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Warriors hold on, snap Rockets' 9-game win streak

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GULF TIMES SPORT



FOOTBALL

Liverpool 'back at the top' after Bayern win, says Klopp

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FOCUS

Qatar Olympic Committee marks 40 years of success

'Over 40 years, the Qatar Olympic Committee has made accomplishments in various fields and at all levels'

QNA
Doha

Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) celebrated its 40th Anniversary in a ceremony held at Kempinski Doha Hotel yesterday.

In a speech during the ceremony, QOC president HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani said that the founding of QOC contributed to creating a route of sports development in Qatar, thanks to the efforts made by His Highness the Father Amir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, who announced the establishment of the sports body on March 14, 1979.

"Since that day, sport in Qatar has been steadily advancing under the leadership of its presidents, who have led the Qatari sports movement and continued its march with confidence, competence and efficiency, having a great impact on the development of the Olympic movement. This was followed by an important milestone when His Highness the Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, assumed the presidency of the Qatar Olympic Committee in December 2000, which marked a turning point in the history of Qatari sport," said Sheikh Joaan.

"Doha has become a beacon of pride, thanks to the guidance and directives of His Highness the Amir, who has established Qatar's status globally, and made sport one of the important pillars for sustainable development of the country," he said.

Sheikh Joaan also praised the efforts of the champions over the past decades, achieving some of the best continental and international results that put Qatar in its current leading sport position.

He added: "Over 40 years, the Qatar Olympic Committee has made accomplishments in various fields and at all levels. QOC has made a quantum leap in sports work and has had an active presence in continental and international forums, and in various sports events and competitions in which Qatari athletes participated and won several titles and medals."

The QOC President said that with the outstanding presence of Qatar, the great development of its sports infrastructure, the world-class sports facilities, and its organisations of major international tournaments, Doha deserves to be named the capital of sport.

QOC has received numerous accolades and awards in various sectors, and has created a number of concepts through slogans such as Sports for Life, he added.

Sheikh Joaan concluded his speech affirming QOC's keenness and commitment to achieve the objectives of promoting and developing the Olympic Movement in Qatar, and developing it in accordance with the Olympic Charter in addition to advancing with its strategy in support of the Qatar National Vision 2030.

He presented an award to His Highness Sheikh Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Thani as the first QOC president.



Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) president HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani (left) honours His Highness Sheikh Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Thani, the first QOC president, yesterday.



HE the Minister of Culture and Sports Salah bin Ghanem bin Nasser al-Ali (right) at the ceremony marking QOC's 40th anniversary.



QOC president HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani (left) and His Highness Sheikh Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Thani (right) with former secretary-general and current second vice president Dr Thani Abdulrahman al-Kuwari at the ceremony yesterday.



QOC president HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani honours 2016 Rio Paralympics medal winner Abdulrahman Abdulqader (right).



QOC president HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani honours former secretary-general and current Qatar's ambassador to Germany Sheikh Saoud bin Abdulrahman al-Thani.



His Highness Sheikh Abdullah bin Khalifa al-Thani honours Mohamed Sulaiman (center), Qatar's first Olympic medal winner, in the presence of QOC president HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani.



QOC president HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani with 2016 Rio Paralympics medal winner Sara Masoud.

HE Sheikh Mohamed bin Fahad al-Thani was also honoured as a former QOC president, besides a number of senior athletes and former QOC secretary-generals, including Mohamed bin Hamam al-Abdulla, Yousef Ahmed al-Sa'at, Rashed bin Haseen al-Nuaimi, Dahlan Jumaan al-

Hamad, Sheikh Saoud bin Ali al-Thani, Dr Thani bin Abdulrahman al-Kuwari and Sheikh Saoud bin Abdulrahman al-Thani.

The awardees also included the first Qatari winner of an Olympic medal Mohamed Sulaiman, and Paralympics Rio 2016 medal winners Abdulrahman

Abdulqader and Sarah Masoud.

QOC secretary-general Jassim bin Rashid al-Buenain expressed delight for meeting the awardees on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the committee. He said with this day QOC has completed 40 years, which is a path that witnessed many proud sporting

achievements, due to the outstanding role it has played since its inception in promoting the Olympic Movement, and hosting many events and major sports tournaments.

He said the occasion celebrates the ongoing successes and developments. He then expressed ap-



QOC's secretary-general Jassim bin Rashid al-Buenain (left) and IAAF vice-president Dahlan al-Hamad.

preciation to all former QOC staff since its inception in 1979.

QOC strategy, which was launched in 2017 and extends until 2022, comes from national priorities which aim to achieve three main outcomes: increasing sports in the community, reviving Olympic values and ensuring sports excellence locally and internationally, he added.

Al-Buenain said in order to achieve these goals, a strategic map has been prepared for the QOC and the sports federations and committees.

He said this strategy is based on institutional values of appreciation, quality, trust, responsibility, development and creativity.

He said that QOC can reach the desired results with the concerted efforts of each of the QOC members, the efforts of federations and sports committees, and all local

and international partners.

He said that QOC has reaffirmed its commitment to complete its path and looks forward to excellence under the guidance of QOC President HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani. He added that after an impressive first 40 years, QOC is confident that the next phase will witness further achievements in support of Qatar National Vision 2030.

The celebration of the 40th anniversary of QOC included a discussion panel with the participation of QOC President HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, former secretary-general and Qatar's ambassador to Germany Sheikh Saoud bin Abdulrahman al-Thani, IAAF vice-president Dahlan al-Hamad, QOC second vice-president Dr Thani bin Abdulrahman al-Kuwari and QOC's secretary-general Jassim bin Rashid al-Buenain.



TOUR

Top Thailand sporting delegation visits AZF

A senior delegation from the Sports Authority of Thailand (SAT) visited Aspire Zone Foundation (AZF) on Wednesday and received an introduction to its member organisations Aspetar, the orthopaedic and sports medicine hospital, Aspire Academy and Aspire Logistics.

The delegation included Khunying Patama Leeswadtrakul, Member of International Olympic Committee (IOC), and Member of the Executive Board of National Olympic Committee of Thailand (NOCT), as well as Somsak Leeswadtrakul, President's Advisor of (NOCT), Gongsak Yodmani, Governor of STA, Montri Chaipun, Advisor to Governor of SAT and Chairman of Subcommittee of Sports Science Renovation, National Sports Training Centre.

At Aspetar, the delegation discussed opportunities for co-operation and ways in which Aspetar can support Thai efforts to establish a sports medicine hospital based on Aspetar's world-class model.

The Thai representatives were wel-



Aspire Academy Deputy Director General Ali Salem Afifa with the sports delegation from Thailand.

comed by Dr Abdulaziz Jaham al-Kuwari, Aspetar Acting Chief Executive Officer, who led the Thai officials on a

tour across the hospital's world-class facilities and briefed them on its athletic offer.

Commenting on the visit, Gongsak Yodmani, Governor of STA, said: "In my opinion, Aspetar is one of the best [sports medicine] hospitals in the world. I have been to Japan, South Korea and Germany, I believe Aspetar has one of the most comprehensive offers out there. We are looking forward to co-operating with Qatar to build a similar offer in Thailand."

The high-powered delegation then visited Aspire Academy, where the champions of the Asian Cup were born. At Aspire, the visiting delegation was met and welcomed by Aspire Academy Deputy Director General, Ali Salem Afifa, Secretary General of the Qatar Olympic Committee, Jassim Rashid al-Buenain, Director of Performance Development and Sports Sciences at the Academy professor Valter di Salvo, and Marketing & Communications manager at Aspire Academy, Ward Abdullah.

The delegation had the opportunity to see the new Aspire Academy Football

Performance Centre boasting state-of-the-art equipment and latest sporting technology on their comprehensive tour.

Mrs Khunying Patama Leeswadtrakul praised the work the Academy does in terms of youth sports development and focus on education and academic excellence. "We have seen the tremendous work in the area of sports development done here at Aspire and we intend to learn from Qatar and Aspire as well as exchange plans, programmes and know-how on youth sports development," she said.

The Thai delegation's final stop was the Khalifa International Stadium where they were welcomed by Mohammed Mubarak al-Kuwari, Chief Marketing Officer at AZF, Abdullah Aman al-Khater, Director of Events and Venues at AZF, and Nasser Abdullah al-Hajri, Director of PR and Communications at AZF. The visitors were briefed on the recently renovated stadium that will host matches through to the quarter-finals of the 2022 FIFA World Cup Qatar.

SPOTLIGHT

Messi's mission on course after Lyon masterclass

'When he is at that kind of level he is almost unstoppable. We did what we could'

AFP
Barcelona

Lionel Messi pledged at the start of the season to bring "that beautiful cup" back to the Camp Nou and on the evidence of Wednesday night, few would bet against him.

Barcelona's 5-1 thrashing of Lyon in their Champions League last 16 second leg, a score that overlooked a nervy spell in the second half when the visitors were a goal from going through, in the end, was all about him.

Messi scored twice, including once from the penalty spot, although it was no ordinary spot-kick, instead a delightful chip that hung in the air and plopped perfectly down the middle.

There was a pair of assists too, for Gerard Pique and Ousmane Dembele, during a three-goal flurry in the final 12 minutes, with Messi leaving Lyon defenders sprawled to add a second of his own.

"Almost everything went through Messi," said Lyon coach Bruno Genesio, whose team had held Barcelona to a 0-0 draw in the first leg. "When he is at that kind of level he is almost unstoppable. We did what we could."

They restricted him to two goals, one short of Cristiano Ronaldo's hat-trick that had sent Juventus through and Atletico Madrid crashing out in Turin on Tuesday.

Messi paid tribute: "Cristiano had a magical night," he said.

The talk has been of a changing of the guard, after Real Madrid's European hegemony was ended by Ajax, and a new era, with Spain having only one side in the Champions League quarter-finals for the first time since 2010.

But Messi and Ronaldo remain constant, the former now on 108 goals in the competition, behind the latter's imperious 124.

Each still has the power to settle a tie on their own and those most ardent in the debate about who is greater might be hoping for a Barca-Juve showdown when the draw for the quarter-finals is made on Friday.

"Big players like Leo and Cristiano, they give you so much," said Pique. "Not just in results."

Having Leo on your team makes you feel like you can face anything."

Certainly, Barca will be amongst the two or three opponents that clubs will be keenest to avoid, with only Manchester City and perhaps Juve, because of Ronaldo, carrying the same sense of power and momentum.

Ernesto Valverde's team are not without weaknesses.

KY WOLD
GULFTIMES
15-03-2019



Barcelona's Argentinian forward Lionel Messi (R) celebrates with Barcelona's Uruguayan forward Luis Suarez after scoring during their UEFA Champions League round of 16, second leg match against Olympique Lyon at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona on March 13.

Their defence, as proven against Lyon, is always susceptible while teams like Real Betis, Sevilla and Levante have laid a template for success in recent months, using speed on the counter-attack.

But with a seven-point lead in La Liga, Valverde can afford to keep his players fresh while last year's collapse against Roma in the Champions League quarter-finals should mean complacency is out of the question.

For Barcelona, domestic dominance has become the norm, meaning the Champions League is what will define their season, however unfair that assessment might be.

"From all over Spain, this team is given little credit for what we do," said Jordi Alba on Wednesday. "The team has been consistent in all the competitions but the Champions League is decided by fine margins. We will try to do better." Messi perhaps feels that urge more than most and the 31-year-old, who has won the competition four times but only once since 2011, is playing like a man on a mission.

"We are all extremely focused for this competition and Leo too," Valverde said. "He played an incredible match, extraordinary!"

FOCUS

Dembele out for up to a month, say Barcelona



AFP
Barcelona

Ousmane Dembele (left in picture) could miss Barcelona's crunch La Liga game against Atletico Madrid after Barcelona confirmed yesterday he will be out for up to a month with a hamstring injury. Dembele is likely to miss upcoming league matches against Real Betis, Espanyol and Villarreal while he has just under four weeks to recover in time for the meeting with Atletico on April 6.

The game at the Camp Nou could prove decisive for Barca, who already sit seven points clear of Diego Simeone's side, their closest chal-

lengers at the top of the table. Dembele appears to have suffered a recurrence of the hamstring strain he sustained during the win over Rayo Vallecano last weekend.

"The tests performed have confirmed that Dembele has a muscle injury in his left hamstring," a Barcelona statement read. "The approximate time out will be three to four weeks."

The Frenchman was not deemed fit enough to start against Lyon but he was risked for the last 20 minutes as the visitors threatened a comeback.

Dembele finished off the 5-1 victory with a goal, latching onto Lionel Messi's pass to confirm Barcelona's place in the quarter-finals.

ACCLAIM

Ronaldo football's greatest header, says Cascarino

Reuters
London

Portugal and Juventus forward Cristiano Ronaldo is the greatest header in the history of football with an extraordinary range, according to former Ireland striker Tony Cascarino.

Ronaldo, who has netted 123 headed goals in his career, scored with two headers to help Juventus come from behind and eliminate Atletico Madrid 3-2 on aggregate in the Champions League last-16 on Tuesday.

Cascarino, who scored 103 goals in his career, many of which were towering headers, explained in his column in *The Times* how Ronaldo has converted himself from a tricky winger to a forward who excelled at headers inside the box. "Ronaldo is a class above anyone who has ever played the game. The range of headers he can score is extraordinary," Cascarino wrote.

"You'll see flicked headers from a standing position, powerful leaps with power and precision, flicks at a near post after running across a defender... There are so many different varieties and he is brilliant at all of them."

Cascarino was most im-

pressed with Ronaldo's second goal against Atletico when he directed a header goalwards even though he was on the way down when he headed the ball.

"(He) was almost falling to the ground when he connected with Joao Cancelo's cross and thumped a header that Jan Oblak failed to keep out," he said. "He was on the way down from his jump and still created so much power with his header."

Cascarino credits Ronaldo's height, technique and physique which allows him to make a running jump that is 78cm high, 7cm higher than the average basketball player in the NBA. "His body shape has changed a lot over the years and he has clearly spent a lot of time working on his upper body strength. This allows him to lift himself into the air... When he's in the air, he's not coming down quickly," Cascarino added.

"The strength of his thighs is pivotal to the height of his leap... If you look at his neck he has clearly strengthened it considerably. It's very important for generating power with your head."

"He has transformed himself into the best header of the ball in world football, and that will have happened from grafting in the gym and tireless work on the training pitch."

SPOTLIGHT

La Liga slams 'catastrophic' UEFA proposals

Reuters
Barcelona

UEFA proposals to change part of the Champions League format would be "catastrophic" for soccer but FIFA plans to overhaul the Club World Cup will be a boon for the sport, La Liga president Javier Tebas told Reuters yesterday.

Tebas lashed out at changes he said Europe's governing body is considering making to the Champions League, saying they would damage domestic competitions.

Accusing UEFA and the European Club Association (ECA) of plotting in secret, Tebas said the body wanted to play European games on weekends rather than in mid-week and expand the group stage to have four groups of eight teams, rather than the current format of eight groups of four sides.

"UEFA and the ECA are negotiating



behind closed doors so that the others don't know about the reforms which put national leagues in danger," said in an exclusive interview.

"They are making reforms to the

Champions League which are very dangerous for football. It's a model which is very damaging for national leagues and also for them, as they don't understand business."

UEFA did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Tebas earlier this year made headlines for attempting to switch a La Liga game between Barcelona and Girona to Miami, a move which was opposed by FIFA.

While he remains committed to taking domestic league games abroad to widen La Liga's global appeal, Tebas said his priority was stopping UEFA's proposed changes.

"Playing a game in Miami is much less important to La Liga than the catastrophic reforms of UEFA and the ECA," he said.

"FIFA has been transparent in the last few weeks and changed its position so we support them (in their Club World Cup plans), meanwhile UEFA and ECA are doing the opposite and we are very worried about that and don't support them."

FIFA's ruling council meets today in Miami to discuss and vote on president Gianni Infantino's plans for the re-

vamped Club World Cup, which would take place in 2021, replacing the Confederations Cup.

The new-look competition would see 24 teams taking part instead of the current, annual tournament between six continental champions and an invited team, which has been dominated by the winners of the Champions League since 2013.

Tebas initially opposed Infantino's plan for an annual, expanded Club World Cup, calling it "irresponsible" last year. But he said the Spanish league and other major European leagues have radically shifted their position on it.

"In the last year FIFA has made some changes and we are on the path to a good Club World Cup which fits well into the calendar and can be supported by national leagues," Tebas said.

"It still needs to be polished but they are discussing distributing the money more evenly to smaller leagues and that's very important. FIFA have also

been more transparent about it.

"They've also committed to playing it every four years which affects national leagues a lot less."

The proposed shake up to the tournament has been rejected by UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin and the ECA chief Andrea Agnelli, who is also the chairman of Juventus.

The FIFA council in Miami will also explore the possibility of expanding the 2022 World Cup in Qatar from 32 to 48 teams, which could see the number of host countries also increase.

The tournament will take place between November and December rather than the traditional slot of June and July due to Qatar's scorching summer temperatures, which is set to disrupt domestic leagues across Europe and around the world.

"We always opposed the change of the dates and now La Liga is preparing ourselves for the break in the season," Tebas said.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Klopp says Reds 'back at the top' after Bayern win

'We think that is where this club should be, but let's carry on, we have a lot to learn'

AFP
Munich

Jürgen Klopp said his Liverpool side proved they are "back on the European stage" after an impressive 3-1 win at Bayern Munich on Wednesday put them into the Champions League quarter-finals.

Sadio Mane scored twice at the Allianz Arena to put last season's finalists Liverpool through with a 3-1 aggregate last-16 win.

"It's a big step to get this club back on the European stage and I am really happy," said Liverpool's German manager.

"If Barcelona, if Real Madrid come here, they know this is a hard place to win.

"It's a big step for us, let's see what we can do with it, but we have a set a bar for this wonderful club that we really are back on the landscape of top international football.

"We think that is where this club should be, but let's carry on, we have a lot to learn, a lot to improve, but we're back."

Having missed the goalless first leg at Anfield three weeks ago through suspension, Virgil van Dijk's long pass led to Mane's excellent first-half goal.

"His first goal was ridiculous, the calmness with how he's finished it off" Liverpool midfielder James Milner told BT Sport. "He's on fire at the minute and let's hope it continues for the rest of the season."

Dutch centre-back Van Dijk then headed Liverpool into a 2-1 lead from a Milner corner on 69 minutes after Joel Matip's own goal had handed Bayern a first-half equaliser.

Mane made sure of Liverpool's place in the quarter-final draw by nodding in six minutes from time.

Liverpool's victory means they join Tottenham Hotspur, Manchester City and Manches-



Liverpool's Sadio Mane scores their third goal against Bayern Munich on Wednesday.

ter United in the quarter-finals, completing a clean sweep of English sides reaching the last eight for the first time since 2008/09.

"It is good for English football - that's what you want," added Milner. "We have good feelings from last year, so hopefully we can carry that on and go as far as we can." It is a bleaker picture in Germany as Bayern's exit leaves no Bundesliga club in the quarters for the first time since 2005/06, as Borussia Dortmund and Schalke also bowed out in the last 16 - to Tottenham and Man City respectively.

"Both teams were very cautious for a long period, but the

second goal took the belief out of us," said Bayern defender Mats Hummels.

"Jurgen Klopp is good at neutralising the opponents' strengths and he did that once again. We didn't play well enough to create enough clear chances at this level."

This is the first time since 2011 that Bayern have failed to make the quarter-finals.

"We have the right to be bitterly disappointed, it's tough not being part of the Champions League anymore," said Bayern head coach Niko Kovac.

"We have to be positive, we have a good run in the Bundesliga

and we have to focus on that"

Milner was preferred to Fabio in Liverpool's midfield, but Klopp was forced into an early change when captain Jordan Henderson hobbled off on 12 minutes.

Brazilian Fabinho made an early entrance and Milner took the skipper's armband.

"It doesn't look so serious for Jordan's ankle, but it's always a bad sign when you have to make a change, especially in midfield," said Klopp.

Klopp had urged his side to "be brave on the ball" and it was that, combined with an amazing piece of skill by Mane, which gave them

the lead.

Van Dijk's pin-point pass over 40 metres found Mane in the Bayern box with goalkeeper Manuel Neuer off his line.

Mane spun away and looped his shot inside the far post to give the visitors a valuable away goal in the 26th minute.

Kovac defended Neuer's decision to come off his line.

"Mane was in the inside track, Rafinha was outside, so it was the right call for Manu to come for the ball," said Kovac.

"However, it shows Mane's quality that he saw where Neuer was and was able to take advantage of it."

QNB STARS LEAGUE

Al Arabi target third straight win

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Arabi are sixth on the QNB Stars League table with 27 points, from nine victories and as many defeats

A keen contest is on the cards when Al Arabi play Al Gharafa today in Week 19 of the QNB Stars League. The kick-off is at 19:25 at the Al Arabi Stadium.

Al Arabi are on a hat-trick of victories, having beaten Al Shahania 2-1 and Al Saliya 3-2 in their previous two matches.

However, Al Gharafa are going through tough times and have not tasted victory since the tournament resumed after a long winter break. The Cheetahs lost 1-2 to Umm Salal in Week 16.

Even though Al Gharafa managed to hold reigning champions Al Duhail to a goalless draw in Week 17, they crashed 0-3 against Al Kharaitiyat in the last round.

Al Arabi are sixth in the QNB Stars League table with 27 points, from nine victories and as many defeats. The Dream Team's goal difference is -10 (23 goals for and 33 against).

Al Arabi's chances of finishing among the top four, after quite a long time, are bright this time provided they play to their potential in their remaining matches. They had strengthened their ranks in the January transfer window and that is reflecting on their results.

They have the likes of Wilfried Bony, Victor Vazquez and Mohammed Salah El Neel to deliver the goods.

Al Gharafa are placed ninth with 19 points (five wins, four draws and nine defeats). Their goal difference is -5 (28 goals for and 33 against).

Mehdi Taremi, Ahmed Alaeladin, Abdulaziz Hatem and Othman al-Yahri lead their charge.

Al Arabi coach Heimur Hallgrímsson said on the eve of the match that his players are in fine fettle for the game.

"Our goal against Al Gharafa

is victory. Our preparations over the past two weeks went off well and I hope all our players would be ready for the game," said Hallgrímsson.

"Al Gharafa are a side with great potential, especially on the individual players' front. They played in the AFC Champions League last season even though they lost out in play-off this time around.

"Their current standing (ninth) and results do not reflect their potential. They have many outstanding players in their ranks."

In another match today, Al Rayyan, fresh from their win over Uzbekistan's Lokomotiv in the AFC Champions League, will take on Al Khor.

Al Rayyan Under-23 coach Gilson Souza, now also in charge of the senior team, said his players' morale is very high after the win.

"I am happy that we made good progress in the AFC Champions League by beating Uzbekistan's Lokomotiv in the second round, after losing our opening game. Our players showed good levels, thanks to team spirit which was the main reason and will be the key to victory over Al Khor as well.

"The Asian engagements are behind us for the time being and it is back to the QNB Stars League, where we will face Al Khor. They are a strong side that showed great potential during their previous two games which they won. So we must be wary of them.

"Now, I have the opportunity to be the coach and keep working towards our goals. Seventeen points separate us from leaders Al Sadd. Our goal is to stay in the top four," said Souza.

FOCUS

Goalless draw for Al Ahli, Shahania

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Ahli and Al Shahania played out a goalless draw in Week 19 of the QNB Stars League at the Al Ahli Stadium yesterday. Al Ahli moved to 30 points and Al Shahania 21.

Al Ahli's Ali Qaderi was booked with a yellow in the 23rd minute. His teammate Jhon Carlos was given the marching orders the next minute.

A minute later, Al Shahania defender Ramin Rezaeian fired a shot at the Al Ahli goal, but keeper Ivanildo Santos blocked the move with a quick save.

In the 35th minute, Rezaeian

was also booked with a yellow card. There were more bookings in the second half when Al Shahania's Sultan al-Kuwari (59th), Alvaro Perez (75) and Abdullah Khaled (82nd) were shown yellow cards.

In an enterprising move in the 70th minute, al-Kuwari got close to scoring, but his shot from close range was blocked by Rodrigues. A similar attack from Kesse Amangoua of Al Shahania was blocked by the goalkeeper in the 62nd.

Al Ahli's Jassem Mohamed fired at the Al Shahania goal, but his shot was blocked by goalkeeper Saoud al-Hajri.

In the second match of the day, Al Kharaitiyat defeated Qatar sports Club 1-0 to move to 12 points from 19 matches.

BOTTOMLINE

Scholes quits after 31 days as Oldham boss

AFP
London

Former Manchester United star Paul Scholes quit as Oldham manager yesterday after just 31 days in charge of the English League Two club.

Scholes has walked away from Boundary Park over claims of

broken promises from his hometown team.

The 44-year-old took charge at Oldham last month and won his first match, but the ex-England midfielder failed to pick up another victory in his next six games and leaves with the side languishing in 14th place in the fourth tier.

"It is with great regret that I have decided to leave the club with immediate effect," Scholes

said in a statement.

"I hoped to at the very least, see out my initial term of 18 months as the manager of a club I've supported all my life.

The fans, players, my friends and family all knew how proud and excited I was to take this role.

"In the short period since I took on the role it unfortunately became clear that I would not be able to operate as I intended and

was led to believe prior to taking on the role.

"I wish the fans, the players and the staff - who have been tremendous - all the best for the rest of the season and will continue to watch and support the club as a fan."

Scholes, who won Premier League and Champions League titles during a glittering playing career with United, was appoint-

ed as Oldham boss on a one-and-a-half-year deal on February 11. He resigned as a club director at non-league Salford, while retaining his 10% stake, before taking the job.

Scholes' departing statement is at odds with owner Abdallah Lemsagam saying upon his appointment in February that "Paul will have my backing 100 percent"

CRICKET

Beleaguered to buoyant, Australia stage turnaround

Australia pulled off a remarkable series win by winning three matches in a row

Reuters
New Delhi

Abeleaguered Australia resurrected their one-day fortunes in the most dramatic fashion in India and the timing could not have been better for a team who will be defending their World Cup title in England and Wales later this year.

Aaron Finch and his men arrived in India as clear underdogs, having endured a wretched couple of years in the format during which they lost six ODI series in a row and were ravaged by a ball-tampering scandal.

Even their 2-0 romp in the preceding Twenty20 series could not really alter perceptions about a team who had been beaten at home both in the test and ODI series by Virat Kohli's India earlier this year.

With India racing to a 2-0 lead, a seventh consecutive series defeat loomed over Australia who pulled off a remarkable comeback by winning three matches in a row for a morale-lifting 3-2 series victory.

"The resilience and fight that we showed being down 0-2 it would have been easy to roll over in those small moments in the game, just let them drift away and India win the series," Finch said after Australia's win in the series-deciding final match at Feroz Shah Kotla.

"But the fight that we showed,



Australian players celebrate a wicket during the fifth ODI against India in New Delhi on Wednesday. (AFP)

we've had our backs against the walls for quite a while now so I'm really proud of the group. From 2-0 down to win 3-2 is pretty special."

His India counterpart Virat Kohli felt Australia played "exactly" how his team had played Down Under.

"When they sensed they had a foot in the door, they made sure

they did not let us close the door in the series," said Kohli.

"You have to give credit to them. They are a very young side, very inexperienced side but they showed more heart and more confidence in pressure situations. They deserve to win. It's good for their confidence."

What makes it even more special is Australia achieved it with-

out batting duo Steve Smith and David Warner, who are expected to join the team after serving ball-tampering bans that expire this month.

This was the first time Australia overcame a 0-2 deficit to win a five-match series, and they did it without their front-line pace pair of Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood.

In their absence, Pat Cummins, who took a series-high 14 wickets, and Jhye Richardson formed a potent new ball attack while Usman Khawaja catapulted himself into World Cup considerations with a stellar performance with the bat.

The opener arrived in India seeking a maiden ODI century and returns with two of them against his name. He walked away with the player-of-the-series award, a no-brainer after his 383 from five innings.

Khawaja's red hot form, coupled with Finch's inconsistency, will present a selection headache for Australia, who will have to make a call on who should partner Warner at the top of the batting order in World Cup.

A clearer picture will emerge after the ODI series against Pakistan in United Arab Emirates later this month, but the manner of their victory against India makes Finch confident of their title defence at the World Cup.

"People have written us off for quite a while now," said the 32-year-old. "We always knew that the plans and the style that we wanted to play are all there, can win us the World Cup, win us big series against great teams and India are definitely a great team."

"It's about ourselves believing we're good enough and sticking to our game plan."

"We did that for four of the five games and... to get over the line in three of them was a great series all round."

PAKISTAN SUPER LEAGUE

Islamabad knock out Karachi



Islamabad United's Hussain Talat plays a shot during the Pakistan Super League match against Karachi Kings in Karachi yesterday. (AFP)

Agencies
Karachi

Islamabad United defeated Karachi Kings by four wickets in a nail-biting finish in the Pakistan Super League yesterday.

Alex Hales hit 41, Cameron Delport 38 and Hussain Talat 32 as Islamabad reached the target of 162 with three balls to spare at the Karachi National Stadium.

With this loss, the Kings have

been knocked out of the tournament, while United will need to defeat Peshawar Zalmi in today's eliminator in order to advance to the final against Quetta Gladiators. Earlier, Karachi Kings made 161 with Babar Azam making 62 and Colin Munro 32.

BRIEF SCORES: Karachi Kings 161 for 9 (Babar 42, Munro 32, Musa 3-42, Faheem 2-30) **lost to Islamabad United 164 for 6** (Hales 41, Delport 38, Talat 32, Asif 24*, Umer 2-16) **by 4 wickets**

No excuse, no panic — Kohli sees big picture in Australia loss

Reuters
New Delhi

India captain **Virat Kohli** is too busy counting the gains for his team's World Cup campaign to mourn the setback in their dress rehearsal against Australia. The importance of the five-match series against the world champions — India's last before this year's World Cup — was not lost on Kohli who wanted to assess the team's preparedness for the showpiece event in England and Wales. Australia spectacularly overturned a 0-2 deficit to emerge 3-2 winners, but Kohli was more interested in the big picture for his team. "None of the guys in the change room are panicking,

the support staff is not feeling down after this defeat," the 30-year-old said after their defeat in the Delhi decider. "Because we know the things that we were wanting to do in these last three games, purely because now it's only the World Cup after this..." One of them was to find a reliable batsman at number four after several candidates fluffed their audition. Ambati Rayudu scored 13, 18 and two at that position in the first three matches, while Rishabh Pant managed 16 in the fifth. Kohli himself flirted with the position in Mohali where he managed seven — his lowest of the series — and will return to his usual number three where he has been most effective. "The idea was to give the guys



on the bench and the fringe guys a bit of game time as well and just put them in those positions and see how they react," he said. "And you couldn't have tried

that anywhere else apart from those three games. That is not an excuse at all because whoever is selected for India is supposed to deliver." India will also be fretting on the second wicketkeeper's slot after Pant's patchy glove work in the last two matches when Mahendra Singh Dhoni was rested. Kohli said the team had finalised their World Cup combination, which would not be much different from the 11 players who played at Feroz Shah Kotla. "We are sorted combination wise. We know our playing XI going into the World Cup," he said.

"There will be one change maybe, based on condition... We know where we are heading. We are clear about our

playing XI." To get the best out of them, the players have been asked to take it easy in this year's Indian Premier League which begins on March 23. "We told the players 'go and enjoy these two months in IPL, don't think of performance pressure or I have to do this or that'," said India's batting mainstay. "We've given the responsibility to the player to be smart, to inform the management of the franchise and be in touch with Patrick (Farhart), our physio. "Not to say we won't be committed to the IPL, but we've got to be smart... No one will be forced to do something. Eventually, everyone will know no one wants to miss the bus to the World Cup and cost the team good balance."

RUGBY

Nations offered 5bn pound carrot for new global league

Reuters
Dublin

World Rugby's proposed global league will guarantee billions of pounds in investment while a revised schedule would address player welfare concerns, the sport's governing body said after meeting major stakeholders in Dublin yesterday.

The governing body said the proposed Nations Championship could be supported by a partnership with Swiss-based sports marketing firm Infront, guaranteeing nearly 5bn pounds (\$6.6bn) over an initial 12-year period.

Under revisions to the original tournament plan presented to unions in September, the semi-final stage has been removed with players set to feature in 11 matches and a maximum of 12 if their team makes the final.

"We're encouraged that the for-

mat revisions and robust financial model has been well received," World Rugby chairman Bill Beaumont said in a statement.

"Everyone, not just the established teams, will benefit, accelerating the development and competitiveness of the global game," the former England captain added.

World Rugby's business plans follow reports in the British media that the Six Nations is considering an offer from private equity firm CVC to buy a stake in the championship, which could prove to be a hurdle for the new league.

Officials from national rugby unions, competition owners and international player representatives attended the meeting in Dublin.

UPS AND DOWNS

World Rugby said it would continue to work with players and leading domestic club competitions to optimise the model, while also committing to invest in a women's Nations Championship.

The global league will include promotion and relegation to allow minor nations the possibility of access but that part of the format has been opposed by some unions.

"As you would expect in an ambitious, complex and multi-stakeholder project, not everyone is in full agreement on the way forward, including the matter of promotion and relegation, but we will continue to engage and consult," Beaumont added.

According to World Rugby's outline, the event will start in 2022 and run twice every four years, excluding those when World Cups or British and Irish Lions tours take place.

It will be split into two conferences, with the Six Nations retained as one and an expanded Rugby Championship tournament, adding two 'Tier Two' teams to the existing four southern hemisphere nations, as the other.

Each team will play the other once, with the top two teams from each conference playing the final.

Beirne starts as Ireland look to spoil Welsh party

Reuters
Dublin

Lock Tadhg Beirne will make his Six Nations debut as one of three Ireland changes in their bid to upset Wales' Grand Slam hopes tomorrow and end the Six Nations on a high that could even include a championship title. After a stuttering start, defending champions Ireland need to win in Cardiff and hope injury-hit Scotland avoid defeat by England at Twickenham, where they have not won in 36 years, to complete their outside shot at retaining the championship.

With one eye on the World Cup, Ireland coach Joe Schmidt is just focussing on the performance and named flanker Sean O'Brien as the other change

in the pack from Sunday's win over France that saw the world's second-ranked side recover some form.

O'Brien replaces injured number seven Josh van der Flier while Beirne gets his chance after Iain Henderson was ruled out with a knee injury. Rob Kearney will also start after a knock forced him out of the France game at the last moment.

"It's one of those things where you'd love to go two weeks in a row with the same team," Schmidt, who like his opposite number Warren Gatland will take charge of his final Six Nations game as coach, told a news conference.

"We haven't really been afforded that luxury so it's just a case of slotting people in but as I've said all through the Six Nations, it's been a really positive challenge for us to try to mix

and match players and still try to get some cohesion." The 27-year-old Beirne made a name for himself as an athletic, all-round second row in a two-year spell with Welsh club Scarlets before returning home to Ireland with Munster this season.

His versatility in being able to play at flanker could make him a valuable addition to Schmidt's already hugely competitive World Cup squad. With Wales unchanged after winning their last 13 games on the trot, Schmidt cited the championship leaders' home form as a big challenge having lost both of his previous Six Nations games in Cardiff.

"In both games, they were incredibly fine margins. Both times, I felt we played reasonably well but they're incredibly good at slowing the ball down

once you get into their danger zone," Schmidt said. "It is difficult to score against them, particularly at home. Obviously last year (in Dublin) we managed to score five tries but they do grow another leg in the Principality Stadium and that's going to be a challenge for us."

TEAM: 15-Rob Kearney, 14-Keith Earls, 13-Garry Ringrose, 12-Bun-dee Aki, 11-Jacob Stockdale, 10-Jonathan Sexton, 9-Conor Murray, 8-CJ Stander, 7-Sean O'Brien, 6-Peter O'Mahony, 5-James Ryan, 4-Tadhg Beirne, 3-Tadhg Furlong, 2-Rory Best (captain), 1-Cian Healy
Replacements: 16-Niall Scannell, 17-Dave Kilcoyne, 18-Andrew Porter, 19-Quinn Roux, 20-Jack Conan, 21-Kieran Marmion, 22-Jack Carty, 23-Jordan Larmour

NBA

Warriors hold on, snap Rockets' 9-game win streak

'Whether Kevin is out here or not, I play the same way. I try to keep moving and being a force'

AFP
Washington

Playing without injured Kevin Durant, the Golden State Warriors snapped Houston's nine-game win streak and avoided being swept this season by the Rockets with a 106-104 road victory on Wednesday.

Klay Thompson scored a game-high 30 points while DeMarcus Cousins netted a season-high 27 points plus team-highs of eight rebounds and seven assists and Stephen Curry contributed 24 points in a crucial victory for the defending champions.

"When Kevin is out, we don't have the luxury of throwing to him and getting 30 points," Thompson said. "We had to throw it to 'Boogie' (Collins) in the post and he came through for us in a big way. He propelled us to a victory tonight."

RESULTS

Oklahoma City	108-96	Brooklyn
Washington	100-90	Orlando
Miami	108-74	Detroit
Atlanta	132-111	Memphis
Golden State	106-104	Houston
Utah	114-97	Phoenix

Durant, a two-time NBA Finals Most Valuable Player, was sidelined by a right ankle sprain suffered in a Sunday loss to Phoenix.

But the Warriors, a Western Conference-best 46-21, bounced back behind 3-point sharpshooter Thompson, who hit 12-of-23 from the floor including 5-of-10 from beyond the arc.

"Whether Kevin is out here or not, I play the same way," Thompson said. "I try to keep moving and being a force."

Cousins, signed as an injured free agent in July, has had to blend with the Warriors powerhouse lineup since returning in January from a ruptured Achilles tendon.

But Cousins established himself as a physical inside force who could give Houston fits in a playoff series.

"We made a concerted effort to feed him in the post," Curry said. "Nothing he does out there should surprise anybody."

Houston, which led Golden State 3-2 in last year's Western Conference finals before falling in seven games, had won the first three meetings of the season with Golden State but could not become the first team to sweep the Warriors since Steve Kerr became coach of the club and their run of four consecutive NBA Finals runs began.

"It's a good win for us," Kerr said. "We've got 15 games left for us to figure out the combinations. This was a good night."

NBA scoring leader James Harden netted 29 points and added 10 assists to



Golden State Warriors guard Quinn Cook drives to the basket as Houston Rockets guard James Harden defends during the second quarter at Toyota Center. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

lead the Rockets (42-26), who also got 24 points from Chris Paul and 13 points and 13 rebounds from Clint Capela.

Paul sank two free throws with 47 seconds remaining to pull Houston within 104-100, then completed a 3-point play after being fouled by Andre Iguodala to pull the Rockets within 104-103 with 10 seconds remaining.

Curry sank two free throws with eight seconds to play to boost the lead and the Warriors fouled Harden to send him to the free throw line.

Harden sank the first to create the final margin, but missed the second only to have Iguodala chase down the rebound and tap the ball to unguarded Thompson, who tossed it in the air as the final horn sounded.

Russell Westbrook unleashed his 26th triple double of the season and led a second-half surge that lifted the Oklahoma City Thunder over visiting Brooklyn 108-96.

Westbrook finished with 31 points, 12 rebounds, 11 assists and three steals while the Thunder's Paul George and Brooklyn's Spencer Dinwiddie each added 25 points.

The Nets led 52-42 at half-time but could not silence the Thunder in the second half.

"My job is to bring the energy every night. It was my fault in the first half," Westbrook said. "I knew I needed to pick it up in the second half."

Justice Winslow scored 16 points to lead seven double-figure scorers for Miami in a 108-74 rout of visiting Detroit.

The Pistons, led by 13 points from Blake Griffin, were outscored 33-8 in the third quarter, the Heat opening the second half with a 21-0 run.

Miami improved to 32-35, tightening the Heat's grip on the eighth and last Eastern Conference playoff berth to two games over Orlando and Charlotte with Washington 3.5 afloat.

Bradley Beal scored 23 points and Thomas Bryant came off the bench to add 21 points and 10 rebounds as the Washington Wizards beat visiting Orlando 100-90.

Atlanta's John Collins scored 27 points to lead the Hawks over visiting Memphis 132-111 while Donovan Mitchell scored 26 points to lead Utah's 114-97 victory at Phoenix.

NFL

Raiders, Steelers make Brown trade official

Reuters
New York

The Oakland Raiders officially announced their acquisition of wide receiver Antonio Brown from the Pittsburgh Steelers on Wednesday, shortly after the new league year opened at 4pm ET.

"In my opinion, we acquired the best wide receiver in football," head coach Jon Gruden said at Brown's news conference. "Now, let's get to work."

"I am so excited to sit down next to Antonio Brown," first-year general manager Mike Mayock added. "...He's as good a practice football player and works as hard as any football player I've ever seen in my life."

Brown, who was a few minutes late, showed up looking much different than the public has seen him much of the

offseason, with his hair cut short and his blonde mustache gone. He voiced lofty goals for his future, saying he hopes to catch Jerry Rice in terms of longevity.

"It's an honor to be here," Brown said. "...I'm here to prove what I am and what I stand for, not just my words but my actions."

Brown, 30, was acquired for third-round (66th overall) and fifth-round (141st overall) draft picks, and he received a new three-year, \$50.125 million contract with \$30.125 million guaranteed as part of the agreement.

The Steelers were believed to be close to a deal with the Buffalo Bills late Thursday, but Buffalo backed out after learning that Brown desired a contract adjustment.

The deal with the Raiders was reportedly reached in the early hours of Sunday.

"We weren't even in on the process until Friday," Mayock said of how the Raiders jumped into trade discussions late. "...When that deal fell through with Buffalo, we got involved."

Asked if he has any regrets about his acrimonious departure from Pittsburgh - where he spent the first nine years of his career, earning seven Pro Bowl appearances and four first-team All-Pro nods - Brown said he appreciated his time with the Steelers.

"Pittsburgh will always be my family," he said. "Those guys gave me a chance when I was a 21-year-old kid. Obviously people listen to the things that are being said and written, but at the end of the day, it's all about how you make people feel."

"I think I make people feel really great and really inspired, the way they watched me go to work, the way they watched me play. I know Steeler nation is having a bad day today, but it's always love."

As for the Steelers themselves, general manager Kevin Colbert acknowledged that while Brown remains great, his departure was what the team needed.

"We believe the compensation, which will now give us four picks in the first 83 selections and 10 overall in the upcoming NFL draft, can benefit our efforts to improve our team in 2019 and beyond," Colbert said in a statement.

"Antonio remains one of the best players in the National Football League, but as we believe, this move was in the best interest of the Pittsburgh Steelers. We wish Antonio all the best the rest of his career."

Yankees vs Red Sox game in London a best-seller: StubHub

Major League Baseball's first-ever game in London featuring world champion Boston Red Sox and rival New York Yankees is the best-selling game of the 2019 regular season, ticket seller StubHub said yesterday.

Following matchups in Mexico and Japan in recent years, the league is making its first foray into Europe with hopes of expanding its international reach with the help of its two most storied franchises. "The appeal of MLB to a global audience continues to grow, and the overwhelming response for the rivalry match-up between the Yankees and Red Sox in London certainly proves that the sport has fans worldwide," said Jill Krimmel, a general manager at StubHub.

"So far, fans from 44 different states in the US and 27 differ-

ent countries have already purchased tickets for the MLB London series, demonstrating that baseball has tremendous potential overseas much like the NFL and NBA have seen." The Yankees are driving demand stateside, outselling the Red Sox, who defeated the Brox Bomber in the Divisional Series last season, by 18 percent.

The Philadelphia Phillies have seen a surge in ticket sales following the acquisition of slugger Bryce Harper, who signed a record 13-year \$330 million contract in the off-season. Phillies' ticket sales are up 93 percent from the same time last year and up 157 percent over the last three seasons, the highest three-year growth out of all the teams in the league.

MLB's opening day is March 28.

NHL

Blackhawks build big lead, hold off Leafs

Reuters
Toronto

Brendan Perlini had a goal and two assists, Brandon Saad added a goal and an assist, and the visiting Chicago Blackhawks held on to defeat the Toronto Maple Leafs 5-4 on Wednesday night.

The Maple Leafs trailed 5-0 before scoring four consecutive goals, including three in the third period, when they took 30 shots.

Duncan Keith, Dominik Kahun and Alex DeBrincat also scored for the Blackhawks, who have won four in a row. Dylan Strome contributed two assists.

Corey Crawford saved 17 of the 18 shots he faced in the Chicago goal but left because of illness after the second period. Collin Delia took over for the third and made 27 saves.

Andreas Johnson, Auston Matthews and Morgan Rielly each had a goal and an assist for the Maple Leafs, who have lost two in a row. John Tavares also scored for Toronto, and William Nylander and Mitch Marner each added two assists. Garret Sparks replaced Frederik Andersen in the Toronto goal at the start of the second period after the Blackhawks scored four first-period goals.

Andersen, who also was replaced by Sparks during a 6-2 loss to the Tampa Bay Lightning on Monday, made 10 saves. Sparks stopped 24 of 25 shots. Keith scored his fifth goal this season at 3:19 of the first period when his slap

RESULTS

Chicago	5-4	Toronto
New Jersey	6-3	Edmonton
Vancouver	4-1	Rangers

shot from the left point was deflected by Nylander before trickling past Andersen.

Perlini notched his 12th goal this season, and seventh in his past six games, beating a Maple Leaf before firing a wrist shot from the high slot at 12:55 of the first period.

Following a Toronto turnover at the Chicago blue line, Kahun scored his 12th from the slot on a nifty pass from Patrick Kane at 17:13 of the first. Saad scored his 23rd of the season 1:33 later, switching to his backhand to tuck the puck home on a feed from Dylan Sikura.

Chicago led 5-0 on DeBrincat's 38th goal when Perlini set him up in the slot at 12:32 of the second period.

Johnson scored his 20th this season on a tip-in of Rielly's shot from the left point at 18:27 of the second. With Delia sprawled to the side of the crease, Matthews converted a pass from Johnson for his 32nd goal at 7:57 of the third period. Rielly scored his 19th goal of the season at 10:55 of the third. With Sparks out for an extra attacker, Tavares scored his 39th goal at 18:29 of the third.

MOTTE'S BACK-TO-BACK GOALS CARRY CANUCKS PAST RANGERS
Tyler Motte scored two goals 11 seconds apart

in the second period as the host Vancouver Canucks beat the New York Rangers 4-1 on Wednesday night. The Canucks posted only their fifth NHL win in the past 18 games (5-10-3), while the Rangers took their eighth loss in nine outings.

Brook Boeser and Jake Virtanen, with an empty-netter in the final minute, also tallied for the Canucks. Pavel Buchnevich scored for the Rangers. Vancouver goaltender Jacob Markstrom stopped 21 of 22 shots. New York goalie Henrik Lundqvist recorded 24 saves on 27 shots in the loss. Lundqvist was denied a chance to become only the sixth goalie to record 450 all-time NHL wins.

The first period was scoreless but the Canucks led 3-0 after 40 minutes. Boeser opened the scoring on a power play at 6:07 of the second period as he one-timed a pass from Josh Leivo. The Canucks received a five-minute power play after Chris Kreider took a major and game misconduct for elbowing rookie Elias Pettersson in the head. Pettersson, who suffered a concussion earlier in the season, received a bloody nose and went to the Canucks dressing room for an examination. He later returned to his team's bench.

Vancouver could not score again on the lengthy man-advantage opportunity, but Motte scored 11 seconds after it expired, at 9:34 of the middle frame. He beat Lundqvist with a forehand-to-backhand deke, then scored again at 9:45 as he fired in Antoine Roussel's rebound.



Chicago Blackhawks forward Brendan Perlini (centre) celebrates his goal with defenseman Duncan Keith (right) and Erik Gustafsson in the first period against Toronto Maple Leafs at Scotiabank Arena. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

TENNIS

Federer, Nadal steam into Indian Wells quarter-finals

'Conditions are tough with the glare, and the jump of the ball it's sometimes hard to find the rhythm and timing'



Roger Federer of Switzerland plays a forehand to Kyle Edmund of Great Britain during their BNP Paribas Open match in Indian Wells, California. (Getty Images/AFP)



Rafael Nadal of Spain in action during his fourth round match against Filip Krajinovic of Serbia. (Getty Images/AFP)

AFP
Indian Wells, United States

Former champions Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal edged closer to a blockbuster semi-final showdown at the ATP Indian Wells Masters on Wednesday with brisk fourth-round wins.

World number two Nadal overpowered Serbian qualifier Filip Krajinovic 6-3, 6-4 to book his quarter-final berth in one hour and 26 minutes.

Federer, seeking a record sixth title in the California desert, needed just 64 minutes to get past Britain's Kyle Edmund 6-1, 6-4.

Nadal said his performance on a windy stadium court wasn't as good as his 6-3, 6-1 third-round win over Argentine Diego Schwartzman.

But he was more than a match

for 113th-ranked Krajinovic, breaking him early in each set and saving the only break point he faced.

Nadal, who lifted the Indian Wells trophy in 2007, 2008 and 2013, is in the last eight for the first time in three years after missing last year's edition, skipping both Indian Wells and the Miami Masters with a hip injury.

He next will take on 13th-ranked Russian Karen Khachanov, who beat world number nine John Isner 6-4, 7-6 (7/1).

Khachanov produced just one ace to the big-serving American's 12 but stretched his record over Isner to 4-0.

Fourth-seeded Federer, fresh off his 100th career title, looked poised to finish off Edmund in less than an hour.

But the Swiss great had to fight off three break points as he served for the match, just a small speed bump in a match that he

took charge of early.

"He didn't have the best start, so that cost him the first set," Federer said.

"Second set, it was definitely better. I think he probably struggled throughout a little bit. He never really got going.

"Conditions are tough with the glare, and the jump of the ball it's sometimes hard to find the rhythm and timing."

Federer will fight for a semi-final berth against 22-year-old Pole Hubert Hurkacz.

Hurkacz, ranked 67th in the world, sent 25th-ranked Canadian Denis Shapovalov packing 7-6 (7/3), 2-6, 6-3.

Although he'll be an overwhelming favourite against Hurkacz, Federer said he wouldn't take a semi-final meeting with Nadal for granted.

"I hope I can get there," Federer said, "but I'm not going to underestimate Hubert."

KECMANOVIC CAPITALISES

A day after world number one Novak Djokovic tumbled out of the third round, 19-year-old Miomir Kecmanovic kept the Serbian flag flying.

Kecmanovic became the first lucky loser to reach the last eight at Indian Wells since the ATP's Masters 1000 series launched in 1990.

Kecmanovic, ranked 130th in the world, had taken the first set against Yoshihito Nishioka 6-4 when the 74th-ranked Japanese retired because of injury.

Kecmanovic, who gained entry to the second round when fifth-seeded Kevin Anderson withdrew with an elbow injury, is in his first ATP quarter-final.

Kecmanovic is the last teen left in the men's draw, after the departure of 19-year-old Shapovalov.

At the other end of the age spectrum, 40-year-old Croatian

Ivo Karlovic's run came to an end with a 6-4, 6-3 loss to 25-year-old seventh seed Dominic Thiem.

Thiem needed less than an hour to subdue the 89th-ranked Karlovic, surrendering just seven points on his own serve and punishing Karlovic's second serve.

Thiem said putting 87 percent of his first serves in play was key in his first meeting with Karlovic.

"I felt pretty confident on my own service games. That's what I transferred also to the return games," he said. "I made two breaks in the right moment I would say."

Thiem booked a meeting with 18th-seeded Gael Monfils of France, who defeated Philipp Kohlschreiber 6-0, 6-2 in 57 minutes a day after the German stunned world number one

Novak Djokovic in the third round.

SPOTLIGHT

Tiny Sky hopes to become Britain's youngest Olympian

Reuters
London

A 10-year-old girl could become Britain's youngest Olympian after being selected yesterday in a team of five skateboarders who will receive UK Sport funding to help them qualify for the 2020 Tokyo Games.

If she qualifies, Sky Brown will be 12 years and 12 days old when the Games begin in July 2020, eclipsing the record set by swimmer Margery Hinton who was 13 years and 43 days old when she competed at the 1928 Olympics in Amsterdam. Brown and four others - Alex Decunha, Sam Beckett, Alex Hallford and Jordan Thackeray - were chosen by Skateboard GB to benefit from UK Sport's Aspiration Fund that is aimed at helping them attend qualifying events in the lead up to the Games.

Skateboarding at the Tokyo Games will have a total of four medal events for 40 men and 40 women in two categories: park - a hollowed-out course featuring a series of curves; and street - a straight course featuring stairs, handrails and curbs.

"I just want to get out there, have fun and I don't really know who I'm competing with or any of that stuff," Japan-born Brown told the BBC before the team was announced.

"I feel like it doesn't matter how old you are. I'm tiny and I'm going to be in this huge competition. You can do anything, no matter what age you are.

"Sometimes I just want to beat myself and I want to do what boys do. Why do boys get to have all the fun? I think girls can do whatever boys can do."

To be eligible to participate in Tokyo 2020, a skateboarder must be ranked in the top 20 in the world in their discipline based on points scored in qualification tournaments.

The qualification period has been divided into two seasons which will end on May 31, 2020.

Qualifying events include world championships, tour events, five star events, continental championships and national championships.

Five sports, including baseball, skateboarding and surfing, will feature in Tokyo as part of the International Olympic Committee's revamp of the Games programme to attract younger audiences.



In this file photo taken on January 14, 2018, Sky Brown shows her skateboarding skills on the half-pipe at a park in Kijo town, Miyazaki prefecture. (AFP)

Lee likely to delay cancer comeback again

Lee Chong Wei is likely to miss next month's Malaysia Open and delay his comeback from nose cancer for a second time, an official said yesterday, as the badminton great struggles to make a full recovery.

Norza Zakaria, president of the Badminton Association of Malaysia, warned fans to "lower their expectations" for the 36-year-old former world number one.

The three-time Olympic silver medalist has been on the sidelines since July last year, when he was diagnosed with early-stage nose cancer. He underwent a gruelling programme of specialist treatment in Taiwan but opted not to retire and resumed training in January.

Lee originally planned to play the All England Open in March but then delayed his return to the Malaysia Open, where he is the defending champion, in

early April. But Zakaria said Lee looked likely to miss his home tournament and was now targeting the Sudirman Cup mixed-team event in China in May.

"The probability of him not playing in the Malaysia Open is very high," he told AFP.

"I don't think that he is fully recovered physically. He needs to train properly because Malaysia Open is a very premier event.

"Fans should lower their expectations."

Lee, who has previously said he needs to get the all-clear from his doctors before returning to competitive play, will travel to Taiwan next week for a check-up, Norza added. The player still hopes to compete at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics but qualifying looks increasingly tough as other young Malaysian players are ranked above him.

FOCUS

Teenager Andreescu crushes Muguruza

AFP
Indian Wells, United States

Bianca Andreescu's breakout season continued on Wednesday as the Canadian teenager swept past two-time Grand Slam champion Garbine Muguruza and into the Indian Wells WTA semi-finals.

Andreescu, 18 and ranked 60th in the world, won the first nine games on the way to a 6-0, 6-1 victory that took just 52 minutes.

She reached her third semi-final of the season after a run to the final in Auckland and the last four in Acapulco.

"I just went out there, went for it," Andreescu said. "I didn't focus on who was on the other side.

"It really helped me. I used my serve to my advantage. She didn't serve so well today, so I took advantage that as well."

Andreescu, who began 2019 ranked 152nd in the world, is now headed for the top 40.

The win over Muguruza, now ranked 20th, followed a victory over 18th-ranked Wang Qiang of China in the fourth round and took her win-loss record to a re-

markable 26-3 in 2019, including qualifying matches.

"I had a good day," Andreescu said. "She didn't have such a good day. I felt she was holding back a lot so I just kept putting pressure. She just kept missing."

Muguruza said the overall quality of Andreescu's game was just too much.

"I struggled to find a way to turn things around, because she was keeping her high level all the time," Muguruza said.

Andreescu will get a shot at another top-10 player in the semi-finals, after sixth-ranked Elina Svitolina clawed out a 4-6, 6-4, 6-4 victory over another red-hot teen - Marketa Vondrousova of Czech Republic.

Vondrousova, who reached her second WTA final in Budapest in February to arrive in California ranked 61st in the world, was coming off an upset of world number two Simona Halep in the third round, which followed wins over 2018 finalist Daria Kasatkina and former French Open champion Jelena Ostapenko.

Svitolina, coming off a 7-6 (10/8), 5-7, 6-4 win over Aussie Ashleigh Barty that - at three

hours 12 minutes - was the longest on the WTA Tour this year, struggled to get to grips with the unfamiliar left-hander's game.

But her experience and determination made the difference in the end.

"Not every day you play your best game, you just have to stay strong and stay calm and fight for every ball," Svitolina said.

The remaining quarter-finals will be played on Thursday, with Belinda Bencic taking on Karolina Pliskova and Venus Williams facing Angelique Kerber in a battle of former world number ones.

Bencic, 22, stunned world number one Naomi Osaka 6-3, 6-1 in the fourth round, bringing the Japanese star's first WTA title defence to an abrupt end.

The Swiss player is on the rise after a spate of injuries slowed her career and is ranked 23rd in the world after claiming her first title in four years at Dubai last month.

Bianca Andreescu of Canada plays a backhand against Garbine Muguruza of Spain during their BNP Paribas Open quarter-final. (Getty Images/AFP)



MOTORSPORT

Champion Hamilton says Mercedes team have work to do

'We've got some incredible people in the team, and the energy is really, really inspiring'

Reuters
Melbourne

Defending champion Lewis Hamilton has dismissed the idea of putting statement wins on the board early in the Formula One season, saying his Mercedes team has plenty of work to do on its car ahead of the Australian Grand Prix.

Briton Hamilton, the winner of four of the last five titles, believes the Silver Arrows have a battle on their hands this season against Ferrari, whose car showed impressive pace and reliability during winter testing.

Hamilton's path to his fifth championship started slowly last year, with his first win not coming until the fourth race in Azerbaijan.

However, he said he was only focused on getting his W10 car across the finish line at Albert Park on Sunday, with the championship unlikely to be decided in the early rounds.

"It's a long season, so I don't particularly feel that (pressure to win)," he told reporters at Albert Park yesterday.

"The most important thing, I think, is really about finishing races and analysing and making sure you get as many race points as you can, of course. It's difficult to know what everyone's doing. Naturally we won't fully know until we get out in the car tomorrow and come qualifying you get a better picture.

"We said that we had work to do, we weren't talking BS, we have work to do."

Mercedes are one of only two teams in Formula One this season who have maintained the same driver lineup, with Finn Valtteri Bottas to partner Hamilton for a third successive year.

Where Hamilton's partnership with retired 2016 champion Nico Rosberg was fraught with tension, the 34-year-old has enjoyed a much smoother ride with Bottas, who has not proved as competitive as his German predecessor. Hamilton naturally was keen for continuity on the driving front, at least.

"We have a great pairing and the contribution from Valtteri and I together works, it's worked well for years and there's no reason to change it," he said.

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it.



Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton (right) with Red Bull's Max Verstappen during a press conference in Melbourne yesterday. (Reuters)

In terms of the team, we've got some incredible people in the team, and the energy is really, really inspiring to see so many people so pumped."

Leading a jet-setting lifestyle and boasting a number of celebrity friends, Hamilton had a typically busy off-season but found time to do some sky-diving in Qatar on the way to Australia.

He said he had also done a bit of surfing but not had the courage to test Australia's breaks.

"I wanted to do it here but I couldn't find a netted area to go. I just can't go where the sharks are, man," he said.

"Every Australian I meet, they're like, 'Nah, nah, you'll be alright... If a shark comes up to you, punch it in the face!'"

Bike-loving Hamilton sets sights '100 percent' on MotoGP test

Lewis Hamilton said he wants "100 percent" to ride a MotoGP bike and is hoping for more time on two wheels to be ready for the challenge.

The British five-time Formula One champion has made no secret of his love for motorbikes and attended MotoGP's season opener in Qatar last weekend as a guest of the Petronas-backed Yamaha team.

"Fierce, insane speeds and unforgiving, this sport is phenomenal," the Mercedes driver tweeted afterwards. "What an experience! How about you guys let me ride next time?"

It followed Hamilton trialling

a Yamaha World Superbike at Jerez in December and he told motogp.com that he wants to experience more.

"100 percent I'm going to ride one. I'm building up to it," he said ahead of embarking on his Formula One world championship defence in Melbourne on Sunday's Australian Grand Prix. "I need more days (on a bike) firstly because I've only had two-and-a-half kind of days on the track, but eventually I'd love to try a MotoGP bike. That's the dream.

"I watch it every weekend it's on," he added. "Even when I'm on a grand prix weekend, I'm

jumping out of my meetings before and after qualifying so I can watch the (MotoGP) qualifying." According to the website, Monster Energy, which sponsors Hamilton as well as the Yamaha MotoGP team, is keen on arranging a ride swap between him and seven-time world champion Valentino Rossi. Hamilton is a huge fan of Rossi's and after meeting him in Qatar tweeted: "Always an honour to get time with this legend. "Over 20 years in the world championship, I'm constantly inspired by this man and his humble attitude to his work, his team and his passion."

FOCUS

Vettel says new teammate Leclerc 'free to race'

Reuters
Melbourne

Sebastian Vettel said yesterday new Ferrari teammate Charles Leclerc will be "free to race" from the start of the Formula One season and the German rejected suggestions his bid for a fifth world championship title would take precedence.

Ferrari's new team principal Mattia Binotto said earlier in the year that Vettel, as the team's "champion", would be given priority over Leclerc in certain racing situations, though he later clarified the drivers would be "free to fight".

Vettel, bidding for a third successive win in the season-opening Australian Grand Prix, said testily that he expected no special treatment.

"I think it's very clear, and I think Mattia also made it very clear, we are free to race each other," he told reporters at Albert Park yesterday.

"I think Charles will do his best to help himself, to help the team and that's the same for me, I'll do the best to help myself and to help the team.

"In the end we are racing for Ferrari and that means we will try to get Ferrari back to where we've been trying to get it back to the last couple of years. That's the main priority and the rest, it's a long, long season and I think it's a bit pointless at this point to start pointing out certain scenarios."

Monegasque Leclerc, who drove for Sauber last year, has swapped race seats with Kimi Raikkonen, with the Finnish former champion now at the rebranded Alfa Romeo team.

Leclerc said Binotto had also told him he would be free to race Vettel, albeit with the qualification that the German



would be given priority in certain race situations. The highly rated 21-year-old declined to elaborate as to what situations would apply but was unfazed about the prospect of having to play second fiddle to Vettel.

"I'm still young but I'm pretty sure that you always learn with our sport," he said in the paddock.

"On the feedback side there are still a lot of things I can learn from Seb especially because he's very experienced and very strong in that point.

"So I've got a good example next to me."

Ferrari, runners-up in the constructors championship the last two years, have arrived with plenty of buzz around their SF90 car, which was fast and reliable during winter testing.

Pundits have tipped the Scuderia to give Mercedes, winners of the last five driver's and constructors' titles, a genuine challenge in the coming championship.

Ferrari's last constructors' title came in 2008. Vettel was also bullish about his car's quality compared to last year's leadup to Melbourne, where he snatched a lucky win over Lewis Hamilton courtesy of a safety car deployment.

"In this regard we are more prepared, the car seems to work fine and there are no problems at this stage," he said.

F1 mourns sudden death of race director Whiting

Formula One race director Charlie Whiting, a popular and key figure in the sport, has died three days before the season-opening Australian Grand Prix, the governing FIA said in a statement yesterday. He was 66.

The Briton, who started his career working for the Hesketh team in 1977, died in Melbourne of a pulmonary embolism, it said.

"It is with immense sadness that I learned of Charlie's sudden passing," said Jean Todt, president of the International Automobile Federation. "He has been a great race director, a central and inimitable figure in Formula One who embodied the ethics and spirit of this fantastic sport.

Formula One has lost a faithful friend and a charismatic

ambassador in Charlie." Whiting, who worked for Brabham with the sport's former commercial supremo Bernie Ecclestone in the 1980s, joined the FIA in 1988. He had been race director since 1997.

The news was met with shock in the Formula One paddock where Whiting was close to drivers, with whom he conducted pre-race briefings, and teams who sought technical guidance and clarifications. Former champions McLaren said they were "shocked and deeply saddened."

"Charlie will be remembered as one of the giants of our sport, as well as a great colleague. Our deepest sympathies and thoughts are with all of his loved ones," the team said on Twitter.

FIVB KATARA CUP

Qatar's Younousse-Tijan enter quarter-finals

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Star Qatari pair of Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan marched into the quarter-finals of the FIVB Beach Volleyball World Tour Doha 4-Star Katara Cup yesterday.

At the Katara Cultural Village Amphitheatre, the World No 8 Qatari pair defeated Russia's Viacheslav Krasilnikov and Oleg Stoyanovskiy 2-1 (21-12, 18-21, 15-8) in the pre-quarter-final match. Younousse and Tijan will take on Poland's Michal Bryl and Grzegorz Fijalek, who defeated Austria's Robin Seidl and Philipp Waller 2-0 (23-21, 21-14), in the last eight stage today.

Earlier in the day, Poland's Piotr Kantor and Bartosz Losiak also reached the quarter-finals as they defeated Canada's Sam Schachter and Sam Pedlow 2-0 (23-21, 21-14) to set up a clash with the USA's Phil Dalhausser and Nick Lucena today.

"We started very slowly, but in the end we won a tough set," Losiak said.

"We tried to put more pressure on their serve and we had some good points from block serve. In the second set we started very aggressively and went to 5-1, but they started to serve well and we kept

serving well. We are happy that we are in the quarter-finals. We did a good job today and it is important that we're guaranteed a fifth, but now we'll do our best to reach the semis."

Joining them in the last eight are the evergreen Spain's Pablo Herrera and his long-time partner Adrian Gavira, who are chasing their first World Tour gold since they won the Ostrava 4-Star in June 2018. The Spaniards also enjoyed a straight-set victory, 2-0 (22-20, 21-14) over Austria's Clemens Doppler and Alexander Horst. Their win means that they have improved on their second round finish from 2018, the first time they competed in Doha.

"We know them well and they know us well because we train together in Spain," Gavira said.

"It was a really tough match, but we've been playing really well in this tournament especially with our side-outs.

"I'm not sure if we're playing Brazil or Russia next, but if we play like this we have a chance. Now we have to rest well."

Herrera-Gavira will vie for the semi-finals spot with Russian pair of Nikita Ljamin and Igor Velichko. In the last quarter-final Italy's Paolo Nicolai and Daniele Lupo will take on Chile's Marco Grimalt and Esteban Grimalt.



Qatar's Cherif Younousse (right) and Ahmed Tijan celebrate after winning their FIVB Beach Volleyball World Tour Doha 4-Star Katara Cup pre-quarter-final against Russia's Viacheslav Krasilnikov and Oleg Stoyanovskiy yesterday.

MANATEQ QATAR INTERNATIONAL RALLY

Al-Attiyah leads Qatar rally after Wakrah opener

'I'll do my best to win this race. The new stages are a little bit tricky'



Qatar's Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah is flagged off from the podium for the Manateq Qatar International Rally at Souq Al Wakrah yesterday.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah set the fastest time through the opening 2.72km super special stage of the Manateq Qatar International Rally at Al Wakrah, south of Doha, late yesterday evening.

A time of 4min 01.1sec enabled the Qatari to hold a lead of 23.8 seconds in his new Volkswagen Polo GTI R5 over second-placed Abdulaziz al-Kuwari at the overnight halt. Khalid al-Suwaidi was third.

The Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) attracted 16 FIA cars, six national entrants and competitors from 13 nations for the opening round of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC).

This is the 40th edition of the event and the 35th to be a counting round of the regional series since its inception in 1984. Qatar has been an ever present in the MERC with the exception of 2004 when it ran as a candidate event and this is the 24th occasion that the rally has been the first round of the championship. It is the 211th rally in MERC history.

The opening super special was filmed live by Al-Rayyan television and featured two different sections of a purpose-built, floodlit track with drivers competing in pairs and taking their turns on each section of the special.

QMMF president Abdulrahman al-Mannai and Manateq CEO Fahad Rashed al-Kaabi flagged the cars off the start podium at Souq Al Wakrah.

Several drivers carried out pre-event testing on Wednesday afternoon. Al-Attiyah took the opportunity to shake down his new Volkswagen Polo GTI R5.

The 13-time event winner said: "It's fantastic. A great feeling for the first time in the Polo. I get support from VW Motorsport. Qatar is a major investor in the company. We see what we can do. In this moment, we only have the support for the MERC. I would also like to do some European Championship events. I will do my best to win this race. The new stages in the north are a little bit tricky. They are far away from service and, tomorrow, two stages and repeat and without remote service. So it will not be easy."

Sheikh Hamed bin Eid al-Thani won the regional title in 1993 and had made a surprise return to special stage rallying after a long stint in cross-country events.

The Qatari said: "This is the



Manateq Qatar International Rally drivers in a press conference ahead of the start yesterday.

first time that I drive the R5. The last time I drove a car like this was a Group A (Toyota Celica) in '94 or '95. I made test yesterday, around 10km, but the car was easy to drive. I don't have the experience with saloon cars for a long time, but I hope to do well and go to the finish without a problem."

Abdulaziz al-Kuwari returns to action for the first time since the Qatar event in 2016. "I test for a short time and I need to get back into it," said Abdulaziz, who is hoping to extend his programme to more events this season. "I need to decide whether to drive like a taxi and make sure I finish or push a little."

Khalid al-Suwaidi made a late co-driver change and lined up at the start with Adel Abdulla in the Motortune Ford Fiesta R5 that his co-driver had driven to second overall last November.

Adel is only the second individual in MERC history to finish inside the top two as a driver and co-driver - he finished second in the Qatar Rally as a navigator to the late Misfer al-Marri in 2006. Qatar's Mubarak al-Hajri won the event in 1993 as a co-driver with Nasser Khalifa al-Attiyah and in 1995 with Khalifa al-Mutaiwei, and finished second overall as a driver in the 2011 Qatar Rally with Emirati Arif Yousef Mohamed.

There were late technical dramas for the two MERC 3 contenders: Henry Kahy's crew changed the engine in the defending champion's Skoda Fabia for an Evolution 1 version from

Italy and Asem Aref was forced to fit a standard gearbox after damaging his transmission earlier this week.

Lebanon's Nadim Zaide retired his Renault Clio with electrical issues before the start of the Manateq Qatar National Rally.

Today, teams will tackle just four special stages in a short but potentially tricky opening day. There will be no opportunity to return to Lusail Sports Centre for a midday service break in a day that starts with the first of two runs through the 19.86km of Al Ruwais in the far north of Qatar at 10.40hrs.

The first pass through Al Ghariyah follows at 11.15hrs and the two specials are repeated at 12.10hrs and 12.45hrs after a chance for remote refuelling between the two loops.

QATAR INTERNATIONAL RALLY POSITIONS AFTER S51

1. Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah (QAT)/Matthieu Baumel (FRA) Volkswagen Polo GTI R5 4min 01.1sec
2. Abdulaziz al-Kuwari (QAT)/Marshall Clarke (GBR) Skoda Fabia R5 4min 24.9sec
3. Khalid al-Suwaidi (QAT)/Adel Abdulla (QAT) Ford Fiesta R5 4min 25.0sec
4. Ahmad Khaled (LEB)/Dany Kairouz (LEB) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VIII 4min 25.3sec
5. Stefano Marrini (ITA)/Nicolas Garcia (ARG) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X 4min 28.3sec
6. Meshari al-Thefiri (KWT)/Nasser al-Kuwari (QAT) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X 4min 28.8sec
7. Abdullah al-Ruwaihi (OMN)/Ata

Hmoud (JOR) Subaru Impreza 4min 41.2sec

8. Abdulla al-Kuwari (QAT)/Hugo Magalhães (POR) Subaru Impreza 4min 48.8sec

9. Henry Kahy (LEB)/Musa Djiverian (JOR) Skoda Fabia 4min 57.6sec

10. Rashid al-Mohannadi (QAT)/Yousef Juma (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X 4min 58.0sec

11. Sheikh Hamed bin Eid al-Thani (QAT)/Dale Moscatt (AUS) Ford Fiesta R5 5min 04.1sec

12. Saif al-Harthy (OMN)/Saif al-Minai (OMN) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X 5min 27.7sec

13. Mohammed al-Meer (QAT)/Alexei Kuzmich (RUS) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X 5min 42.0sec

14. Nasser Khalifa al-Attiyah (QAT)/Nicola Arena (ITA) Ford Fiesta R5 6min 02.0sec

15. Jaralla Jahman (QAT)/Feras Allouh (QAT) Subaru Impreza 6min 40.7sec

16. Asem Aref (JOR)/Faris Al-Tal (JOR) Renault Clio 6min 41.1sec

QATAR NATIONAL RALLY POSITIONS AFTER S51

1. Shaun McGonigal (OMN)/Nath Marriott (OMN) Subaru Impreza STI 4min 47.5sec
2. Jarah al-Touqi (OMN)/Issa al-Wardi (OMN) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VIII 4min 52.3sec
3. Humaid al-Waili (OMN)/Ghaith al-Qassimi (OMN) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VIII 4min 59.6sec
4. Zakariyah al-Amri (OMN)/Abdullah al-Amri (OMN) Subaru Impreza 5min 24.0sec
5. Hamid al-Qassimi (OMN)/Yakhdan al-Rashdi (OMN) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VIII 6min 19.7sec

HORSE RACING

Itorio completes al-Ramzani double with feature win

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Mohamed Nasser al-Naimi's Itorio was back in the winner's circle after almost two years in the Ain Khaled Cup, yesterday's feature on turf at the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club's Al Rayyan Park.

The victory was a first for the Oratorio colt after moving yards to Hadi Nasser al-Ramzani.

In some top-class Thoroughbred sprint action, Tomas Lukasek rode the seven-year-old to a thrilling victory in the six-furlong sprint, beating Stephan Ladjadi-ridden Cristofano Allori by a quarter of a length. Jassim Mohamed Ghazali-saddled Black Granite too made it to the paddock after a third-place finish under champion jockey Harry Bentley.

Al-Ramzani, who was awarded the Qatari Horse Trainer of the Year award last year, saddled another winner on the day in Al Jeryan Stud's Al Lusail, with Ronan Thomas riding the five-year-old to a victory in the seven-furlong Local Thoroughbred Conditions event.

Thomas made it to the winner's circle again astride Al Shaqab Racing's Al Walid, who registered his second victory this season for trainer Alban de Mieulle in the 2,200m Purebred Arabian Conditions event.

Champion trainer Ghazali added two more winners to his tally with Bentley and JP Guillambert riding two horses owned by Khalifa bin Sheail al-Kuwari - Alignment and Festive - to victory in the two Thoroughbred Conditions races.

The day started with trainer Ibrahim al-Malki saddling two handicap winners - Sheikh Faisal bin Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani's Yvanlend and Mohamed Abdulla Abdulmalik's War King.

Yvanlend's timely lunge at the post ensured that Eduardo Pedroza-ridden gelding had beaten ironically-named Tremendous Leap, from the stables of Ghazali, by a short head for his second victory since arrival in Qatar.

In the 2,200m Local Thoroughbred Handicap Mohamed Khaled Elahmed-trained Sarmad Bu Thaila was edged out by a head after leading from the start by Quinn-ridden War King.

Quinn was also astride Mohamed Hussain-saddled Qassy, who topped the Purebred Arabian Conditions miller. The nine-year-old was the oldest runner in the field but did enough to win by a comfortable one-and-a-half lengths.

RESULTS

Race 1: 1. Yvanlend (Eduardo Pedroza), 2. Tremendous Leap (JP Guillambert), 3. Amenable (Ronan Thomas), 4. Suprematism (Tomas Lukasek). Won



Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC) Racing manager Abdulla Rashid al-Kubaisi (right) presents the owner's trophy after Itorio won the Ain Khaled Cup yesterday. PICTURES: Juhaim



Trainer Hadi Nasser al-Ramzani (right) celebrates Itorio's victory in the Ain Khaled Cup with jockey Tomas Lukasek (second from left).

by: Shd, 2 1/4. Hd. Time: 2:03.02. Owner: Sheikh Faisal bin Hamad bin Jassim al-Thani. Trainer: Ibrahim al-Malki.

Race 2: 1. War King (Jimmy Quinn), 2. Sarmad Bu Thaila (JP Guillambert), 3. Look At Me (Eduardo Pedroza), 4. Damsah (Damien Morin). Won by: Hd, 1 1/4. Time: 2:20.06. Owner: Mohamed Abdulla Abdulmalik. Trainer: Ibrahim al-Malki.

Race 3: 1. Qassy (Jimmy Quinn), 2. Ateej (Eduardo Pedroza), 3. AJS Anfwan (Tomas Lukasek), 4. Al Dawooda (Faleh Bughnaim). Won by: 1 1/2, 1 1/4. Hd. Time: 1:45.31. Owner: Al Thumama Racing. Trainer: Mohamed Hussain Afroz.

Race 4: 1. Alignment (Harry Bentley), 2. Full Moon (Ryan Curatolo), 3. Jewel House (Eduardo Pedroza), 4. Es'hail (Gerald Avranche). Won by: Shd, 1 1/2, 1 1/4. Time: 2:02.92. Owner: Khalifa bin Sheail al-Kuwari. Trainer: Jassim Mohamed Ghazali.

Race 5: 1. Al Lusail (Ronan Tho-

mas), 2. Mosayer (Harry Bentley), 3. Saar (Gerald Avranche), 4. Nahaab (Eduardo Pedroza). Won by: 3/4, Hd, 1 1/4. Time: 1:26.57. Owner: Al Jeryan Stud. Trainer: Hadi Nasser al-Ramzani.

Race 6: 1. Festive (JP Guillambert), 2. Wayside Flower (Harry Bentley), 3. Izghawa (Eduardo Pedroza), 4. Darkanna (Jean Baptiste Hamel). Won by: 1 1/4, 3/4. Shd. Time: 1:23.17. Owner: Khalifa bin Sheail al-Kuwari. Trainer: Jassim Mohamed Ghazali.

Race 7: 1. Al Walid (Ronan Thomas), 2. Spaghetti (Harry Bentley), 3. She'ris (Eduardo Pedroza), 4. Reda (Stephan Ladjadi). Won by: 2 3/4, 3 1/2. Time: 2:26.07. Owner: Al Shaqab Racing. Trainer: Alban de Mieulle.

Race 8: 1. Itorio (Tomas Lukasek), 2. Cristofano Allori (Stephan Ladjadi), 3. Black Granite (Harry Bentley), 4. Shobrom (Jimmy Quinn). Won by: 1/4, 1 1/4, 2 1/4. Time: 1:09.91. Owner: Mohamed Nasser al-Naimi. Trainer: Hadi Nasser al-Ramzani.

Qatar at Special Olympics World Games



Team Qatar delegation enters the opening ceremony for the Special Olympics World Games at the Zayed Sports City Stadium in Abu Dhabi yesterday. (AFP)