

Sheikh Joaan attends School Olympic Program closing day

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) President H E Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al Thani attended the closing day of the boys' competitions at the 19th edition of the Schools Olympic Program at Aspire Dome yesterday.

The closing day was also attended by President of the UAE School and University Sports Federation Sheikh Suhail bin Butti Al Maktoum, President of the Bahrain School and Collegiate Athletic Association Sheikh Dr. Saqer bin Salman Al Khalifa, President of the Kuwait School Sports & Higher Education Federation Hamad Abdullah Al Hamad, and Executive Director of the International School Sport Federation Mrs. Hasnae El Ayoubi.

From the Qatari side, the event was attended by QOC Second Vice President Dr. Thani bin Abdulrahman Al Kuwari, QOC Secretary General Jassim bin Rashid Al Buenain, Chief Executive Officer of the Doha 2030 Asian Games Organizing Committee and the Director General of the Organizing Committee of the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027 Dr. Ahmad Abdulla Al Buenain, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Aspire Zone Foundation Abdulla Al Nuaimi, and Executive Director of the School Olympic Program Abdulrahman Al Muftah, along with a number of presidents of national sports federations.


QOC President H E Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al-Thani with athletes on the last day of School Olympic Program.

This year's edition witnessed wide participation, with approximately 25,000 students from public and private schools competing across 21 sports.

The Schools Olympic Program was established in response to an initiative by the Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, with the QOC organizing the program in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, the Qatar School Sport Federation and the Qatar Paralympic Committee.

The Schools Olympic Program was first launched in the 2007–2008 season as a national initiative under the slogan "Sport and Health," forming part of the legacy of the Doha 2006 Asian Games.


Action during the closing day.




Akram Afif celebrates after scoring.

Afif brace as Al Sadd crush Al Duhail, set up Amir Cup final with Al Gharafa

Ababacar the hero for Al Gharafa in 3-2 penalty win over Al Wakrah

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Akram Afif fired a brace as Al Sadd delivered a dominant performance yesterday to thrash arch-rivals Al Duhail 4-1 and set up an Amir Cup final against defending champions Al Gharafa.

Pedro Martins' Al Gharafa stayed in the hunt for a second successive crown after beating Al Wakrah 3-2 in a penalty shootout following a 0-0 draw in regulation time in the first semi-final. Al Gharafa goalkeeper Khalifa Ababacar emerged as the hero, blocking two penalties in the shootout.

The highly-anticipated final will take place at Khalifa International Stadium on Saturday.

Roberto Mancini's Al Sadd made a flying start at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium, with Akram Afif putting them ahead in the 10th minute. A powerful effort by Giovani was initially saved by Salah Zakaria with a diving stop, but the rebound fell to Afif, who slotted home comfortably.


Goalkeeper Khalifa Ababacar produced a match-winning performance for Al Gharafa.

Rafa Mujica made it 2-0 in the 24th minute, finishing off a swift counter-attack. The move came after a challenge involving Tarek Salman and Edmilson saw Al Duhail appeal for a foul, but play continued. Claudinho drove forward in Al Duhail's half and combined neatly with Afif, exchanging passes before a final touch from Claudinho set up Mujica to slot in from the left.

Al Duhail pushed to respond through Sultan Al Brake and Krzysztof Piatek, but Al Sadd went into the break holding their two-goal advantage.

The Red Knights pulled one back in the 54th minute, with Boubakary Soumare firing a low shot into the bottom-right corner with Adil Boulbina providing the assist.

A mistake from Meshaal Barsham almost led to the equaliser, but Paulo Otavio saved Al Sadd, blocking Piatek's shot from outside the box after the goalkeeper underhit a pass that fell straight to the striker.

Just when Al Duhail looked dangerous, veteran forward Hassan Al Haydos, who came on from the bench for Salman, made an instant impact in the 82nd minute, firing a stunning long-range effort past a diving Zakaria into the bottom-left corner to restore Al Sadd's two-goal cushion at 3-1.

Afif put the game to bed, firing into the left corner from the centre of the box in the first minute of stoppage time after a brilliant ball from Otavio.

"It was not an easy match, but we delivered a strong performance and got the result we needed," said Al Haydos.

"The Amir Cup is the most important competition for us. We always aim to reach the final and compete for the title. I'm happy to have scored, and we hope to carry the same spirit into the final against Al Gharafa."

Al Gharafa see off Al Wakrah

Earlier at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium, Ababacar set the tone early, denying Yusuf Abdurisag as the match burst into life. Ferjani Sassi then headed wide from a Yacine Brahimi delivery as Al Gharafa pressed forward.

Ababacar was called into action again, producing a sharp save to keep out Amin Zahzouh's close-range header. At the other end, Al Wakrah goalkeeper Mohammed Al Bakri got down well to stop Brahimi's low effort, ensuring the deadlock remained intact at the break.

Both teams kept pushing after the break, but clear chances remained scarce. Zahzouh thought he had broken the deadlock in the 83rd minute, volleying home Murad Naji's cross, only for the effort to be ruled out for a foul in the build-up.

With nothing to separate the sides, the semi-final went to penalties, where Al Gharafa held their nerve.

Ababacar capped a fine outing by saving attempts from Hamdy Fathy and Luis Alberto after Lucas Mendes had already fired Al Wakrah's opening kick wide. Yacine Brahimi, Ferjani Sassi and Aron Gunnarsson converted Al Gharafa's first three spot-kicks, which proved decisive despite Alvaro Djalo missing the target.

QFA scraps Second Division and Olympic League, launches QSL 2

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The Qatar Football Association yesterday approved a major revamp of the domestic football structure, scrapping the Second Division League and Olympic League and introducing a new competition – Qatar Stars League 2 (QSL 2) – from the 2026/2027 season.

In a statement, the QFA Executive Committee confirmed the "cancellation of the Olympic League competition and the Second Division League competition for the upcoming 2026/2027 sports season."

The newly-formed QSL 2 will feature Second Division clubs, the Qatar U-23 national team and selected 'B' teams from top-flight sides, subject to meeting participation criteria. The federation said the league "includes the teams of the second division clubs, the under-23 national team, and the (B) team of some first division clubs that meet the conditions and criteria for participation... based on coordination meetings with the clubs."

The move is aimed at strengthening the player development pathway and increasing competitiveness. Separately, the QFA outlined revised foreign player regulations for the top tier, the Qatar Stars League.

Each First Division club will be allowed "a maximum of (5) foreign professional players + at least (2) talented players within the list of (11) players on the field at any time during the match."

For the second tier under the new structure, clubs can field up to eight foreign professionals in a matchday XI.

Al Arabi, Al Sadd ready for Amir Basketball Cup final

CHINTHANA WASALA
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Al Arabi and Al Sadd go head-to-head in a blockbuster final showdown as the Qatar basketball heavyweights clash for the 2025-2026 Amir Cup title today.

The title clash will tip off at 6:30pm at Al Gharafa Hall.

Al Arabi enter the final targeting a clean sweep of domestic titles this season, having already won the League Championship and the Qatar Cup.

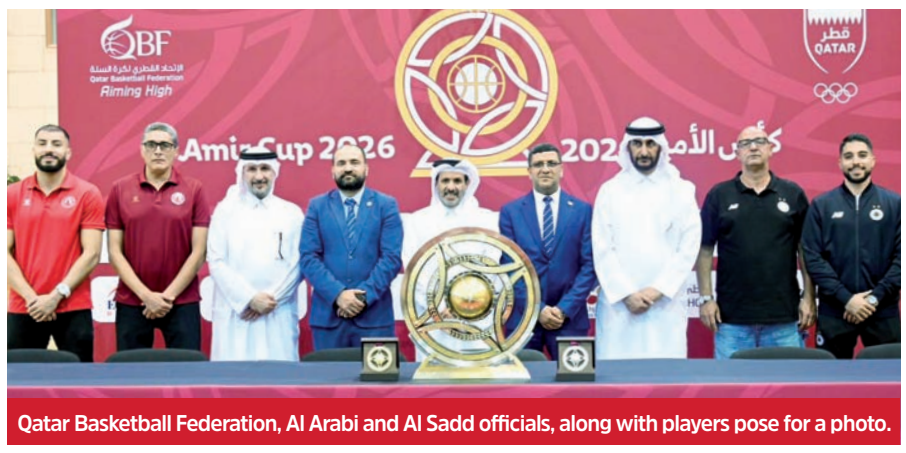
Meanwhile, Al Sadd will look to add another trophy to their account.

Both sides arrive in strong form after strong wins in the knockout rounds.

Al Arabi powered into the final with an 89-70 victory over Al Ahli in the semi-final. They had earlier beaten Qatar SC 104-73 in the quarter-final, showing their strength in attack and defence.

On the other hand, Al Sadd booked their place in the final with an 87-72 win over Al Rayyan following a 107-96 win over Al Shamal in the quarter-final.

Coach Hatem Mamlouk confirmed Al Arabi are ready. He called for full focus against a side that knocked out defending champions Al Rayyan in the semifinals.



Qatar Basketball Federation, Al Arabi and Al Sadd officials, along with players pose for a photo.

He backed his players to produce a strong display and lift the title.

Al Sadd coach Cengiz Karadag said reaching the final is a major step, following their win over the holders. He expects a tight contest against Al Arabi. He said both teams are evenly matched and the outcome will hinge on small details.

Last season, Al Rayyan beat Al Arabi 77-70 at the same venue to win the title.

The competition began in the 1999-2000 season, with Al Rayyan winning the first edition. They remain the most successful club with 10 titles from 14 final appearances. Al Gharafa has five titles, Al Sadd four, and Al Arabi three. Qatar Club and Al Jaish have two titles each.

At a pre-match press conference at the Qatar Basketball Federation headquarters, Secretary General and Director of National Teams Saadoun Sabah Al-Kuwari said the Federation is set to deliver a final that matches the stature of the Amir Cup, one of the key events on Qatar's basketball calendar.

Lebanese School crowned inaugural Mini World Cup champions

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The inaugural Mini World Cup for the 2025–2026 season came to a close yesterday at Aspire Academy, capping a well-contested schools tournament staged under the umbrella of International Basketball Federation, in collaboration with the Qatar Basketball Federation and the Qatar School Sports Federation.

In the final, Lebanese School produced a strong second-half display to defeat Philippine School 58–47 and secure the title in the competition's first edition. The decider unfolded in a lively setting at Aspire Academy, with officials, media, and vocal Lebanese and Filipino supporters adding to the occasion.

During the awards ceremony, Qatar Basketball Federation (QBF) Secretary General Saadoun Sabah Al-Kuwari, joined by FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027 Director Predrag Bogosavljev and Competitions Director of the Qatar 2027 Organizing Committee Ahmed Al Darwish, crowned Lebanese School with the championship trophy and gold medals. GEMS American Academy Qatar claimed he third place.

The Tournament stood as a pioneering and unprecedented initiative in the Middle East and globally, delivered through an innovative competitive format inspired by the upcoming FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027.

This event coincided with the finals of the School Olympic Program for the 2025–2026 seasons, within a comprehensive vision that blends athletic excellence with educational values.



Lebanese School produced a strong second half show to beat Philippine School 58–47 and clinch the inaugural title.

A total of 32 secondary schools from across Qatar participated in the season 2025-2026 of the Mini World Cup, representing a diverse and vibrant educational landscape.

Based on the final standings of the 2025–2026 season, participating schools in the second edition (2026–2027) will be granted the opportunity to represent the national teams qualified for the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027.

On this occasion, Qatar 2027 Director Bogosavljev said: "I am a great supporter and admirer of this event, which serves as an important platform for promoting the Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027."

QBF Secretary General Al-Kuwari highlighted the event's success as an advanced model for leveraging sport as a tool for education and development.

He emphasized that the Tournament fostered teamwork, encouraged active student participation, and expanded opportunities for volunteering, further supporting the growth and popularity of basketball among youth.

From his side, Marwan Egho, Director of the Mini World Cup Project affirmed that the second edition, to be held in October and November 2026, will adhere to the same high standards. Schools will compete under the names of national teams qualified for the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027, with Lusail Sports Arena set to host the final in a realistic simulation of one of the most eagerly anticipated global sporting spectacles.

Saka ends Arsenal's 20-year wait to reach Champions League final

LONDON: Arsenal reached the Champions League final for the first time in 20 years as Bukayo Saka sealed a 1-0 win against Atletico Madrid yesterday.

Mikel Arteta's side settled the semi-final second leg with Saka's strike late in the first half at an ecstatic Emirates Stadium.

The Gunners, who drew 1-1 in the first leg in Madrid last week, held firm after Saka's goal to go through 2-1 on aggregate.

Arsenal will face Paris Saint-Germain or Bayern Munich in the final in Budapest on May 30.

Holders PSG, who beat Arsenal in the semi-finals last year, have a 5-4 lead ahead of the second leg in Munich today.

It was a cathartic night for Arsenal, who are back in the Champions League final for the first time since losing 2-1 to Barcelona in their only previous appearance in the showpiece in 2006.

Arsenal have never won the Champions League, with their two major European trophies coming in the 1994 Cup Winners' Cup and the 1970 Inter-Cities Fairs Cup.

Their last continental final ended in a 4-1 defeat against Chelsea in the 2019 Europa League.

It is shaping up to be Arsenal's greatest ever season as they chase a Premier League and Champions League double.

Even Arsene Wenger's 'Invincibles' -- who won the club's last English title in an unbeaten top-flight campaign in 2004 -- might have to bow to the current generation if they finish the job.


Arsenal's Bukayo Saka shoots to score against Atletico Madrid.

Fittingly, it was Saka -- the homegrown symbol of the Arteta era -- who proved Arsenal's match-winner.

Now just four games from immortality, Premier League leaders Arsenal were given a huge boost in the title race when second-placed Manchester City drew at Everton on Monday.

The Gunners will be crowned champions if they win their last three games against West Ham, Burnley and Crystal Palace.

Once the title is decided, Arsenal will head to Hungary with a maiden Champions League crown in their sights.

Arsenal endured jibes about their perceived lack of mental strength after a run of four defeats in six games in all competitions sparked painful memories of previous failures to end their six-year wait for silverware. But the 'nearly-men' and 'serial choker' labels applied only weeks ago are on the verge of being banished forever.

Arsenal were nearly caught on the counter in a frenetic start when Julian Alvarez shot just wide before Giuliano Simeone's close-range effort deflected past the post. But Arsenal recovered from those anxious moments to deliver a dominant spell that brought their 44th minute goal.

Viktor Gyokeres' clever run unhinged the Atletico defence and his cross reached Leandro Trossard inside the area.

Trossard wriggled into just enough space for a low drive that Jan Oblak weakly pushed out to Saka, who reacted quicker than his flat-footed markers to slot home from four yards. Arteta jubilantly punched the air as all around him the Emirates erupted into a roiling red sea of celebration.

Atletico tried to ruin the party in the second half, but Gabriel Magalhaes made a last-ditch tackle on Simeone to avert a certain goal before David Raya repelled Antoine Griezmann's blast. Arteta recently revealed he visualised Arsenal conquering the Champions League even in the difficult early days of his reign. The Spaniard now is just one win away from seeing that daydream become a glorious reality. — *AFP*


Sanju Samson plays a shot.

Samson stars as Chennai beat Delhi to stay in hunt

NEW DELHI: Disciplined bowling and an unbeaten 87 by opener Sanju Samson helped Chennai Super Kings stay in the hunt for the IPL playoffs with an eight-wicket win over Delhi Capitals yesterday.

Batting first on a tough pitch backfired for hosts Delhi, who slipped to 69-5 before posting 155-7 at the Arun Jaitley Stadium.

Five-time champions Chennai lost two early wickets in the chase, but Samson paced his 52-ball knock to perfection as his team chased down the target with 15 balls to spare.

Samson, a wicketkeeper-batter, put on an unbeaten 114-run stand with Kartik Sharma, who made 41, as the two ensured a fifth win for Chennai in 10 matches to be sixth in the 10-team table.

Delhi's chances of making the playoffs took a hit as they went down to their sixth defeat.

The top four teams at the end of the league stage will qualify for the playoffs.

In-form Samson, who has hit two centuries in the season, reached his fifty in 32 balls and finished with seven fours and six sixes.

He has scored 402 runs in 10 matches this edition and is fifth in the batting chart led by Delhi's KL Rahul (445).

Samson came into this edition of the IPL on the back of three half-centuries in the last three matches of India's T20 World Cup triumph on home soil in March. — *AFP*

PSG 'not here to defend' against Bayern: Enrique

MUNICH: Paris Saint-Germain coach Luis Enrique said his side's one-goal first leg lead meant "nothing" ahead of today's second Champions League semi-final at Bayern Munich.

Defending champions PSG won 5-4 in an astonishing opening leg, having conceded first and at one point held a 5-2 advantage.

The match was the highest scoring Champions League semi-final in history and Luis Enrique expected more of the same on Wednesday.

"It's nothing," the Spaniard said of PSG's narrow lead.

"It's just one goal. We are ready. We know Bayern Munich can get back into the match and we can also score goals.

"And we are certainly not here to defend. We're trying to win the game." PSG are competing in their fifth semi-final in the past seven seasons -- and the third straight under Luis Enrique.

The coach said Bayern were the "strongest team we have faced" this season, but promised the French giants would be "loyal to who we are".

"I can't say Wednesday will be different based on what we saw in the first leg. I don't think either team will just accept that the other is better," said the Spaniard.

"Our mentality is to win every game. We don't need to play for a particular result because we have to win." Luis Enrique called the opening match the best he had been involved in as a coach, but admitted he had little fun on the sidelines.

"As a top-level coach, it was very difficult to enjoy," he added.

PSG midfielder Warren Zaire-Emery said the players had as much fun as the supporters in the opening leg in Paris and expected "the same thing" in Munich.

"It was a crazy game for us. We play football to be involved in these sorts of games. It was one of the best matches the Champions League has seen," the French player said.

"The intensity, the commitment, the goals, it was simply exceptional. And we're expecting the same thing on Wednesday." PSG return to Munich's Allianz Arena, where they won last year's final, for the first time.

Luis Enrique, who has fond memories of the stadium after eliminating Bayern on the way to winning the 2015 Champions League title with Barcelona, said returning to Munich reminded him of what PSG had achieved.

"Coming back here will always be a real pleasure because we remember what we achieved last year." — *AFP*



Al-Attiyah tops quality field for next week's Jordan Rally

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Jordan Motorsport has announced the entry list for next week's Jordan Rally and multiple regional champion Nasser Saleh Al-Attiyah tops a quality field of the region's leading drivers. The third round of the 2026 FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) takes place on May 14-16.

Al-Attiyah teams up with Spanish navigator Candido Carrera as he continues his challenge for a record-breaking 21st regional rally title and an 18th success in the Hashemite Kingdom since 2003. He is entered in a Škoda Fabia RS run by Autotek Motorsport.

Al-Attiyah drives one of six Rally2 machines in the 17-car entry that includes competitors from 10 nations.

Oman's Abdullah Al-Rawahi is the Qatari's fierce rival and will be hoping that a return to full fitness helps to rekindle his title challenge with Jordanian co-driver Ata Al-Hmoud in a second Škoda Fabia RS. Al-Rawahi and Al-Hmoud won the Jordan Rally for the first time in 2023.

Veteran Nasser Khalifa Al-Atya is the early leader of the championship after rounds in Oman and Qatar and the Qatari teams up with Lebanon's Ziad Chehab in the solitary Ford Fiesta on the entry list.


Qatar's Nasser Saleh Al-Attiyah is aiming for a record-breaking 21st regional rally title and an 18th success in Jordan since 2003.

Saudi Arabia's Hamza Bakhashab will be hoping to follow in the footsteps of his father Abdullah (champion in 1995) and challenge for the overall regional title. The Jeddah driver is currently second in the points' standings and teams up with Irishman Lorcan Moore in a Toyota GR Yaris.

Local driver Sheikh Bader Al-Fayez suffered engine issues during the opening round in Oman and was forced to miss round two as a result. He returns with Lebanese co-driver Joseph Matar to crew a third Škoda. Bassel Abu Hamdan and Firas Elias round off the Rally2 field in a Volkswagen Polo.

Jordan's Shaker Jweihan has been the dominant force so far this season in the FIA MERC2 category and will be aiming for a hattrick of class victories with Mustafa Juma in a Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution X. Competition comes from Oman's Zakariya Al-Aamri (Subaru) and Sami Fleifel (Mitsubishi).

Engine-related issues ruined the start of the season for the Qatari duo of Rashid Al-Muhannadi and Mohammed Al-Marri in a pair of Peugeot 208 Rally 4s entered by the QMMF.

They return to action over a dozen special stages in the Dead Sea and Jordan Valley areas looking to pick up their first points of the season.

Lebanon's Shadi El-Fakih will be chasing a third maximum points score of the year in FIA MERC4 in his Renault Clio RS.

Jordanian female driver Farah Zakaria teams up with Lebanese Dolyne Schlink and is registered for the championship in a Can-Am entered in the SSV section.