

Al Arabi claim fifth Qatar Basketball Cup title

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Al Arabi were crowned champions of the 13th Qatar Basketball Cup (2025–2026) after defeating Al Shamal 77-71 at Al Gharafa Hall yesterday, sealing their fifth title and third consecutive triumph.

Al Arabi took early control, dominating the first quarter 24–13 with strong defensive pressure and forcing turnovers. Al Shamal responded in the second quarter, tightening their defence and improving tempo to edge it 21-17 and cut the halftime deficit.

After the break, Al Arabi regained control through disciplined rotations and balanced scoring, winning the third quarter 21-16 to rebuild their advantage. The final quarter witnessed a spirited fightback from Al Shamal, who won the period 21-15 and closed the gap, but Al Arabi held firm in key moments to secure the victory.



QBF President Mohammed bin Saad Al Mughaseeb applauds as Al Arabi players celebrate with the trophy.

The win moves Al Arabi to a record five Qatar Basketball Cup titles, surpassing Al Gharafa's four. Qatar SC, Al Sadd, Al Rayyan and Al Wakrah each hold one title.

Al Shamal's Tyree Crump led all scorers with 36 points, while Al Arabi's Elmedin Kikanović top-scored for his side with 28.

Following the match, Mohammed bin Saad Al Mughaseeb, President of the Qatar Basketball Federation (QBF), Sheikh Tamim bin Fahd Al Thani, President of Al Arabi Club, Abdullah Shamsan Al Sada, Vice President of Al Shamal Club, and Saadoun Sabah Al Kuwari, Secretary-General of the Qatar Basketball Federation, presented the trophy and gold medals to the champions

The champions were presented with the trophy and gold medals by Qatar Basketball Federation officials and club representatives, along with a prize of QR 600,000. Al Shamal received silver medals and QR 400,000.

Al Arabi reached the final after a dramatic 104-103 overtime win over Al Rayyan, while Al Shamal advanced by beating Al Wakrah 71-56 in the semi-finals.

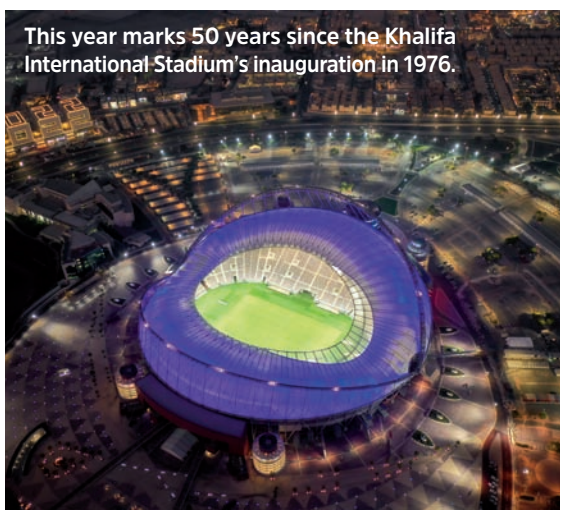
French Open increases prize money, €2.8m for winners

PARIS: The French Open singles champions will win €2.8m ($3.3m) this year, up from €2.55m in 2025, tournament organisers announced yesterday.

Total prize money has risen by 9.5 percent compared to last year.

Losers in the first round of singles qualifying will receive 24,000 euros, while players will be guaranteed at least 87,000 euros for reaching the main draw.

The prize money on offer for the clay-court major at Roland Garros is larger than at the Australian Open, but smaller than the other two Grand Slam events, Wimbledon and the US Open. The tournament in Paris gets under way on May 24. — *AFP*


This year marks 50 years since the Khalifa International Stadium's inauguration in 1976.

Amir Cup final set to take place on May 9

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Qatar Football Association (yesterday) announced that the Amir Cup Final 2026 will take place on May 9 at Khalifa International Stadium.

The country's biggest annual football cup has returned for its 54th edition, with a total of 20 clubs from first and second divisions participating in the competition.

Starting 2 May, fans can purchase tickets for the Amir Cup Final 2026 at www.qfa.qa in three categories: CAT 1: QR 50; CAT 2: QR 30; CAT 3: QR 10; Accessibility: QR 10.

Fans can purchase up to six tickets per person. Upon purchase, tickets will be made available on the Road to Qatar mobile app on 7 May. Accessibility tickets can be requested at: accessibility.tickets@sc.qa

Fans arriving at the Khalifa International Stadium will be treated to a variety of entertainment and cultural activities at the fan zone.

Following the Round of 16 held earlier in the year, eight teams including Al Gharafa, Umm Salal, Al Rayyan, Al Wakrah, Al Shamal, Al Sadd, Al Duhail, Al Arabi have qualified to the quarterfinals. The quarterfinals and semifinals that will take place between May 1-8.

The grand finale will take place at the renowned Khalifa International Stadium. This year marks 50 years since the stadium's inauguration in 1976.

Located in Aspire Zone, it has served as the cornerstone of the country's sporting legacy, hosting several premier sporting events, including matches of the historic FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

Penalty heartbreak for Al Sadd as Vissel Kobe reach ACL Elite semis

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Al Sadd SC suffered a heartbreaking exit from the AFC Champions League (ACL) Elite, going down 5-4 on penalties to Vissel Kobe after a pulsating 3-3 draw in the quarter-final at Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Sports City Stadium in Jeddah yesterday.

Substitute Jean Patric scored the winning penalty for Michael Skibbe's team after Claudinho had fired his attempt high over the bar in the third round of spot-kicks for the Qatari side.

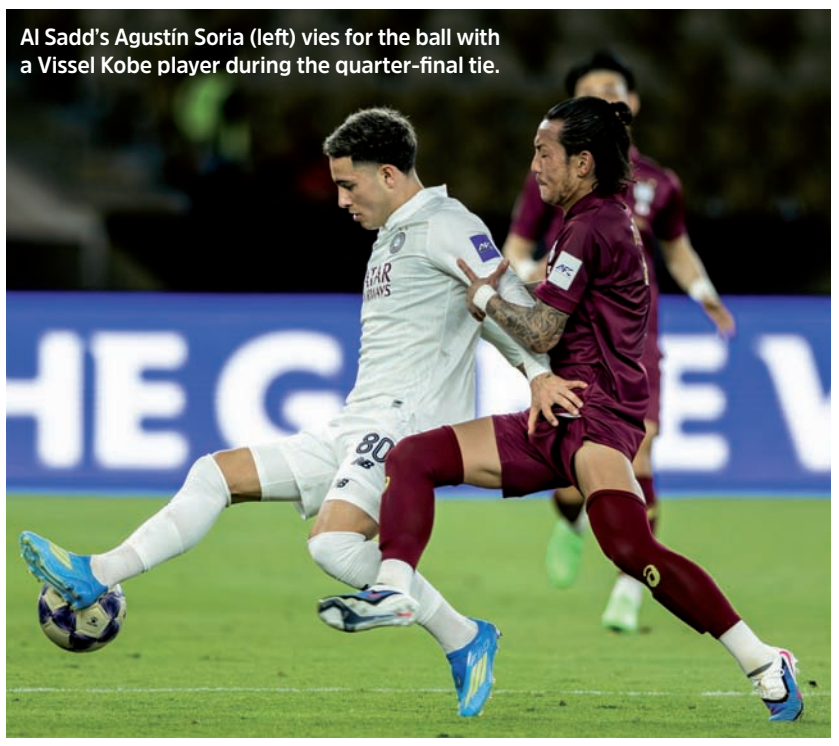
Rafa Mujica had given Roberto Mancini's outfit a sixth minute lead and the Spaniard restored his side's advantage in the 61st minute after seeing Yuya Osako level for the Japanese in the 24th minute.

Roberto Firmino added a third for Al Sadd in the 65th minute but Yusuke Ideguchi's strike with 16 minutes remaining gave Kobe hope and Yoshinori Muto's header in the third minute of stoppage time took the game into an additional 30 minutes.

Kobe will next face either defending champions Al Ahli Saudi FC from Saudi Arabia or Malaysia Super League champions Johor Darul Ta'zim, who meet at the King Abdullah Sports City Stadium today.

The Qataris made a strong start despite having had only three days' rest following their extra time exertions in their penalty shoot-out win over Saudi Arabia's Al Hilal SFC in the Round of 16.

Daiya Maekawa needed to be at his sharpest in the second minute, the Vissel Kobe goalkeeper throwing himself to his right to push Firmino's strike from the edge of the area to safety in a flowing opening to the game.


Al Sadd's Agustín Soria (left) vies for the ball with a Vissel Kobe player during the quarter-final tie.

Substitute Jean Patric scored the winning penalty for Michael Skibbe's team after Claudinho had fired his attempt high over the bar in the third round of spot-kicks for the Qatari side.

Muto thumped an ambitious effort from more than 30 yards over the Al Sadd crossbar two minutes later but by the sixth minute, the Qatari side had punished the Japanese outfit on the counterattack.

Firmino's backheel inside his own half found Claudinho and his first-time pass was shuttled forward to Akram Afif, who fed Mujica and his clinical finish from just inside the area found the bottom corner of Maekawa's goal.

By the 24th minute, Kobe had pulled level. Gotoku Sakai stormed down the right and delivered an inch-perfect cross onto the head of the unmarked Osako, who powered a header to the left of Meshaal Barsham that the Al Sadd goalkeeper could not keep out.

Firmino failed to bend his attempt to restore Al Sadd's lead into the top corner of Maekawa's goal in the 34th minute while Osako headed against the crossbar seconds later as the action switched from one end of the pitch to the other.

Sixteen minutes into the second half, Mujica put Al Sadd's back in front with another fine finish.

Claudinho clipped his pass into the penalty area from deep towards Firmino and the Brazilian improvised by chesting the ball into the path of Mujica, who swept his volley beyond Maekawa's dive.

Four minutes later another Al Sadd counterattack caught out the former J1 League champions.

Afif's long pass from inside his own half released Mujica and the former Las Palmas forward turned provider, delivering from the left into the path of Firmino and he slotted home his side-foot volley.

Ideguchi pulled one back for Kobe with 16 minutes left when he was set up by substitute Jean Patric, the midfielder dragging his right foot shot into the bottom corner to give Michael Skibbe's side hope.

Afif should have snuffed that out with 10 minutes to go when he directed Firmino's centre the wrong side of the target and Al Sadd were to rue that miss when Muto raced in at the near post to nod in Rikuto Hirose's cross from the right.

Maekawa denied Javairo Dilrosun with a flying save in the 102nd minute before pulling off a fine stop to keep out Afif's strike a minute into the second period of extra time.

The Japanese goalkeeper saved another goal-bound Dilrosun strike with five minutes left to take the quarter-final into a penalty shoot-out where Claudinho blazed his attempt over the bar to set up Jean Patric to fire the winner into the top corner.

De Lepine guides Samha Alseej to Al Bidda Cup win

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Samha Alseej stormed to victory in the Al Bidda Cup, producing a blistering late burst under jockey Arnaud de Lepine to land the Local Thoroughbred Graduation Plate feature at Al Rayyan Racecourse yesterday.

Making a winning debut, the filly – owned and trained by Jassim bin Hamad Al-Atteya – proved far too strong in the closing stages of the 1400m contest, powering clear inside the final 100m to win by 1½ lengths.

The success capped a double for De Lepine on the day.

Earlier, the jockey had guided Ibrahim Khaled Elahmed's Minsk to a one-length victory in the 1200m Local Thoroughbred Handicap (0–45), maintaining a strong rhythm throughout before holding off challengers in the final stretch.


Samha Alseej, ridden by Arnaud de Lepine, leads the field during the feature. PIC: Juhaim/QREC

Reflecting on the feature win, De Lepine said: "She is a very good filly. When I asked her to quicken, she responded very well. It was a nice run and I am happy with the victory."

Jockeys Alberto Sanna and Pierre-Charles Boudot also notched up two wins each on the nine-race card at the 68th Al Rayyan Race Meeting.

Sanna opened his account by guiding Maraaheb to victory in the Thoroughbred Maiden Plate before rounding off the meeting with a half-length success aboard Mohimma in the Purebred Arabian Handicap (80–100), the final race of the day.

Boudot produced a quick double, first steering Mohammed Al Ghazali-trained Studio City to a neck win in the Thoroughbred Handicap (75–95), before sealing a commanding three-length victory on Monaafasah in the 1400m Purebred Arabian Handicap (70–90).

Elsewhere, Rudy Nerbonne-trained Safwan Al Shahania, ridden by Lukas Delozier, claimed the Purebred Arabian Premium Maiden Plate, while Morello Man landed the Thoroughbred Handicap (0–75) under Saleh Faraj Al-Otaibi.

Al Ghazali-trained Make Love also featured on the card, winning the Thoroughbred Handicap (60–80) by half a length with Salem Alajmi in the saddle. Action at the venue continues tomorrow with eight races on the card.

68th Al Rayyan Race meeting – Al Bidda Cup
WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)

Al Bidda Cup, Local Thoroughbred Graduation Plate
Samha Alseej, Jassim bin Hamad Al-Atteya, Arnaud de Lepine
Thoroughbred Maiden Plate
Maraaheb, Hadi Al Ramzani, Alberto Sanna
Purebred Arabian Premium Maiden Plate
Safwan Al Shahania, R. Nerbonne, Lukas Delozier
Local Thoroughbred Handicap (0-45)
Minsk, Ibrahim Khaled Elahmed, Arnaud de Lepine
Thoroughbred Handicap (0-75)
Morello Man, Hamad Al-Jehani, Saleh Faraj Al-Otaibi
Thoroughbred Handicap (60-80)
Make Love, Mohammed Al Ghazali, Salem Alajmi
Thoroughbred Handicap (75-95)
Studio City, Mohammed Al Ghazali, Pierre Charles Boudot
Purebred Arabian Handicap (70-90)
Monaafasah, Ahmed Al Jehani, Pierre Charles Boudot
Purebred Arabian Handicap (80-100)
Mohimma, Jean de Mieulle, Alberto Sanna

GCC Games: Doha hosts virtual draw for team sports

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Organising Committee of 4th GCC Games – Doha 2026 staged the official draw ceremony for the team sports competitions yesterday via advanced virtual communication technology.

Held at Lusail Hall at the Qatar Olympic Committee headquarters, the event brought together heads of delegations from GCC nations and attracted strong media presence, reflecting the importance and prestige of the occasion.

Head of the Sports Committee Mohammed Issa Al-Fadala said that the meeting forms part of ongoing preparations and close coordination to ensure competitions are delivered to the highest technical and organisational standards.

He highlighted that this step builds on continuous cooperation between the Organising Committee and GCC Olympic Committees, strengthening readiness and contributing to an exceptional edition of the Games.

Al Fadala added that sport remains a powerful bridge that fosters unity and solidarity among GCC nations, embodying shared values and the spirit of brotherhood and fair play.

He expressed confidence that the draw would pave the way for exciting and highly competitive matches during the Games, scheduled to take place in Doha from May 11 to 22, 2026.



The virtual draw ceremony took place at Lusail Hall at the QOC headquarters.

The handball draw was conducted by Hamad Misfer Al Nuaimi, Handball Competition Manager, in accordance with international regulations, with participation from Qatar (host nation), Bahrain, the UAE, Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Arabia.

Meanwhile, the volleyball draw was carried out by Yousef Kano, Volleyball Competition Manager, alongside former players Saeed Al Hatmi and Ali Ishaq, also following international rules, with all six GCC national teams taking part.

The fourth edition of the Games, taking place from May 11 to 22, will feature the participation of elite athletes from the GCC countries, who will compete in 19 sports, including handball, table tennis, athletics, squash, padel, fencing, boxing, taekwondo, karate, swimming, billiards and snooker, basketball (5x5), basketball (3x3), shooting, archery, volleyball, equestrian, and bowling.

The competitions will be hosted across 10 venues, including Aspire Dome, Qatar Sports Club, Khalifa International Tennis, Squash and Badminton Complex, Lusail Shooting Range, Al Gharafa Sports Club, and other leading sports facilities.

Historically, the inaugural GCC Games were held in Manama, Bahrain, from October 11 to 22, 2011, featuring six nations and around 1,500 athletes competing in 11 sports, with Qatar finishing third (7 gold, 11 silver, 2 bronze).

The second edition took place in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, from October 12 to 26, 2015, with five participating nations and nearly 1,500 athletes across 15 sports, where Qatar again secured third place with 59 medals (21 gold, 22 silver, 16 bronze).

The third edition was hosted by Kuwait City, Kuwait, from May 16 to 31, 2022, with six nations and over 1,500 athletes competing in 16 sports; Qatar finished fifth with a total of 52 medals (16 gold, 21 silver, 15 bronze).



Qatar Cup 2026 shifted to next season: QSL

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Qatar Stars League (QSL) yesterday announced that the Qatar Cup 2026 will be rescheduled and included in the 2026–2027 season calendar.

In a statement yesterday, QSL said the decision was made in coordination with relevant stakeholders after reviewing the remaining fixtures of the current 2025–2026 season. The league noted that the schedule has been affected by several unplanned breaks, as well as the participation of Qatari clubs in international competitions and the national team's preparations for the upcoming FIFA World Cup 2026.

As a result, QSL confirmed that the Qatar Cup 2026 will be played during the next season.

The Qatar Cup is contested by the top four teams of the top flight Qatar Stars League at the end of each season.

Zverev cruises into Munich quarter-finals

MUNICH: German first seed Alexander Zverev is on track to defend his crown at the Munich ATP event after swatting aside Canada's Gabriel Diallo yesterday.

The world number three won 6-1, 6-2 in 73 minutes and will face Argentinian Francisco Cerundolo in the quarter-finals.

"I won and I won decisively, that's pretty good," Zverev said as he kept his bid for a record fourth Munich title alive.

The Bayern Munich fan, who was in attendance at Wednesday's dramatic Champions League quarter-final win over Real Madrid, added: "It wasn't as exciting as yesterday in the Allianz Arena -- that was an experience."

Zverev said the clash with fifth seed Cerundolo, who moved past Botic van de Zandschulp 6-3, 6-0 earlier in the day, "would be a more exciting match".

The 28-year-old had struggled past Serb Miomir Kecmanovic in three sets in his opener but had no such difficulties in the Munich sunshine against the world number 37 Diallo.

Diallo seemed to struggle with a back injury and needed treatment on court after the first set.

The victory was Zverev's 100th clay court victory this decade, with only world number two Carlos Alcaraz and Dane Casper Ruud boasting more wins in that time. — *AFP*


Alexander Zverev


President of the Qatar Equestrian Federation Bader bin Mohammed Al-Darwish and President of FEI Regional Group VII Sultan Mohammed Al-Yahyai presented the trophies to winners of the CSISCH-A Children Team competition.

FEI Group VII Finals: Team Qatar tops Children Team event at Al Shaqab

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Team Qatar delivered a standout performance to claim top honours in the CSISCH-A Children's Team competition at the FEI Group VII Finals at the Longines Arena at Al Shaqab yesterday.

The hosts finished ahead of the United Arab Emirates, who took second place, while Saudi Arabia completed the podium in third.

The awards were presented by Bader bin Mohammed Al-Darwish, President of the Qatar Equestrian Federation, and Sultan Mohammed Al-Yahyai, President of FEI Regional Group VII.

Seventeen riders qualified for the next individual class following the conclusion of the team event.


Tournament's Marketing and Communications Manager Abdullah Al-Qashouti presented trophy to UAE's Saif Owaida Mohammed Alkirbi.

In the junior individual competition at a height of 130cm, 15 riders produced clear rounds to qualify for the next stage. Teams representing Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates also competed in the team event for the same class. The qualifiers were honoured by Salmeen Al-Suwaidi, the tournament's sports director.

Meanwhile, the under-25 class at a height of 135cm was dominated by riders from the United Arab Emirates, with 15 participants competing and 13 securing placings.

Saif Owaida Mohammed Alkirbi, riding Hui Buh 21, claimed first place with a faultless round in 64.05 seconds, followed by Mohamed Hamad Ali Al-Kirbi on Lyon van de Plataan in 64.24 seconds. Omar Abdul Aziz Al-Marzooqi, aboard Billy Martini, finished third in 67.55 seconds. The top five finishers were crowned by Abdullah Al-Qashouti, the tournament's marketing and communications manager.

Competitions continue today at 1:30pm with a local junior class at a height of 110cm, followed by the youth team final at 120cm and the senior team final at 130cm. The programme will conclude with the under-25 Grand Prix class at a height of 145cm, scheduled for 7:45pm.

Musetti reaches Barcelona Open quarters

BARCELONA: Italian second seed Lorenzo Musetti **(pictured)** eased into the quarter-finals of the Barcelona Open yesterday with a straight-sets victory over Frenchman Corentin Moutet.

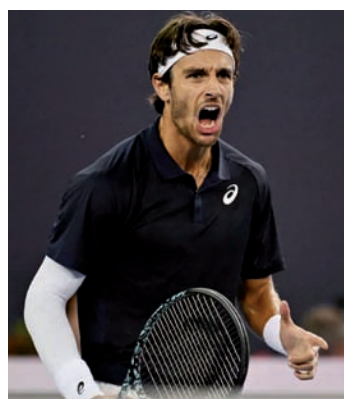
The world number nine will face either Arthur Fils or Brandon Nakashima after a 6-3, 6-4 win. He is the highest remaining seed left in Barcelona after Carlos Alcaraz pulled out of the tournament on Wednesday with a wrist injury.

Musetti impressed on clay last season, reaching at least the semi-finals in the ATP 1000 events in Monte Carlo, Madrid and Rome, as well as at the French Open.

But he has struggled for form and fitness this year and is still without an ATP title since 2022.

Musetti had lost in his opening matches at both Indian Wells and the Monte Carlo Masters, after being forced to retire injured from his Australian Open quarter-final against Novak Djokovic in January.

Earlier, Russian fifth seed Andrey Rublev saw off Lorenzo Sonego 6-2, 6-3 to set up a quarter-final meeting with Tomas Machac, the beneficiary of Alcaraz's withdrawal. — *AFP*





Lionel Messi new owner of Spanish club Cornella

BARCELONA: Lionel Messi has bought Catalan club Cornella and become the team's new owner, the Spanish fifth-tier side announced yesterday.

The eight-time Ballon d'Or winner is still playing in the United States for Inter Miami and is expected to play a key role in Argentina's World Cup title defence this year.

"This move reinforces Messi's close ties to Barcelona and his commitment to the development of sport and local talent in Catalonia," the club said in a statement confirming the former Barcelona star's acquisition.

Several top players have come through the ranks at Cornella, including Arsenal goalkeeper David Raya and Messi's former Barca teammate Jordi Alba.

Cornella have suffered back-to-back relegations in the past two seasons.

"Leo Messi's arrival marks the beginning of a new chapter in the club's history, aimed at driving both sporting and institutional growth, strengthening its foundations, and continuing to invest in talent," Cornella added. — *AFP*

Punjab Kings down Mumbai Indians despite De Kock century

MUMBAI: South African Quinton de Kock's record third century was to no avail as Prabhsimran Singh and skipper Shreyas Iyer hauled Punjab Kings back to the top of the IPL table with a commanding seven-wicket victory over Mumbai Indians yesterday.

De Kock marked his return to the Mumbai team for the first time since 2021 by becoming the first overseas batter to record hundreds for three different sides as the home team posted 195-6 at the Wankhede Stadium. De Kock only got a look-in because Rohit Sharma was ruled out with a hamstring injury.


Punjab Kings' Arshdeep Singh (right) celebrates with Cooper Connolly after taking the wicket of Mumbai Indians' Suryakumar Yadav.

Alongside Naman Dhir, the left-handed opener put on 122 for the third wicket, Dhir making the most of being dropped by Yuzvendra Chahal on 10 to go on to post 50.

De Kock, who drove his first ball from compatriot Marco Jansen over cover for six and carried his bat, remained unbeaten on 112 off 60 balls, including eight fours and seven sixes.

With Mumbai on course to top 200, Punjab fought back at the death through pacers Arshdeep Singh, who took three wickets, and Jansen, and a spectacular catch facilitated by the brilliance of Shreyas and completed by Xavier Bartlett to account for Mumbai captain Hardik Pandya. Prabhsimran and fellow opener Priyansh Arya took 21 off the first over of the chase from Deepak Chahar before Afghanistan's Allah Ghazanfar dismissed Arya and Cooper Connolly in quick succession.

But Prabhsimran, put down at short third-man by Jasprit Bumrah when he was on 11, thwarted those designs with a typically counter-punching second successive half-century. Prabhsimran's blistering unbeaten 39-ball 80 contained 11 fours and two sixes.

Alongside him, Shreyas continued his excellent start to the tournament with a third straight fifty. Worryingly for Mumbai, who slumped to their fourth consecutive loss, Bumrah went wicketless for the fifth match in a row, conceding 41 runs in his four overs.

With their pace spearhead rendered ineffective, Mumbai were pummelled by Prabhsimran and Shreyas, who added 139 in only 67 deliveries before the latter fell against the run of play, smartly caught by Naman running in from deep mid-wicket and diving forward.

Marcus Stoinis then came to the crease and, with his unbeaten 10 off five deliveries, helped Punjab over the line as they remain the only unbeaten side in the IPL. — *AFP*

Real season in tatters, Arbeloa looking shaky after Euro exit



Real Madrid's coach Alvaro Arbeloa (second right) and forward Kylian Mbappe (second left) are seen on the sidelines during the UEFA Champions League quarter-final second leg against Bayern Munich.

MADRID: Serial Champions League winners Real Madrid bared their fangs but left Munich staring down the barrel of a second consecutive season without a major trophy and left coach Alvaro Arbeloa's tenure looking tenuous.

Nine points behind La Liga leaders Barcelona, Los Blancos seem destined to end a troubled campaign empty-handed after their dramatic European quarter-final exit against Bayern on Wednesday.

Arbeloa's side took the lead three times at the Allianz Arena and until Eduardo Camavinga's 86th minute red card had every chance of going through after digging deep and going blow-for-blow with the Bavarian giants in a thrilling clash.

A late double for Bayern consigned Madrid to a 4-3 defeat on the night -- one on which Arbeloa said his team gave "their souls and their lives" -- and a 6-4 aggregate loss.

"An honourable exit that will not provide consolation or avoid another revolution," wrote Spanish newspaper *AS* after a heady night in Munich.

That revolution could cost Arbeloa his job and Los Blancos are braced for pain and possible change in the weeks and months to follow.

"I've always tried to help the club in the best way I can, and that's how it will be until the last day," Arbeloa told reporters after the match.

"I'm not at all worried (about my future) and I will understand perfectly any decision that the club takes.

"I'm a man of the club -- if I'm hurt today it's not for me, it's for Real Madrid, and because this year we will not win our 16th (Champions League title)."

Failure in the Spanish capital is rarely tolerated under president Florentino Perez without someone paying the price.

When Arbeloa was promoted to first team manager in January, Madrid did not state the length of his contract -- suggesting that he had no long-term guarantees.

The coach has found it hard to motivate the squad at times in La Liga, and has only 13 victories in 21 matches at the helm.

In his first game in charge, Real's superstars were knocked out of the Copa del Rey by second-tier Albacete.

Lack of balance

Yet, his bold, attacking line-up against Bayern almost paid off.

Arbeloa left Camavinga and Thiago Pitarch on the bench and opted for an aggressive midfield trio of Jude Bellingham, Federico Valverde and Turkish playmaker Arda Guler, who struck twice.

Ultimately, it was not enough, and Real will likely fail to win any silverware for a second successive season for the first time since the 2008-09 and 2009-10 campaigns.

Perhaps Madrid's biggest problem remains one which Carlo Ancelotti could not solve last season, nor Xabi Alonso in his short time at the helm -- how to fit Kylian Mbappe, Vinicius Junior and Bellingham into the same side without losing balance.

> *I'm not at all worried (about my future) and I will understand perfectly any decision that the club takes. I'm a man of the club -- if I'm hurt today it's not for me, it's for Real Madrid, and because this year we will not win our 16th Champions League title.*
> ***Alvaro Arbeloa***
> ***Real Madrid coach***

Arbeloa could argue that the Bayern second leg showed it is possible, with England international Bellingham impressive, Mbappe on the scoresheet and Vinicius hitting the woodwork.

Yet the energy and effort the star trio put into this game was beyond their regular performances this season and unlikely to be replicated on lesser occasions.

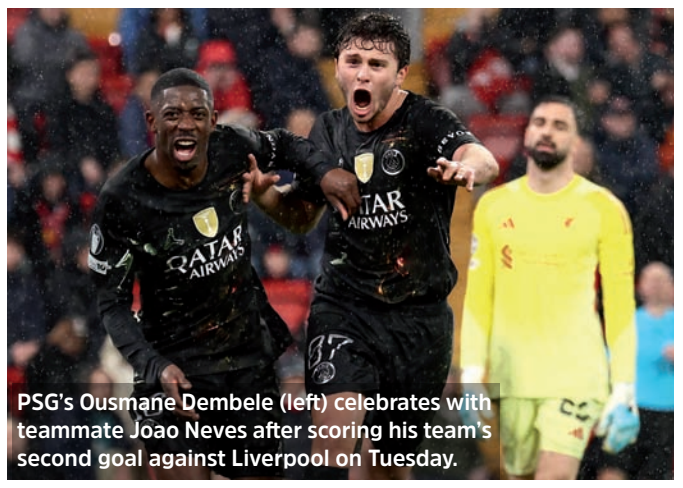
Not to mention, the team still conceded four goals.

Real's anger at the pivotal decision to send off Camavinga and their gutsy display could help Arbeloa, but whether it is enough to save his job, only time will tell.

There is no obvious replacement for Perez to turn to either.

The final weeks of the season in La Liga may have a say in Arbeloa's prospects, including their performance in the Clasico against Barcelona on May 10, when the Catalans could capture the title.

It may be a grim procession to the end of May but Arbeloa said that his team had "no other choice" but to keep on trudging and defend the club's badge for as long as he is in charge. — ***AFP***



PSG's Ousmane Dembele (left) celebrates with teammate Joao Neves after scoring his team's second goal against Liverpool on Tuesday.

Enrique's PSG fix sights on another Ligue 1 and Champions League double

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's dream of retaining the Champions League title remains alive and they could have yet another Ligue 1 crown all but wrapped up by the time they play the first leg of their semi-final tie in Europe.

A 2-0 win away to Liverpool on Tuesday, in which they had to withstand fierce pressure before Ousmane Dembele scored twice, secured a 4-0 aggregate victory in their Champions League quarter-final.

PSG have now reached the Champions League semi-finals in three straight seasons since Luis Enrique became coach in 2023, as many times as in their entire history before his arrival.

The biggest hurdles are still to come with a last-four tie against Bayern Munich up next, but PSG could become only the second team in the modern Champions League era to successfully defend their title.

"You can see the maturity of the team now," captain Marquinhos told broadcaster Canal Plus in Liverpool.

"Last year we went through all sorts of moments, good and bad, which allowed us to gain experience. We managed to hold on and suffer through games away from home, and we did that again."

Europe is the priority, so much so that PSG requested the postponement of their pivotal showdown with domestic title rivals Lens last weekend -- and the French league were happy to accommodate them, despite Lens voicing their opposition.

On Sunday PSG return to domestic duty at home to Lyon, who are themselves scrapping to qualify for next season's Champions League.

The Parisians are four points ahead of their closest rivals with a game in hand, meaning the title race might well be run by the time the teams do eventually face off next month.

French champions in the last four seasons, and in 11 of the last 13 years, PSG also host relegation-threatened Nantes in a rearranged fixture next Wednesday.

Meanwhile Lens must try to keep the pressure on by beating Toulouse at home on Friday, before those teams meet again in the same stadium in the French Cup semi-finals next Tuesday.

"We are approaching the run-in and we want to see what we are made of," said Lens goalkeeper Robin Risser.

"We are keen to get the reward of Champions League qualification as soon as possible, and win the French Cup to make history for this magnificent club." — ***AFP***



beIN expands motorsport portfolio with WEC deal

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: beIN Media Group ('beIN') has secured a multi-year deal to broadcast all races of the FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC) in 35 territories across the Middle East & North Africa (MENA) and Asia Pacific (APAC). Fans will be able to watch all races live via beIN's flagship sports network, beIN Sports, and beIN's OTT platform TOD across the MENA region.

The 2026 season will span five global regions – Europe, North America, South America, APAC and MENA. The action begins on 19 April with the 6 Hours of Imola in Italy, before moving through a European leg – including the 24 Hours of Le Mans taking place in June – and concluding with a run of international rounds across the Americas and Asia. The rearranged Qatar 1812km will take place in late October, ahead of the season finale in Bahrain.

The addition of the FIA World Endurance Championship strengthens beIN Sports' position as the home of global motorsport – which includes Formula 1, MotoGP, FIA European Rally Championship, FIA World Rally Championship, FIM Superbike World Championship and Deutsche Tourenwagen Masters.

All races will be available to beIN subscribers across the following 35 territories: Algeria, Bahrain, Chad, Djibouti, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, UAE, Yemen,Brunei, Cambodia, East-Timor, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand.

Silva to leave Man City at end of season

LONDON: Bernardo Silva will leave Manchester City when his contract expires at the end of the season, the Premier League club announced yesterday as they hailed his "incalculable" contribution to our "greatest sustained period of success".

The 31-year-old Portuguese playmaker, who is the current club captain, joined City from Monaco for £43m ($58m) in 2017 and has gone on to make over 450 appearances for manager Pep Guardiola's side, winning 15 major trophies, including six Premier League titles and one Champions League as well as this season's League Cup.

He has also scored 76 goals and provided 77 assists to date, with Silva also involved as City won the 'treble' of Premier League, FA Cup and Champions League in the 2022/23 season.

Silva recently moved into the top 10 of all-time City appearance holders, overtaking several notable former players, including David Silva, Paul Power and Willie Donachie.

"Manchester City can confirm Bernardo Silva will leave the club this summer," said a City statement.

"Bernardo will now focus on seeking to try and ensure his remaining time at City ends with even more silverware, with Pep Guardiola's side still very much in the hunt to win both the Premier League title and the FA Cup.



Man City's Bernardo Silva lifts the Premier League trophy in this file photo.

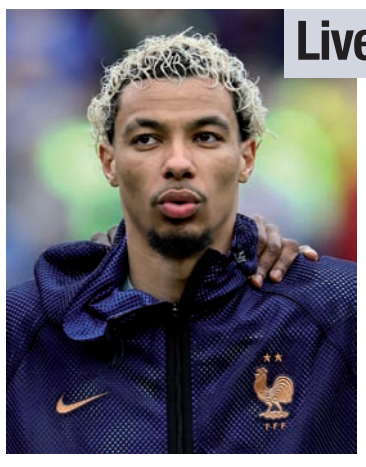
"In short, he will be deservedly remembered both as one of City's finest and most popular players of all time."

Confirming his departure from the Etihad on his Instagram page, Silva wrote: "When I arrived nine years ago, I was following a dream of a little boy, wanting to succeed in life, wanting to achieve great things.

"This city and this club gave me much more than that, much more than I ever hoped for. What we won and achieved together is a legacy that will forever be cherished in my heart.

"The Centurions, the domestic quadruple, the Treble, the Four In A Row and much more... It wasn't that bad.

"In a few months, it's time to say goodbye to the city where not only we won so much as a football club, but also where I started my marriage and my family. From the bottom of my heart, Ines and Carlota, thank you!" — ***AFP***



Liverpool confirm Ekitike out for season, will miss World Cup

LONDON: Liverpool followed France in confirming that forward Hugo Ekitike **(pictured)** will miss the remainder of the Premier League season and the 2026 World Cup after suffering a serious injury in a Champions League loss to Paris Saint-Germain.

The 23-year-old crumpled in a heap holding his lower right leg during the first half of Liverpool's 2-0 quarter-final second-leg defeat by European champions PSG at Anfield on Tuesday and had to be substituted.

A brief statement issued by Premier League champions Liverpool on Thursday said scans had subsequently confirmed a "rupture of the Achilles tendon".

The statement added: "Ekitike will therefore be sidelined for the remaining weeks of the club season and unable to participate at this summer's World Cup with France."

Liverpool gave no timescale for Ekitike's recovery, saying only "further updates will be provided at the appropriate time, with Hugo receiving the full support of everyone at LFC".

Liverpool's statement followed Wednesday's announcement by France coach Didier Deschamps that Ekitike was out of the World Cup.

Ekitike has scored 17 goals in 45 matches in all competitions for Liverpool since arriving at Anfield last summer. — ***AFP***

World Athletics delivers nationality switch hammer blow to Turkiye

MONACO: World Athletics yesterday refused the applications of 11 elite athletes seeking to transfer their allegiance to Turkiye in a hammer blow to the country's medal chances at the 2028 Olympics.

Four Jamaicans, including 2024 Olympic men's discus gold medallist Roje Stona, and a quintet of Kenyans, among them former women's marathon world record-holder Brigid Kosgei, were among the 11 concerned.

The full list included Kosgei's compatriots Catherine Relin (Selin Can) Amanang'ole, Brian Kibor, Ronald Kwemoi and Nelvin (Can) Jepkemboi, Stona's fellow Jamaicans Rajindra Campbell, Jaydon Hibbert and Wayne Pinnock, Nigeria's Favour Ofili and Russian Sophia Yakushina.

Turkiye had been offering long-term financial support to recruit foreign track and field stars with the aim of winning a host of gold medals at the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles.

The move was prompted by Turkiye's dire performance at the 2024 Summer Games in Paris, where it failed to win a single gold among its eight medals across all sports.

But the World Athletics deemed otherwise, saying that approval of the applications "would impinge upon and compromise the imperatives" underlying eligibility rules and transfer of allegiance regulations. A World Athletics panel found that the applications "formed part of a coordinated recruitment strategy led by the Turkiye government acting through a wholly?owned and financed government club".

Their aim, track and field's body said, was "to attract overseas athletes through lucrative contracts, with the aim of facilitating transfers of allegiance and enabling those athletes to represent Turkiye at future international competitions, including the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games".

"Given the common features across the applications, the panel assessed them together and determined that such an approach is inconsistent with the core principles of the regulations.

"These principles are designed to safeguard the credibility of international competition, encourage member federations to invest in the development of domestic talent and maintain confidence among athletes that national teams are not primarily assembled through external recruitment."

World Athletics concluded: "As a result of the decisions, the athletes are not eligible to represent Turkiye in national representative competitions or other relevant international events." — ***AFP***