, with Waseem finding timely boundaries to keep the chase on track.

Afridi struck again to remove Waseem and Moeen Ali, but Khushdil Shah and Azam Khan produced a crucial partnership to push the contest deep before Abbas sealed the win in emphatic fashion.

Earlier, Abdullah Shafique's 33 and a 43-run stand between Sikandar Raza and Haseebullah Khan lifted Qalandars to 128/9 before a late collapse stalled their momentum.— *AGENCIES*

Motsepe to 'respect' CAS decision on AFCON final row

JOHANNESBURG: The Confederation of African Football (CAF) president Patrice Motsepe said yesterday he will "respect" the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) decision on Senegal's appeal against being stripped of its Africa Cup of Nations title.

"I will respect and implement the CAS decision. My personal opinion regarding the matter is irrelevant," Motsepe told a press conference in Cairo after a meeting of CAF executives.

The Senegal appeal came after the CAF appeals body overturned a 1-0 win by Senegal over hosts Morocco in the Cup of Nations final last month.

Many Senegalese players, head coach Pape Thiaw and his staff walked off the pitch in Rabat after Morocco were awarded an added-time penalty.

After they returned, Brahim Diaz missed the penalty. Pape Gueye scored in extra time to win the title decider.

A CAF disciplinary committee later fined various figures from both teams, but did not alter the result.

Morocco then appealed and were awarded a 3-0 victory. Motsepe stressed that the appeal board consists of independent judges and lawyers.

When Senegal played Peru in a 2026 World Cup warm-up match in Paris on Saturday, they paraded the Cup of Nations trophy.

Senegal then played in shirts with two stars -- one for their first Cup of Nations triumph in 2022 and the other for their disputed February victory.

Motsepe said he would visit Senegal and Morocco, without giving dates, to stress the importance of "working together to grow African football".

A statement said CAF "is implementing changes and improvements to their statutes and regulations that will strengthen trust and confidence in (African) referees, VAR operators and judicial bodies.

"These changes and improvements to the statutes and regulations will also ensure that the incidents that took place at the final... do not happen again."

Motsepe later announced that Nigeria-born CAF official Samson Adamu would become the caretaker general secretary of the Cairo-based organisation in place of retiring Veron Mosengo-Omba.

Mosengo-Omba, a former FIFA official born in the Democratic Republic of Congo, has reached the mandatory retirement age of 66 for CAF staff. — *AFP*

The Senegal appeal came after the CAF appeals body overturned a 1-0 win by Senegal over hosts Morocco in the Cup of Nations final last month.

Rohit and Rickelton power Mumbai to IPL win over Kolkata

MUMBAI: Openers Rohit Sharma and Ryan Rickelton hit blistering half-centuries to lead Mumbai Indians to a six-wicket win over Kolkata Knight Riders as they opened their IPL campaign in style yesterday.

Chasing 221 for victory, five-time champions Mumbai rode a commanding 148-run opening stand from Rohit (78) and Rickelton (81) to reach their target with five balls to spare at the Wankhede Stadium.

The 38-year-old Rohit, who plays just the 50-over format for India after retiring from Test and T20 internationals, hit six fours and six sixes in his 38-ball knock. His batting blitz came a day after long-time international teammate Virat Kohli steered Royal Challengers Bengaluru to a big win in the tournament opener.

It needed a special effort to dismiss Rohit and Anukul Roy pulled off a stunning catch while running back from mid-on to finally dislodge the star batter.

South African wicket-keeper-batter Rickelton kept up the attack as he hit his eighth six after Rohit's departure, continuing the pummelling of the Kolkata attack.

He was finally run out after a direct throw from Roy hit stumps at the non-strikers' end.

Mumbai's chase slowed down before skipper Hardik Pandya, unbeaten on 18, and Tilak Varma, who made 20, helped the team get over the line.

Mumbai -- the most successful team in the IPL along with fellow five-time winners Chennai Super Kings -- won their opening match in the league for the first time since 2012.

Pandya won the toss and invited three-time winners Kolkata to bat first amid a loud roar from the home Mumbai crowd.

Skipper Ajinkya Rahane and New Zealand's Finn Allen handed Kolkata a blazing start and the team finished on 220-4.

Rahane went on to hit 67 off 40 balls after Allen fell for 37. Australia international Cameron Green contributed 18.

Rinku Singh's unbeaten 33 off 21 balls gave Kolkata a late lift, but it wasn't enough to challenge Mumbai.

Mumbai medium-pace bowler Shardul Thakur returned figures of 3-39, while Jasprit Bumrah finished wicketless but played a role in checking Kolkata's scoring in the middle overs. — *AFP*



Mumbai Indians' Rohit Sharma (left) and teammate Ryan Rickelton run between the wickets.