

Marquez keeps feet on ground as Qatar GP offers title opportunity

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Marc Marquez is within reach of another world championship crown, but the Ducati Lenovo Team rider is taking nothing for granted as MotoGP heads to Lusail International Circuit for the MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar this weekend.

The Spaniard arrives with his first match point of the season, knowing that a successful weekend could secure his 10th world title overall and eighth in the premier class. However, despite being aware of the numbers, Marquez insists his focus remains on building his weekend rather than rushing towards the championship celebrations.

"I know the numbers: 30 and 8. I know them, but it seems far off. I think too many things have to happen, and it would be a mistake to think about the title now or to get the urge, the anxiety, to win it right away," Marquez said during yesterday's press conference at Lusail International Circuit.

"Little by little; we're closer than we were in Malaysia, yes, but it doesn't mean we're within reach. I still feel we're far away. Many things can happen, many things can occur, and we need to stay calm, with the same concentration and the same mindset as always."

Marquez needs to outscore closest title rival Jorge Martin by 30 points across tomorrow's sprint and Sunday's Grand Prix, while also gaining at least eight points on third-placed Marco Bezzecchi, to seal the championship in Qatar.

Otherwise, the battle will continue to the final two rounds in Portimao and Valencia.

The seven-time MotoGP champion, who won both races at Lusail last year, is aware that the circuit has not always been among his strongest venues.

"The mentality is the same as always: think that the competition will be stronger than ever. If they're weaker, that's a bonus, but like I did in Malaysia, I'll try to go flat out from the first free practice, find the limits, stay focused, and then, during the weekend, we'll see where the opponents put us," he said.



Aprilia Racing's Marco Bezzecchi (left) and Ducati Lenovo Team rider Marc Marquez during a press conference yesterday.

> *I know the numbers: 30 and 8. I know them, but it seems far off. I think too many things have to happen, and it would be a mistake to think about the title now or to get the urge, the anxiety, to win it right away.*
> ***Marc Marquez***

Martin awaits medical clearance

Martin's participation remains a major talking point ahead of the weekend. The Aprilia rider fractured his right wrist less than two weeks ago at Phillip Island and was unable to progress beyond practice at Sepang last weekend.

Although he is feeling better, Martin must pass a medical assessment today before being cleared to ride.

"I am feeling much better. I am getting my strength back. I will try to ride in the best way possible. Let's see if I can race," Martin said. Describing his recovery, he estimated his fitness had improved from around 20 percent in Malaysia to 50 percent now, adding that he hoped to complete consecutive laps today to assess his wrist ahead of Saturday.

"I need to be calm," he said, while making no secret of his hopes of preventing Marquez from sealing the title this weekend.

Bezzecchi ready to fight

Bezzecchi, meanwhile, knows the task facing him is difficult but remains determined to keep the championship battle alive.

"It's a difficult situation. The gap is big. My target is to go as fast as I can to keep the title race alive. Hopefully we can try to fight with the top guys," the Aprilia rider said.

"It's gonna be tough. The field is always tough."

The Italian will be looking to make the most of a circuit where Aprilia could be competitive and put pressure on Marquez from the opening sessions.

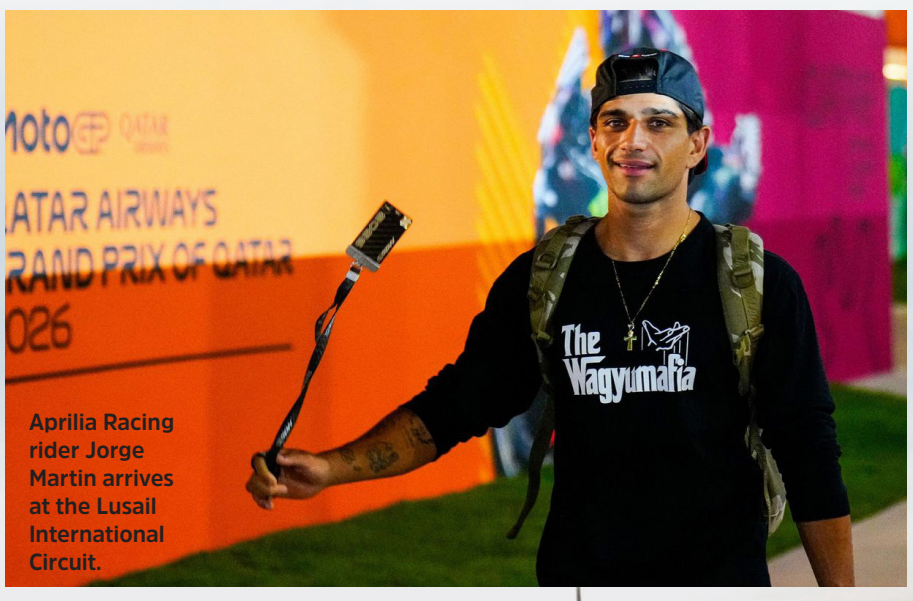
There will also be changes to the grid. Marquez's brother Alex will miss the Qatar round following shoulder surgery, with Iker Lecuona replacing him at Gresini Racing. Honda HRC Castrol have also confirmed that British rider Jake Dixon will replace Joan Mir, who withdrew from the Malaysian Grand Prix and is continuing his recovery at home.

Dixon, who recorded seven wins and 22 podiums in Moto2, will make his return to MotoGP machinery with the factory Honda team.

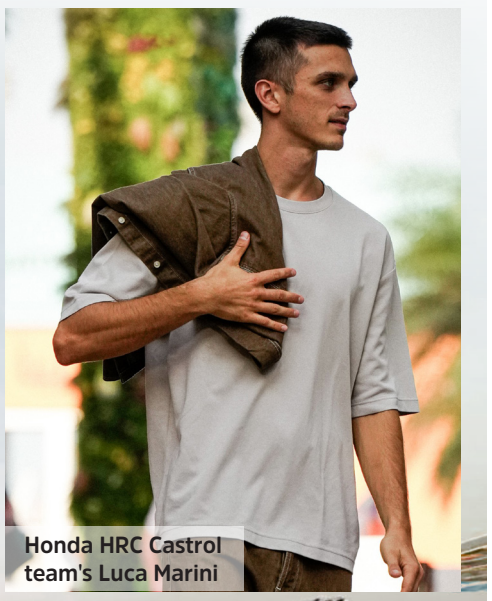
MOTOGP STANDINGS (TOP 20)

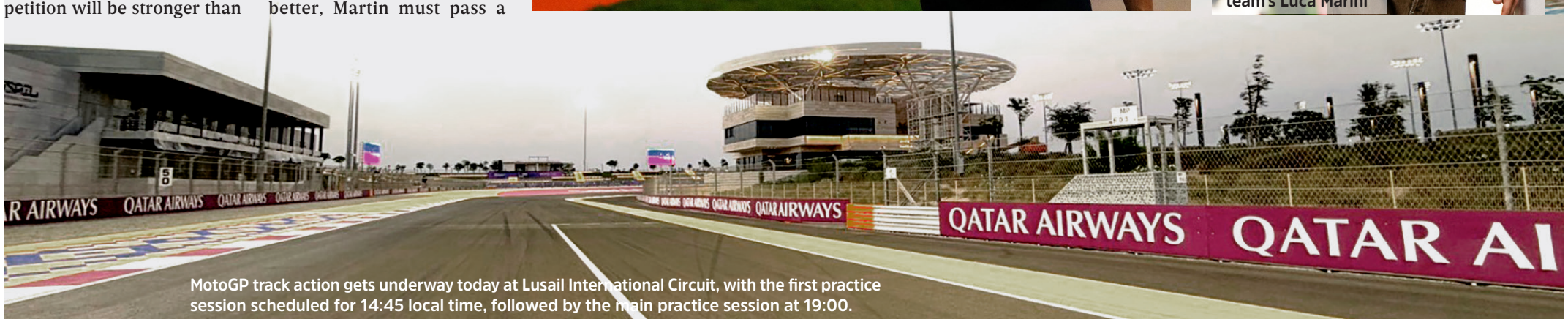
1	Marc Marquez	399
2	Jorge Martin	355
3	Marco Bezzecchi	333
4	Pedro Acosta	295
5	Ai Ogura	278
6	Fabio Di Giannantonio	265
7	Raul Fernandez	236
8	Alex Marquez	197
9	Francesco Bagnaia	173
10	Enea Bastianini	134
11	Fermin Aldeguer	125
12	Brad Binder	118
13	Luca Marini	117
14	Fabio Quartararo	79
15	Diogo Moreira	78
16	Franco Morbidelli	65
17	Johann Zarco	51
18	Joan Mir	33
19	Jack Miller	31
20	Alex Rins	29

> *It's a difficult situation. The gap is big. My target is to go as fast as I can to keep the title race alive. Hopefully we can try to fight with the top guys.*
> ***Marco Bezzecchi***



Aprilia Racing rider Jorge Martin arrives at the Lusail International Circuit.


Honda HRC Castrol team's Luca Marini



MotoGP track action gets underway today at Lusail International Circuit, with the first practice session scheduled for 14:45 local time, followed by the main practice session at 19:00.

Argentina, Spain cruise to Padel World Cup semis in Doha

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Defending champions Argentina, along with title-contenders Spain stormed into the men's semi-finals with commanding wins on Day 4 of the FIP World Cup in Doha, yesterday.

Argentina, chasing a 13th men's title, secured an easy 3-0 victory over Germany in the quarter-finals at the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex.

Federico Chingotto and Gonzalo Alfonso opened with a 6-1, 6-1 win over A. Reca and M. Wunner, followed by Leandro Augsburger and Martin Di Nenno, who beat J. Lindmeyer and B. Fitzon 6-0, 6-4. Franco Stupaczuk and Maximiliano Arce Simo completed the clean sweep with a 6-3, 6-0 victory over C. Boehnke and N. Merten.

Last edition's runners-up, Spain also booked their place in the semis after taking a 2-0 lead against Brazil in their quarter-final. J. Nieto and J. Sanz opened with a 6-2, 6-2 victory over L. Fernandes and M. De Avila Simonato, before J. Leal and A. Coello defeated A. Freitas and D. Correa Rodrigues 6-2, 6-1 to secure Spain's progression. The third match between A. Goni Lacabe-J. Lebron and J. P. Flores-J. C. Julianoti was not played.



Action during the women's quarter-finals between Spain and Sweden.

Hosts Qatar suffered a 2-0 defeat to France in the men's 9-16 quarter-final play-offs, ending their hopes of progressing in the classification draw. T. Leygue and T. Fonteny gave France the lead with a 6-0, 6-1 victory over Mohammed Saadon Al-Kuwari and Essa Alharrasi, before M. Joris and J. Bergeron secured the tie by defeating Khalid Saadon Al-Kuwari and Mohammed Al-Khanji 6-1, 6-1.

The third match between Y. Boronad-J. Robert and Hassan Adel Waly-Rayyan Aljufairi was not played. In the other classification matches, Mexico defeated the United Arab Emirates 2-0, while Paraguay recorded a 2-0 victory over the United States. Chile also advanced with a 2-0 win against Australia, keeping their hopes alive in the classification competition.

Meanwhile, defending champions Spain and Argentina booked their places in the semi-finals after convincing quarter-final victories, with France and Italy completing the last four.

Spain swept Sweden 3-0, while France advanced after winning their tie against the Netherlands 2-0. Argentina also produced a dominant display, defeating Portugal 3-0, while Italy secured a 2-0 victory over Brazil.

The semi-finals will see Spain face France, while Argentina take on Italy for a place in the final. Three of the four semi-finalists also reached the podium in the previous edition, with France replacing Portugal in the last four. In the classification matches for positions 5-8, Sweden will meet the Netherlands, while Portugal face Brazil.

Qatar-Saudi friendly cancelled after Asian Cup postponement

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar's international friendly against Saudi Arabia, scheduled for December 27 in Al Khobar, has been cancelled following the postponement of the AFC Asian Cup Saudi Arabia 2027, the Qatar Football Association (QFA) announced yesterday.

The Asian Football Confederation (AFC) has moved the continental showpiece from its original dates of January 7 to February 5, 2027, to December 23, 2027, to January 21, 2028.

The QFA said the decision to cancel the friendly was taken in coordination with the Saudi national team following the AFC's announcement to reschedule the tournament.

The match was part of Qatar's preparations for the Asian Cup, where the defending champions were set to pursue an unprecedented third consecutive title.

There has been no announcement regarding changes to Qatar's other scheduled friendlies against Australia and the Republic of Korea in November.

Coach Julen Lopetegui's side are scheduled to face Australia on November 13 and the Republic of Korea on November 17, both at Abdullah bin Khalifa Stadium in Doha.

QSL: Al Arabi, Al Ahli eye points as Al Wakrah take on Al Shahania

THE PENINSULA

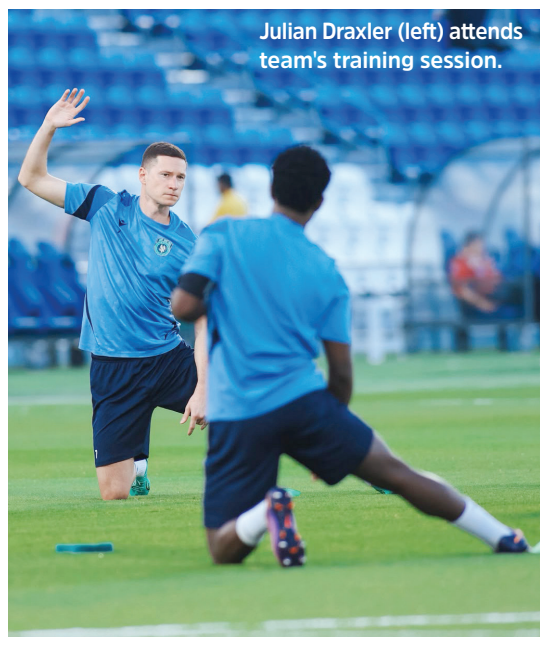
DOHA: Al Arabi and Al Ahli kick off the ninth round of the Qatar Stars League at Al Thumama Stadium today, with just two points separating the teams in the standings.

Fourth-placed Al Arabi have 13 points, two more than Al Ahli, who are fifth. Al Arabi were held to a draw by Al Rayyan in their previous outing, while Al Ahli secured a win over Al Shahania.

Al Arabi coach Cosmin Contra expects a demanding contest and wants his side to be more decisive in front of goal.

"We face a difficult challenge against a well-organised opponent that has been performing well this season and holds a genuine ambition to climb the rankings," he said.


Al Arabi's Michael Olunga (left) in action during team's training session.


Julian Draxler (left) attends team's training session.

"We have moved on from the Al Rayyan match although we displayed a high level of tactical discipline, dominating possession and performing as the better side. We lacked the final touch and decisiveness in front of goal, which cost us two points," Contra added.

"We have no choice but to enter the match with complete focus, impose our style of play from the very beginning, score goals and secure the victory we desperately need at this stage."

Al Ahli coach Nebojsa Jovovic said his team will need the same approach that helped them beat Al Shahania.

"We aim to maintain our positive results and strong performances, especially in what stands as one of our toughest and most important matches. Al Arabi are one of the league's top sides this season, boasting a talented squad with a distinct style of play.

"We must respect all our opponents and approach every game with complete seriousness, an attitude that was clearly evident in our previous match against Al Shahania. We will carry this same mindset into the game against Al Arabi, remaining fully focused on securing a win," said Jovovic.

Today's second match will see Al Wakrah take on Al Shahania at Saoud Bin Abdulrahman Stadium, with both sides looking to recover from defeats in their previous round matches.

Al Wakrah are sixth on 11 points after losing to Al Duhail, while Al Shahania sit 10th with seven points following their defeat to Al Ahli. The two sides will be looking to turn around their recent results and pick up valuable points.

Leaders Al Sadd, Al Rayyan face off

The round's biggest fixture comes on Sunday when Al Sadd meet Al Rayyan at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium, with both teams entering the crucial clash on 18 points.

Defending champions Al Sadd, Al Rayyan and Al Duhail are level at the top after eight rounds, making every point increasingly important.

Al Duhail will be in action tomorrow against Al Gharafa at Thani Bin Jassim Stadium, giving them a chance to put pressure on the two leaders before they meet.

Saturday also features Al Shamal against Al Sailiya at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium, while Sunday's earlier game sees Lusail face Qatar SC.

Al Shamal, Lusail and Al Gharafa are all on nine points, with Qatar SC on six and Al Sailiya at the bottom with one point.

QSL ROUND 9 FIXTURES

Today
Al Arabi vs Al Ahli
Al Thumama Stadium | 5:15pm
Al Wakrah vs Al Shahania
Saoud Bin Abdulrahman Stadium | 7:30pm

Tomorrow
Al Shamal vs Al Sailiya
Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium | 5:15pm
Al Gharafa vs Al Duhail
Thani Bin Jassim Stadium | 7:30pm

Sunday
Lusail vs Qatar SC
Al Khor Stadium | 5:15pm
Al Sadd vs Al Rayyan
Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium | 7:30pm

Champion Antonelli back to work as Mercedes chase F1 championship double

SAO PAULO: Five celebratory days on from claiming the Formula One world title, Kimi Antonelli will seek to lead Mercedes to the double this weekend by beating Ferrari to take the constructors' championship at the Sao Paulo Grand Prix.

The youngest champion in F1 history, and first Italian winner for 73 years, will be bidding for his 10th win of a remarkable season, but knows luckless team-mate George Russell will be intent on returning to winning ways himself.

Blighted by ill-fortune and a series of car failures, the Briton is aiming for a strong end to the season, with a repeat of his 2022 triumph at Interlagos, to give him a springboard for a title challenge in 2027.

"All I can promise is that for the rest of this season, and into the next one, I will be giving my absolute all to rediscover the performance I have been capable of producing for the majority of my career," Russell said.

"And fingers crossed that a little bit of luck returns," he added earlier this week after congratulating 20-year-old Antonelli on finishing third in Mexico to clinch his maiden title. Russell is without a win in four races since dominating from pole position in Baku and is chasing a fourth win this year.

Deputy technical director Simone Resta conceded, as did team chief Toto Wolff, that Mercedes had failed Russell.

"We really need to sort out these problems for the future," he said.

"We let George down and he really deserves to have a chance to fight for a much higher position...

"It's clear for the team -- we need to maximise our points and results to win the championship. We are focused on it and we will do our best to achieve it."

Mercedes need to outscore Ferrari by three points or more to be champions.

While Russell licked his wounds, Antonelli visited the family of his childhood hero Ayrton Senna and was photographed sitting in the three-time champion's famous black and gold Lotus 98T car -- complete with number 12 on the nose, the number the Italian has said he will keep next year. — *AFP*


Kimi Antonelli celebrates his triumph.


Amir Jangoo watches the ball after playing a shot.

Jangoo century lifts West Indies to 235-4 against Bangladesh

SYLHET: Amir Jangoo's counter-attacking century guided West Indies to 235-4 on the opening day of the second cricket Test against Bangladesh in Sylhet yesterday.

Jangoo was unbeaten on 111 off 171 balls, with 11 fours and two sixes, while Justin Greaves was 35 not out when bad light brought an early end to play.

Debutant Kevin Wickham was the second-highest scorer with a gritty 61 off 145 balls. Hasan Mahmud and Taskin Ahmed took two wickets each to lead Bangladesh's bowling effort.

West Indies, who lead the two-match series 1-0, won the toss and elected to bat on a pitch offering assistance to Bangladesh's new-ball bowlers. The hosts made an early breakthrough when Taskin bowled Brandon King for nine with a yorker in the fifth over, leaving West Indies at 13-1.

Hasan then dismissed Kavem Hodge for one with an inswinger in the next over, reducing the visitors to 14-2.

Taskin struck again in the ninth over, trapping Joshua Da Silva lbw for 12 as West Indies slumped to 27-3.

Wickham and Jangoo then steadied the innings, riding their luck as one edge fell short of the fielders and another flew past second slip.

Jangoo reached his half-century off 86 balls as the pair put on a 131-run partnership off 192 deliveries.

Wickham brought up his maiden Test fifty off 123 balls before Hasan broke the stand, uprooting the debutant's off stump for 61. After the tea break the 29-year-old Jangoo brought up his second Test century in style, hitting Taijul Islam over long-off for six.

Bad light interrupted play twice before the umpires called stumps with visitors on 235-4 after 70 overs. — *AFP*

Intisar De Monlau wins Qetaifan Cup as Saadi marks hat-trick of victories

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Intisar De Monlau made a winning seasonal return, claiming the feature Qetaifan Cup at the eighth Race Meeting at Al Rayyan Racecourse , as trainer Alban de Mieulle and jockey Soufiane Saadi enjoyed successful outings.

The Wathnan Racing-owned five-year-old grey mare landed the Purebred Arabian Conditions contest over seven furlongs, winning by 1¾ lengths under Saadi.

Having finished among the first two in each of her previous five starts, including a Group 2 victory in January 2026, Intisar De Monlau raced prominently before asserting herself inside the final 200 metres to secure a decisive victory.

De Mieulle completed a double on the card, while Saadi recorded a treble.

France Galop President Guillaume de Saint-Seine presented the Qetaifan Cup, accompanied by Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC) Chairman Hamad bin Abdulrahman Al-Attiyah.

Meanwhile, Al Nasr Al Washeek, trained by Jihad El Ahmad and ridden by Alberto Sanna, won the Local Thoroughbred Handicap (45-70), by a length.


France Galop President Guillaume de Saint-Seine presented the Qetaifan Cup, accompanied by Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club Chairman Hamad bin Abdulrahman Al-Attiyah. PICS: Juhaim/QREC


Soufiane Saadi rides Intisar De Monlau to win.

Prodigious Blue, under Patrick Cosgrave, secured the Thoroughbred Handicap (75-95) by a length for trainer Rashid Al Jehani.

Tulaitila gave Hamad Al-Jehani a win prevailing in the Purebred Arabian Handicap (65-85) over 1,200 metres, with Arnaud De Lepine in the saddle. The horse won by a length.

Atlantic War, trained by De Mieulle and ridden by Abdulla Rashid Al-Hajri, claimed the Local Thoroughbred Handicap (0-70) by 3½ lengths.

Saadi won aboard Don Pacifico, trained by Mohammed Al Ghazali, in the Thoroughbred Novice, winning by 1½ lengths.

The jockey also rode Tuyoof to win in 1600m Thoroughbred Maiden. Trained by Hamad Al-Jehani, Tuyoof won by five lengths.

Cosgrave started the day guiding Deira Storm to victory in the Thoroughbred Maiden for trainer Ibrahim Saeed Al Malki. The winner prevailed by ¾ lengths.

8th Al Uqda Race Meeting in Al Rayyan - Qetaifan Cup
WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)

Qetaifan Cup, Purebred Arabian Conditions
Intisar De Monlau, Alban de Mieulle, Soufiane Saadi
Local Thoroughbred Handicap 45-70
Al Nasr Al Washeek, Jihad El Ahmad, Alberto Sanna
Thoroughbred Handicap 75-95
Prodigious Blue, Rashid Al Jehani, Patrick Cosgrave
Purebred Arabian Handicap 65-85
Tulaitila, Hamad Al-Jehani, Arnaud De Lepine
Local Thoroughbred Handicap 0-70
Atlantic War, Alban de Mieulle, Abdulla Rashid Al-Hajri
Thoroughbred Novice
Don Pacifico, Mohammed Al Ghazali, Soufiane Saadi
Thoroughbred Maiden
Tuyoof, Hamad Al-Jehani, Soufiane Saadi
Thoroughbred Maiden
Deira Storm, Ibrahim Saeed Al Malki, Patrick Cosgrave

Al-Nuaimi wins Silver Tour, Al-Marri claims Amateur title

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Sultan Salem Al-Nuaimi topped the Silver Tour while Salman Faisal Al-Marri claimed the Amateur class title as the fifth leg of the 10th edition of the Longines Hathab Qatar Equestrian Tour got underway at the Qatar Equestrian Federation's indoor arena yesterday.

Al-Nuaimi produced the fastest round in the Silver Tour (130cm), winning the jump-off in 35.92 seconds aboard Vernay. Rami Younes finished second in 37.07 seconds riding Mauran, while Khalid Abdulaziz Al-Eid took third place in 37.12 seconds aboard Gin Tonic.


Head of the Facilities and Logistics Committee for Hathab Mohammed Saleh Al-Marri presented awards to the top three riders of Silver Tour.


Member of the Championship's Organising Committee Khalid Sanad Al-Nuaimi presented the awards to the Amateur class podium winners.

More than 12 riders qualified for the jump-off, making for a competitive finish to the class. Head of the Facilities and Logistics Committee for Longines Hathab Mohammed Saleh Al-Marri presented awards to the top three riders.

In the Amateur class (100cm), Salman Faisal Al-Marri secured the title with a time of 45.53 seconds aboard Gravity. Nasser Hamad Al Thani finished second in 48.31 seconds riding Equinox, while Maryam Abdulkarim Abed took third place in 50.38 seconds aboard Sandro.

Member of the Championship's Organising Committee Khalid Sanad Al-Nuaimi presented the awards to the Amateur class winners.

The competition continues today with the Future Riders class (70cm), followed by the Open Class (110cm). The day's programme will conclude with the Gold Tour, featuring individual and team competitions at a height of 140cm.

Cristiano Ronaldo announces international retirement

LISBON: Portuguese football legend Cristiano Ronaldo announced yesterday he was retiring from international football at the age of 41.

Ronaldo made his debut for Portugal in 2003 and went on to play a world record 234 times for his country, scoring 146 goals.

But the forward's powers have been waning in recent years and he fell out with national coach Jorge Jesus last month after refusing to play him in a Nations League match.

Ronaldo immediately left the team camp and was handed a 30-day suspension.

He apologised and it was rumoured he intended to return to the international fold, but on Thursday the five-time winner of the Ballon d'Or released a video on his Instagram account in which he said he had played his last match for Portugal.

"To the Portuguese people, the day has come for me to hand back the number seven shirt of our national team," Ronaldo said, as images of his career were played.

"I never felt it belonged to me alone, but for 23 years I had the privilege and the responsibility of wearing it, defending it and carrying it with me into stadiums all around the world.

"Today the time has come to pass it on to the future. It was not an easy decision, because some decisions are not made with the mind alone -- they are also made with the heart.

"A journey that began in August 2003 and changed my life forever has come to an end," he added.

The Portuguese Football Federation said it would organise a "fitting tribute" to Ronaldo's "immense career".

Ronaldo will continue to play for his current club in Saudi Arabia, Al-Nassr, where he is under contract until June 2027.

In the highlight of his international career, Ronaldo won the European Championship with Portugal in 2016 in France, although he had to leave the field during the final with an injury.

"I won Euro 2016 and, for me, that's just as important as the World Cup. It will stay with me forever," he recalled.

At this year's World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico, he scored three goals but Portugal were knocked out in the last 16 by eventual winners Spain.

In a notorious moment at a previous World Cup, a 21-year-old Ronaldo was caught by TV cameras winking at his bench after appearing to exhort the referee to send off his then Manchester United teammate Wayne Rooney as Portugal faced England in the 2006 quarter-finals in Germany.

Rooney was red-carded and Ronaldo scored the winning spot kick in the penalty shootout to send Portugal into the semi-finals where they lost to Zinedine Zidane's France.

His departure from the international stage follows that of his long-term rival, Lionel Messi, who played his final match for Argentina last month. — *AFP*

MAJOR MILESTONES

- Made his international debut against Kazakhstan in August 2003.
- Announced himself on the big stage at Euro 2004, scoring his first international goal and helping Portugal reach the final.
- Took over as national team captain in 2008, eventually becoming Portugal's most-capped player and leading scorer.
- Inspired Portugal to their maiden major international trophy at Euro 2016.
- Added two UEFA Nations League titles to his collection in 2019 and 2025.
- Broke Ali Daei's long-standing record of 109 goals to become the highest scorer in men's international football.
- Competed in six FIFA World Cups and became the first player to score in six different editions.
- Ended his international career in 2026 with a record 234 appearances and 146 goals for Portugal.



Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo celebrates after scoring a goal during the FIFA World Cup 2026, in this June 23 file photo.

Ronaldo's five great moments with Portugal

PARIS: Cristiano Ronaldo announced his retirement from international football yesterday to bring down the curtain on more than two decades in the Portugal shirt.

He scored a record 146 times in a mammoth 234 appearances for his country having made his debut in 2003.

Here are his five stand-out games with the Selecao.

2013: Outclassing Zlatan Having won the World Cup play-off first leg 1-0 against Sweden thanks to the iconic No. 7, Portugal headed to Stockholm for the return fixture.

Ronaldo opened the scoring before Zlatan Ibrahimovic brought the sides level in the tie with a double in the Swedish capital. But the then Real Madrid attacker claimed Portugal's spot at the tournament in Brazil by completing his hat-trick in two minutes.

2016: Tears before the joy Portugal reached the Euro 2016 final having failed to win a single group game. Ronaldo's side went into the decider against hosts France in Paris searching for their first major international trophy and to make up for the past after losing to Greece on home soil 12 years earlier. The forward left the field injured and in tears after just 25 minutes before spending the rest of the game on the touchline cheering on his teammates.

Eder scored the winner in extra-time to the relief of Ronaldo and 11 million Portuguese compatriots.

2018: One-man mission Fresh from winning three straight Champions Leagues with Real, Ronaldo faced Spain in Portugal's World Cup opener in 2018. CR7 opened the scoring in Sochi with a penalty before grabbing a hat-trick, including a superb late free kick, to fire Portugal to a thrilling draw.

2025: 40 years young Three months after turning 40, Ronaldo helped Portugal to the Nations League final against Spain in Munich. He scored the winner over Germany in the semi-final before claiming the equaliser against Spain to send the decider to extra time. The Selecao eventually won on penalties, six years on from winning the same crown.

2026: Outplayed Croatia Following a lacklustre group stage, Ronaldo and Portugal faced Croatia in the last 32 of this year's World Cup in Toronto.

Despite the prospect of it being his final ever World Cup match, Ronaldo took control of things.

He had an early effort chalked off for offside and Ivan Perisic put Croatia ahead, but Ronaldo equalised for Portugal from the penalty spot. Goncalo Ramos' late header gave Portugal a memorable 2-1 victory and sent them into the last 16, where they lost to eventual winners Spain. — *AFP*



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz serves to Alex Michelsen of the US.

Alcaraz into Paris Masters quarters after Berrettini withdraws

PARIS: Carlos Alcaraz moved into the quarter-finals of the Paris Masters yesterday after his last 16 opponent Matteo Berrettini withdrew.

Alcaraz, a seven-time Grand Slam champion, was scheduled to play the Italian, but Berrettini pulled out ahead of their encounter with an elbow injury.

"Unfortunately, the pain in my arm that I've been putting up with for the past few days means I won't be able to take to the court tonight," Berrettini posted on social media.

After receiving a bye through the first round as a top-eight seed, Alcaraz is into the last eight with only one match under his belt in Paris, a straight-sets success against Alex Michelsen.

He will meet either Arthur Fils or Taylor Fritz on Friday for a spot in the semi-finals.

The Spaniard has never won the Paris Masters. He is the top-ranked player remaining in the draw this year after world number one Alexander Zverev lost on Wednesday.

Berrettini, 30, has endured an injury-plagued career and was forced to retire earlier this season in Paris when a hip issue brought a premature end to his French Open quarter-final clash with Matteo Arnaldi.

Ben Shelton overcame France's Arthur Rinderknech in a third-set tie-break to secure his passage into the quarter-finals.

The American third seed battled past the 68th-ranked Frenchman 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 (7/5) to avoid becoming the latest high-profile departure.

Shelton will next play compatriot Tommy Paul after the 12th seed beat Frenchman Quentin Halys 7-6 (7/3), 6-4 in the day's opening match on centre court.

Australian qualifier Rinky Hijikata continued his remarkable run as he backed up his second-round victory over 24-time major champion Novak Djokovic with a 2-6, 6-3, 7-5 win against Tomas Martin Etcheverry. With Alcaraz no longer on the menu, local player Fils will headline the night session when the world number seven faces American 11th seed Fritz. Former world number two Casper Ruud of Norway will also be in action against Germany's Jan-Lennard Struff.

The tournament lost a swathe of top seeds on an upset-filled Wednesday as Daniil Medvedev, Frances Tiafoe and Alex de Minaur all joined Zverev and Djokovic in exiting early. — *AFP*

China sweep 10m air pistol world titles

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: China's Hu Kai won the 10m Air Pistol Men title at the ISSF World Championships in Lusail yesterday, finishing ahead of India's Jaypal Malviya and Czechia's Jindrich Dubovy.

All three medallists also secured Olympic quota places for their National Olympic Committees for LA28.

Hu delivered a winning score of 243.9 to claim the world title, holding off a strong challenge from Malviya, who finished just 1.7 points behind with 242.2 to take silver.

Dubovy completed the podium with 220.9, earning bronze and securing an Olympic quota place for Czechia.

The three quota places awarded through the final went to China, India and Czechia

China's Bu Shuaihang finished fourth with 199.5, followed by Italy's Paolo Monna in fifth with 179.4. Islam Shamsutdinov, competing as an Individual Neutral Athlete (AIN), placed sixth with 156.8.

China's Xie Yu finished seventh with 136.5, while Thailand's Kiettikul Sudkhet completed the final in eighth position with 116.7.

Meanwhile, China's Jiang Ranxin claimed the 10m Air Pistol Women world title, narrowly defeating compatriot Yao Qianxun in a closely contested final.

The competition also awarded Olympic quota places for LA28 to China, Hungary and Iran. Jiang secured gold with a final score of 242.4, just 0.3 points ahead of Yao, who finished with 242.1 to take silver.

The two Chinese athletes remained locked in a tight battle throughout the final, with Jiang producing the decisive advantage in the closing stages.

Veronika Major of Hungary took bronze with 222.1, while Haniyeh Rostamiyan of Iran finished fourth with 201.2. The performances of Jiang,

Major and Rostamiyan also secured Olympic quota places for their respective National Olympic Committees, meaning China, Hungary and Iran each added a place for the LA28 Olympic Games through the women's 10m Air Pistol competition.



China's Hu Kai claimed the men's 10m Air Pistol title at the ISSF World Championships, with India's Jaypal Malviya taking silver and Czechia's Jindrich Dubovy finishing third.

Ballon d'Or winner Kane extends Bayern contract

MUNICH: Ballon d'Or winner Harry Kane said yesterday the decision to further his Bayern Munich stay was made "a long time ago" after signing a two-year extension to keep him at the club until 2029.

The 33-year-old England captain joined Bayern from Tottenham in 2023 and has scored 156 goals in 161 games for the German side.

"We signed the contract yesterday, but to be honest the decision was made quite a long time ago," he said.

"I knew I was going to sign, it was just a matter of some of the details and the behind-the-scenes stuff," he added.

Famously without a team trophy after more than 10 years at boyhood club Spurs, Kane has won two Bundesliga titles and one German Cup since joining Bayern, although the Champions League has proved elusive -- reaching the semi-finals twice in three campaigns.

Kane achieved the ultimate personal accolade for a footballer when he was voted the men's player of the year at the Ballon d'Or ceremony in London last month.

He became the first Englishman since Michael Owen in 2001 and the first Bayern player since Karl-Heinz Rummenigge in 1981 to win the award, beating France captain Kylian Mbappe into second place.

"I feel right at home at FC Bayern. I love the club, the fans and the city of Munich. We have a fantastic team and, in Vincent Kompany, a fantastic manager," Kane said.

In September, Kane became the fastest player in German history to reach 100 Bundesliga goals, doing so in 98 games to shatter the previous record set by Dieter Mueller in 1977 by 31 games.

Bayern and Kane were in negotiations about the extension since August, with the duration of the deal the main sticking point, according to German media.

Much as Premier League sides might have dreamed of luring him back to England, Kane's longer-term Bayern future was never in doubt.

He has repeatedly thanked the city, the club and its fans for warmly welcoming him to southern Bavaria.

Kane scored 61 goals for Bayern last campaign and 12 for England, bringing him to an incredible 73. That mark was bettered only once this century, by Lionel Messi in 2011-12, who scored 82 in a Ballon d'Or-winning season.

Kane reserved special praise for the club in his Ballon d'Or acceptance speech.

"Without you guys (his Bayern Munich team-mates) and the rest of the team it wouldn't be possible, the way you guys push me, the way we compete. So thank you very much," he said after collecting the award. — *AFP*



Harry Kane