



Al Gharafa players and officials celebrate with the trophy.

Brahimi hat-trick fires Al Gharafa to back-to-back Amir Cup glory

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Yacine Brahimi scored a brilliant hat-trick as Al Gharafa defeated Al Sadd 4-1 at Khalifa International Stadium in front of a crowd of 37,823 to retain the prestigious Amir Cup title yesterday.

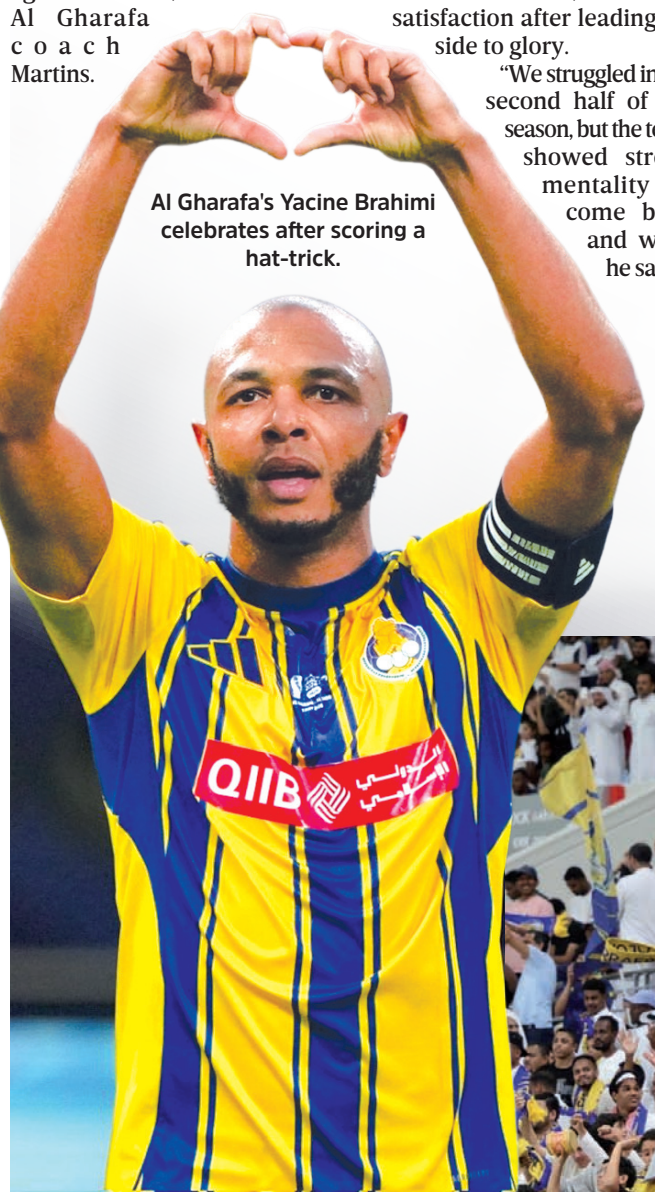
Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani crowned Al Gharafa the champions.

On a night carrying huge stakes, Roberto Mancini's Al Sadd arrived chasing a record-extending 20th Amir Cup crown and a domestic double after winning the Qatar Stars League. But Pedro Martins' Al Gharafa had other ideas, delivering a disciplined, compact and clinical display to successfully defend their title.

With the victory, Al Gharafa claimed their ninth Amir Cup title including five under their former name Al Ittihad, and secured qualification for the AFC Champions League Elite. For Al Sadd, who never truly settled into rhythm and looked below their best on the big night, the defeat ended their hopes of a double.

"I am so proud of the team, they played excellent football against Al Sadd," said Al Gharafa coach Martins.


Al Gharafa players celebrate their victory. PICS: RAJAN VADAKKEMURIYIL/THE PENINSULA


Al Gharafa's Yacine Brahimi celebrates after scoring a hat-trick.

"Winning back-to-back Amir Cup titles is not an easy job. It's an amazing job Al Gharafa have done. I am proud of my team. We give this gift for our fans, it's very important, they deserve it."

Brahimi, who once again rose to the occasion, echoed the satisfaction after leading his side to glory.

"We struggled in the second half of the season, but the team showed strong mentality to come back and win," he said.

"It was a tough match against a very good side, so we are delighted to retain the Amir Cup for a second straight year. We know our fans were disappointed after missing out on the league title, so it was important for us to give them something to celebrate. The Amir Cup is the biggest trophy in Qatar, and we are very happy to win it again."

The foundation of the victory was built on organisation and patience. Early on, Al Sadd tried to assert themselves through Akram Afif, who was heavily involved in attacking moves, but repeated stoppages disrupted the tempo and Al Gharafa's defensive structure held firm throughout the opening exchanges.

Afif continued to probe between the lines, but Martins' side refused to be stretched, matching Al Sadd's intensity and slowly growing into the contest.

Even as Al Sadd searched for control, Al Gharafa's belief was already clear.

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> ***Al Gharafa coach Pedro Martins***

Al Gharafa broke the deadlock in the 21st minute. Fabricio Diaz had earlier tested the waters with a shot narrowly wide, but Al Gharafa struck when Ahmed Al Ganehi showed remarkable composure under pressure, controlling the ball while surrounded by multiple defenders before releasing Ferjani Sassi, who finished clinically from the centre of the box.

Three minutes later, Al Gharafa doubled their advantage. A slick exchange between Sassi and Brahimi unlocked Al Sadd again, with the Tunisian midfielder delivering the final pass for the Algerian playmaker to slot calmly into the bottom-right corner.

Al Sadd attempted to respond, with Hassan Al Haydos going close from distance, but the shot sailed over as frustration grew for Mancini's side. Al Gharafa nearly added a third before half-time, but Aron Gunnarsson's effort drifted wide after a flowing move, leaving Al Sadd two goals down at the break.

The second half began with urgency from Al Sadd, with Claudinho testing from range, but Al Gharafa's structure remained unbroken.

As Al Sadd pushed forward, they were punished again. Gunnarsson intercepted and released Brahimi, who sprinted from halfway before finishing calmly past Meshaal Barsham in the 63rd minute to make it 3-0.

Roberto Firmino was introduced as Al Sadd searched for a response, while goalkeeper Khalifa Ababacar once again stood tall, producing a crucial save to deny Pedro Miguel and preserve Al Gharafa's commanding lead.

Al Sadd pulled one back late through substitute Javairo Dilrosun in the 88th minute, briefly raising hopes of a comeback.

But Brahimi had the final word. In first minute of stoppage time, Amro Surag's long ball found the Algerian, who finished with trademark composure into the far corner to complete his hat-trick and spark celebrations among Al Gharafa players and supporters.

After finishing fourth in the league, Al Gharafa ended their campaign on a high lifting the trophy once again.

"It was a tough season and we are so happy to end our campaign with the Amir Cup in our hands," Sassi said.


Al Gharafa fans celebrate.

RECENT AMIR CUP CHAMPIONS

2026: Al Gharafa
2025: Al Gharafa
2024: Al Sadd
2023: Al Arabi
2022: Al Duhail
2021: Al Sadd
2020: Al Sadd
2019: Al Duhail
2018: Al Duhail
2017: Al Sadd
2016: Lekhwiya
2015: Al Sadd
2014: Al Sadd
2013: Al Rayyan
2012: Al Gharafa
2011: Al Rayyan
2010: Al Rayyan
2009: Al-Gharafa
2008: Umm-Salal
2007: Al Sadd
2006: Al Rayyan
2004: Al Sadd

QFA President congratulates Al Gharafa

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Following Al Gharafa's victory in the 54th Amir Cup final, President of the Qatar Football Association (QFA) Jassim bin Rashid Al-Buenain extended his congratulations to the club.

"I congratulate Al Gharafa on winning the Amir Cup," said Al-Buenain.

The final, played under the gracious patronage of Amir H H Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, saw Al Gharafa defeat Al Sadd at Khalifa International Stadium.

Beyond the result, the QFA President was keen to highlight the collective effort behind the event.

"I truly appreciate the work of all our partners in making this final—our most precious trophy—a success," he stated.

"It caps off a successful and truly special season for Qatari football."

The QFA President also praised the technical and organisational standards on display, noting that the final coincided with a landmark anniversary.

"This was a fitting celebration as Khalifa International Stadium marks 50 years since its opening, I extend my appreciation to every government, sports, security, and media entity that collaborated with the QFA to deliver a memorable experience for the fans in attendance."

Asian Cup draw: Qatar to face Japan, Thailand and Indonesia

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar, seeking a hat-trick of Asian Cup titles, will face four-time champions Japan, Thailand and Indonesia in Group F after the final draw for the continent's premier tournament produced an intriguing set of fixtures.

Qatar defeated Jordan 3-1 in the final in February 2024 to retain the crown they first won in 2019.

The draw ceremony took place at Salwa Palace in Riyadh yesterday. The tournament, to be hosted by Saudi Arabia for the first time, will kick off on January 7, 2027.

Saudi Arabia, seeking to lift the coveted trophy for the fourth time, will face 1980 winners Kuwait, Oman and Palestine in Group A. The hosts will kick off the tournament with an enticing encounter against Palestine at the 72,000-seater King Fahd Sports City Stadium in Riyadh.



A screen displays the results of the final draw of the 2027 AFC Asian Cup during a ceremony in Diriyah, on the outskirts of Riyadh, yesterday. PIC: AFP

Group B will see Uzbekistan, Bahrain, DPR Korea and Jordan vying for the two automatic spots to the Round of 16.

Standing in Islamic Republic of Iran's way of a fourth title in Group C will be Syria, Kyrgyz Republic and China.

Australia - champions in 2015, lead Group D, with Tajikistan, 2007 winners Iraq and Singapore their challengers.

Aiming to deny twice-winners Korea Republic progression from Group E will be United Arab Emirates, Vietnam and either Lebanon or Yemen, who will meet in June to decide the final qualifier for the continental showpiece.

The tournament, to be hosted by Saudi Arabia for the first time, will kick off on January 7, 2027.

Four-time winners Japan lead the Group F cast, with defending champions Qatar, Thailand and Indonesia also seeking to advance to the knockout stage.

The top two sides from each group and the four best third-placed teams will advance to the Round of 16, which will be played between January 22 and 25. The quarter-finals are scheduled for January 28 and 29, with the semi-finals on February 1 and 2.

The final will be played on February 5, 2027 at the King Fahd Sports City Stadium, where the champions of the 19th edition will be crowned.

Doha to host third edition of One Run For All half marathon

DOHA: The Qatar Sports for All Federation, of the Ministry of Sports and Youth, will organize the third edition of the "One Run For All" half marathon on May 24 at the Lusail International Circuit, with the participation of more than 2,500 runners of all ages and categories, including men, women, children and senior citizens.

Speaking at a news conference, Executive Director of the Qatar Sports for All Federation, Abdullah Al Dosari, unveiled details of the race, which is being held in Qatar for the third time.

He said Doha was once again preparing to host one of the world's largest half-marathon events, staged simultaneously in more than 110 countries with the participation of over 200,000 runners worldwide, including 160,000 from Russia and 40,000 from other countries, among them Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, China, Brazil, Serbia, Cameroon and Armenia.



Executive Director of the Qatar Sports for All Federation, Abdullah Al Dosari unveiled details of the race.

Al Dosari said the competition would feature six race categories, including the introduction of a 400-meter race for children and a 2.5-kilometer course aimed at expanding participation and encouraging families to take part alongside their children. The event will also include 1-kilometer, 5-kilometer, 10-kilometer and 21.1-kilometer races.

He added that the event would offer participants an enjoyable evening for running enthusiasts, noting that entertainment activities accompanying the race would begin at 4:30 p.m. in the fan zone, while the races themselves would start at 9 p.m. All races are scheduled to conclude by 10 p.m.

The executive director said race day would be a special occasion for participants, their families and friends, as in previous editions. — ***QNA***

Manchester City keep title race alive; Liverpool frustrated by Chelsea

MANCHESTER: Manchester City kept the pressure on Arsenal at the top of the Premier League with a 3-0 win over Brentford, while Liverpool were booed off after a 1-1 draw against struggling Chelsea yesterday.

With three games of the season left for both title contenders, City closed to within two points of the Gunners, who face a tricky trip to relegation-threatened West Ham today.

After a dramatic 3-3 draw at Everton on Monday, Pep Guardiola's men could not afford another slip up if they were to retain hope of a seventh title in nine years.

A resolute Brentford, still in the running for European football themselves next season, held out until the hour mark when the in-form Jeremy Doku curled into the top corner.

Erling Haaland backheeled in a second to move four goals clear of Brentford's Igor Thiago in the battle for the Golden Boot.

Haaland then turned provider for Omar Marmoush to score what could be a vital third in stoppage time.

City cut the goal difference gap on Arsenal to one and now must hope the Hammers cause an upset in a huge clash at both ends of the table at the London Stadium.

Arsenal face already-relegated Burnley and Crystal Palace, days before the play in the Conference League final, in their final two games.

Liverpool inched towards Champions League qualification but failed to inflict a seventh consecutive league defeat on Chelsea.

Ryan Gravenberch's sweet strike gave the Reds the perfect start in the sixth minute at Anfield.

Chelsea hit back when Enzo Fernandez's 35th-minute free-kick evaded everyone to find the bottom corner.

Boos at full-time reflected the mood around Anfield but Arne Slot said he is convinced he can win back the faith of the Liverpool support next season.

Bournemouth's 1-0 win over Fulham cut Liverpool's lead over the sixth-placed Cherries to four points with two games remaining.

Chelsea can no longer mathematically finish in the top five and remain in ninth.

Manchester United are already assured of Champions League football and a lack of jeopardy showed in the Red Devils' uneventful 0-0 draw at Sunderland.

Bournemouth's charge towards a first ever season in Europe continued as both sides were reduced to 10 men at Craven Cottage.

Both dismissals came late in the first half as first Bournemouth's Ryan Christie and then Fulham defender Joachim Andersen saw red after VAR reviews for rash challenges.

Brazilian teenager Rayan won the game for the visitors in the 53rd minute with a fine finish from just outside the penalty area. — ***AFP***


Aprilia Racing's Jorge Martin (right) leads the pack at the start of the sprint race.

Martin surges to MotoGP sprint win as Marquez breaks foot at Le Mans

LE MANS: Jorge Martin surged to victory in the MotoGP sprint race at the French Grand Prix at Le Mans yesterday as Marc Marquez broke a foot in a spectacular crash.

Martin started eighth on the grid but raced through the pack heading into the first corner and then pulled away to win.

"I love this track," said Martin, who won both the sprint and the main race at Le Mans on his way to the 2024 world title.

Behind him, reigning world champion Marquez endured a nightmare day that ended in a violent crash on his factory Ducati. It left him with a broken right foot that will require surgery.

Marquez started on the front row but had slipped to seventh before losing control with less than two laps of the 13-lap race to go.

He put his left foot on the ground to try to regain his balance but was flipped over the handlebars in the opposite direction, sliding along the ground as his disintegrating Ducati cartwheeled just past him. Ducati issued a statement after the race saying that an X-ray showed "a fracture of the fifth metatarsal in his right foot" and that Marquez, who is a distant fifth in the standings, would miss Sunday's main race and at least one more.

"He will fly to Madrid this evening to undergo surgery in the coming days. He will not participate in the Catalan Grand Prix next week," said the Ducati statement.

Martin started from eighth on the grid but jumped to first early on his Aprilia.

"I struggled a bit in qualifying but I knew my potential," he said.

"I put all my determination into the start. I found myself ahead at the second corner and I pushed like I'm used to alone, and boom! boom! boom!" he added, punching the air three times. In balmy, sunny conditions, Martin finished a comfortable 1.107 seconds ahead of Francesco Bagnaia on the second factory Ducati.

"I'm happy," said the Italian. "We are stilling missing something compared to Aprilia. I hope tomorrow we will have good weather because we can make a good result."

The other Aprilia, ridden by Marco Bezzecchi, was third 2.786sec back. The Italian remained at the top of the riders' standings, with his lead cut to six points over team-mate Martin. — ***AFP***

Tchouameni can play Clasico despite Valverde clash: Real Madrid's Arbeloa

MADRID: Real Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa said Aurelien Tchouameni will be in his team's squad to face Barcelona today in La Liga, despite his confrontation with team-mate Fede Valverde.

The Uruguay captain was treated in hospital for a head injury and will miss up to a fortnight while he recovers, after the two players argued at the end of training on Thursday.

Real Madrid fined France international Tchouameni and Valverde on Friday and said both midfielders had apologised to each other and the club, fans, staff and team-mates.

If Real Madrid fail to beat Barcelona, the Catalans will be crowned Spanish champions for a second consecutive season.

"Tomorrow Tchouameni will be in the squad," Arbeloa told reporters, when asked about the Frenchman's availability for the Clasico at Camp Nou.

Arbeloa, who replaced Xabi Alonso in January of a troubled season for Madrid, said he had accepted both players' apologies for the incident.


FROM LEFT: Real Madrid's Aurelien Tchouameni, David Alaba, Jude Bellingham and Kylian Mbappe attend a training session.

"I'm very proud of the club's decisiveness, speed, and transparency, and that the players have acknowledged their mistake, expressed their regret, accepted the consequences of what they have done, and asked for forgiveness," said Arbeloa.

"For me, that's enough. What I'm not going to do is burn them at the stake in public, because they don't deserve that... because of what they've shown me over these four months and over these years.

"They've shown they understand what it means to be a Real Madrid player, their commitment, their effort, their love for the shirt, and I'm not going to forget that." Arbeloa said what was more troubling to him was that somebody would leak the details of the row to the media.

"That things are leaked that happened in the dressing room, to me is a betrayal of Real Madrid and the club badge," said the coach. Arbeloa was at Liverpool in 2007 when Welsh striker Craig Bellamy hit team-mate John Arne Riise with a golf club.

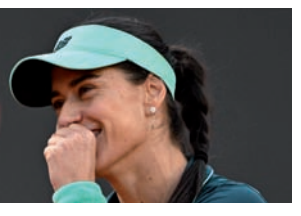
A few days later Bellamy celebrated scoring against Barcelona at Camp Nou in the Champions League with a golf swing celebration.

"I had a team-mate who smacked another one with a golf club," remembered Arbeloa.

"For me, the thing that hurts me the most is that what happens in the Real Madrid dressing room should stay in the Real Madrid dressing room.

"Situations that don't represent Real Madrid, or any club, situations that shouldn't happen between team-mates, have always happened, everywhere, but I'm not justifying it." — ***AFP***

Sabalenka knocked out of Italian Open in third round



ROME: Aryna Sabalenka was dumped out of the Italian Open in the third round by Sorana Cirstea **(pictured)** yesterday, the world number one falling to a 2-6, 6-3, 7-5 defeat in Rome.

Sabalenka is the second star name to be eliminated from the final big tournament before the French Open, with Novak Djokovic being knocked out from the men's event on Friday.

The 28-year-old, who had been the favourite for the women's title in Rome, hadn't been knocked out of a tournament in the round of 32 since the Qatar Open in February last year.

But she failed in her bid for a first tournament victory in the Italian capital, with Cirstea facing Linda Noskova in the next round after claiming the biggest win of her career.

Sabalenka looked set for a quick and clean win on centre court after romping to the first set, but errors and grumbling soon began to creep in, in particular on her service game.

Cirstea broke Sabalenka's serve three times on her way to levelling the match and she continued to pose problems heading into the decisive third.

Sabalenka lost her serve for the fifth time after saving three break points to go 3-2 behind in the third set, and two games later she called for a medical time out for a problem with her left hip.

Treatment appeared to get Sabalenka back into the groove once she drew level at 5-5 in the set. But Cirstea held her nerve to win the next two games, sealing her first ever win over a woman at the top of the world rankings with her first match point. — ***AFP***

Rashid Khan bowls Gujarat to 77-run win

JAIPUR: Rashid Khan took four wickets for 33 runs as Gujarat Titans bowled out Rajasthan Royals for a 77-run win in the IPL yesterday.

Kagiso Rabada also took two wickets and Jason Holder polished off the tail with three as Gujarat dismissed Rajasthan for 152 runs, after wonder-kid Vaibhav Sooryavanshi scored 36 off 16 balls.

Earlier, skipper Shubman Gill hit 84 and Sai Sudharsan made 55 as Gujarat notched up 229-4 batting first. — ***AFP***