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**FOOTBALL | Page 4**

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# GULF TIMES

# SPORT



**TENNIS**

**Halep sets up Serena showdown as Djoko marches on**

Page 7

**FOCUS**

# Al-Attiyah targets more Dakar wins after third title

Qatari ace says victory extra special because it came amidst the blockade

By **Sahan Bidappa**  
Doha

**D**akar Rally champion Nasser al-Attiyah was given a grand welcome on his arrival in Doha, with the ace Qatari driver declaring he will be hard to stop in the next decade.

The 48-year-old's triumph in Lima, Peru on Thursday was his third Dakar title to add to his 2011 and 2015 wins on the world's most gruelling endurance race. Al-Attiyah won by a massive 46-minute margin over second-placed Nani Roma, which gave the Japanese manufacturer Toyota their first Dakar triumph.

Al-Attiyah and his French co-driver Matthieu Baumel led after every stage bar the second day in this year's event when South African teammate Giniel de Villiers was ahead.

"I am still strong and the support from His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani always makes me much stronger and pushes me to do well," said al-Attiyah, after being received by Minister of Culture and Sports HE Salah bin Ghanem bin Nasser al-Ali at the Hamad International Airport yesterday.

"In Dakar people were saying now it will be very, very difficult to stop Nasser in the next 10 years. I don't want to say it will be easy but it is very much possible that I will win many more titles in Dakar Rally," the ever-smiling Qatari added.



Minister of Culture and Sports HE Salah bin Ghanem bin Nasser al-Ali, and Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation president Abdulrahman al-Mannai join Qatar's three-time Dakar Rally champion Nasser al-Attiyah in cutting a cake on his arrival at Hamad International Airport yesterday.



Qatar's three-time Dakar Rally champion Nasser al-Attiyah lifts his trophy during a welcome ceremony on his arrival at Hamad International Airport yesterday.

## Al-Attiyah is an inspiration, says Sports Minister

By **Sports Reporter**  
Doha

**T**he Minister of Culture and Sports HE Salah bin Ghanem bin Nasser al-Ali said Qatar's Dakar Rally champion Nasser al-Attiyah can win many more titles. Minister al-Ali, and Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) president Abdulrahman al-Mannai received al-Attiyah at the Hamad International Airport yesterday,

out the 10-stage rally.

Not only was it a first win for Toyota, but it was also the first petrol-powered car to win the Dakar in the South-American era and much of that credit goes to al-Attiyah and his mastery. But the ace driver was modest in his victory and predicted them to do

after the ace driver returned from Lima, Peru, having won his third title in the world's most gruelling endurance race. "Motorsport is a big thing in Qatar and Nasser has won the Dakar Rally title for the third time. It's the most difficult challenge anyone can achieve and Nasser has done it for third time. He is still young and hopefully he will win many more times. He is an inspiration not only for Qataris but also for people living in Qatar, and even beyond Qatar.

well in the next few years.

"I am happy for Toyota because it is the first time in history that they have won the Dakar. It's very important victory for me, my country and for Toyota. I received a call from Toyota owner Akio Toyoda, he was so proud and happy. I am sure we will be

Hopefully in 2019 we will see many more sporting achievements," Minister al-Ali said. Meanwhile, al-Mannai described al-Attiyah's recent triumph as one of the best of his entire career. "Nasser had a very strong battle in the car. I think the performance he displayed in Peru was one of the best of his career. Nasser's achievement has come in the presence of legends like Stephane Peterhansel and Carlos Sainz, who are multiple winners. I think Nasser

much stronger for the next three, four years," al-Attiyah said.

Now the Qatari legend says he will turn his attention to taking part in his seventh Olympic Games in Tokyo next year. A bronze medallist in skeet shooting at London Games in 2012, the multi-talented athlete is looking

used right strategy in the race, he pushed very hard in the beginning and then he had to pull back and manage the gap between him and the others," al-Mannai said.

"So to be here and receive Nasser is the least we can do, because to us this is really a victory for everybody - for Qatar, the QMMF, and all the drivers and members of the QMMF. It's a victory for the Middle East," the QMMF chief added. Al-Mannai also predicted al-

Attiyah to win many titles in the coming years. "Someone like him to be a multiple Dakar winner, I think it's a record. No one from the Middle East or even from outside Europe has won it three times. It's an amazing record and we are so proud. We are hoping for him to take some rest after this long trip. We are sure after this victory he will become much more stronger. I don't think honestly he is done; he still has lot to give," al-Mannai said.

he said. He also plans to defend his Dakar title in 2020 before heading to Japan. "It will be tough. I will start my preparation for the Olympic Games next week and then we will come back here to Peru to defend our Dakar title," said al-Attiyah.



Fans take selfies with Qatar's Toyota driver Nasser al-Attiyah (right) during the Dakar Rally earlier this week. Al-Attiyah won his third Dakar Rally title on Thursday. (AFP)

QSL CUP

# Qatar Sports Club, Duhail book spots in semis

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

**Q**atar SC and Al Duhail completed the QSL Cup semi-final line-up after posting victories against Al Sadd (2-0) and Al Khor (5-1) respectively in the second set of quarter-finals at the Al Sadd Stadium yesterday.

Al Kharaitiyat had beaten Al Rayyan 3-2 and reigning champions Al Gharafa blanked Al Ahli 1-0 in Friday's quarter-finals to book their berths in the semi-finals.

Thus, it will be Al Kharaitiyat vs Al Gharafa and Qatar SC vs Al Duhail in the semi-finals scheduled for 26th January.

Playing aggressive football, Qatar SC upset Al Sadd 2-0 to reach the QSL Cup

semifinals.

Ali Said al-Mohannadi fired a goal once in each half as Qatar SC wrapped up a dominant performance against Al Sadd, coached by Portuguese Jesualdo Ferreira.

Ali Said, who found the net in the sixth and 58th minutes, proved to be a thorn in Al Sadd's backline for most part of the match.

Qatar SC, coached by Argentinian

Sergio Batista, came into the game after topping Group A with three wins from five matches.

Al Sadd, on the other hand, were playing in the last-eight after finishing fourth in Group B with just one win from five games.

Meanwhile, Al Duhail eased past Al Khor 5-1 in the last quarter-final of the QSL Cup.

Fahad al-Bayati opened the scoring

for Al Duhail in the sixth minute.

Al Khor equalised through Said Brahmi in the 23rd minute.

Substitute Nasser al-Yazidi doubled Al Duhail's lead in the 56th. Five minutes later, he scored again with a close-range flick that easily beat Al Khor keeper Baba Djibril.

With momentum on their side, it was not long before Al Duhail, coached by their former player Madjid Bougherra,

jumped to a 4-1 cushion, thanks to star Moroccan striker Yousef El Arabi in the 72nd minute.

In injury time, al-Yazidi drilled one past keeper Djibril from an acute angle to complete his hat-trick and Al Duhail's big win (90+2).

Al Duhail came into the quarter-finals with two wins from five matches, whereas Al Khor had three victories to their credit.

PREMIER LEAGUE

# Arsenal see off Chelsea to revive top-four hopes

A SCINTILLATING FIRST HALF SAW CHANCES GALORE FOR UNAI EMERY'S SIDE



Arsenal's French defender Laurent Koscielny celebrates after scoring their second goal against Chelsea in London yesterday.

Agencies  
London

**A**rsenal revived their hopes of a top-four finish with first-half goals by Alexandre Lacazette and Laurent Koscielny securing a comfortable 2-0 derby win at home to Chelsea yesterday.

Victory, only Arsenal's third at home in the league against Chelsea in 10 years, left them in fifth place but cut the gap on their fourth-placed London rivals to three points.

A scintillating first half saw chances galore for Unai Emery's side who began the match in sixth spot after Manchester United's earlier win against Brighton and Hove Albion.

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang should have scored early on but sliced wide from in front of goal but strike partner Lacazette was more clinical with a superb opener after 14 minutes.

Arsenal doubled their lead in the 39th minute when skipper Koscielny mistimed an attempted header but the ball came off his shoulder and beyond Blues keeper Kepa Arrizabalaga.

Marcos Alonso headed against the post on the stroke of half-time for Maurizio Sarri's side who were perhaps fortunate not to be further behind at the interval.

Arsenal restricted Chelsea in the second half as the visitors enjoyed the lion's share of possession without ever opening up Arsenal's defence.

Not even the introduction of former Arsenal striker Olivier Giroud could liven up Chelsea's blunt attack.

The one sour note for Arsenal was the sight of Spanish right back Hector Bellerin leaving the

field on a stretcher with what appeared to be a knee injury.

Meanwhile, Newcastle United leapfrogged Cardiff City to push the Welsh club back into the relegation zone after a 3-0 win at St James' Park that featured a double from Fabian Schär, his first goals for the club.

Like Anfield, Molineux also witnessed a seven-goal thriller, with Diogo Jota scoring a stoppage-time winner for Wolverhampton Wanderers to complete his hat-trick and earn a 4-3 victory over Leicester City in one of the league's best games of the season.

After captain Wes Mor-

gan's late header looked to have earned the Foxes a 3-3 draw, Jota's clincher made Wolves boss Nuno Espirito Santo so delirious that he raced on to the pitch, celebrated with his players and was promptly sent off.

"I tried to avoid going inside the pitch but it is clear and I was sent off for it — and that was the right decision," conceded the contrite Portuguese.

Southampton also eased their relegation fears under their inspiring new manager Ralph Hasenhuetl, holding on for a deserved 2-1 win over Everton at St Mary's.

GOAL FEST

# Fortune favours Liverpool in seven-goal thriller against Palace

AFP  
Liverpool

**M**ohamed Salah twice benefited from good fortune as 10-man Liverpool showed the mental strength required of champions to beat Crystal Palace 4-3 and extend their lead at the top of the Premier League to seven points on a nervy afternoon at Anfield.

Only once previously this season had Liverpool conceded more than one goal in the league, but Roy Hodgson's Palace pushed them all the way in a thrilling encounter.

Andros Townsend gave the visitors a half-time lead against the run of play, but deflected efforts from Salah and Roberto Firmino turned the match on its head within eight minutes of the restart.

Palace showed impressive grit to draw level as James Tomkins scored a fine header with 25 minutes left, but Salah then popped up with another freakish goal thanks to an error from 39-year-old goalkeeper Julian Speroni to swing the momentum back Liverpool's way.

Liverpool were reduced to 10 men as James Milner saw two yellow cards, but a ruthless Sadio Mane finish in injury time made it 4-2.

And although Max Meyer scored a last-gasp third for Palace, they could not pull off a miracle comeback.

Like last weekend's 1-0 victory at Brighton, Liverpool dominated possession before half-time without creating too many clear chances.

Joel Matip missed the hosts' best chance, heading Milner's corner wide when perfectly placed.

However, Liverpool were stunned in the 34th minute when Townsend ghosted in to give Palace the lead against the

run of play from Wilfried Zaha's cut-back and silence the Kop.

Yet the half-time break energised the home side and Palace's lead had vanished just a minute into the second period as Salah pounced to drag Liverpool level.

From the edge of the area, Van Dijk attempted a shot that bounced off James McArthur and looped into the six-yard box where Salah was waiting to neatly volley past Speroni.

Looking to end a 29-year wait to win the title, Liverpool again got the fortune they may need to hold off champions Manchester City with a second moments later.

Naby Keita fed Firmino inside the area and his shot also deflected past the helpless Speroni.

Liverpool immediately seemed to click into top gear and started attacking at will, but were hit by another Palace sucker-punch as Tomkins rose to score a superb header after 65 minutes from Luka Milivojevic's corner.

Both sides began pushing for a winner, but it was Liverpool who found the killer touch thanks in large part to Speroni.

With 15 minutes remaining, the Argentine, making his first appearance for 13 months, parried a simple Milner cross back towards his own goal and Salah rushed in to tap over the line from just millimetres out.

The goal was certainly one for Speroni for forget, as were the last couple of minutes for Milner when he was dismissed for a second bookable offence following a poor challenge on Zaha.

That looked like ensuring a nervy ending until Mane raced inside the box and clipped into the far corner in the first minute of added time.

There was still time for a seventh goal when Meyer slotted past home goalkeeper Alisson Becker, but Liverpool held on to take another step towards the title.



Liverpool's Mohamed Salah scores their first goal against Crystal Palace yesterday.

BOTTOMLINE

# United keep rolling with 2-1 win over Brighton

Reuters  
London

**M**anchester United stretched their perfect run under caretaker manager Ole Gunnar Solskjaer to seven wins from as many games in all competitions with a 2-1 home defeat of Brighton & Hove Albion in the Premier League yesterday.

The result provisionally lifted United one place up to fifth on 44 points from 23 games, three more than sixth-placed Arsenal who were playing fourth-placed Chelsea in the 1730 GMT fixture.

United stormed into a two-goal lead through Paul Pogba and Marcus Rashford in the first half but faded in the second and served up a nervy finish to their

fans after Pascal Gross pulled one back for battling Brighton.

Solskjaer, who has rejuvenated United and reinstated the club's trademark attacking brand of football, which was rarely seen under his predecessor Jose Mourinho, praised Rashford after the 21-year old forward produced another impressive performance.

Often subbed in a deeper role during his rare starts under the Portuguese, Rashford has repaid Solskjaer's faith handsomely and scored a brilliant individual goal in his 150th appearance for United yesterday.

"Marcus Rashford has been top class," United's former striker Solskjaer told Sky Sports after becoming the club's first manager to win his first six Premier League games in charge.

"You start with work rate. He has that, works like no one else, runs channels, holds the ball up. He has now calmed down in front of goal and he's assured and is practising all the time. Now he's confident."

United left back Ashley Young added: "Marcus Rashford is an unbelievable talent. I have said it since he was in the youth team. He has the world ahead of him and can be one of the best in the world."

Pogba opened the scoring with a 27th-minute penalty and Rashford made it 2-0 in the 42nd, beating his marker with dazzling footwork on the left flank before finding the top corner from a tight angle.

Gross reduced the arrears out of the blue in the 72nd minute, drilling in a

close-range shot off the underside of the bar after Davy Propper floated in an inch-perfect cross with the outside of his foot.

United, who missed several chances to increase their lead in the opening hour, were forced to hang on in the closing stages and although Solskjaer conceded his team were on the back foot late on, he was delighted with the outcome.

"We should have maybe played the game out better than we did as the last 15 minutes we were under it," he said.

"You can't always play fantasy football. At times we did and it's a great three points."

"I can't complain can I? I am smiling and this is one of these things I will remember for the rest of my life. It's been a roller coaster and it's class to be here."

RESULTS AND STANDINGS

Wolverhampton...2	Leicester City...3	United...23	13	5	46	33	44
Bournemouth...4	West Ham Utd...0	7 Watford...23	9	6	8	32	33
Liverpool...4	Crystal Palace...3	8 Wolverp...23	9	5	9	27	31
ManUnited...2	Brighton...1	9 Leicester City...23	9	4	10	29	31
Newcastle Utd...3	Cardiff...0	10 West Ham U...23	9	4	10	30	31
Southampton...2	Everton...1	11 Everton...23	8	6	9	34	30
Watford...0	Burnley...0	12 Bournemouth...23	9	3	11	33	20
Arsenal...2	Chelsea...0	13 Brighton					
		6 Hove Albion...23	7	5	11	25	26
		14 Crystal Palace...23	6	4	13	23	22
		15 Southampton...23	5	7	11	25	40
		16 Burnley...23	6	4	13	23	22
		17 Newcastle Utd...23	5	6	12	19	21
		18 Cardiff...23	5	4	14	19	19
		19 Fulham...22	3	5	14	20	49
		20 Huddersfield...22	2	5	15	13	

P W D L F A Pts

1 Liverpool...23	19	3	1	54	13	60
2 Mancher C...22	17	2	3	59	17	53
3 Tottenham Hr...22	16	0	6	46	22	48
4 Chelsea...23	14	5	4	40	19	47
5 Arsenal...23	13	5	5	48	32	44
6 Manchester						

SPOTLIGHT

# Qatar's Almoez pick of the bunch among young guns

'OF COURSE, I AM PLAYING AS STRIKER AND I HAVE TO KILL THE TEAMS'

DPA  
Abu Dhabi

Almoez Ali has written his name in big letters at the Asian Cup in the United Arab Emirates but the Qatar striker is merely the pick of a handful of young forwards all making a name for themselves.

"I don't think about the golden boot, I am thinking to win the competition. First the team, then my achievements," he told broadcaster beIN sports.

Ali had just netted a double to down arch-rivals Saudi Arabia 2-0 to ensure Qatar, hosts of the World Cup in 2022, progressed as winners of Group E and the three-time champion Saudis were left as runners-up.

That followed a goal against Lebanon in the opening game and a record-equalling four against North Korea. While the 22-year-old Ali may not be thinking about the golden boot trophy for the competition's top scorer, it is almost certainly his already – the last to score more than seven in a single tournament was Iranian great Ali Daei in 1996.

"Of course, I am playing as striker and I have to kill the teams, this comes from the good work with my team," he said. "I scored the goals but we all worked together."

While football in Qatar does not yet match the standard in Europe, the money invested to make the team competitive for 2022 is bringing a return.

Ali came through the Aspire Academy and though a first crack at Europe, with Linz in Austria and then the Spanish lower-leagues failed, he thrived on his return to Al Duhail in Doha.

Capable of finishing well with both feet, good in the air and constantly on the move, scouts will have plenty in their notebooks on him when they report back to their clubs after the tournament.

Were it not for Ali, Uzbekistan striker Eldor Shomurodov would top the scoring chart on four goals ahead of his next chance to impress against champions Australia in the last 16.

The 23-year-old Rostov for-



Qatar's Almoez Ali celebrating one of his goals against Saudi Arabia on Thursday.



Qatar coach Felix Sanchez (fourth from right) and his support staff pose for a picture.

ward has been in dazzling form so far to net in each of his side's group games against Oman, Turkmenistan and Japan. Media reports have linked a host of European clubs with Iraq teenager

Mohanad Ali, who is officially the youngest player at the UAE.

While there is some dubiety over the Al-Shorta attacker's official age of 18, there has been no doubt about his two goals

and high quality of overall play.

"After his performances with the Iraq national team, it is only natural that there is enormous interest in Mohanad Ali, as well as some of the biggest clubs in

the Arabic countries", his agent Christian Emile told Football Insider.

"However, we are calm and will make a decision when the time is right. For now, the player's focus is fully on the Asian Cup."

Iran's Sardar Azmoun, 24, has three goals from the group phase ahead of his team's meeting with Oman today and is only likely to improve as the effect of a pre-tournament injury wears off.

"What is the most important is that we keep progressing in the tournament," he said, dismissing personal ambition in favour of Iran ending a 43-year wait to lift the Asian Cup.

Youth, however, is not everything. The only other player to have scored three times so far is Kyrgyzstan's Vitalij Lux, thanks to a hat-trick against the Philippines. The 29-year-old journeyman has spent his career in the German lower leagues.

BOTTOMLINE

# Kyrgyz star Lux – the Asian Cup's reluctant sex symbol

AFP  
Abu Dhabi

Kyrgyzstan ace Vitalij Lux claims he would rather sit in his hotel room alone than be a sex symbol after his Asian Cup hat-trick sent female fans into a spin.

The 29-year-old hunk with the James Dean film-star looks and a name that sounds like a designer shampoo, plundered a midweek treble against the Philippines to fire the White Falcons into the last 16 on their tournament debut.

"This is new for me," hat-trick hero Lux told AFP in an interview yesterday. "I can't believe it. I have a lot more Instagram followers suddenly."

Lux admits he is footloose and fancy-free, but the Kyrgyz heartthrob insists he's finding it hard to come to terms with his new-found fame.

"I'm still single, I'm searching for the right one," he blushed. "But I'm a very shy person. I prefer to sit in my room and just work hard at training."

Lux's Instagram followers jumped by some 6,000 overnight – to just over 9,000 – after his sharp-shooting swept Kyrgyzstan into the next round.



Kyrgyzstan's forward Vitalij Lux (L) celebrates with his teammates after scoring against Philippines at the Maktoum Bin Rashid Al Maktoum Stadium in Dubai on January 16.

"I'm proud that I have so many followers," said the blond bomber, whose feed shows pictures of him training or lounging bare-chested by the pool.

"It's definitely an unusual situation for me but I feel proud the fans believe in me. "I get goosebumps just thinking about the hat-trick," added Lux, who plays his

club football in Germany with SSV Ulm.

"It was a fantastic feeling – awesome, amazing. It's given me more self-belief. I feel stronger, bigger. I didn't expect it, it was just a perfect day."

Lux still has some way to go to catch Cristiano Ronaldo's 152m Instagram followers but a Kyrgyzstan official whis-

pered conspiratorially: "girls love him back home."

The player himself hastily turned the conversation to Kyrgyzstan's clash with Asian Cups hosts the United Arab Emirates in Abu Dhabi on Monday.

"It will be a tough game but they have the pressure, we don't," said Lux, who revealed that Kyrgyzstan president Sooronbai Jeenbekov had delivered a rousing pep talk over the phone before their last game.

"We can just play our football. We have nothing to lose."

For Kyrgyzstan – hitherto better known for horseback wrestling, eagle hunting and dead goat polo – simply reaching the Asian Cup was an astonishing achievement, given the parlous state of football in the former Soviet state.

But after finishing third behind South Korea and China in Group C to squeak through themselves, the Kyrgyz players are daring to dream.

"It's the biggest achievement in our football history," said Lux of Kyrgyzstan's run to the knockout stage, noting the country has won Olympic wrestling medals and long-distance track athlete Darya Maslova's gold at last year's Asian Games.

PREVIEW

# Ambitious Oman eye Iran upset

Reuters  
Abu Dhabi

Coach Pim Verbeek says Oman are by no means satisfied with reaching the last 16 of the Asian Cup for the first time and will be going all out to forge another historic breakthrough when they take on Iran today.

The Omanis will be rank outsiders when they face three-times champions Iran at the Mohamed bin Zayed Stadium in Abu Dhabi but the always upbeat Dutchman said there was no sense of mission accomplished in his squad.

"I agree that our first target was always to be in the final 16 but there was always a second target and that was to get into the next round," Verbeek told reporters yesterday.

"We do not sit in the hotel and say that we have achieved everything we wanted to achieve and let it go. This could be an historic game if we reach the last eight."

"This is not enough. We will do everything we can to get to the next round of this Asian Cup."

Oman lost to Uzbekistan and Japan in the group stage but beat Turkmenistan 3-1 in their final match to qualify for their knockout stage clash with Iran, the 29th best team in the world

according to the FIFA rankings. Asked about the gulf between Iran's standing and 82nd ranked Oman, Verbeek was dismissive.

"I have no idea about the FIFA rankings," he scoffed.

"I think in big tournaments, this doesn't matter. This is the start of the knockout stage. Everybody will be excited to play one of the best teams in Asia at the moment."

"These are fantastic games to play. We know that it will not be easy, we know the strength of the Iran team and the Iranian players. It is up to the team to play good football and, if necessary, fight to the last second."

"These are the games you want to play!"

Oman struggled to convert their chances in their group games and Verbeek said it was vital that they were clinical at one end and focused at the other today.

"My team are not as experienced in big leagues or competitions as other teams at the Asian Cup so we still have to learn that if you lose concentration for five seconds, that's a goal," he added.

"We will get chances, I'm not worried about that. Of course we have to play our best football (but) when we get those chances, we have to take them."

"We'll try to score as many goals as possible, but let's start with one."



Oman coach Pim Verbeek.

## Familiar foes Jordan, Vietnam clash again

AFC, Dubai

The AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 Round of 16 tie between Jordan and Vietnam will be a meeting of familiar foes but head coach Vital Borkelmans says the circumstances are now different with the stakes much higher.

The two sides met twice in the UAE 2019 Qualifiers, with the matches ending 1-1 and 0-0, but that was before Borkelmans took over the reins from Jamal Ahmad Abu Abed.

"I have seen, with my technical staff, many games of Vietnam. We know they are very strong but we also know their weaknesses," said the former Belgium assistant head coach. "As coach, you work on this and I believe in my players. My players are trained at a high level. We've worked together for seven weeks now and they are amazing players."

"I have talked to my players many times, 'Guys, you've made this (achievement) with what you did at this moment. You know the Vietnam team, you've played two times but that's history. Now is today, and tomorrow is tomorrow.'" Jordan were the first team to reach the last 16 after stunning defending champions Australia 1-0, beating a resilient Syria 2-0 and playing to a 0-0 draw with Palestine to finish top of Group B.

Despite their impressive group stage campaign, Borkelmans said that won't mean a thing against Vietnam.

"What happened in the first round is finished for me. For me, it's now about going to the

game against Vietnam. I never look back, only forward.

"This is totally different now, you play three games for the next round, and now you play one game to stay or go home. Tomorrow, two teams from two countries believing in what they have will do anything to go to the next round. It's totally a different game from this moment."

Vietnam advanced to the Round of 16 in a more dramatic fashion.

After suffering losses to Iraq (3-2) and Islamic Republic of Iran (2-0) in their first two Group D ties, a 2-0 win over Yemen, coupled with better fairplay points over Lebanon, saw the Southeast Asians advancing as the fourth best third-placed team.

Vietnam last reached the knockout stage in 2007 when they co-hosted the AFC Asian Cup, but with head coach Park Hang-seo at the helm, the Golden Dragons have enjoyed successes over the last 12 months.

They finished runners-up in the 2018 AFC U23 Championship, reached the Asian Games semi-finals for the first time in the country's history and lifted the AFF Championship title in December.

Jordan will be another test at the Al Maktoum Stadium in Dubai, but head coach Park is undaunted by the challenge. "We have already played strong teams in this competition, such as Iran and Iraq," Park said.

"Jordan are also well organised and well prepared and that's why they got first place in their group ahead of Australia."

LIGUE 1

# PSG claim record home win with 9-0 thrashing of Guingamp

It was PSG's largest victory at the Parc des Princes, beating an 8-0 win over Dijon 12 months ago

AFP  
Paris

**K**ilian Mbappe and Edinson Cavani both scored hat-tricks as Paris Saint-Germain romped to their biggest-ever home win with a 9-0 Ligue 1 thrashing of Guingamp yesterday.

The runaway league leaders gained sweet revenge on bottom club Guingamp, who had ended their bid for a sixth straight League Cup title earlier this month in Paris.

It was PSG's largest victory at the Parc des Princes, beating an 8-0 win over Dijon 12 months ago, but fell narrowly short of equalling their biggest win in total – a 10-0 French Cup thumping of Cote d'Ivoire in 1994.

The capital club, who lead second-placed Lille by 13 points with two games in hand, have dropped just four points in their opening 19 matches of the season as they bid for an unbeaten league campaign.

Neymar also scored twice as PSG's front three took their combined tally for the season to 58 goals, while Mbappe extended his advantage in the Ligue 1 scoring charts having netted 17 times in only 14 appearances.

PSG did not take long to forge ahead, with a wonderful goal by Neymar doing the damage.

His former Brazil international teammate Dani Alves picked out the world's most expensive player with a sumptuous pass over the top, and Neymar flicked the ball over Guingamp right-back Jordan Ikoko and slotted in his 19th goal of the season.

The home side were utterly dominant in the first half, monopolising possession as Angel Di Maria headed wide and Neymar fired a free-kick well over.

Coach Thomas Tuchel did see Marco Verratti forced from the field with injury, while Neymar also had to shake off a thigh knock.

But the 26-year-old was involved as



Paris St Germain's Edinson Cavani in action with Guingamp's Papy Djilobodji and Christophe Kerbrat yesterday.

PSG all but ended the game as a contest eight minutes before half-time, playing a neat one-two with Mbappe which allowed the World Cup winner to side-foot into the corner of the net.

Mbappe added another goal on the stroke of the interval, as Cavani's pass found him in acres of space inside the Guingamp box.

The game was even more one-sided after the restart, with Cavani tapping in Juan Bernat's low cross just before the hour mark, before nodding Di Maria's swinging delivery past helpless Guingamp goalkeeper Marc-Aurele Caillard.

Guingamp, who remain four points adrift of safety at the foot of the table, were totally unable to deal with the

reigning champions, as Mbappe sent Neymar racing clear to slide the ball under Caillard in the 68th minute.

Cavani won the three-man race to a hat-trick by miskicking a rebound in off the post, with the goal awarded by VAR, before the Uruguayan's square pass was diverted into an empty net by Mbappe to seal his own treble.

There were still 10 minutes remaining as PSG looked to match their record winning margin, and full-back Thomas Meunier got in on the act to make it nine in the 83rd minute.

A lack of injury-time was the telling factor in the hosts' failure to reach double figures, as Guingamp desperately clung on to avoid further ignominy.

FOCUS

## Napoli lash out at Italy FA

AFP  
Milan

**S**erie A club Napoli have blasted an Italian football federation appeals court's decision to reject Senegalese defender Kalidou Koulibaly's appeal against his two-match ban as "a great opportunity missed to fight racism".

French-born Koulibaly was targeted by monkey noises and racist chants in Napoli's 1-0 defeat to Inter Milan at the San Siro on December 26, before being sent off for sarcastically applauding referee Paolo Mazzoleni.

But an FIGC appeals court on Friday said it did not want to create a precedent where being subjected to racist abuse "could otherwise be used to justify any act of violence".

"(The) unacceptable atmosphere that was created inside the stadium during the match has no relevance and cannot be considered justification for an athlete to mock the referee," the FIGC said.

The 27-year-old had already missed Napoli's 3-2 win over December 29, and will miss this weekend's game against Lazio.

"The rejection of our appeal is a grave defeat for football," Napoli said in a statement issued through spokesman Nicola Lombardo. "A battle that UEFA have been carrying on – with Napoli's support for many years – has been humiliated. "But the defeat is also for those who, mistakenly, maintain there is no racism in stadiums, that hurling abuse at black people, Neapolitans and Jews is only done by a handful of people.

"Thousands of people (7,400 estimated by the Federal representative in the stadium) insulted Koulibaly because he is black.

"Koulibaly, football, the institutions, everyone emerges from this situation feeling humiliated. Removing Koulibaly's ban should have been logical regardless of the regulations and red tape.

"UEFA and FIFA condemn what happened, saying the protocol was not respected and the game should have been stopped.

"And then the appeal, with judges who tell us they are fully aware of what happened, that they stand with Koulibaly as a man, who urge him not to give up or feel alone, the way this wonderfully honest gentleman said he felt that night!"

LA LIGA

## Casemiro wonder goal helps Madrid defeat Sevilla

AFP  
Madrid

**C**asemiro's stunning long-range strike and a late goal from Luka Modric earned Real Madrid a 2-0 win over Sevilla yesterday and a much-needed boost to their flailing title challenge in La Liga.

Madrid began the day 10 points adrift of leaders Barcelona, a gap that will be restored if the Catalans defeat Leganes today, but this victory should inject a timely shot of confidence.

Casemiro's brilliant strike in the 78th minute and Modric's injury-time finish settled a cagey contest of third against fourth but Madrid were dominant in the second half and deserved more than a draw.

It means they jump above Sevilla, whom they were level on points with at kick-off, and register their most impressive result in weeks, following a run of only two wins from five matches.

Sevilla had gone top of La Liga in November when Barcelona were also stut-



Real Madrid's Brazilian midfielder Casemiro (R) celebrates with Real Madrid's Spanish defender Dani Carvajal after scoring a goal against Sevilla at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid yesterday.

tering but doubts remain about their sturdiness under pressure. In their last 28

visits to the Santiago Bernabeu and Camp Nou, they have now lost 27 and drawn

one. Isco again started on the bench, along with the struggling Marcelo, while Gareth Bale was absent as he continues to recover from a calf strain.

Vinicius Junior was Madrid's brightest spark in the first half and could have scored early after Modric robbed Ever Banega in midfield but the teenager's shot was saved easily by Tomas Vaclik.

Sevilla grew in confidence though and had the best chance before the interval as one pass sent Wissam Ben Yedder racing clear on the counter-attack.

Madrid's defenders sprawled to track the runners but Sergio Escudero arrived late on the left and only had Thibaut Courtois to beat. He drilled into the side-netting.

Modric finished the half with a bandage around his head after a collision with Franco Vazquez and his team were much improved in the second half.

Vinicius' shot was blocked, Modric curled over and Dani Carvajal weaved through. Dani Ceballos' bending effort even rattled the crossbar, with Vaclik tapping it afterwards in gratitude.

## El Shaarawy strike lifts Roma into Champions League places

**Milan:** Stephan El Shaarawy struck the winner as Roma held off Torino 3-2 to move into the Champions League places on Saturday as Serie A returned to action after a three-week winter break.

El Shaarawy fired in the winner midway through the second half after coming on as a substitute in the sixth minute for injured Turkish winger Cengiz Under and watching his side throw away a two-goal half-time lead in the second period.

Roma overtake city rivals Lazio to move into fourth place, the final Champions League berth, with 33 points from 20 games – 20 points behind leaders Juventus. "We made life complicated for ourselves as usual," said Roma coach Eusebio Di Francesco. "The important thing is that the team is showing an impressive overall approach when creating chances.

"We need to calm it down a bit sometimes and defend as a team." Roma looked to be

cruising when promising teenager Nicolò Zaniolo opened the scoring after 14 minutes at the Stadio Olimpico and Aleksandar Kolarov added the second from the spot 20 minutes later after Torino goalkeeper Salvatore Sirigu brought down El Shaarawy.

But Torino fought back after the break, with Tomas Rincon curling in a fine goal in the 51st minute and Christian Ansaldi volleying home to pull Walter Mazzarri's side level 16 minutes later. Roma bagged the three points thanks to El Shaarawy, who was set through by Lorenzo Pellegrini and shot home the winner in the 73rd minute to inflict a first away defeat on ninth-placed Torino.

"It was an important and hard-fought victory," said El Shaarawy, after the capital club claimed a third straight league win for the second time this season.

"It's a shame that we conceded those two goals, but it was a win we earned with heart."

ASIAN CUP

## Wu boosts China's chances against Thailand

AFP  
Al Ain

**M**arcello Lippi has declared striker Wu Lei ready to play in China's AFC Asian Cup UAE 2019 Round of 16 meeting with Thailand at Al Ain's Hazza bin Zayed Stadium today after recovering from a shoulder injury which kept him out of Wednesday's loss at the hands of Korea Republic.

The Shanghai SIPG forward has been training separately from his teammates since sustaining the injury against Kyrgyz Republic on Matchday One but Lippi will pick the 27-year-old as the Chinese attempt to win a game in the knockout

phase of the AFC Asian Cup for the first time since 2004. "He's ready to go, he can play in tomorrow's match," said the Italian.

"We have a few players who are not 100 percent in the best condition, but we will check in training to see if they are going well. We're ready and we'll do our best to achieve the result we want so we can go to the quarter-finals."

Central midfielder Wu Xi is among those struggling with injury while Yu Hanchao is unlikely to feature again at the tournament due to an unspecified injury as China seek to put 15 years of AFC Asian Cup disappointment behind them.

China's last win in the knockout phase came on home soil when they defeated Iran in a penalty shootout in the semi-finals of the 2004

AFC Asian Cup before failing to advance from the group phase in 2007 and 2011. They reached the quarter-finals in 2015, but lost 2-0 to hosts Australia.

More recently, Lippi's team faced the Thais last year in Bangkok, with Wu Lei scoring twice as China registered a 2-0 win. The Italian, though, is expecting a very different game on Sunday. "I can say they're a good team," said Lippi. "They changed the coach after the first match they played and they changed the tactics and basic formation after the first match.

"But what is important is they have changed their attitude. They are very aggressive, this is the characteristic of this team. They play at a high intensity and we have to be careful, smart and ready. "We hope we have the same perform-

ance we had against the Philippines because it's important not to give too much space to them."

Thailand will be making their first appearance in the knockout phase of the AFC Asian Cup since reaching the semi-finals in 1972 and coach Sirisak Yodyadthai is hoping his players can continue to play with the freedom they have shown since he took over during the group phase.

"Since my appointment what I've tried to do is inject some positivity into the squad as well as freedom and creativity so the players can express themselves to their full potential," said Sirisak, who replaced Milovan Rajevac following Thailand's 4-1 defeat at the hands of India in their tournament opener.

"You can see the results have gradually im-

proved. Hopefully we'll see that continue tomorrow."

Sirisak's side will not have Sanrawat Dechmitr available after the midfielder was ruled out of the rest of the tournament with a back injury while the coach claims he is fully aware of the threat posed by Lippi and his team.

"I've been following China closely, not just recently but for the last two years," he said. "I've also been following the development of the Chinese Super League as well.

"I don't want to pinpoint any names because China have a lot of players who are very good, so we'll be cautious about the game tomorrow and we'll be careful not to underestimate them or focus only on one player but on the team as a whole."

NBA

# Cousins scores 14, makes hasty exit in season debut

Cousins season debut came almost a year after he tore his left Achilles tendon

AFP  
Los Angeles

**D**eMarcus Cousins scored 14 points in his much-anticipated Golden State debut and Stephen Curry once again sparked as the Warriors won their seventh straight game with a 112-94 victory over the Los Angeles Clippers on Friday. Cousins shot five-of-11 from the floor, grabbed six rebounds and had three three pointers before fouling out after just 15 minutes of playing time.

Cousins season debut came almost a year after he tore his left Achilles tendon, an injury that took place when he was with the New Orleans Pelicans.

"I told myself coming in that I would go with flow and try to make the right plays," Cousins said. "It felt great to be out there. It has been a long journey. There were a lot of dark days, good days, but this is where my passion is."

Curry finished with a team high 28 points and Kevin Durant tallied 24 as the two-time defending league champion Warriors took over the game in the third quarter. The temperamental Cousins left the game at 8:51 of the fourth in what was the quickest foul out of his career.

He has now fouled out 50 times, more than double any other player since he joined the league in 2010-11. The Warriors are hopeful that Cousins will have an immediate impact, but management is also looking to see if he will be able to fit in around a bevy of all-star players.

Coach Steve Kerr said he is willing to be patient with Cousins' return. "This is about him getting confidence, getting on the floor. It takes a long time to come back from an injury. This is just the first game," Kerr said.

Elsewhere, D'Angelo Russell drained a clutch three pointer with 27 seconds remaining as the Brooklyn Nets rallied from a 21-point deficit to defeat the Orlando Magic 117-115. Russell equalled his career high total with 40 points and his three pointer gave them the lead for the first time since they opened the scoring with the first basket of the contest.

"We've got a great group of guys with the same goals and that's what we're starting to notice," said Russell. "We're

all buying in and we're all hanging on each other's success. It's a great feeling."

Spencer Dinwiddie scored 18 of his 20 points in the second half for Brooklyn, who posted their 16th win in the last 24 games. The Nets made 19 free throws compared to just 10 for the Magic. Aaron Gordon scored 23 points, Nikola Vucevic finished with 16 points and 17 rebounds for Orlando, who have lost six of eight.

After Russell hit his key three, the Nets held onto their slim two-point lead when both teams missed free throws. Orlando's Evan Fournier missed a shot in the lane that would have tied it for Orlando allowing the Nets to sneak off with the win. "It's not every day you see a team coming back from 21 points down," said Jarrett Allen. "When you start winning games like this, it definitely changes your personality."

In Minneapolis, head coach Gregg Popovich recorded his 520th win on the road as the San Antonio Spurs continued their dominance over the Minnesota Timberwolves with a 116-113 victory.

Popovich's victory ties him with Pat Riley for the most on the road by a coach in league history. LaMarcus Aldridge scored 25 points, Rudy Gay added 22 and the San Antonio Spurs held on to win their 16th game in the past 18 against the Timberwolves.

Marco Belinelli added 19 points off the bench for San Antonio, who were playing without leading scorer DeMar DeRozan because of left ankle soreness. In Boston, Kyrie Irving led by example, scoring 20 of his 38 points in the third quarter as his Boston Celtics defeated the Memphis Grizzlies 122-116.

Irving, coming off a 27-point, 18-assist performance in a win over the Toronto Raptors on Wednesday, added 11 assists and seven rebounds as the Celtics won their second straight in the wake of a three-game skid. Over his last two games, Irving has averaged 32.5 points on 62.5% shooting.

**RESULTS**

LA Clippers 94, Golden State 112; Portland 128, New Orleans 112; Utah 115, Cleveland 99; Minnesota 113, San Antonio 116; Boston 122, Memphis 116; Detroit 98, Miami 93; Orlando 115, Brooklyn 117



Golden State Warriors forward Kevin Durant (left) and centre DeMarcus Cousins (centre) reach for a rebound during the NBA game against the Los Angeles Clippers at Staples Center in Los Angeles on Friday. (USA TODAY Sports)

NHL

## Greiss shines in Islanders' victory

Reuters  
New York

**T**homas Greiss stopped 19 shots as the New York Islanders defeated the host Washington Capitals 2-0 Friday night to move into first place in the NHL's Metropolitan Division. Josh Bailey and Cal Clutterbuck scored 2:26 apart early in the third period for the Islanders, who won their fourth in a row and improved to 14-3-0 in their past 17 games to move a point ahead of the Capitals and Columbus.

The Blue Jackets lost 4-1 on Friday night to Montreal. Braden Holtby stopped 23 of 25 shots for the Capitals, but their losing streak reached a season-high four games (0-3-1). Islanders coach Barry Trotz, who led the Capitals to their first Stanley Cup championship last season, was honoured with a video tribute during a stoppage in play with 13:41 remaining in the first period.

**FLAMES 6, RED WINGS 4**

Sam Bennett scored twice, including the game-winner, in a three-point outing as host Calgary erased four different deficits to beat Detroit. The Flames tallied three power-play goals and a short-handed score, and scored four times in the final period.

Goalie Mike Smith made 31 saves in the wild win that has Western Conference-leading Calgary on a 6-0-1 roll. Jimmy Howard stopped 30 shots for the Red Wings, who had a modest two-game winning streak snapped.

**PENGUINS 3, COYOTES 2 (OT)**

Phil Kessel deflected a shot by Sidney Crosby for an overtime power-play goal to lift Pittsburgh past Arizona in Glendale, Arizona. After Richard Panik was penalized for hooking Pittsburgh's Brian Dumoulin, Kessel was in front of the net when he shoved Crosby's shot past goaltender Darcy Kuemper with 49.9 seconds left in overtime.

Penguins goaltender Matt Murray made 30 saves to improve to 10-1-0 in his past 11 starts. He is 4-0-0 in his career against the Coyotes. Kuemper, who had won four consecutive starts, stopped 32 of 35 shots for the Coyotes. Arizona had won four of its previous five games.

**CANADIENS 4, BLUE JACKETS 1**

Tomas Tatar and Joel Armia each scored twice



New York Islanders goaltender Thomas Greiss (left) celebrates with teammate Nick Leddy after their win over Washington Capitals on Friday. (USA TODAY Sports)

as Montreal earned a win at Columbus. The victory gave Montreal its first four-game winning streak of the season and a 10-4-0 record over its last 14 games.

The Canadiens won for the first time in their past five visits to Columbus. The defeat snapped the Blue Jackets' four-game winning streak. The Blue Jackets outshot the Canadiens 35-26, yet Carey Price was a difference-maker in net. Price stopped 34 of 35 shots, giving Montreal an 8-0-0 record this season when he has made 33 or more saves in a game.

**CANUCKS 4, SABRES 3**

Loui Eriksson's goal at 5:57 of the third period to break a 3-3 tie gave host Vancouver a win over Buffalo. Thatcher Demko stopped 36 of 39 shots as Vancouver earned only its second win in the past six games (2-2-2). The Sabres dropped their fourth decision in five games.

Brock Boeser led the Canucks with a goal and an assist, while Alex Edler and Sven Baertschi also tallied.

Bo Horvat, whose status was in question after he took a hard hit Wednesday against Edmonton, furnished two assists. Evan Rodrigues, Kyle Okposo and Sam Reinhart scored for the Sabres.

**PANTHERS 3, MAPLE LEAFS 1**

Vincent Trocheck, playing for the first time since he fractured his right ankle on Nov. 19, earned an assist and helped Florida snap a seven-game losing streak by defeating Toronto in Sunrise, Florida.

Florida had been on its longest skid since dropping nine in a row in 2013-14. Trocheck, a 2017 All-Star who scored 54 goals over the past two seasons, missed 27 games. He had played all 82 games in each of the two previous seasons. Mike Hoffman, Mike Matheson and Frank Vatrano scored for Florida. Roberto Luongo earned the win, making 20 saves. Ron Hainsey scored Toronto's goal.

**SENATORS 4, HURRICANES 1**

Magnus Paajarvi, Bobby Ryan, Mark Stone and Christian Wolanin scored for Ottawa in a victory that included two goals in a 13-second span. Cody Ceci supplied two assists for the Senators, who have won four of their past five games. Warren Foegele scored for Carolina, which doesn't have another home game until February. Senators goalie Anders Nilsson stopped 33 shots. Carolina goalie Petr Mrazek made 22 saves. He also gave up four goals at Ottawa, but the Hurricanes won that game.

FOCUS

## Thomas may return before break

Reuters  
Denver

**A**fter missing the entire season while recuperating from hip surgery last March, Denver Nuggets guard Isaiah Thomas reportedly may return to the court before the NBA's All-Star break in mid-February.

Sources said Adrian Wojnarowski that the two-time All-Star has been progressing in his rehab and that the Nuggets are optimistic that he could debut with the team as early as Feb. 11, when the Nuggets host

the Miami Heat shortly before All-Star weekend. According to the report, the team believes at worst he should be activated for the Nuggets' first game after the break against the Mavericks on Feb. 22 at Dallas. Thomas, who turns 30 next month, has not played a game since last March 22 while a member of the Los Angeles Lakers. He signed a one-year contract as a free agent with the Nuggets last summer, with Denver being his third team in less than a year and sixth of his career. Thomas has averaged 18.9 points and 5.1 assists per game during his off-injured career that began in

the 2011-12 season after he was drafted by Sacramento.

His finest success came with the Boston Celtics, with whom he averaged 24.7 ppg in two-plus seasons. However, hip problems plagued him last season and he never panned out for the Cleveland Cavaliers after Thomas was moved in an off-season trade involving All-Star guard Kyrie Irving.

Injuries that limited him to 15 appearances and an apparent lack of on-court chemistry with then-Cavs star LeBron James led to a trade to the Lakers, where he played just 17 games before surgery.

## Souq Waqif Equestrian Festival



Winners and connections pose with their trophies on Day Two of the horse show at the Souq Waqif Equestrian Festival yesterday.



## GOLF

# Irishman Lowry wins see-saw battle with Sterne

'I was brave out there today. I grounded out well and I'm over the moon'



Shane Lowry of Ireland (R) poses with his wife Wendy Honner and daughter Iris after winning the Abu Dhabi Golf Championship yesterday.

**AFP**  
Abu Dhabi

Ireland's Shane Lowry won a see-saw battle with Richard Sterne, needing a birdie on the last hole to win the \$7mn Abu Dhabi HSBC Championship yesterday.

Lowry held his nerves on the back nine to make up a deficit of four shots after losing a three-shot advantage early in the final round.

He closed with a one-under par-71 round for a one-shot win over Sterne, who shot a final round of 69.

It was Lowry's first win since the World Golf Championship-Bridgestone Invitational in August 2015 and he is expected to rise to number 40 in the world ranking from his current 75.

Netherlands' Joost Luiten made two eagles in his round —

including a hole-out second shot on the par-four ninth hole — to shoot a 65 on a windy Abu Dhabi Golf Club course to finish solo third at 15-under 273, one better than South African Louis Oosthuizen (66).

World number two Brooks Koepka (70) finished tied ninth on 277, which meant that England's Justin Rose will remain the world number one irrespective of his finish this week on the US PGA Tour's Desert Classic.

"It was an emotional roller-coaster today. I obviously went out with the lead by a few and before I knew it, I was four behind. I was brave out there today. I grounded out well and I'm over the moon," said Lowry, who received \$1.16mn for his fourth European Tour title but the first in which he led wire-to-wire.

"People looking from the outside probably thought I was gone, but I holed a couple of great putts

on 12 and 13 and I knew I was in it then.

"I said to my caddie walking down 16 that (if I got) three fours on the last three holes we could have a shout here.

He said he had talked in depth with his coach Neil Manchip before the tournament "about hanging in and staying in there no matter what I do and no matter what I shoot and what shots I hit". He added: "It definitely helped me out there today."

Sterne was quick off the blocks and caught up with Lowry with birdies on his first three holes. The Irishman had also started with a birdie on the opening hole, but dropped a shot on the par-four third and found his three-shot advantage at the start of the day soon vanished.

Lowry regained the lead when he birdied his 10th par-three hole of the tournament on the fourth, but the South African chipped in

for a birdie on the difficult par-four fifth hole playing into stiff headwind.

However, he did not enjoy the cushion for long and missed a par putt from a couple of feet on the sixth to tie again with Lowry on 17-under.

The tournament looked like becoming a two-horse race, with their closest rivals five shots behind at that stage, but the next two holes changed the equations completely.

Sterne birdied the par-five eighth hole to go one ahead. Lowry then hooked his tee shot straight into the water on the par-four ninth and wound up with a bogey, while Sterne made another impressive 15-foot birdie putt to go ahead by three at the turn.

The drama continued on the back nine. A bogey by Lowry on the 11th hole gave Sterne a four-shot advantage, but the burly

Irishman bounced right back with back-to-back birdies on the 12th and 13th holes.

Sterne then dropped shots on the 14th and 16th and the duo headed to the 18th hole tied on 17-under par.

Both found the fairway, but the South African pushed his second shot into the cart path on the right. He failed to get his up-and-down from there, while Lowry, on the green in two, two-putted for the decisive birdie.

"I'm just glad that I gave a good performance this week with a strong field. It's been a while since I've had a decent tournament, so I'm pretty happy with the way I performed," Sterne said.

The win takes Lowry to the top of the European Tour's Race to Dubai, while Sterne's long wait for a title — his last was at the Joburg Open in February 2013 — goes on.

## SPOTLIGHT

# Mickelson stays ahead by 2 shots



Phil Mickelson of the United States plays a shot during the second round of the Desert Classic at the Nicklaus Tournament Course in La Quinta, California.

**AFP**  
Los Angeles

"fun, if not surprising, start" to his year.

"It's fun to be in the mix," said Mickelson, whose two-round total is the second-best of his career, behind the 36-hole total of 125 to start the 2013 Phoenix Open.

Mickelson appeared to be picking up where he left off with back-to-back birdies at the 11th and 12th holes, but his approach at the 18th found the water and he took a double bogey.

An eight-foot birdie putt at the fifth sparked a string of three straight birdies and he picked up one more shot at the ninth.

"I turned a round that was not very good into a respectable round," said Mickelson, although he admitted that he would have liked to be even lower heading into a third round on the tougher Stadium course.

"If you shoot six-, seven-under par on the Nicklaus course that's a good solid round," he said. "I shot four (under) so I'll just have to come out tomorrow and shoot six or seven (under) to make up for it."

Defending champion Jon Rahm fired his second straight 66 to head a trio of players on 132 alongside Wyndham Clark (67) and Joey Garber (64).

Mickelson said he would have to stay aggressive on the weekend.

"You just have to keep firing on all cylinders and going after birdies because this is a course where there's going to be a lot of birdies," he said.

"Usually when you play that well the first two rounds you're hitting the ball where you want and making some putts. I just have to keep that going the next couple of days."

## Fujimoto takes slender lead in Singapore

Singapore: Japan's Yoshinori Fujimoto holds a one-shot advantage heading into the final day of the Singapore Open after carding a five-under-par 66 in the third round yesterday. The 29-year-old Fujimoto re-

turned to the Serapong Course at Sentosa Golf Club early in the morning to complete his remaining 11 holes from the second round, which was delayed due to rain and fading light on Friday. After grabbing the second-round

lead with a 67, Fujimoto then carded four birdies, an eagle and a bogey in the afternoon session to set the clubhouse target at 13-under.

Thailand's Jazz Janewattana-nond enjoyed six birdies and

finished with a bogey-free round of 65 to sit in second place alongside England's Matthew Fitzpatrick, who carded a 66. Four-time Asian Tour winner Chappchai Nirat surged to 10-under after sinking five birdies in

six holes on his back nine to finish three shots off the pace. The 35-year-old Thai took a share of fourth spot on the leaderboard alongside South Korean's Mun Do-yeob (67) and England's Paul Casey (68).

## BOTTOMLINE

## Henderson surges ahead, Ariya charges in LPGA

**AFP**  
Washington

Canada's Brooke Henderson fired a four-under par 67 yesterday to grab a two-stroke lead after the second round of the LPGA's season-opening Tournament of Champions.

Ninth-ranked Henderson closed a bogey-free round with seven pars in a row to stand on 10-under 132 after 36 holes at Four Seasons Golf and Sports Club in Lake Buena Vista, Florida.

"I felt like I gave myself a lot of birdie opportunities," Henderson said. "My ball striking has been really good this week and I'm happy about that. The holes where I did run into a little bit of trouble I was able to get up and down.



Ariya Jutanugarn of Thailand.

"Overall, I'm just happy to be in the position I'm in and just hope I can keep it going over the weekend."

World number one Ariya Ju-

tanugarn was hot on Henderson's heels after firing a second consecutive 67 to share second on 134 alongside New Zealand's 14th-ranked Lydia Ko and South

Korea's 32nd-ranked Ji Eun-hee.

Henderson, a 21-year-old who has now gone 34 holes without a bogey, began the day level for the lead with Ji but jumped ahead with birdies at the fourth and par-5 seventh holes, then began the inward nine with back-to-back birdies.

"It's always fun to be in the final groups and be in contention. That's what we play for," Henderson said. "It's only the halfway point. Hopefully I can keep playing the way I have been."

Ariya, who had a bogey-free opening round, took bogeys at the par-3 fifth and 18th holes but sandwiched six birdies in between. She birdied all four par-5 holes — the seventh, 10th, 13th and 17th — as well as the par-4 eighth and 16th.

"It was great," Ariya said. "I didn't expect to hit 4-under to-

day, because I was everywhere."

Ko birdied the first and fourth holes before stumbling with a bogey at the fifth. She opened the back nine with a birdie and added another at 13 but bogeyed 15 before answering with a birdie at 17 in the new event, which matches LPGA winners and celebrities from other fields.

"I've just been embracing this format and enjoying playing with these celebrities," Ko said.

Ji shook off a birdie-bogey start and answered a bogey at six with a birdie two holes later, then birdied 13 and 16 and closed with two pars to stay in the second-place pack. Henderson won last year's LPGA Lotte Championship and Canadian Women's Open to qualify for the Tournament of Champions while Ariya won three times, including her second career major title at the US Women's Open.

### Farrell injury blights England build-up

**London:** England captain Owen Farrell has suffered a thumb injury which could rule the fly-half out of his side's Six Nations opener away to Ireland in a fortnight.

Farrell is expected to return in seven to 10 days' time, and so could be ready for the match against the reigning Grand Slam champions in Dublin on February 2.

But the Saracens playmaker is unlikely to take a full part in training during England's upcoming preparation camp in Portugal ahead of an opening match where coach Eddie Jones has warned his side will "need to compete brutally in all the contest areas of the game" if they are to come away from Lansdowne Road with a win. "It's a simple procedure and he should be back in seven

to 10 days," Saracens director of rugby Mark McCall told *BT Sport* before the English title-holders' European Champions cup clash with Glasgow.

Were Farrell ruled out, his place as England starting fly-half would likely go to back-up George Ford, with Henry Slade then providing bench cover. Another alternative option could be to recall Danny Cipriani, although this would be something of a surprise move given the Gloucester No 10 was left out of Jones' 35-man training squad announced on Thursday.

England have reverted to one squad skipper in Farrell after Dylan Hartley, their co-captain during the November internationals, was ruled out of the Ireland match with a knee injury.

AUSTRALIAN OPEN

# Halep sets up Serena showdown as Djoko marches on

Serbian will next play Medvedev, who is yet to drop a set

AFP  
Melbourne

World number one Simona Halep set up a headline last 16 showdown with Serena Williams by beating her sister Venus yesterday as Novak Djokovic's relentless drive towards more Australian Open glory cranked up another gear.

On day six at Melbourne Park, the Romanian finally hit form to pull off her best win of the year and cruise past the veteran American 6-2, 6-3.

"I was super-motivated today," she said after being taken to three sets in both her opening two matches as she bounces back from a herniated disc that ended her 2018 season early.

"I have nothing to lose," she added, looking ahead to tomorrow's clash against 23-time Grand Slam winner Serena. "I'm playing against a great champion. It's going to be a bigger challenge but I'm ready to face it."

Williams crushed Ukrainian Dayana Yastremska 6-2, 6-1 before consoling her at the net as the teenager burst into tears.

The ominous 37-year-old, seeded 16, has dropped just nine games in her three matches so far on her first return to the tournament since winning it in 2017 while pregnant.

"I just play each match at a time, play as hard as I can and do the best I can. That really is all you can do," she said as she zeroes in on an eighth Australian title and a record-equalling 24th Slam crown.

Fourteen-time Grand Slam winner and top seed Djokovic is gunning for a record seventh Australian title.

He dropped a set for the first time this year against fast-rising Canadian Denis Shapovalov, before demolishing him in the fourth stanza to win 6-3, 6-4, 4-6, 6-0.

"I just tried to be in the moment and weather the storm," said the Serb, who was unsettled when the lights were switched on in Rod Laver Arena for television reasons, despite it still being daylight.

"Completely unnecessary to turn on the lights," he said in roasting the organisers.

Djokovic's victory means he is guaranteed to stay world number one when the new rankings are released after the tournament.

He next plays another up-and-coming star, Russia's 15th seed Daniil Medvedev, who eased past David Goffin and has yet to drop a set.

Another young gun Alexander Zverev made the last 16 for the first time when he swatted aside



Romania's Simona Halep hits a return against Venus Williams (not pictured) of the US during their match on day six of the Australian Open in Melbourne yesterday. (AFP)

## 'Agitated' Djokovic regrets meltdown in floodlight fury

AFP  
Melbourne

Top seed Novak Djokovic admitted he should have known better than to let a floodlight row get to him after copping a code violation during a mini-meltdown in the Australian Open yesterday. The Serb angrily blamed floodlights for dropping a tournament set for the first time as he beat Denis Shapovalov 6-3, 6-4, 4-6, 6-0 in the third round. He seethed when leading 3-0 in the third set against the 25th-seeded Canadian when the powerful lights blazed on all around Rod Laver Arena — in broad daylight. An incandescent Djokovic lost his focus, swore towards a wise-cracking fan and dropped six of the next seven games as the red mist descended under bright sunshine.

"I think there was no sense to turn on lights on court at 5pm when we have another four hours of daylight," fumed the

Australian Alex Bolt in three sets and will play former world number three Milos Raonic for a place in the quarter-finals.

Fourth seed Naomi Osaka looked down and out against Taiwanese veteran Hsieh Su-



wei before battling back to win 7-5, 4-6, 6-1 and set up meeting with Latvia's Anastasija Sevastova.

"Completely unnecessary to turn on the lights. The explanation I got was for TV reasons. I hope the viewers enjoyed it," he added. The normally mild-mannered Djokovic earned his warning from French umpire Damien Dumousois for snapping at a cheeky fan who shouted "Nervous!", as he faced three break points at 4-4, 0-40 in the third set.

"I misbehaved myself verbally. That's why I got the code violation," a sheepish Djokovic

old's best performance at the Australian Open, where she reached the last 16 in 2018 but lost to Halep.

But she looked headed for the exit when she conceded the first set and was down 4-1

told reporters after he had calmed down. "It was very bright. There was no reason for the lights. For the first two sets, just had things under control. At 4-1 (up in the third set), I was agitated. As I said, should not happen to me. I know better. I have experience. But it does happen. I guess. I allowed him to come back to the match. Other than the little letdown that I had when I was 4-1, 4-2 up in the third set, other than that I thought I played well, especially in the fourth set."

"I just didn't want to give up," said the Japanese, who received a code violation after throwing her racquet.

Sixth seed Elina Svitolina struggled with a painful shoulder complaint that required treatment at every changeover, and medical timeouts, before she somehow beat China's Zhang Shuai 4-6, 6-4, 7-5 as the temperature rose in the centre court sunshine.

"I just told myself 'you're going to die or win,'" said Svitolina, who scored her biggest career win by clinching the WTA Finals in Singapore last October.

She will next meet 17th-seeded American Madison Keys, while seventh seed and former world number one Karolina Pliskova will face two-time Slam winner Garbine Muguruza.

Eighth seed Kei Nishikori made it back-to-back victories for Japan, following Osaka on court by beating Portugal's 44th-ranked Joao Sousa in three sets.

The 29-year-old has won all three of his first week matches on Margaret Court Arena to reach the last 16 for the seventh time in nine appearances.

"I love to play this court," said the 2014 US Open finalist after delighting a large contingent of Japanese fans.

He next plays Spain's 23rd seed Pablo Carreno Busta.

SPOTLIGHT

# Lack of guidance and vision hurting tennis, says McEnroe

Reuters  
Melbourne

John McEnroe believes tennis is suffering from a lack of "guidance and vision" and says it is time the various organisations in charge began to work in harmony.

Like many fans and players the American, an analyst for Eurosport at the Australian Open, has been left bemused by the four Grand Slams all adopting different ways to finish a match.

Long final sets have been ditched at the tournament in Melbourne, where first-to-10 tiebreaks are being used at 6-6 in deciding sets to bring matches to a close.

This year's Wimbledon championships will use a regular first-to-seven tiebreak at 12-12 in deciding sets — a move brought in after last year's semi-final saw Kevin Anderson beat John Isner 26-24 in the fifth set.

That six hour 36 minute epic played havoc with the final weekend schedule and left Anderson in no fit shape to take on Novak Djokovic in the final.

While a tiebreak (first to seven) has long been the preferred system for final sets at the US Open, the French Open will continue to allow matches to run and run at least this year before, inevitably, the organisers have another look.

"So this guy or this girl, they are tennis players, right?" former world number one McEnroe said.

"They are at the Australian Open and the score is 6-6 in the fifth for him or in the third for her. And suddenly, they start panicking... what's next? Is there a tiebreaker? If there is a tie-

breaker, is it at 6 games all or 12 all?"

"And if there is a tiebreaker, is it first to seven points? Or first to 10 points? 6-6? 10-10? 12-12? Where am I? Paris, New York? London, Melbourne? What do I do? Who am I?"

McEnroe pointed to British player Katie Boulter's premature celebration in her first round match against Ekaterina Makarova, having reached seven points in the third-set tiebreak.

**Four Grand Slams and four different rules to conclude the fifth set! Hello? Is there a federation here, someone who is supposed to harmonise this**

— John McEnroe, former world number one

After realising that she still needed another three points she refocused and got the job done.

But it is not hard to see the situation cropping up again.

"Four Grand Slams and four different rules to conclude the fifth set! Hello? Is there a federation here, someone who is supposed to harmonise this kind of thing?" McEnroe added.

With the International Tennis Federation's (ITF) revamped Davis Cup, set to start in November, facing competition from the newly-branded ATP Cup, McEnroe says it is another example of the governing bodies not singing off the same hymn sheet.

"More than ever, this sport needs guidance and vision. Someone who can think beyond the childish rivalries between, the ATP, WTA, ITF, Grand Slams," McEnroe said.



France's Lucas Pouille (left) is interviewed for television by former world No1 John McEnroe of the US after the former's win over Australia's Alexei Popyrin at the Australian Open yesterday. (AFP)

DIARY

# No ID, no entry — Federer stalled by steward

Security around the Australian Open is always tight and if you don't have ID you're not getting in, no matter who you are — as even Roger Federer found out yesterday.

He might have been coming here for 20 years but the great man was denied access into the players' lounge by a very plucky security guard when he didn't have his accreditation: no pass, no entry.

Jolly Roger typically displayed exemplary manners and resisted giving the impertinent steward the big "Don't you know who I am?" treatment. Instead, he stood patiently to one side until coach Ivan Ljubicic turned up with his errant ID to allow him to proceed.

**WHO SCARES SERENA STILL?** Serena Williams' teenage third round opponent Dayana Yastrem-

ska was clearly intimidated by being in the presence of greatness, collapsing to a straight sets defeat.

Asked afterwards if she had ever been in awe as a teenage prodigy, Serena replied: "When I was young every match was intimidating but you go out and do the best you can. When I was young, I played so many people like Martina Hingis and Monica Seles and everyone I faced was in the Hall of Fame," she said.

"Also I forgot (sister) Venus — she still intimidates me." Asked if any player inspired her growing up, she quickly nominated Billie Jean King. "I feel like all of women's — not just tennis — but sport, we owe everything to Billie Jean King," she said.

"Demanding equal prize money, ethical play. Everything she has done for us and to get to know her on a personal level is inspiring."

AMANDA HAS THE Z-FACTOR

American teen Amanda Anisimova's advance to round four in Melbourne Park means a new generation has quietly made its debut at the pointy end of a Grand Slam tournament.

The 17-year-old is the first player born after 2000 to ever reach the last 16 at a major, a milestone for the post-Millennials known as Generation Z. Florida-based Anisimova, who has Russian parents, is also the youngest American to reach round four of a Slam since Serena Williams at the French Open in 1998.

Williams, who is chasing her 24th major at Melbourne Park, said she had been following Anisimova's development with interest. "I'm really excited to see this new generation of American players make a loud splash," she said.



Swiss tennis star Roger Federer (left) meets Indian cricket captain Virat Kohli (centre), and his wife and actress Anushka Sharma at the Australian Open in Melbourne yesterday. (AFP)

CRICKET / FIRST ODI

# Imam and Hafeez steer Pakistan to victory over SA

Amla's 27th ODI ton not enough for South Africa as hosts lose by five wickets



Pakistan's Mohamed Hafeez celebrates his team's victory against South Africa in the first ODI in Port Elizabeth yesterday. (AFP)

AFP  
Port Elizabeth, South Africa

Imam-ul-Haq and Mohamed Hafeez set up a five-wicket win for Pakistan in the first one-day international against South Africa at St George's Park yesterday.

The left-handed Imam made a cultured 86 off 101 balls and Hafeez hit an unbeaten 71 off 63 deliveries as Pakistan chased down a target of 267 with five balls to spare.

Hashim Amla's 27th one-day international century was not enough for South Africa, who lost only two wickets in scoring 266 runs after winning the toss.

Pakistan's bowlers deserved credit for their team's win, which came after the tourists were well-beaten in all three Test matches.

Pakistan captain Sarfraz Ahmed used his bowlers in short spells and their mixture of seam and spin proved better suited to a slow pitch than South Africa's attack.

South African strike bowlers Kagiso Rabada and Duanne Olivier conceded a combined 124 runs in 19.1 overs.

The Pakistan batsmen also proved better at rotating the strike, particularly during a 94-run second-wicket stand between Imam and Babar Azam (49).

Amla (108 not out) and new cap Hendrick 'Rassie' van der Dussen (93) put on 155 for South Africa's second wicket but although they gradually increased the tempo of their partnership they were unable to dominate the bowling.

"Those two guys batted really well but there were probably 15 or 20 more

runs that we could have scored if we had pushed a bit harder," said South African captain Faf du Plessis.

"Pakistan bowled really well in the middle overs."

Man of the match Hafeez said: "We were confident because we knew 266 was not a par score on this track. The first win of the series is very important."

Hafeez said an aggressive opening stand of 45 off 50 balls by Imam and Fakhar Zaman had given Pakistan momentum which was continued during the partnership between Imam and Azam.

Seamer Hasan Ali and leg-spinner Shadab Khan were the best Pakistan bowlers and the only two who bowled their full quota of ten overs, taking one for 42 and one for 41 respectively.

Pakistan looked to be cruising to an easy win until Imam was dismissed in

Scorecard	
<b>SOUTH AFRICA</b>	
H. Amla <i>not out</i>	108
R. Hendricks <i>c Ali b Khan</i>	45
H. van der Dussen <i>c Malik b Ali</i>	93
D. Miller <i>not out</i>	16
<b>Extras</b>	(lb3, w1) 4
<b>Total</b>	(2 wkts, 50 overs) 266
<b>Fall of wickets: 1-82 (Hendricks), 2-237 (Van der Dussen)</b>	
<b>Bowling:</b> Ashraf 10-0-64-0, Shinwari 8-0-49-0, Wasim 7-0-37-0 (w1), Hafeez 3-0-22-0, Ali 10-2-42-1, Khan 10-0-41-1, Zaman 2-0-8-0	
<b>PAKISTAN</b>	
Imam-ul-Haq <i>c Hendricks b Olivier</i>	86
F. Zaman <i>c Pretorius b Olivier</i>	25
B. Azam <i>b Hendricks</i>	49
M. Hafeez <i>not out</i>	71
S. Malik <i>b Phehlukwayo</i>	12
S. Ahmed <i>lbw b Tahir</i>	1
S. Khan <i>not out</i>	18
<b>Extras</b>	(lb1, w4) 5
<b>Total</b>	(5 wkts, 49.1 overs) 267
<b>Fall of wickets: 1-45 (Zaman), 2-139 (Azam), 3-185 (Imam), 4-218 (Malik), 5-223 (Ahmed)</b>	
<b>Bowling:</b> Rabada 9.1-51-0, Olivier 10-0-73-2 (2w), Pretorius 10-0-42-0, Phehlukwayo 7-0-43-1 (2w), Imran Tahir 10-0-44-1, Hendricks 3-0-13-1	
<b>RESULT:</b> Pakistan won by five wickets	

the 37th over when he stepped out of his crease and sliced an attempted drive to deep cover.

Two more wickets fell cheaply before Hafeez and Shadab saw their side home, maintaining an unbeaten record for Pakistan in five one-day matches in Port Elizabeth, four of them against South Africa.

Amla and Reeza Hendricks (45) put on 82 off 105 balls for the first wicket before Van der Dussen made a slow start in his first one-day international, taking ten balls to score his first run.

Van der Dussen gained confidence as he hit six fours and three sixes in a 101-ball innings before hitting a full toss from Hasan to long-off in the 47th over. Amla made his runs off 120 balls with seven fours and a six.

SPOTLIGHT

## India praised for 'perfect finish' to historic Aussie tour

AFP  
New Delhi

India's cricketers are being hailed a once-in-a-generation side as the World Cup looms, capping off a "perfect finish" to their historic Australia tour with a maiden one-day international bilateral series victory.

The Men in Blue will return home to India triumphant without having lost a Test or limited-overs series — a first on Australian soil.

The Test victory was India's first in 71 years of trying in Australia, a crowning achievement burnished by another historic first as the visitors clinched the ODI series 2-1 in Melbourne on Friday.

India earlier drew a three-match Twenty20 showdown 1-1 after one match was washed out, ending the tour without losing a series in any format.

"Perfect Finish To Dream Tour", declared the *Mail Today* daily on page one yesterday.

"One-Day wonder Under", ran a front page headline in the weekend edition of the *Indian Express* newspaper. Other Indian dailies called it a "perfect ending" and "series of firsts".

Captain Virat Kohli, riding on a high, is already looking ahead to the World Cup in May, confident his men have hit their stride as the coveted ODI cup looms.

"We are feeling confident and balanced as a side with the World Cup in mind," the skipper said.

"In all the three series we bounced back in different stag-

es, and I think that builds team character ahead, especially when the World Cup is so near. If everyone contributes at different stages, it is then you win a big tournament."

The India side is being tipped as one of the best in years.

"The teams that used to come here (to Australia), you can't compare those teams to this (one)," veteran commentator Harsha Bhogle told broadcasters Sony Six after India's seven-wicket win in the third ODI.

"It has only happened twice in history that a visiting team has won a Test and ODI series in Australia."

Indian cricketer-turned-commentator Sanjay Manjrekar also praised their "nonchalant" confidence on foreign soil and pointed to "signs that they are setting themselves high standards" going forward.

Special praise was reserved for veteran wicketkeeper-batsman Mahendra Singh Dhoni, who defied critics to smash an unbeaten 87 and register his third straight ODI half-century.

The 37-year-old had been accused by some of losing his lustre as a finisher but was named man of the series after driving India's tricky 231-run chase at the MCG.

Legendary batsman Sachin Tendulkar praised Dhoni on Twitter, saying he "once again played the role of the anchor beautifully!"

India now head to New Zealand for a limited-overs series, starting with the first of five ODIs in Napier on January 23.

The 50-over World Cup begins in England on May 30.

## Australia's Hazlewood ruled out of Sri Lanka Tests

AFP  
Melbourne

Australia suffered a big blow yesterday with star fast bowler Josh Hazlewood ruled out of their two upcoming Tests against Sri Lanka with a back injury, and Jhye Richardson replacing him. The vice-captain has hurt the same part of his back that sidelined him last year.

But Cricket Australia physiotherapist David Beakley said he was confident Hazlewood would recover in time for the World Cup in England and Wales.

"Josh has reported some back soreness over the last few days and scans have revealed a very early stage stress fracture in the same lower back

area as his previous injury from last summer," he said on the Cricket Australia website.

"He will now begin a rehabilitation programme and we are confident he will be available for selection ahead of the ICC Cricket World Cup in the UK later this year."

Richardson, who has impressed in the one-day series against India, joins Mitchell Starc, Pat Cummins and Peter Siddle as the pace attack in the squad to face Sri Lanka.

The first Test starts next Thursday in Brisbane, with the second in Canberra.

"Jhye has had an impressive first half in his Sheffield Shield season," said national selector Trevor Hohns. "We consider Jhye to be an ideal replacement in the squad for Josh."

HORSE RACING

# Anima Rock takes feature; De Mieulle wins four

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

In a thrilling finish to the day's feature, charges of champion trainer Jassim Mohamed Ghazali locked the top two spots in the Muather Cup sprint feature for Thoroughbreds, even as Alban de Mieulle saddled four winners at the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club's Al Rayyan Park yesterday.

Khalifa bin Sheail al-Kuwari's Anima Rock, who had stayed in the rear third till the bend, showed some fantastic pace on the home straight in the 1000m sprint feature under Theo Bachelot to edge out Injaaz Stud's Izzthathright, with Harry Bentley in the saddle, in the final few metres, winning by half a length at the post. Stephan Ladjadi helmed Abdulaziz Ali al-Kathiri's Cristofano Allori to third.

It was Ghazali's second victory of the day, after champion jockey Harry Bentley rode Indian Horseman to his maiden victory in the first race of the card, a maiden race for three-year-old Thoroughbreds.

After Ronan Thomas guided Patrice Nicolet-owned Baahir to the colt's maiden victory in the Local Thoroughbred Maiden Plate for three-year-olds in the third race of the day, De Mieulle had three more winners in consecutive races, including a one-



Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club's (QREC) Racing manager Abdulla Rashid al-Kubaisi (third from right) with the winners of the Muather Cup after Anima Rock won the 1000m feature at Al Rayyan Park yesterday. PICTURES: Juhaim

two for Nicolet's colours with Prince Amer and Diese finishing first and second respectively in the Purebred Arabian Handicap for horses rated 95 and below.

Umm Qarn's Dabaab, who shed her maiden status on her second outing in Qatar, and Sehab, who has now picked up two graduation plate wins this season, were the other two winners for the Frenchman.

Julian Smart-trained Al Wannah was the other Arabian, other than Dabaab, to shed her maiden status, while Hadi Nasser al-

Ramzani-schooled Sharhan Az-zam and Ibrahim al-Malki-saddled Black Fear were among the Thoroughbreds who registered their first career victory.

**RESULTS**

**Race 1:** 1. Indian Horseman (Harry Bentley), 2. Bercheny (Theo Bachelot), 3. Hard Forest (Marco Casamento), 4. Don Logan (JP Guillambert). Won by: 2, Shd, 3/4. Time: 1:14.78. Owner: Khalifa bin Sheail al-Kuwari. Trainer: Jassim Mohamed Ghazali.  
**Race 2:** 1. Al Wannah (Ryan Cu-

ratolo), 2. Aila (Ronan Thomas), 3. Enfrad (Faleh Bughanaim), 4. AJS Rayah (Tomas Lukasek). Won by: 2 1/4, 1/2, 1 1/2. Time: 2:09.98. Owner: His Highness Sheikh Mohamed bin Khalifa al-Thani. Trainer: Julian Smart.  
**Race 3:** 1. Baahir (Ronan Thomas), 2. Ezaz (Faleh Bughanaim), 3. Mukhtar RS (Jean Baptiste Hamel), 4. Hilala (Marco Casamento). Won by: 8, 1 1/2, 4. Time: 1:18.49. Owner: Patrice Alexandre Nicolet. Trainer: Alban de Mieulle.  
**Race 4:** 1. Sharhan Azzam (Tomas Lukasek), 2. Al Motanaa (JP

Guillambert), 3. Meera (Theo Bachelot), 4. Adaam Bu Thaila (Meteb Ali al-Marrri). Won by: 1 1/4, 1, Shd. Time: 1:28.89. Owner: Nasser Owaida al-Hajri. Trainer: Hadi Nasser al-Ramzani.  
**Race 5:** 1. Black Fear (Eduardo Pedroza), 2. Sharifa Bu Thaila (Ronan Thomas), 3. Gazwa (Marco Casamento), 4. Attaf (Harry Bentley). Won by: 1 1/4, 1, No. Time: 1:29.49. Owner: Sheikh Ghanem bin Jassim al-Thani. Trainer: Ibrahim al-Malki.  
**Race 6:** 1. Dabaab (Mathieu Pelletan), 2. Evolution Du Croate



Theo Bachelot rides Anima Rock to victory in the Muather Cup.

(Stephan Ladjadi), 3. AJS Al Uraiq (Theo Bachelot), 4. Fakhir (JP Guillambert). Won by: 1 1/4, Shd, 3/4. Time: 1:49.95. Owner: Umm Qarn. Trainer: Alban de Mieulle.  
**Race 7:** 1. Sehab (Ronan Thomas), 2. Abercrombie (Eduardo Pedroza), 3. Goumoh (Harry Bentley), 4. Shabih Alreeh (Ryan Curatolo). Won by: 2, 1, Hd. Time: 2:34.89. Owner: Umm Qarn. Trainer: Alban de Mieulle.  
**Race 8:** 1. Prince Amer (Ronan Thomas), 2. Diese (Mathieu Pelletan), 3. Melk (Harry Bentley), 4. Fazan (Marco Casamento). Won by: 3, 3 1/2, 2. Time: 1:48.13. Owner: Patrice Alexandre Nicolet.

Trainer: Alban de Mieulle.  
**Race 9:** 1. Anima Rock (Theo Bachelot), 2. Izzthathright (Harry Bentley), 3. Cristofano Allori (Stephan Ladjadi), 4. Shobrom (Jimmy Quinn). Won by: 1/2, 1 1/4, 1 3/4. Time: 1:00.85. Owner: Khalifa bin Sheail al-Kuwari. Trainer: Jassim Mohamed Ghazali.  
**Race 10:** 1. On The Front Line (Faleh Bughanaim), 2. Dark Light (Ivan Rossi), 3. Lawless Louis (Jean Baptiste Hamel), 4. War Order (Ryan Curatolo). Won by 1, 1 1/4, 1 3/4. Time: 1:27.03. Owner: Nasser Owaida Salem al-Hajri. Trainer: Hadi Nasser al-Ramzani.