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## Al Rayyan fight back to clinch fifth Amir Cup handball title

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Al Rayyan were crowned Amir Cup handball champions for the 2025–2026 season after a dramatic 28–26 victory over Al Arabi at Duhail Sports Hall, in a final marked by a stunning comeback.

The final was attended by senior dignitaries, including Olympic Council of Asia and Qatar Olympic Committee President H E Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al Thani, who presented the trophy and medals.

Al Rayyan reached the final after eliminating Al Wakrah and defending champions Al Duhail, while Al Arabi, who beat Al Sadd and Al Gharafa en route, suffered a third consecutive final defeat despite a strong season.

Al Arabi led 16–12 at half-time after controlling the opening period, but Al Rayyan produced a remarkable second-half turnaround built on resilience and sharp execution to overturn the four-goal deficit and secure their fifth title in the competition's history.

The win ends a long wait since their last triumph in 2009–10, adding to earlier titles in 1997–98, 2000–01, 2008–09 and 2009–10, and placing them alongside the competition's elite multiple champions.



Olympic Council of Asia and Qatar Olympic Committee President H E Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al Thani presents the Amir Cup champions' trophy to Al Rayyan.

## Al Sadd beat Al Hilal on penalties to reach quarters

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Al Sadd SC produced a night of remarkable resilience to reach the AFC Champions League (ACL) Elite quarter-finals, defeating Al Hilal SFC 4–2 on penalties after a pulsating 3–3 draw across extra time at Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Sports City Stadium in Jeddah, yesterday.

Captain Akram Afif held his nerve to convert the decisive penalty, sending Al Sadd into the quarter-finals in dramatic fashion.

The Wolves showed no signs of slowing down as they fought back three times in regulation and extra time before sealing a famous victory in the shootout. They will now face Japan's Vissel Kobe in the last eight on Thursday.

Al Sadd began brightly, exploiting the absence of injured defensive leader Kalidou Koulibaly, with Mohamed Camara testing Yassine Bounou early through a long-range effort that forced a sharp save. Roberto Firmino also threatened in the opening exchanges, pressing high and forcing Al Hilal into early errors.

Despite the strong start from the visitors, Al Hilal struck first in the 29th minute. Theo Hernández chased down an overhit pass and delivered a cutback for Sergej Milinkovic-Savic, who finished calmly to open the scoring.

Al Sadd responded quickly. Seven minutes later, a defensive mix-up



Al Sadd players celebrate during the match.

allowed Romain Saïss to set up Claudinho, who lifted a delicate finish over Bounou to restore parity before half-time.

The Saudi side regained control after the break, with Ruben Neves producing a moment of class in the 55th

minute, threading a pass for Salem Al Dawsari to slot home. But Al Sadd hit back again almost immediately, as Rafael Mujica latched onto Claudinho's pass to level the score once more.

Al Hilal thought they had sealed it when substitute Marcos Leonardo

finished from Karim Benzema's cutback in the 67th minute. Yet Al Sadd refused to yield, with Firmino heading home from a Soria cross to complete a third comeback and force extra time.

Both sides pushed for a winner, with Pablo Mari going closest for Al

Hilal, firing just wide in the 114th minute. With no breakthrough, penalties decided the contest. Firmino missed the opening spot-kick for Al Sadd, but Al Hilal faltered with misses from Benzema and Saimon Bouabre before Afif sealed the win.

### Mahrez fires Al Ahli past Al Duhail

Earlier yesterday, Al Ahli Saudi edged Al Duhail 1–0 after extra time at King Abdullah Sports City Stadium to book their place in the quarter-finals, thanks to a late Riyadh Mahrez winner.

The defending champions survived a dramatic finish after Ivan Toney saw a penalty saved by Al Duhail goalkeeper Salah Zakaria, which initially looked set to take the match to a shoot-out.

However, Mahrez struck a brilliant free-kick from around 25 yards in the 117th minute to seal the tie.

The match was tightly contested, with Zakaria producing several key saves to deny Toney and Mahrez during regular time, while Edouard Mendy kept out Benjamin Bourigeaud at the other end. Al Duhail also came close through Boulbina and Enzo Millot, both hitting the woodwork in a tense second half.

Extra time brought further drama as Galeno and Ibanez threatened for Al Ahli before Toney's missed penalty. Mahrez, however, delivered the decisive moment to send Al Ahli through, where they will face Johor Darul Ta'zim in the last eight on Friday.

## Al Shamal's protest after defeat to Qatar SC adds twist to QSL title race

FAWAD HUSSAIN  
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Following a 0–2 defeat to 10-man Qatar SC in the Qatar Stars League (QSL) yesterday, Al Shamal lodged a formal complaint with the Qatar Football Association (QFA), alleging that the opposition fielded an ineligible player.

The result at Al Bayt Stadium dealt a major blow to Al Shamal's quest for a maiden title, with the appeal now carrying significant implications ahead of the final round on April 28.

With 42 points, Al Sadd are five clear of Al Shamal, with both sides set to meet on the final matchday.

A ruling on Al Shamal's appeal could confirm a record-extending 19th QSL title for Al Sadd, who were in action against Al Hilal in the AFC Champions League Elite Round of 16 yesterday.

It was another disappointing night for David Prats' Al Shamal, who followed their defeat to Al Shahania with a performance defined by early errors and missed opportunities as Qatar SC capitalised on defensive lapses.

A loose clearance from Jeison Ceron off a Joao Pedro long ball fell to Ahmed Al Rawi, who opened the scoring in the seventh minute.



Qatar SC players celebrate a goal against Al Shamal.

Eleven minutes later, goalkeeper Babacar Seck miscontrolled a routine pass, allowing Pedro to double the lead.

Al Shamal responded through Baghdad Bounedjah but lacked precision in the final third, with Qatar SC goalkeeper Ali Nader producing a series of important saves.

The match turned before half-time when Qatar SC were reduced to ten men after Ali Saoudi was sent off for a dangerous challenge on Bounedjah in stoppage time.

Al Shamal pushed forward after the restart. Naim Sliiti struck the crossbar, but the breakthrough

never came as Nader remained solid throughout.

The result has since been formally challenged by Al Shamal, who confirmed they have lodged an official protest with the Qatar Football Association.

In a club statement, Al Shamal said they are "protesting Qatar SC's fielding of professional player Franco Russo instead of Ahmed Al Rawi following the expulsion of Ali Saoudi due to a red card received in today's match," a rescheduled fixture from the 17th round of the QSL.

The club added that the protest is based on Article 15 of the competition

regulations governing player eligibility and matchday squad composition following dismissals.

Al Shamal stated that the regulations "stipulate that if one of the six foreign professional players on the field is sent off or receives a red card, a Qatari/resident player cannot be substituted by a foreign professional player, and the team must continue with five foreign professionals on the field."

The QFA action is expected to review the complaint before issuing a ruling that could have implications for the final standings, with the title race awaiting final mathematical and disciplinary confirmation.

In another postponed match yesterday, relegation-threatened Al Sailiya edged Al Arabi 2–1 at Al Thumama Stadium.

Anwar El Ghazi put Al Sailiya ahead in the fifth minute before Younes Belhanda doubled the lead in the 20th minute. Rodri reduced the deficit in the 81st minute, but Al Sailiya held firm to secure a vital win.

The result lifted Al Sailiya to 22 points, moving them clear of the bottom as they now lead Umm Salal and Al Shahania by two points.

Al Arabi remain on 32 points, three behind Al Rayyan, Qatar SC and Al Gharafa in a battle for a top-four finish.

## Luis Enrique warns PSG to avoid Liverpool 'trap'

LIVERPOOL: Luis Enrique has warned Paris Saint-Germain to avoid falling into a "trap" against Liverpool as the Champions League holders aim to reach the semi-finals today.

PSG head to Anfield protecting a 2–0 lead from last week's quarter-final first-leg in Paris.

Liverpool failed to record a single shot on target as Desire Doue and Khvicha Kvaratskhelia scored for Luis Enrique's side.

Despite PSG's dominance at the Parc des Princes and their victory on penalties against Liverpool in the last-16 last season, Luis Enrique is taking nothing for granted on Merseyside.

Liverpool have a reputation for staging epic comebacks in Europe and they are desperate to salvage a difficult season by advancing to the last four in Europe's elite club competition.

"You need to be really careful, there could be pitfalls and it could be a trap," Luis Enrique told reporters yesterday. "Everyone says, 'you won the first leg easily and you were much better than opposition'. It might be the case but things can change so quickly in a football match."

"You need to be careful, take care of the details, you need to be ready because you can concede a goal in the first half and the game is still open."

With a two-goal advantage, PSG could be forgiven for adopting a defensive approach as they look to finish off the tie. — AFP



PSG coach Luis Enrique attends a press conference.

# Atletico need 'personality' to prevent Barca comeback: Koke

**MADRID:** Atletico Madrid midfielder Koke said yesterday his team must play with "personality" to stop Barcelona mounting a Champions League quarter-final comeback.

The Rojiblancos earned a 2-0 first leg win at Camp Nou last week and host the Spanish champions today aiming to reach the semi-finals for the first time since 2017.

Five-time winners Barcelona reached the final four last season and arrive at the Metropolitano stadium determined to fight their way back into the tie and ramp up the pressure on the hosts.

"It's hugely important to beat the press they usually put on," Koke told reporters.

"They're a team that presses



Atletico Madrid players attend a training session on the eve of their UEFA Champions League quarter-final second leg match against Barcelona.

very high, that pushes their line almost up to the halfway line, that presses you, that suffocates you.

"That's where our personality comes in, when it's time to play, to want the ball, to

make ourselves available, to make runs in behind." The match is the third between the

sides in the last fortnight and the sixth they have played this season, with Atletico knocking Barca out in the Copa del Rey semi-finals.

"We've faced each other many times throughout this year," continued the midfielder.

"We know each other perfectly, and it's going to be very important to take the ball off them, attack the spaces well, and have the personality to want the ball and not lose it." Koke scored against Barca in the 2014 quarter-finals as Atletico -- who have never won the competition -- went on to reach the final, as they did in 2016, losing on both occasions to rivals Real Madrid.

"I've watched that goal

quite a few times," admitted Koke.

"It's true that when these kinds of matches start coming around, you try to motivate yourself and you try to visualise a lot of positive things that happened, like in 2014, like in 2016, and like in the first leg a week ago."

Atletico coach Diego Simeone kept his cards close to his chest ahead of the second leg, refusing to say whether goalkeeper Jan Oblak was fit to start or elaborate much on anything at all.

"We're fully aware of the strong opponent we'll have in front of us," said the coach. "But we're also clear about our objective, which is to go through." — AFP

# McIlroy wins second Masters in a row for sixth major title

**AUGUSTA:** Rory McIlroy overcame early stumbles and a late scare to win the Masters on Sunday, capturing his sixth major title to become only the fourth back-to-back champion at Augusta National.

The world number two from Northern Ireland made a double bogey at the fourth and a bogey at the sixth, but responded with four birdies in the next seven holes and hung on after woeful late tee shots to win a second green jacket and a record top prize of \$4.5 million.

McIlroy joined Tiger Woods, Jack Nicklaus and Nick Faldo as the only back-to-back winners in Masters history, firing a final round one-under-par 71 to finish on 12-under-par 276 and defeat top-ranked Scottie Scheffler by one stroke.

A year after winning his first Masters to complete a career Grand Slam and snap a 10-year major win drought, McIlroy pulled off a wire-to-wire triumph.

"I just can't believe I waited 17 years to get one green jacket and you know I get two in a row. It's just sort of the way," McIlroy said.

"I think all of my perseverance at this golf tournament over the years has really started to pay off."

Augusta National chairman Fred Ridley placed the green jacket on McIlroy, a role usually reserved for the prior year's Masters winner.

McIlroy seized a 36-hole Masters record six-stroke lead only to play the weekend at level par.

"It was a tough weekend. I did the bulk of my work on Thursday and Friday," McIlroy said. "But just so, so happy to hang in there and get the job done."

McIlroy, third-from last in

## 90TH MASTERS TOURNAMENT SCORES (TOP 10)

276 - Rory McIlroy (NIR) 67-65-73-71  
277 - Scottie Scheffler (USA) 70-74-65-68  
278 - Russell Henley (USA) 73-71-66-68  
Justin Rose (ENG) 70-69-69-70, Tyrrell Hatton (ENG) 74-66-72-66, Cameron Young (USA) 73-67-65-73  
279 - Collin Morikawa (USA) 74-69-68-68, Sam Burns 67-71-68-73  
280 - Max Homa (USA) 72-70-71-67, Xander Schauffele (USA) 70-72-70-68

driving accuracy for the week, saved par at 15 from trees but sent his tee shot at the 18th over right trees to a spot near the adjacent 10th fairway.

With a victory at risk, McIlroy curled a dramatic approach around the pines and into a greenside bunker, then blasted onto the green to 12 feet and two-putted for bogey to secure the triumph.

"It's nice to have that two-shot cushion instead of the one like I had last year," said McIlroy, who needed a playoff to win in 2025.

McIlroy, 36, yelled with joy and lifted his arms into the air after the triumph and hugged daughter Poppy and wife Erica after walking off the 18th green where she embraced his parents.

Scheffler, a four-time major winner seeking his third Masters victory in five seasons, was on 277 after shooting a 68 to complete a bogey-free weekend.

"Over the weekend I put up a good fight, did a lot of good stuff in order to give myself a chance and ultimately came up a couple

shots short," Scheffler said.

England's Tyrrell Hatton and 45-year-old Justin Rose and Americans Russell Henley and Cameron Young shared third on 278.

Rose, the 2013 US Open champion, settled for another near miss after three runner-up Masters finishes.

"I felt like there was an opportunity to do better, so obviously that's frustrating for sure,"

Rose said.

Rose birdied four of the last five holes on the front nine and

## PAST 10 MASTERS WINNERS

2026: Rory McIlroy (NIR)  
2025: Rory McIlroy (NIR)  
2024: Scottie Scheffler (USA)  
2023: Jon Rahm (ESP)  
2022: Scottie Scheffler (USA)  
2021: Hideki Matsuyama (JPN)  
2020: Dustin Johnson (USA)  
2019: Tiger Woods (USA)  
2018: Patrick Reed (USA)  
2017: Sergio Garcia (ESP)



Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland poses with the Masters trophy.

# Russian, Belarusian swimmers free to compete under own flag

**LAUSANNE:** Athletes from Russia and Belarus are free to participate under their own flags in senior World Aquatics events after the global governing body yesterday lifted a ban on them competing.

Competitors from Russia and Belarus had been banned from international competition following Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine although since September 2023 they have been allowed to compete as neutrals.

"Following a decision of the World Aquatics bureau, and in consultation with the aquatics integrity unit (AIU) and the World Aquatics athletes' committee, the guidelines for athlete participation in aquatics events during a period of political conflict will no longer apply to senior athletes with Belarusian or Russian sport nationality," a World Aquatics statement read.

"Senior athletes with Belarusian or Russian sport nationality will be permitted to compete in World Aquatics events in the same way as their counterparts representing other sport nationalities, with their respective uniforms, flags and anthems."

Russian and Belarusian athletes will only be permitted to compete once they have successfully passed at least four successive anti-doping controls, World Aquatics said.

"Over the last three years, World Aquatics and the AIU have successfully helped ensure that conflict can be kept outside the sporting competition venues," World Aquatics president Husain Al-Musallam said in a statement.

World Aquatics has followed the International Paralympic Committee which allowed Russian and Belarusian athletes to compete under their own national flags at the 2026 Winter Paralympics in Milan-Cortina in February.

Russia's sport minister Mikhail Degtyarev "welcomed" the decision. He said it followed a meeting with Al-Musallam in January at the Olympic Council of Asia in Tashkent.

The next world swimming championships will take place in Budapest in 2027. — AFP

# 'Beautiful' battle with Sinner extra motivation: Alcaraz

**BARCELONA:** Spanish tennis star Carlos Alcaraz (pictured) said yesterday his battle with new world number one Jannik Sinner was giving him extra inspiration ahead of the Barcelona Open.

Sinner defeated Alcaraz in the final at the Monte Carlo Masters on Sunday to usurp him at the top of the world rankings. Alcaraz can claim back the spot with victory in Barcelona this week, where he finished runner-up last year.

"I think the battle for number one that Jannik and I are having is a very beautiful one, and I think it's probably an extra motivation," Alcaraz told reporters. "The truth is that Jannik and I have a very good relationship. Obviously it's not super personal, we don't go out to dinner, we don't go eat together, but I think the relationship we have off court is very good."

Alcaraz said the Italian was driving him on to be a better player, although he would "not miss him" this week in Barcelona.

"(He's someone who) makes me better, who makes me aware of my weaknesses, who makes me realise what I really have to focus on in every practice and every match," said the 22-year-old seven-time Grand Slam winner.

"I try to push myself every day, and that's why it's really nice to have him as a reference point and to see him achieving everything he's achieving."

Alcaraz said he was happy to see Sinner taking "giant steps forward" on clay and that they were very even on every surface.

"When we face each other, between him and me there isn't really a favourite, it doesn't matter if we play on grass, on hard court or on clay," he added. The Spaniard has won the Barcelona Open twice, in 2022 and 2023, and takes on Finnish player Otto Virtanen today in the round of 32.

— AFP



# Qatar's Younousse, Tijan seal second win at Samila Open

Qatar's leading beach volleyball duo, Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan (Team Qatar 1), delivered a dominant performance to top Pool B at the 2026 AVC Beach Tour 25th Samila Open in Thailand. The pair completed a perfect run, closing the group stage with a commanding straight-sets win over Hong Kong's L F Lee and C H Lee, 21-7, 21-8. They had earlier secured a hard-fought 2-1 victory against Oman's Hood Al Jalaboubi and Alhashmi Mazin, winning 21-16, 18-21, 15-8. In contrast, Qatar's second team of Mohamed Ihab and Mousa Al Keer faced a tough outing in Group A, losing their opener 1-2 to Hong Kong's Sze Hang Kan and Wong Chun before falling in straight sets to Thailand's Kaewsai Dunwinit and Nakprakhong Banlue. The tournament features 27 teams from 15 countries, divided across eight pools, with a mix of three-team and four-team groups.



# Sooryavanshi flops as Hinge rattles Rajasthan

**HYDERABAD:** Fifteen-year-old Vaibhav Sooryavanshi fell for a golden duck in a rare IPL flop as his team Rajasthan Royals went down to Sunrisers Hyderabad by 57 runs as two debutants Praful Hinge and Sakib Hussain shined yesterday.

The teen prodigy has been the flavour of this season in the T20 tournament with two 15-ball fifties including in the previous match and key to Rajasthan's four wins.

Hyderabad pace bowler Hinge wreaked havoc with a triple-wicket first over -- an IPL first -- as he sent back Sooryavanshi, Dhruv Jurel and Lhuan-dre Pretorius, all three without scoring.

Hinge, who idolises Australia's Pat Cummins claimed four wickets and was ably supported by fellow Indian talent Hussain, who returned figures of 4-24 after coming in as impact substitute.

Rajasthan had slumped to 9-5 in their chase of 217 with Hinge sending back



Sunrisers Hyderabad's Praful Hinge (right) bowls during match against Rajasthan Royals.

in Hyderabad. South Africa's Donovan Ferreira, who top-scored with 69, and Ravindra Jadeja, who made 45, then put on 118 before Hyderabad were bowled out for 159 in 19 overs.

It was Rajasthan's first defeat in five games in this edition but they still top the 10-team table. Hyderabad, the 2016 champions, bounced back after two losses.

Earlier, Hyderabad skipper Ishan Kishan hit 91 off 44 balls to guide his team to 216-6 after being invited to bat first.

Abhishek Sharma fell for a first-ball duck off pace ace Jofra Archer and fellow opener Travis Head departed on 18 before the left-handed Kishan hit back.

Kishan, who hit eight fours and six sixes, put on 88 with Heinrich Klaasen, who made 40, to rebuild the innings and lay the foundations of the tall total.

Rajasthan's England star Archer returned figures of 2-37. — AFP