Rivals face tough task to challenge Mercedes after their dominance at Lusail

Russell secures Qatar GP pole ahead of Antonelli

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: George Russell put Mercedes on pole position for the Formula One Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix as the German team secured a front-row lockout, continuing their impressive form at the Lusail International Circuit.

Russell beat team-mate and world champion Kimi Antonelli by 0.128 seconds, with McLaren's Lando Norris taking third, 0.480 seconds behind.

Russell was outstanding yesterday as he topped all three qualifying segments to claim his sixth pole of the 2026 season.

Mercedes have been the team to beat since the opening practice session, with Antonelli completing a clean sweep of all three practice sessions before Russell took charge in qualifying. The result also gave Mercedes their first front-row lockout since the Canadian Grand Prix in May.

"It's always incredible driving around this circuit because it's so fast. The car has been absolutely brilliant this weekend. From the first lap in practice we were really quick," said Russell, who is eyeing a second overall position in the standings this season.

"But all sessions I was just behind Kimi – FP1, FP2, FP3. But come Q1 (the first phase of qualifying) I had a really good feeling with the car and it's great to be back on pole. It's been a while."

Russell's pole-winning lap left Antonelli in second place, with the young Italian unable to find the extra pace needed to challenge his team-mate. Despite showing impressive speed in practice, Antonelli could not put everything together in Q3, losing valuable time in the second sector.

The Mercedes driver also felt the timing of his final run could have been better, revealing that he had wanted to be among the last drivers on track rather than lead the queue.

"I had a good feeling in Q3. We need to review with the team because on that last run, I wanted to go at the back but they sent me first, so we just need to review that," Antonelli said.

> *It's always incredible driving around this circuit because it's so fast. The car has been absolutely brilliant this weekend. From the first lap in practice we were really quick.*
> ***George Russell***

Mercedes' dominance has left their rivals with plenty of work to do before today's 57-lap grand prix as the gap to the chasing teams was significant.

Norris was more than four tenths of a second behind Russell, while McLaren team-mate Oscar Piastri was fourth, another 0.070 seconds adrift.

"I feel like we did a good job today as a team, P3, P4. These guys were just too fast... They have been in another category compared to us," said Norris.


Mercedes drivers George Russell (centre) and Kimi Antonelli (right), and McLaren's Lando Norris after the qualifying session.

Red Bull also have ground to make up, with Isack Hadjar qualifying fifth ahead of Max Verstappen in sixth.

Verstappen, who has won the last three editions of the Qatar Grand Prix, now faces a major challenge in his bid for a fourth consecutive victory at Lusail. With Mercedes occupying the front row and showing superior pace throughout the weekend, the Dutchman will need a strong start and an effective race strategy to get into contention.

"Not a good weekend so far for us. I just couldn't get the balance together. Too disconnected. I think that's the main problem," Verstappen said.

"I think at the same time it just highlights where we are still lacking compared to our competition, where I think on a track like this, high-speed corners, like the aero efficiency, we're just not at that same level. We're quite good at low speed."

His recent victory in Las Vegas has kept him in strong form, but qualifying has left him with plenty of ground to recover.

Ferrari endured a disappointing session, with Charles Leclerc qualifying seventh and Lewis Hamilton ninth. Racing Bulls' Arvid Lindblad split the two Ferraris in eighth, while team-mate Liam Lawson completed the top 10.

Ollie Bearman was 11th for Haas, followed by Pierre Gasly, Gabriel Bortoleto, Franco Colapinto, Rafael Camara and Nico Hulkenberg.

Williams drivers Carlos Sainz and Alexander Albon were eliminated in Q1 in 17th and 18th, ahead of Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso and Lance Stroll in 19th and 20th.

Valtteri Bottas qualified 21st for Cadillac, with team-mate Sergio Perez last in 22nd.

Tyre management will be another major factor today.

Pirelli has imposed a maximum of 27 laps per tyre set for the 57-lap race because of concerns over high tyre wear, meaning teams will have to make at least two pit stops.


Mercedes' George Russell celebrates after securing the pole position. PICS: MercedesAMGF1


George Russell beats team-mate and world champion Kimi Antonelli by 0.128 seconds.

FORMULA 1 GRID

1	RUSSELL	2	ANTONELLI
3	NORRIS	4	PIASTRI
5	HADJAR	6	VERSTAPPEN
7	LECLERC	8	LINDBLAD
9	HAMILTON	10	LAWSON
11	BEARMAN	12	GASLY
13	BORTOLETO	14	COLAPINTO
15	CAMARA	16	HULKENBERG
17	SAINZ	18	ALBON
19	ALONSO	20	STROLL
21	BOTTAS	22	PEREZ

F1 has a duty to promote peace and positivity in the region: Domenicali

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Ahead of the Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix 2026 and speaking exclusively to Finish Line, beIN Sports' Arabic-language F1 podcast, F1 President and CEO Stefano Domenicali has emphasised the role of sport in promoting peace and bringing people together.

Speaking during a specially recorded episode of beIN's new podcast, Domenicali addressed the decision to proceed with the final two races of the season in the Middle East, highlighting Formula 1's commitment to bringing a message of peace and positivity to the region.

"We felt that, as a sign that the sport wants to bring peace, as a sign that the sport wants to connect people, it would've been a mistake not to come," Domenicali said during a specially recorded episode ahead of today's Grand Prix at Lusail International Circuit.

"Therefore, [we're] happy to be here, happy that we can start this event knowing there will be a lot of people that will come. We hope to have an incredible weekend that will be perceived as a sort of new [and] positive energy, which we have a duty to bring [to] this region – a region that is affected by the situation and operations that are very invasive.

"I can understand for the population that is involved that they are having a lot of worries, so that's why we really hope we can bring a message of peace and positivity."

Developed as part of beIN's partnership with Formula 1, Finish Line offers Arabic-speaking audiences dedicated F1 content, exclusive interviews and insights from across the sport.

The full interview is available at: https://youtu.be/Atq4SkrPFCo

Al Mannai: Qatar ready for new era in motorsport

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar is entering a new phase in its motorsport journey with ambitions to move beyond hosting major international championships and establish itself as a key hub for the global racing industry, Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) and Lusail International Circuit (LIC) President Abdulrahman bin Abdullatif Al Mannai said yesterday.

Speaking during a media roundtable on the sidelines of the Formula 1 Qatar Grand Prix at Lusail International Circuit, Al Mannai said the focus was increasingly shifting towards developing national talent, producing Qatari champions and strengthening local expertise.

"We are moving beyond merely hosting major international championships. Our ambition is to establish Qatar as an active hub for the racing industry, while investing in national talent, developing Qatari champions and enhancing local expertise," Al Mannai said.

Al Mannai also praised the support provided by government ministries, state bodies and security agencies in staging major international events, saying their cooperation had been vital to ensuring the success of the championships.

> *We are moving beyond merely hosting major international championships. Our ambition is to establish Qatar as an active hub for the racing industry, while investing in national talent, developing Qatari champions and enhancing local expertise.*
> ***Abdulrahman bin Abdullatif Al Mannai***

"We extend our deepest thanks to the various ministries, government bodies and state security agencies for their continuous cooperation and their strong commitment to the success of these events. We also thank all the staff and employees at the Federation and Lusail International Circuit for their tremendous efforts and dedication," he said.

He noted that hosting the MotoGP race only a few weeks before the Formula 1 event had presented a major logistical challenge. However, he said the Federation and its partners were able to complete the preparations within a short timeframe through teamwork and coordinated efforts.


QMMF and LIC President Abdulrahman bin Abdullatif Al Mannai during a round table discussion.

"Hosting MotoGP just a few weeks ago, followed quickly by Formula 1, was a significant logistical challenge. But through concerted efforts and a unified team spirit, we completed all the necessary preparations within a short timeframe," Al Mannai said.

He added that government agencies and relevant ministries had worked to provide high-quality services and a safe environment for drivers, teams, fans and guests, describing the institutional partnership as a key factor in Qatar's ability to stage major sporting events.

Al Mannai said Qatar's focus over the past three years had been on organising world-class championships to the highest standards, helping strengthen its position as a global sports destination.

But he stressed that the ambition goes beyond hosting major races.

"This new phase is about building national talent, developing teams, enhancing knowledge and expertise, supporting businesses linked to the sport and creating tangible opportunities that leave a sustainable national legacy," he said.

The QMMF president said developing Qatari champions remained a top priority, pointing to the recent performance of Qatari driver Abdullah Al-Khelaifi in the Le Mans international series. Al-Khelaifi, competing as part of the Qatar team, secured first place despite starting from the back of the grid.

"This achievement reflects the significant progress being made in Qatari motorsport and demonstrates the ability of our drivers to compete and excel at the highest global levels," he said.

He also praised Qatar's world champion Nasser Al-Attiyah for continuing to raise the country's flag internationally, particularly through his successes in the Middle East Rally Championship and Dakar Rally.

Al Mannai said Al-Attiyah's achievements were a source of pride and an inspiration for developing a new generation of Qatari champions.

He said the coming period would see further efforts to strengthen Qatar's motorsport ecosystem, expand its international presence and invest in national talent.

"Our objective is to ensure that Qatar's role extends beyond hosting major races and that we become a fundamental partner in developing champions and shaping the future of motorsport," Al Mannai said.

Boudot guides Lueur De Faust to Lekhraib Cup victory

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Lueur De Faust bounced back to winning form with an impressive victory in the Lekhraib Cup at Al Uqda Racecourse yesterday, securing her first success of the 2026/27 season on her second appearance.

The five-year-old bay mare came through strongly in the closing stages of the 2,100m Purebred Arabian Handicap (Class 2) to win for owner Khalifa bin Sheail Al-Kuwari, with PC Boudot in the saddle and Hamad Al-Jehani training. The victory also helped Al-Jehani complete a double on the card.

Having finished third in the Qetaifan Cup, a Purebred Arabian Conditions Class 2 race on November 5, Lueur De Faust showed improved form to return to the winner's enclosure.

Breaking sharply from stall 2, she initially took the lead before Boudot settled her behind the front-runners. AJS Falak set the early pace, followed by Samsa Al Shahania and Medan, with the field maintaining its positions through much of the race.

Approaching the home turn, Boudot asked Lueur De Faust to quicken, and the mare responded decisively, sweeping past the leaders to take command.

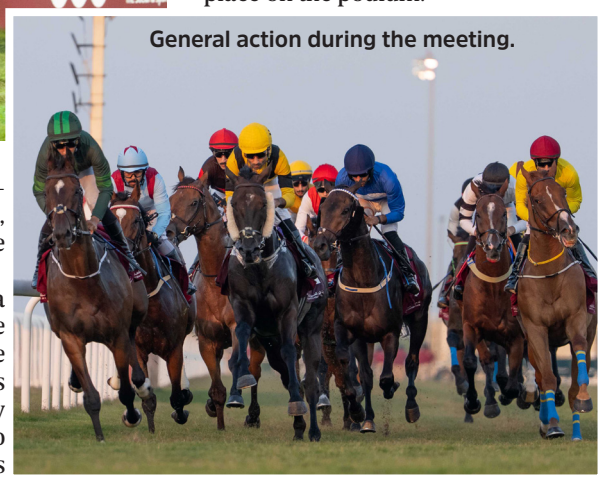

Lueur De Faust storms to Lekhraib Cup win under PC Boudot. PICS: Juhaim/QREC

Despite making her move relatively early, she maintained a strong gallop in the closing stages and held off her challengers to secure a convincing victory.

Earlier on the card, Al-Jehani also celebrated success with Serengeti Sunset, who won the Thoroughbred Handicap for three-year-olds and older, completing the trainer's double.

Samsa Al Shahania attempted to keep pace with the winner in the closing stages but was unable to make any significant inroads into Lueur De Faust's advantage. The Al Shahania Stud-owned filly, trained by Rudy Nerbonne and ridden by Lukas Delozier, nevertheless finished comfortably clear of the rest of the field to claim second place.

A further three lengths behind, Al Shaqab Racing's Shabbab came through to finish third under Jefferson Smith. Trained by Elvis Guerra, Shabbab had been towards the rear of the field for much of the race but produced a strong late run to secure a place on the podium.


General action during the meeting.

17th Al Uqda Race Meeting
Lekhraib Cup
WINNERS: (Horse, Trainer, Jockey)

Lekhraib Cup, Purebred Arabian Handicap 80-105
Lueur De Faust, Hamad Al-Jehani, PC Boudot
Local Purebred Arabian Conditions
Aneed Al Shahania, Rudy Nerbonne, Lukas Delozier
Thoroughbred Handicap 65-85
Deira Storm, Ibrahim Saeed Al Malki, Patrick Cosgrave
Thoroughbred Fillies & Mares Handicap 65-85
Its All Peachy, M.H.K Al Attiyah, Szczepan Mazur
Local Thoroughbred Handicap 0-55
Al Yateema, Mohammed Al Ghazali, Marco Casamento
Thoroughbred Handicap
Serengeti Sunset, Hamad Al-Jehani, Saleh Faraj Al-Otaibi
Local Purebred Arabian Maiden
Okaz, Elvis Guerra, Faleh Bughenaim
Thoroughbred Maiden
Cluain Peata, Dr Fahad Salman Al-Hajri, Salman Fahad Al-Hajri

Al Attiyah excels in Diamond Tour at Hathab


Hamad Ali Al-Attiyah claimed the Diamond Tour title.

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Hamad Ali Al-Attiyah claimed the 150cm Diamond Tour title on the final day of the seventh leg of the 10th Longines Hathab Qatar Equestrian Tour at the Qatar Equestrian Federation's indoor arena yesterday.

Al Attiyah produced a faultless jump-off, completing the course in 35.16 seconds aboard Midas to secure first place. Sirine Cherif finished second in 38.42 seconds on Triple T Calamando, while Christine Vanderveen took third place in 70.42 seconds riding Ranz Ammen.

In the 120cm Bronze Tour individual category, Khalifa Abdullah Al-Attiyah topped the competition on Elio in 52.12 seconds. Khalid Jassim Al-Suwaidi finished second on Queenie Z in 54.64 seconds, while Saif Mohammed Al-Kaabi took third place on Van Dieli in 55.58 seconds.


Diamond Tour podium winners were awarded by Tour Organising Member Amer Mohammed Al Humaidi.


Head of Hathab Facilities and Logistics Services Committee Mohammad Saleh Al Marri presented the awards to the Bronze Tour individual winners.

In the team category, Doha Stars claimed first place with a combined time of 120.29 seconds. Al-Bida'a finished second in 124 seconds, while Al Shaqab Bronze took third place with 112.74 seconds.

Meanwhile, Mashael Mohammed Al Thani won the 90cm Future Riders class aboard Malaga in 50.34 seconds. Sultan Abdulaziz Al-Sada finished second on Argileth Squid in 51.06 seconds, while Salman Faisal Al-Marri took third place on Hendrix in 51.19 seconds.

Dressage competitions across the Silver and Gold categories also featured on the final day of the seventh leg.

Hamad Nasser Al-Marri secured first and third places in the Silver Dressage round with scores of 71.105 and 68.563 points, while Michelle Grimes finished second with 70.667 points. In the junior category, Al-Marri again claimed the top two positions with the same scores, while Mohammed Abdullah Al-Marri took third place with 64.063 points.

In the Gold Round, Sheikha Maryam Hamad Al Thani topped the standings with 74.275 points, followed by Maryam Ahmed Al-Buainain with 73.242 points and Jassim Al-Jaham Al-Kuwari with 71.475 points.

The team dressage competition saw Triple E take first place with 144.942 points. Ajwad finished second with 139.559 points, while Doha Harmony secured third place with 132.272 points.

AMIR CUP

Malaysia and Republic of Korea bowlers shine in Doha

DOHA: Malaysia and Republic of Korea bowlers dominated the sixth day of H H the Amir Bowling Cup, which continued yesterday with five attempts featuring 42 players from 19 countries.

Malaysian Tun Hakim topped the first attempt with 739 points, narrowly edging Ireland's Christopher Sloane (737), while Republic of Korea's Jang Jae-yong finished third with 705.

Jang bounced back to win the second attempt with 716 points, followed by Malaysia's Nora Nastassia (692) and Iceland's Arnar Jonsson (674). Qatar's Bader Al-Sada finished fourth with 654 points.

Qatar's Nasser Al-Sahouti claimed the third attempt with 729 points, ahead of Sloane (724) and Bahrain's Abdullah Al-Marri (711).

Sweden's Noel Torgersson received the highest score award for Friday after posting 789 points. The award was presented by Qatar Bowling Federation board member Saeed Al-Hajri.

The event continues until December 3, with a total prize fund of $129,100. The semi-finals and finals across the three categories are scheduled for December 2 and 3.

Meanwhile, Qatar Bowling Federation vice chairman of the Technical Committee Abdulrahman Mohammed Al-Jaidah said the federation was working to develop a strong national team capable of competing at the 2030 Asian Games.

He said a group of promising young bowlers had been undergoing a continuous training programme for the past three to four years, adding that the team needed another two to three years of preparation to reach the desired level.

Al-Jaidah expressed optimism about the national team's progress, saying recent results reflected an improvement in the players' technical standards. — *QNA*

FIFA Recovery Program helps restore Swiss local pitch after flood damage

GENEVA: FIFA announced that the restoration of flood-damaged Swiss local football pitch Stade des Combes had been completed with the help of the FIFA Recovery Program.

The pitch, which is at 1,033 meters above sea level in the Valais region, was severely damaged by a flood in 2024. The Swiss Football Association submitted a request to the FIFA Development Committee to repair the facilities in February 2026.

FIFA approved a fund of 80,000 U.S. dollars for the 60-year home ground of amateur club FC Iserables later that month within the scope of the FIFA Recovery Program, which supports all 211 FIFA member associations in restoring football infrastructure and activities following exceptional events.

"Football belongs to everyone, and FIFA has a responsibility to help wherever our support is needed," said Gelson Fernandes, FIFA's Deputy Chief Member Associations Officer and Regional Director for Africa and Caribbean.

FC Iserables is able to resume its football activities at the historic home after the restoration of a retaining wall, a comprehensive overhaul of the pitch, the installation of a safety barrier and the replacement of damaged floodlighting. "FC Iserables has been able to restore its sports facilities and continue football activities under optimal conditions. This project is a strong example of how international solidarity and local passion can go hand in hand," said Swiss Football Association President Peter Knabel. — *XINHUA*

Bangladesh veteran Mushfiqur to retire after first England Test

DHAKA: Bangladesh's most prolific Test batter Mushfiqur Rahim **(pictured)** will bring the curtain down on his international career after the opening Test against England in Mirpur in February next year, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) announced.

The first of the two Tests, scheduled to begin on February 14, will mark the end of a career spanning more than two decades. The series forms part of the ICC World Test Championship 2025-27.

The 38-year-old has already retired from ODI and T20I cricket, leaving Test cricket as his final international format. He has played 108 Tests, scoring 7,062 runs, including 14 centuries and 30 half-centuries.

BCB president Tamim Iqbal, who shared much of his international career with Mushfiqur, confirmed the decision and paid tribute to his former teammate.

"Mushfiqur Rahim is going to retire after the Dhaka Test against England. This is a deeply emotional moment for me. We have practically



grown up together and travelled a similar path in international cricket, sharing many experiences along the way," Tamim said.

"He has given so much to Bangladesh cricket both on and off the field, and his contribution will be remembered for a long time. His legacy is firmly established, and I have the utmost respect for his decision," he added.

Mushfiqur made his Test debut against England at Lord's in 2005, scoring 19 and three in his first appearance.

He went on to establish himself as one of Bangladesh's most dependable players, making significant contributions with both the bat and gloves before taking on the captaincy.

Under his leadership, Bangladesh recorded landmark Test victories over England and Australia, marking important milestones in the country's cricket history.

One of his biggest individual achievements came in 2013 when he became the first Bangladesh men's batter to score a double century in Test cricket. His tally of 14 Test hundreds remains the highest by a Bangladesh men's player in the format. — *AGENCIES*

New Zealand pacers leave India reeling after Blundell's 89


New Zealand's Nathan Smith (left) and Tom Blundell run between the wickets yesterday. PIC: BCCI

CHRISTCHURCH: New Zealand's fast-bowling unit dismantled India's batting order on the second day of the ICC World Test Championship encounter at Hagley Oval.

The hosts reduced the visitors to 116 for 6 in reply to the their first-innings total of 356.

New Zealand capitalised on a string of dropped catches by India early on Day 2 to stretch their innings to 116.3 overs. Wicketkeeper-batter Tom Blundell anchored the lower order with a patient 89 alongside handy contributions from Nathan Smith (26) and Kyle Jamieson (19).

Akash Deep finally broke through to finish with a hard-earned five-wicket haul (5/99), while Jasprit Bumrah endured a frustrating outing, going wicketless.

India's reply faltered immediately when Matt Henry knocked over Yashasvi Jaiswal for a duck in the opening over. Devdutt Padikkal (21) and Shubman Gill briefly counter-attacked with KL Rahul at the other end, taking India past 50 before Kyle Jamieson struck twice.

Padikkal edged one to the keeper while Gill was caught at second slip before tea to leave India three down.

In the final session, Rishabh Pant (23 off 39) tried to disrupt the bowlers' lengths by repeatedly charging down the track, hitting a six before top-edging to Jamieson at backward point. KL Rahul dug in for 25 off 80 balls, only to slash a wide Jacob Duffy delivery straight to backward point.

Nathan Smith then landed the final blow of the day on the very last delivery, inducing an outside edge from Washington Sundar to second slip to leave India deep in trouble heading into Day 3.

India spin bowling coach Sairaj Bahutule admitted that it was a disppointing day for his team and rued the lack of partnerships.

"You can never say the game is out of reach till the last ball is bowled. But it was definitely a disappointing day," he said in the post-day press conference.

India will look to eat into the New Zealand lead as much as possible in the first innings and then bounce back in the second innings with the series very much on the line.

Brief Scores: India 116 for 6 (Rahul 25, Duffy 2-21) trail New Zealand 356 (Blundell 89, Akash Deep 5-99) by 240 runs ***(ICC)***



Al-Attiyah clinches sixth Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge title

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatari driver Nasser Saleh Al-Attiyah secured his sixth Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge title after winning the 35th edition of the rally, the final round of the 2026 World Rally-Raid Championship (W2RC).

Partnered by Belgian co-driver Fabian Lurquin in a Dacia Sandrider, Al-Attiyah completed the rally in 12hr 53min 05sec to claim his third consecutive victory in Abu Dhabi.

The victory took Al-Attiyah's overall tally to six titles, having previously triumphed in 2008, 2016, 2021, 2024 and 2025.

He is now just one title behind Frenchman Stephane Peterhansel, who holds the record for most Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge victories.

French duo Sebastien Loeb and Edouard Boulanger, also driving a Dacia Sandrider, finished second in 12hr 55min 49sec, while American pair Seth Quintero and Andrew Short secured third place in a Toyota DKR GR Hilux with a time of 13hr 00min 07sec.

Despite finishing third, Quintero and Short collected enough points to secure their maiden FIA World Rally-Raid Championship Drivers' and Navigators' titles respectively.



Qatar's Nasser Saleh Al-Attiyah and his Belgian co-driver Fabian Lurquin in action in their Dacia Sandrider during the 35th Abu Dhabi Desert Challenge. PICS: DACIASANDRIDERS

Al Duhail pull level with Al Rayyan as Al Sadd falter

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Al Duhail moved level on points with Qatar Stars League leaders Al Rayyan after coming from behind to beat Al Ahli 2-1 in their Round 11 clash yesterday, while defending champions Al Sadd suffered a setback with a 1-0 defeat against Al Wakrah.

Al Duhail's comeback victory took them to 24 points, alongside Al Rayyan, who remain top ahead of their Round 11 match today. Al Sadd slipped to third with 21 points after missing the opportunity to close the gap on the leading pair.

At Al Thumama Stadium, Al Duhail had to recover from a first-half deficit after Younes Hussain put Al Ahli ahead in the 34th minute. Suhaib Gannan's run down the left caused problems for the defence, and after the ball ricocheted off an Al Duhail defender, Hussain collected it near the edge of the box before firing home off the left post.

Al Duhail responded after the break, with Almoez Ali restoring parity in the 59th minute. He capitalised on a headed pass to break through the defence, beat two defenders and the goalkeeper to bring his side back into the contest.



Al Duhail players celebrate.

Mobarak Shanan Hamza came close to putting Al Duhail ahead in the 74th minute, but his effort struck the crossbar. The pressure eventually paid off five minutes from time when Lucas Tuta rose to score with a header volley, beating Al Ahli goalkeeper Mohamed Lengliz to seal the comeback victory.

Meanwhile, Al Wakrah claimed a valuable win over Al Sadd at Saoud Bin Abdulrahman Stadium, with Essa Laidouni scoring the only goal in the 36th minute.

The Tunisian midfielder's first-half strike proved decisive as Al Wakrah held on to secure all three points and return to winning ways after a difficult run that included a defeat against Al Sailiya in their previous outing.

The result was a blow for Al Sadd, who remain on 21 points in third place after missing the chance to put pressure on the leading teams in the title race.

Al Wakrah moved up to seventh with 14 points, while Al Ahli remain ninth on 13 points.

Al Rayyan will look to reclaim their advantage at the top when they face Al Shamal at Al Shamal Sports Club today at 4pm. Qatar SC take on Al Shahania at Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium at 6:30pm.



Al Wakrah's Essa Laidouni celebrates after scoring a goal against Al Sadd.

Bezzecchi dominates Valencia sprint

VALENCIA: Marco Bezzecchi claimed his second consecutive sprint victory with a commanding performance at the Valencia Grand Prix yesterday, moving one point clear of Aprilia Racing teammate Jorge Martin in the championship standings.

Starting from pole position, Bezzecchi made a strong getaway and controlled the 13-lap race to secure a comfortable victory. Martin finished second to complete Aprilia's first-ever one-two finish in a MotoGP Sprint, while Enea Bastianini of Red Bull KTM Tech3 took third.

Bezzecchi built a three-second advantage at the front, leaving Martin with little opportunity to challenge as the Italian strengthened his position in the standings.

The race was delayed following a technical problem with the starting lights. Further drama followed when Marc Marquez's Ducati Lenovo Team machine suffered a technical failure, with smoke and flames emerging from the bike. The Spaniard was forced to leave the grid and received two Long Lap penalties.

Marquez initially recovered to third after overtaking Fabio Di Giannantonio but dropped down the order after serving his penalties on consecutive laps. He eventually finished 13th.

Bastianini held off a late challenge from Ai Ogura to secure his second Sprint podium of the season. Ogura finished fourth, ahead of Di Giannantonio and Alex Marquez. — ***AGENCIES***



Marco Bezzecchi celebrates his win.

Brentford players celebrate during match against Manchester United. PIC: Brentford



United suffer humiliating 4-0 defeat to Brentford

THE PENINSULA

MANCHESTER: Manchester United suffered another humiliating defeat, going down 4-0 to Brentford at Old Trafford in Mauricio Pochettino's first home game in charge, as their Premier League relegation fears deepened.

United have now lost six of their 12 league matches this season and remain in the relegation zone, with the possibility of dropping to the bottom of the table by the end of the weekend.

Despite showing some early attacking intent, United failed to make their opportunities count. Harry Maguire headed against the crossbar, while Patrick Dorgu missed a clear chance to put the hosts ahead.

Brentford capitalised on United's defensive weaknesses, with Callum Wilson scoring twice in the first half.

Amad lost possession in the build-up to the opener before Senne Lammens failed to keep out Wilson's effort. The 34-year-old then doubled the lead, finishing a swift counter-attack following a fine pass from Mikkel Damsgaard who fed to Dango Ouattara, whose cross went through Maguire's legs for Wilson to slide home.

United offered little improvement after the break, with Brentford continuing to exploit gaps in the home defence. Kevin Schade came close to adding a third before Kristoffer Ajer headed home from a corner to make it 3-0.

Schade completed the rout with a stylish chip over Lammens after racing through on goal.

The defeat extended several unwanted records for United. They became the first team in Premier League history to concede at least twice in seven consecutive halves of football.

They have also lost successive league matches by a margin of at least four goals for the first time since December 1963, leaving Pochettino with a major rebuilding task just three games into his tenure.

Aston Villa missed the chance to end their seven-match winless run after being held to a 2-2 draw by Ipswich Town.

Villa looked set for victory after Brazilian players Alysson and Joao Gomes gave them a 2-1 half-time lead. However, Ipswich struck again early in the second half through Leif Davis to earn a point.

Villa had several opportunities to take control of the match but failed to make the most of their chances. The draw lifted them to 11th place, while Ipswich moved up to 15th with their first point in three matches.

Elsewhere, Sean Longstaff scored twice and provided an assist as Leeds United cruised to a 3-0 victory over Coventry City for their third consecutive Premier League win.

Dominic Calvert-Lewin opened the scoring in the 40th minute before Longstaff struck twice, finding the net in the 45th and 66th minutes to seal a comfortable victory.

FIFA U-17 World Cup gears up for knockout action

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: The FIFA U-17 World Cup Qatar 2026 is gearing up for an exciting Round of 32 after the completion of the group stage, with 16 knockout ties confirmed for Monday and Tuesday.

Japan were the latest team to secure a place in the last 32 after thrashing Honduras 7-0 on Friday. The emphatic victory also ended Qatar's hopes of advancing as one of the eight best third-placed teams.

China and Tajikistan had also confirmed their progression, with China recording an 8-0 victory over Fiji, while Tajikistan held Senegal to a 1-1 draw.

Mali completed their group campaign with a perfect record after beating Vietnam 2-0, while Italy defeated Uzbekistan 3-1 to finish top of Group E. Uzbekistan must wait for the remaining results to learn their fate.

The knockout stage promises several exciting encounters, including Mexico against Argentina, Brazil versus Mozambique and Republic of Korea against Japan.



Japan players celebrate during the match against Honduras. PIC: JFA

Group stage in stats

268 A record 268 goals were scored during the opening round, breaking the previous record of 250 at Qatar 2025. A huge 40 of them came in Group H.

22 Spain plundered a group-stage high 22 goals during the groups, thanks to wins over China, Fiji and Morocco. They are now just four goals off the tournament record of 26 set by Nigeria at United Arab Emirates 2013.

15 La Roja were helped to their record haul by a 15-0 victory over Fiji. It is the second-largest victory seen at this event, trailing only Morocco's 16-0 success over New Caledonia at Qatar 2025.

10 Argentina staged an incredible ten-minute turnaround against Denmark. With the South Americans 2-0 down, Giovanni Baroni halved the arrears in the 58th, with Juan Cruz Policella equalising four minutes later. The game was then fully flipped on its head by an Alan Alcaraz piledriver in the 68th. Denmark, though, rallied to level in the 78th minute. Chile also staged an incredible recovery, scoring three times in 14 minutes to come from 2-0 down to eventually defeat Algeria 4-2 in Group J.

9 An incredible nine hat-tricks were scored during the opening round to set a tournament record, surpassing the six scored during the entirety of Qatar 2025. They were plundered by Croatia's Jona Benkotic and Toni Ruso, Korea Republic's Kim Jiwoo, Japan's Maki Kitahara, Uganda's Owen Mukisa and Uzbekistan's Sukhrob Sadirjanov. The other three came during Spain's 15-0 triumph over Fiji via Rafael Cruz, Guillermo Trujillano and Roberto Tomas. It's the first time at any men's 11-a-side global finals that three players have collected match balls from the same game.

8 Uzbekistan defeated Jamaica 6-2 in Group E, marking the first time we've seen that scoreline at this event since Chile's win over Thailand at Egypt 1997. Tajikistan also triumphed with a lesser-spotted scoreline, defeating Cuba 5-3 to become the first team since the Netherlands' against Qatar at Peru 2005 to do so.

4 Mozambique defeated Denmark 4-0 in their maiden U-17 World Cup match. It was the joint-biggest win by a newcomer at this stage, equalling fellow African nation Mali's victory over New Zealand at Egypt 1997.