Al Arabi win Amir Basketball Cup to complete treble

CHINTHANA WASALA
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Al Arabi SC completed a historic domestic treble after overpowering Al Sadd SC 84-63 in the final of the 2025-2026 Amir Basketball Cup yesterday.

At Al Gharafa Hall, the final saw Al Arabi dominate from start to finish and cap one of their most successful seasons in the club's basketball history, as well as their fourth Amir Cup title.

Qatar Olympic Committee President H E Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al Thani crowned Al Arabi champions following their commanding victory.

Al Arabi set the tone early by taking the opening quarter 22-16 before extending their advantage with a 27-25 second quarter.

Hatem Mamlouk-coached Al Arabi then turned the screws on Al sadd in the third quarter by completely outplaying the Wolves with a dominant 32-9 score. Despite a brief 3-13 fightback in the fourth quarter, Al Arabi had already secured control of the season finale.

Mustafa Husein Ali Ahmed Rashed led the scoring for Al Arabi with an outstanding 31-point effort, in addition to making a game-high six assists.

Abdulrahman Saad added 19 points, while Elmedin Kikanovic made 16 points and 13 rebounds. Sindou Ismael Diallo chipped in with 10 points and Nedim Music scored seven points to swell the Al Arabi total.

For Al Sadd, Dejan Janjic and Steven Bernard Lenard Green each scored 17 points, while Petar Rakicevic added 16 points in the losing effort. Rakicevic also made 13 rebounds, while making three assists.

The victory earned Al Arabi a lump sum financial reward of QR1.5m, while the runners-up Al Sadd were awarded QR900,000.


Qatar Olympic Committee President H E Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad Al Thani crowns Al Arabi Amir Basketball Cup champions.

Speaking after the final, Qatar Basketball Federation President Mohammed bin Saad Al Mughaiseeb praised the high standard of the competition, stating that the Amir Cup final reflected the remarkable progress of Qatari basketball at both club and player level.

Al Mughaiseeb also said the match showcased professionalism and sportsmanship, while highlighting the continued development and growing competitiveness of basketball in Qatar.

In recognition of an extraordinary season, the Federation also awarded Al Arabi SC the Sports Excellence Shield for the 2025-2026 campaign which included winning the Qatar Basketball League title, the Qatar Cup and the Amir Cup, in addition to several youth championships.



Al Arabi players and officials celebrate their victory.

Khalifa International Stadium ready to host Amir Cup final as excitement builds

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Excitement is building ahead of the highly anticipated Amir Cup final, with the Local Organising Committee (LOC) yesterday confirming full readiness to host Saturday's showdown at the iconic Khalifa International Stadium.

Record 19-time champions Al Sadd will take on defending champions Al Gharafa in what promises to be a nail-biting finale.

The Amir Cup final – now in its 54th edition – remains the country's most cherished domestic sporting event, with this year's edition carrying added significance as it marks 50 years since the inauguration of Khalifa International Stadium in 1976.

Tickets are selling fast, with the Qatar Football Association releasing a new batch of tickets yesterday for the venue, which has a capacity of over 45,000 spectators.

With a full house expected and fans set to travel from across the country, LOC officials said every arrangement has been put in place to deliver a seamless and memorable final.

"We announce the readiness of Khalifa International Stadium to host the Amir Cup final," said LOC's Director Mobility Eng. Abdul Aziz Fakhro at a press conference yesterday.

"All necessary plans have been put in place to ensure smooth access for fans to the stadium. The final at Khalifa International Stadium will be special as it marks 50 years since the inauguration of the venue, which is considered one of the most prominent landmarks in Qatar's sporting history."



FROM LEFT: Deputy Media Operations Manager Maryam Nazih, Media and Communication Director Ali Al-Salat and Director Mobility Eng. Abdul Aziz Fakhro during a press conference.

Fakhro added that the LOC is fully prepared to manage the expected large turnout.

"We expect a large turnout, as is typical for a final of this stature. We are fully prepared and will be on-site before fans arrive, coordinating with all concerned parties even after the match. We urge fans to come early," he said.

The final will kick off at 5:30pm, with gates opening at 2:30pm. A range of entertainment and cultural activities will be staged at the fan zone ahead of the match. Live draws during the matchday programme will offer fans the chance to win prizes including cars, travel packages, electronics and cash rewards.

"The final will feature various events highlighting Qatari culture, in addition to extensive television coverage and a well-coordinated media strategy within Qatar and abroad," said Tournament's Media and Communication Director Ali Al-Salat.

The LOC has also encouraged fans to use the Doha Metro, with Sports City Station on the Gold Line providing direct access to Khalifa International Stadium for a smooth journey to the venue.


Saturday's Amir Cup final will also mark 50 years since the opening of Khalifa International Stadium in 1976.

Diallo says Manchester United squad happy if Carrick stays

LONDON: Amad Diallo has no doubt "everyone" at Manchester United would be pleased to see Michael Carrick carry on as head coach next season.

The 44-year-old former United midfielder returned to Old Trafford as interim boss until the end of the campaign shortly after the end of Ruben Amorim's ill-fated reign in January.

Carrick has overseen a huge upturn in the Red Devils' fortunes and United have qualified for the Champions League with three games to spare.

Kobbie Mainoo said the players "want to die for" Carrick following a 3-2 victory over Liverpool on Sunday that left third-placed United six points clear of their arch-rivals in the Premier League table.

Carrick's long-term future at Old Trafford remains in doubt, however.

"Honestly, it's not the player who decides who is going to stay here next season, but what I can say (is) everyone is happy to have him as manager," Diallo told *Sky Sports*.

"Everyone is with him.

"He's that manager who has a good relationship with every player, so we are really happy to have him as manager and, yeah, we will be happy if we have him next season as manager."

Diallo has not scored or provided an assist since Carrick's appointment, but the manager has still lauded the 23-year-old for his work-rate and overall impact.

"Even when you are in tough moments, he's there to talk to you, he's there to help you," Diallo explained.

"I think the biggest change maybe is because the team is now more impactful. Like in the dressing room, we are really together.

"Every mistake is not a problem, your mistake is my mistake, so we are a team that doesn't care if you do a mistake, you go again, so we go forward, we want to win as a team." United are next in action away to mid-table Sunderland on Saturday.

The match will see Diallo return to the Stadium of Light, where he had a season-long loan in 2022/23.

"I really enjoyed my time in Sunderland. Honestly, I have nothing bad to say about the club," said the Ivory Coast international.

"Now I'm one of the big fans because I watch every game when they play, so I'm so happy for what they did this season." — *AFP*

FIFA President defends prices of 2026 World Cup tickets

BEVERLY HILLS: FIFA President Gianni Infantino on Tuesday defended World Cup ticket prices, insisting that football's global governing body was obliged to take advantage of US laws that allow tickets to be resold for thousands of dollars above face value.

FIFA has faced searing criticism over the cost of World Cup tickets, with fan organization Football Supporters Europe (FSE) branding the pricing structure "extortionate" and a "monumental betrayal".

FSE filed a lawsuit with the European Commission in March targeting FIFA over "excessive ticket prices" for the tournament.

FIFA's own World Cup resale website, FIFA Marketplace, last week advertised four tickets to the July 19 final in New York at a cost of more than $2m each. Infantino said the eye-watering prices reflected demand to watch the World Cup.

"If some people put on the resale market, some tickets for the final at $2 million, number one it doesn't mean that the tickets cost $2 million," Infantino said.

"And number two it doesn't mean that somebody will buy these tickets," Infantino said. "And if somebody buys a ticket for the final for $2 million I will personally bring him a hot dog and a Coke to make sure that he has a great experience."

Fan groups have contrasted the difference in price of tickets for this summer with the Qatar World Cup in 2022. The most expensive ticket for the final in 2022 was around $1,600 at face value, while in 2026 the most expensive ticket for the final is about $11,000 at its original price.

Infantino was adamant that the steep increase in face-value prices were justified.

"We have to look at the market -- we are in the market in which entertainment is the most developed in the world. So we have to apply market rates," Infantino said. — *AFP*


FIFA President Gianni Infantino

Al Shahania, Al Kharaitiyat face off in QSL play-off

THE PENINSULA


Al Shahania players attend a training session as they prepare for the play-off.

DOHA: Al Shahania and Al Kharaitiyat gear up for the play-off tomorrow, with both sides chasing a spot in next season's Qatar Stars League at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium.

Kick-off is set for 7pm, with the fixture bringing together a top-flight team fighting to retain their status and a Second Division side eager to earn promotion.

Al Shahania head into the contest under pressure after finishing 11th in the QSL standings with 21 points, forcing them into the play-off. The side approach the match with a clear 'must-win' mindset, knowing defeat would see them drop to the Second Division.

Al Kharaitiyat, meanwhile, arrive full of confidence following an impressive campaign in the Second Division.

They secured the runners-up spot with 25 points, finishing behind champions Lusail, who claimed automatic promotion. Having remained unbeaten this season and boasting the best defence, Al Kharaitiyat will look to carry that momentum into the crucial fixture.

Speaking ahead of the clash, Al Shahania assistant coach Pejman Montazeri acknowledged the challenge awaiting his team.

"The entire season hinges on this match. We have watched them, they are a good team with a strong structure, and it will be a very difficult game for us," he said.

Montazeri, however, expressed confidence in his side's recent progress, highlighting improvements in mentality and performances in the closing stages of the season.

"The players are aware of this and we are well-prepared. The team is improving significantly in terms of mentality and form, as seen in the last few matches. But we are up against a side that has not lost and has the best defence, so it will be a tough match," he added.

Echoing his coach's sentiments, Al Shahania player Lotfi Madjer described the encounter as a 'final'.

"Everyone knows this match is very important and the entire season depends on it. It is about either staying in the First Division or being relegated," he said.

Speaking ahead of the decisive clash, Al Kharaitiyat coach Rachid Tiberkanine said: "We worked hard all season for direct promotion, but now we must make the most of this final chance."

"Matches like this are decided by details, composure and avoiding mistakes." Meanwhile, the Qatar Stars League held a technical meeting to finalise arrangements, including match procedures and official kits.

It was also confirmed that the match will go to extra time and, if needed, penalties in case of a draw, ensuring a decisive outcome in this high-stakes battle.


Santos' forward Neymar reacts during the Copa Sudamericana group stage match against Deportivo Recoleta in Pedro Juan Caballero, Paraguay, on Tuesday.

Neymar and Robinho Jr reconcile after training row

PEDRO JUAN CABALLERO, PARAGUAY: Neymar **(pictured)** has publicly apologised to Santos team-mate Robinho Junior for slapping him during a training session, as the pair appeared to put the dispute behind them during a game on Tuesday.

Santos said they had opened an investigation earlier in the week following the altercation between Neymar and the son of Robinho, the former Real Madrid and Manchester City striker.

"If you want an apology in front of the press, here it is. I had already apologised to him and to his family. I crossed the line," Neymar told reporters after Santos' 1-1 draw against Recoleta in Paraguay.

According to Brazilian media, the spat occurred because Neymar, the national team's all-time leading scorer, did not appreciate being dribbled past by his 18-year-old team-mate during a training session on Sunday.

Robinho Jr confirmed after the Copa Sudamericana match on Tuesday that Neymar had slapped him, but said the incident was over, stating: "Everything is resolved."

"It's a situation that upset me because he's been my idol since childhood... I talked about it with my parents and I accept his apology," he added.

During the match, Neymar scored Santos' goal and hugged Robinho Jr during the celebration.

"He's a boy I like very much, for whom I have a special affection. It happens in football; you argue with your friend, your brother," said Neymar.

Despite his recurring physical problems, Neymar, 34, still hopes to be called up by coach Carlo Ancelotti for this year's World Cup, which runs from June 11 to July 19. He has not played for Brazil since October 2023. Ancelotti is due to name his final squad on May 18. — *AFP*

beIN marks one-month countdown to World Cup with special coverage

THE PENINSULA



DOHA: beIN Sports, the leading sports broadcaster in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), will mark the one-month milestone to the FIFA World Cup 2026 with comprehensive, bi-lingual, multi-channel coverage across the region on Monday 11 May.

The 23rd edition of the global football showpiece will be held in the United States, Mexico, and Canada and is the first to feature 48 teams, including a record eight from the Arab world.The 39-day tournament is set to kick off on 11 June, with Mexico facing South Africa in the opening match.

To mark the occasion, beIN will deliver wall-to-wall FIFA World Cup coverage across 4 channels, including beIN Sports 1, beIN Sports News, and beIN Sports English 1.

The lineup will feature the best matches from past tournaments, along with archive content and team documentaries in both Arabic and English. Viewers can also expect live reactions from beIN's extensive network of reporters around the world.

At 19:00 MECCA (16:00 GMT), a celebratory live studio broadcast will air for two and a half hours on beIN Sports News and beIN Sports 1.

Featuring beIN's star presenters and analysts, the studio will revisit beIN's coverage highlights from previous FIFA World Cups while also looking ahead to the FIFA World Cup 2026.

The studio will spotlight the preparations of the eight participating Arab teams - Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Iraq.

The studio broadcast will also mark the launch of beIN's six dedicated FIFA World Cup MAX channels.

All 104 matches will be available live and exclusively on these channels, with commentary in Arabic, English, and French for every game. Drawing on beIN Sports' extensive tournament archive, the legacy of the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022, and a closer look at the 16 venues across the three host countries, beIN will deliver exclusive countdown coverage as anticipation builds toward this highly anticipated global event.

Mohammed Al Bader, Managing Director of beIN Channels - MENA, said: "Reaching the one-month milestone marks the beginning of a new phase of anticipation for fans across the region.

"beIN Sports' comprehensive coverage reflects our commitment to delivering world-class production, expert analysis, and exclusive access as we count down to the biggest tournament in football history.Through dedicated programming across our Arabic and English channels, we will bring viewers closer to every story, every training camp, and every key moment as the road to 11 June gathers pace," he added.

Brilliant Klaasen knock fires Hyderabad to IPL top spot


Sunrisers Hyderabad's Heinrich Klaasen plays a shot.

HYDERABAD: South Africa's Heinrich Klaasen smacked 69 to help Sunrisers Hyderabad climb to the top of the IPL table with a convincing 33-run win over Punjab Kings yesterday.

Klaasen put on key stands including a 88-run partnership with Ishan Kishan, who made 55, to guide Hyderabad to 235-4 at their home Rajiv Gandhi International Stadium.

Klaasen and Kishan built on the blazing start by openers Abhishek Sharma and Travis Head, the pair putting on 54 runs off 21 balls.

Abhishek struck 35 off 13 balls and Head hammered a quick 38 to lay the foundation for the total.

Hyderabad's bowlers restricted Punjab to 202-7 despite a valiant unbeaten 107 by Australia's Cooper Connolly, who struck his maiden T20 century in his debut IPL season.

Hyderabad knocked Punjab from top spot and took over first place in the table with 14 points from 11 matches.

Punjab, who are eyeing their first title, slipped to second with their third straight defeat but have played one match fewer than 2016 champions Hyderabad.

Sharp fielding gave Hyderabad the advantage, with secure catching contrasting Punjab's missed chances.

Connolly dropped Kishan on nine and the wicketkeeper-batter survived again on 18 when Lockie Ferguson spilled a chance at backward square-leg.

Kishan lived a charmed life as Prabhsimran Singh missed an easy stumping off Yuzvendra Chahal. Shahshank Singh dropped Klaasen on nine.

The missed opportunities allowed both batters to pass fifty. Klaasen finished strongly in his 43-ball knock before being dismissed on the final ball of the innings.

Punjab were never in the chase after Hyderabad skipper and pace bowler Pat Cummins dismissed Priyansh Arya for one in the first over and Nitish Kumar Reddy removed Prabhsimran in the next.

Wickets kept tumbling as Marcus Stoinis (28) and Suryansh Shedge (25) had their knocks cut short by Shivang Kumar and Cummins.

Connolly waged a lone battle and put on 68 runs with Marco Jansen (19), but the partnership could only reduce the margin of defeat for Punjab. — *AFP*

Ahmedabad to host final after Bengaluru switch

NEW DELHI: The Indian Premier League final will be held in Ahmedabad on May 31 instead of Bengaluru as originally planned, the country's cricket board said yesterday.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) said the venue was shifted because of "certain requirements" from local authorities and the state association.

Bengaluru was cleared to host five games this IPL season despite a stampede last year outside its main cricket stadium that killed 11 young fans.

The title clash will be held at Ahmedabad's Narendra Modi Stadium, the world's largest cricket stadium with a capacity of 130,000.

Qualifier 1, featuring the top two teams in the standings, will be played on May 26 at Dharamsala, with a direct berth in the final at stake.

Chandigarh will host the Eliminator on May 27 between the third and fourth-placed teams. The same venue will also stage Qualifier 2 on May 29, where the loser of Qualifier 1 will face the winner of the Eliminator to determine the second finalist.

The title clash will be held at Ahmedabad's Narendra Modi Stadium, the world's largest cricket stadium with a capacity of 130,000.

The IPL, the world's richest cricket league, attracts leading international players and is broadcast globally, with several franchises backed by Bollywood stars. — *AFP*





Talal Al Waab shines as Qatar National Peninsula Arabian Horse Show concludes

Talal Al Waab, owned by Abdulla Mohamed Al Kawari and bred by Sheikh Abdulla Khalid Al Thani, claimed gold in the Senior Stallions Championship of the 11th Qatar National Peninsula Arabian Horse Show (for Individual Owners) 2026 which concluded at the Qatar Equestrian Federation on Tuesday. Noor Al Jassasiya of Al Dana Stud won gold in the Senior Mares Championship. Qassam Al Doha, owned by Al Mashrab Stud and bred by Doha Stud, topped the Junior Colts Championship; Farida Al Jaham of Al Jaham Stud was best in Junior Fillies Championship; Marwan Al Shaheen of Al Shaheen Stud won gold in Yearling Colts Championship while Sarah Al Jazeel of Al Jazeel Stud stood out winning gold in the Junior Fillies Championship. The three-day show was organised and conducted by the Qatar Racing & Equestrian Club. (PICS: Juhaim/QREC)

Holders PSG knock out Bayern to set up Champions League final with Arsenal

MUNICH: Holders Paris Saint-Germain set up a Champions League final against Arsenal after a 1-1 second-leg draw at Bayern Munich secured a 6-5 aggregate victory yesterday.

PSG exploded on the counter less than three minutes in and Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembele put Luis Enrique's visitors ahead on the night and two goals up in the tie.

PSG largely succeeded in subduing Bayern's attacking threat, despite Harry Kane's stoppage-time goal.

On their return to Munich's Allianz Arena, the scene of their greatest triumph against Inter Milan in last year's final, PSG once again emphasised their excellence in a competition they coveted without success for so long. The French giants will be favourites to lift the trophy for a second successive season when they face Premier League leaders Arsenal on May 30 in Budapest.

PSG are hoping to become only the second back-to-back winners since 1990, after Real Madrid.

Bayern were angered by some first-half refereeing decisions but were largely toothless in attack. The six-time European champions have still not reached the final since beating PSG in the 2020 showpiece in Lisbon.

Both sides were playing their 52nd match of the season in all competitions -- not even counting last summer's Club World Cup -- but only the hosts looked weary.

So dangerous in the first leg, Bayern were surprisingly stodgy in attack, with Michael Olise in particular having an off night.


Paris Saint-Germain's Ousmane Dembele (left) celebrates with teammates after scoring a goal.

In the midst of a record-breaking season, Bayern's fourth defeat in all competitions will sting for a club set to wonder what might have been.

Dembele scores early

With Bayern already Bundesliga champions and PSG also on track for the Ligue 1 title, both sides heavily rotated their line-ups in the weekend's league fixtures.

But both teams only made one change to their starting XIs compared to last week's spectacle in Paris. Only PSG's was forced, with Fabian Ruiz in for the injured Achraf Hakimi.

The high-octane first leg, won 5-4 by PSG, was widely lauded as among the best matches in the competition's history and Wednesday's game offered more of the same early.

Ruiz, starting his first European match since January, set Khvicha Kvaratskhelia down the left flank with an excellent through ball.

The Georgian latched onto the pass, blazed past his marker before cutting back for the perfectly placed Dembele to slam home. Bayern conceded after just 36 seconds against Real Madrid in the quarter-finals and fought back to win but seemed stunned by the early goal this time around.

Olise, Kane and Joshua Kimmich all mislaid passes in the opening half-hour, ending promising attacks. Bayern surrounded referee Joao Pinheiro claiming a penalty on the half-hour mark when Vitinha's clearance hit Joao Neves's outstretched arm in the box, but their appeals were waved away.

The home players had already been left incensed when PSG full-back Nuno Mendes was not shown a second yellow card for handball.

PSG went inches from scoring a second but Manuel Neuer tipped a close-range Neves header just wide of the post.

The home team rediscovered their rhythm just before the break, with Jamal Musiala forcing an excellent low save from PSG goalkeeper Matvey Safonov and blasting over the bar. PSG showed a more measured side to their game in the second half, sitting back to absorb Bayern pressure while never losing their own threat on the counter.

Neuer made fine second-half saves from Kvaratskhelia and Desire Doue to keep Bayern in the tie. The Bavarians dominated possession and territory but could not break through until Kane scored for a seventh straight Champions League match in stoppage time. There was time for the restart, but it was too little, too late for the hosts. — *AFP*


PSG President Nasser Al Khelaifi celebrates the victory.

Mexico's Tigres book CONCACAF Champions Cup final berth

MONTERREY: Mexico's Tigres UANL booked their place in the final of the CONCACAF Champions Cup on Tuesday after defeating Major League Soccer side Nashville to wrap up a 2-0 aggregate victory.

Tigres, chasing their second victory in the regional club tournament after winning the title in 2020, will face either Los Angeles FC or Toluca in the final.

The Mexican club, leading 1-0 after winning last week's semi-final first leg in Nashville, advanced to the May 30 final after a moment of magic from Argentine midfielder Juan Brunetta after 67 minutes.

Angel Correa set up the goal, gliding past his marker on the left flank to cut inside before rolling a pass into the path of Brunetta.

The 28-year-old sent the Nashville defence the wrong way with a deft feint as he collected the pass and then blasted an unstoppable shot into the roof of the net.

The goal sealed a largely lacklustre encounter which saw Nashville fail to register a shot on goal.

The defeat marked a disappointing end to the campaign for Nashville, who are leading Major League Soccer's Eastern Conference by four points and had eliminated Lionel Messi's Inter Miami in the quarter-finals. — *AFP*


Atletico Madrid's Argentinian coach Diego Simeone gestures during the match against Arsenal.

Simeone, Atletico at crossroads after exit

LONDON: Arsenal's Champions League elimination of Atletico Madrid condemned Diego Simeone's side to a fifth straight season without silverware, inevitably raising questions over the Argentine coach's future.

Asked if he had the strength to continue after Tuesday's defeat in London, Simeone's answer was an unusual one.

"Not now, definitely not now," Simeone said, leaving doubts over his intentions this summer.

There have been similar queries put to Simeone over the years, 14-and-a-half of them, since he took over at the helm of the Rojiblancos.

Usually they have surfaced in moments like these, painful knock-outs, that Atletico have suffered repeatedly. None hurt more than the two final defeats by rivals Real Madrid in 2014 and 2016.

Simeone almost walked away after the second of those, on penalties at the San Siro, admitting it would be difficult to lift the players mentally after such a crushing blow.

Those matches came in the early years of Simeone's reign, Atletico's best period.

The seasons since have largely been frustrating, despite landing La Liga in 2021, even though the task of competing with Spain's two giants in Barcelona and Real Madrid is a difficult one.

"We've grown enormously in every aspect, we're a club recognised in Europe and the world," said Simeone, after the 1-0 loss at the Emirates, resulting in a 2-1 aggregate defeat.

"But the fans want to win. Getting to a semi-final isn't enough."

Since that title triumph half a decade ago, Atletico have been waiting for silverware while wrangling with their own identity. Atletico got to the Copa del Rey final, for the first time since they won it with Simeone in 2013, although they were beaten on penalties by Real Sociedad in April.

Simeone's son Giuliano is showing promise, Ademola Lookman has hit the ground running after arriving in January and defender Marc Pubill has shone under Simeone to the extent he might be called into Spain's 2026 World Cup squad.

Although they fell short in Europe, the run to the semi-finals will leave some fond memories for fans, especially defeating Barcelona in the quarter-finals.

It allowed veterans Antoine Griezmann, departing for MLS side Orlando City, and Koke, whose future is also uncertain, a possible last chance to shine on the biggest stage in club football.

"I hope our fans give Antoine the backing he's earned, in these last few matches," said Simeone. — *AFP*

Arsenal on cusp of history after reaching final

LONDON: Mikel Arteta has urged Arsenal to use the "energy and belief" generated by reaching the Champions League final for the first time in 20 years as fuel to complete an historic double.

Even by his frenetic standards, Arteta was a blur of energy as the Gunners boss embarked on a jubilant lap of honour with his players after Tuesday's 1-0 win over Atletico Madrid in the semi-final second leg at the Emirates Stadium.

Bukayo Saka's close-range finish in the first half sealed a 2-1 aggregate victory that sent Arsenal back into the Champions League final for the first time since their only previous appearance ended in defeat against Barcelona in 2006.

The north London club are now four games from immortality, with three wins from their remaining Premier League matches against West Ham, Burnley and Crystal Palace guaranteeing a first English title since 2004.

After the title fight with Manchester City is decided, Arteta's side will travel to Budapest to face Paris Saint-Germain or Bayern Munich on May 30 as they chase a maiden Champions League crown.

Holders PSG, who beat Arsenal in the semi-finals last year, head into Wednesday's second leg in Munich with a 5-4 lead.

Whoever they face in Hungary will encounter an Arsenal team riding a tidal wave of emotion after the outpouring of joy from Arteta, his players and 60,000 fans on Tuesday.

From the moment, thousands of Arsenal fans massed outside the stadium to greet the team bus with red flares, flags and defiant roars of encouragement, it was clear this was a day unlike any other for the Gunners.

Arteta was ecstatic during the wild post-match celebrations and, on the cusp of history, he challenged his players to use the feeling to carry them to the finish line in both competitions.

"It's great. Everybody can feel a shift in energy, in belief, in everything," he said.

"Let's use it in the right way and understand that the margins and the difficulty of what we are trying to achieve are huge, but that we have the ability and the conviction to do it.

"I'm really going to enjoy it tonight, everybody is enjoying this moment now. But the high is not too high and the low is not too low. My job is to be quite stable.

"We have an incredible game against West Ham, a really tough one, and we're going to have four days to do that."

Over two decades have passed since Arsene Wenger's 'Invincibles' reigned supreme with their unbeaten title-winning campaign in 2004.

Wenger gradually lost his way after losing to Barca in the Champions League final, but Arteta finally appears to have recaptured the spirit of that iconic team.

The Spaniard has laboured for over six years to create the perfect alchemy between players and fans, a bond that has come dangerously close to breaking during a trophy drought dating back to the 2020 FA Cup victory.

Arteta has hit on the perfect ingredients this season, leaving Arsenal on the brink of erasing the pain of three successive runners-up finishes in the Premier League.

"It was an incredible night. We made history again together and I cannot be happier and prouder for everybody that's involved in this football club," Arteta said.

"The supporters were with us for every ball. They made it special and unique, and I have never felt it like that in this stadium.

"We knew how much it meant to everybody, we put everything on the line, the boys did an incredible job." Winning the Champions League and Premier League in a single season would be greatest campaign in the club's 140-year history. — *AFP*


Arsenal players celebrate their victory against Atletico Madrid.

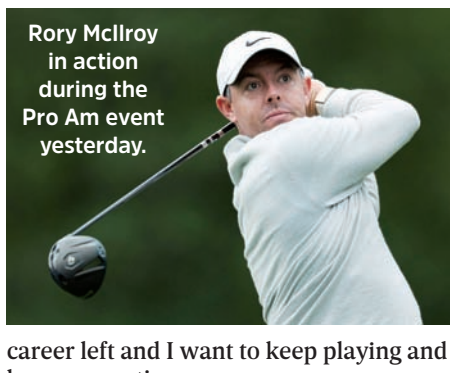
McIlroy ready for return after second Masters win

WASHINGTON: Rory McIlroy says he's "more motivated" than ever after bagging his second Masters title to take his tally of major championships to six.

The Northern Ireland star said his repeat triumph at Augusta National last month "feels a lot different" from his 2025 victory, when he ended an 11-year major title drought to complete a career Grand Slam.

"Even winning felt different," the Northern Ireland star said yesterday as he prepared to tee it up in this week's PGA Tour Truist Championship at Quail Hollow in Charlotte, North Carolina.

"I felt like winning the Grand Slam was going to be this life-changing thing and in some ways it was, but in other ways I had to remember like, no, I still have a lot of my career left and I want to keep playing and keep competing.


Rory McIlroy in action during the Pro Am event yesterday.

"So this year was I think winning was validation for all the work that I've put in over the last few years to get myself back to this place where I'm winning majors.

"I'm excited for the road ahead," McIlroy added, looking ahead to next week's PGA Championship at Aronimink near Philadelphia as well as the US Open at Shinnecock Hills in June and the Open Championship at Royal Birkdale in July.

"I feel like if anything I'm more motivated after what happened at Augusta this year than I've ever been."

World number two McIlroy has kept a low profile since his Masters win, opting out of the RBC Heritage and last week's Cadillac Championship at Doral, both elite signature events. He said he gave himself "a good 10 days to enjoy myself and the thought I needed to get back on the range and start to practice and get ready for this stretch coming up." — *AFP*