Exciting contests on cards

DEFENDING CHAMPION SABALENKA AND MUGURUZA LIKELY TO MEET EARLY IN THE TOURNAMENT

By Sports Reporter

After more than a month in Australia, the WTA tour turns to the Middle East, which kicks off with Qatar Total Open tomorrow.

The draw for the tournament was held virtually yesterday and threw up exciting contests with a likely early meeting between defending champion Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus and Garbine Muguruza of Spain. The main draw begins tomorrow at the Khalifa International Tennis & Squash Complex. The field is a 28-player singles and a 16-team doubles draw. Champions will be awarded 470 points.

The world number eight Sabalenka, seeded third, has a bye and will meet the winner of Muguruza and Russian Veronika Kudermetova’s opening round match. French Open champion Iga Swiatek has pulled out of the event, with the Pole saying she wanted to avoid injury after winning the second title of her career at the Adelaide International yesterday.


The 22-year-old Sabalenka had clinched the Falcon Trophy in 2020 defeating the two-time Grand Slam champion Kvitova in the final. She had raced past the world No. 11 from the Czech Republic in straight sets to claim her sixth career title and the first in her home country. The Belarusian, who had won the Australian Open doubles event playing alongside Elise Mertens of Belgium last month, also notched her third straight year title and 15th consecutive match win against Kudermetova 6-2, 6-2. In the Abu Dhabi Open final, she also won indoor tournaments in Ostrava and Linz at the end of last season.

“I’m happy to be here once again, and I look forward to a wonderful tournament. It’s always a pleasure coming to Doha,” the Belarusian said on being in Qatar.

Svitolina, a former semi-finalist and always a fierce competitor in ‘windy’ Doha, would be looking for a good start. The top seed has a bye and will await the winner of Saisai Zheng (CHN) and Amanda Anisimova (USA) clash.

Fourth seed Kvitova will await the winner of the match between fifth-placed Kiki Bertens of the Netherlands and 2016 finalist Jelena Ostapenko of Latvia. Speaking via video conference, she said, “Doha is a special venue for me. This tournament gives me extra motivation because there’s a lot of good memories here. I am really looking forward to be here.”

Kerber will take on Turkey’s Cagla Buyukakcay in the opening round while seventh seeded Jennifer Brady of USA will play Anett Kontaveit of Estonia. Sixth seed Belinda Bencic of Switzerland was drawn to meet Madison Keys of US in the first round while local favourite Ons Jabeur of Tunisia, who will be back at the Khalifa Complex after becoming the first Arab woman to reach the quarter-finals of a Grand Slam at the French Open in 2020, will play the qualifier.

Tournament Director Saad al-Mohannadi welcomed the defending champion and tennis fraternity for Qatar Total Open 2021.

SEEDINGS:


Defending champion Aryna Sabalenka (left) and Kiki Bertens on their arrival in Doha.
Al-Shahrani becomes second Qatari to lift Qatar Open title

Abdullah al-Bouanain had won the inaugural edition of the amateur event 35 years ago and al-Shahrani won the inaugural title 35 years back on March 10, 1986, when he beat then World No. 114 Abdullah al-Naimi lauded al-Shahrani’s superb achievement and we are proud of him. Al Shahrani was an excellent player in his time and he was the first player in the world.”

Back in January 1986, al-Shahrani had won the inaugural edition of the WTT Star Contender event. Since then, table tennis has grown in importance for international competitions, but the local event has been successful, with some of the best players in the world competing for silverware. The Qatar Open is one of the most prestigious tournaments in the world, and it has been a great source of pride for the country, with players like al-Shahrani having a significant impact on the sport. The tournament has been a platform for Qatari players to showcase their skills and compete against some of the world’s best players, which has helped to raise the profile of table tennis in the country. The success of al-Shahrani in the Qatar Open has inspired other players in the country to strive for excellence and reach new heights in the sport, which has helped to grow the local and regional table tennis scene. The Qatar Open has been a great platform for Qatari players to showcase their skills and compete against some of the world’s best players, which has helped to raise the profile of table tennis in the country. The success of al-Shahrani in the Qatar Open has inspired other players in the country to strive for excellence and reach new heights in the sport, which has helped to grow the local and regional table tennis scene.

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Barca brush aside Sevilla to title hope tides

PREMIER LEAGUE

Manchester City stride clear, Seagulls pay penalty amid VAR Chaos

Guardiola’s men are now 13 points clear thanks to a game-winning run

Manchester City dominated from the off and there was little for Brighton to do as they were left to rue missed opportunities.

Pep Guardiola’s men are now 13 points clear thanks to a game-winning run.

City had the first chance of the game when a Brighton foul gave them a free-kick in a dangerous area, but the resulting effort was easily saved by Maty Ryan.

However, it was City who took the lead just before half-time. Kyle Walker-Peters was brought down in the box by Aymeric Laporte, and Raheem Sterling stepped up to convert the resulting penalty.

In the second half, City continued to dominate and put Brighton on the back foot. The Seagulls did manage to create a few chances, but they were all well saved by Ederson Moraes in the City goal.

Despite Brighton’s efforts, City held on for a comfortable victory, securing their position at the top of the table.

Barcelona quickly built a 2-0 lead through a totally uncharacteristic goal by Lionel Messi, who calmly finished off a sublime pass from Ousmane Dembele.

The victory keeps second-placed Barcelona within three points of leaders Real Madrid, who are top on goal difference. The race for the La Liga title is set to go down to the wire, with both teams set to face each other in the last match of the season.

Barcelona will look to capitalize on their recent form against a struggling Real Sociedad, who are currently in fifth place.

PREMIER LEAGUE RESULTS

Manchester City 4 (Sterling 34, 39, 40, 69) Chelsea 1 (Mount 56)

West Ham United 1 (Antonio 43); West Brom 1 (Foulkes 42)

West Ham held out for a precious point against West Brom, with both sides struggling for form.

That was the case in the Premier League on Saturday, where Manchester City and Brighton & Hove Albion played out an entertaining 1-1 draw.

City had the better of the early exchanges, with Raheem Sterling firing wide and Julian Draxler seeing his shot saved by Maty Ryan.

However, Brighton took the lead just before half-time through a superb solo effort from Leandro Trossard, who cut inside and fired a low shot past Ederson Moraes.

City responded well after the break, with Bernardo Silva testing Ryan with a rasping effort from outside the box.

However, the game was settled late on when Gabriel Jesus squeezed home a rebound after Ryan failed to save a shot from Sterling.

That proved to be the winner as both sides kicked off into the weekend with their tails up.

Barcelona will now travel to Real Madrid on Sunday in what could be a significant match in the title race.

Luis Enrique’s men are currently top of the table, two points clear of Real Madrid, who have a game in hand.

This weekend’s clash is set to be a crucial one in the race for the La Liga crown, with victory for either side likely to put them in a strong position to secure the title.
Mbappe brace helps PSG past Dijon

Pochettino's team move back up to second place, a point behind Lille

PARIS (Reuters) - Mbappe scored twice to fire PSG to a 4-0 victory against Ligue 1 strugglers Dijon on Saturday to extend his team's unbeaten run to 12 games when they face Brest in the capital club but can leapfrog them back up to second place in the table, a feat by Monaco last weekend and moved scored 15 times for Mauricio Pochettino's team, who could well put pressure on leaders Lille in the title race.

Former Monaco striker Mbappe had returned to individual training but, having already missed the first leg, he returned to the training centre this month in protest having its absence against Brazil.

The victory was the 17-year-old midfielder Edouard Michut was due to make his loan move into the principality.

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Heat cool off red-hot Jazz, Celtics snap losing streaks

The Boston Celtics beat the Utah Jazz, 110-107, on Wednesday night, snapping the Jazz’s nine-game winning streak.

Boston Celtics center Jayson Tatum had a career-high 46 points to lead the Celtics to the win. He also had 11 rebounds and five assists.

Boston Celtics guard Jaylen Brown added 28 points and 10 rebounds, while Celtics guard Jayson Tatum had 19 points and eight assists.

The Jazz were led by guard Donovan Mitchell, who scored 36 points and added eight rebounds and eight assists.

The Jazz have lost five of their last six games and are now 14-16 on the season.

Boston Celtics head coach Brad Stevens said after the game, “Our team played really well tonight. We had a lot of energy and we were able to control the game from start to finish.”

The Celtics are now 20-12 on the season and are in second place in the Eastern Conference.

Tatum said, “We just played really well tonight. We made some shots and we played with a lot of energy.”

The Jazz have lost five of their last six games and are now 13-17 on the season.

Mitchell said, “We played well in the first half, but we fell apart in the second half.”

The Jazz have lost four of their last five games and are now 13-17 on the season.

The Celtics are now 20-12 on the season and are in second place in the Eastern Conference.

Jazz head coach Quin Snyder said after the game, “We had a tough night tonight. We just didn’t have the same energy we had in the first half.”

The Jazz have lost four of their last five games and are now 13-17 on the season.

The Celtics are now 20-12 on the season and are in second place in the Eastern Conference.
**GOLF**

**Focus**

Koepka grabs 1-shot lead at WGC-Workday

YOU CAN MAKE BIRIDGES IF YOU HIT YOUR TEE SHOTS IN THE RIGHT SPOTS

Brandon Wu led the field with a 64 at the Granada Club in Bradenton, Florida, on Friday to seize a one-shot share of the lead in the third round of the World Golf Championships-Workday Championship. Wu, who birdied five of his last seven holes, had a 9-under 267 overall and leads the way by a shot over Collin Morikawa and South Africa's Branden Grace.

"I think this is one of the best minutes of my golf career," Wu said. "I don't think I've felt this good in a long time."

Morikawa climbed into contention with a sparkling performance on Friday. He birdied three of his final six holes to end the day with a 65 and set the clubhouse record of 12-under 198.

"I'm really happy with that today," Morikawa said. "This is making sure they understand that this is about decades of systemic abuse that we and so many others have lived through."
**CRICKET**

**It’s the pink ball, not the pitch: India’s Ashwin**

*If you look at Test cricket, these are regular affairs in pink-ball Tests*

- India will be without pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah for the Test against England after the 31-year-old has returned home. The 31-year-old has endured a torrid time in the series and has not played since suffering a back injury in the second match.

India’s Bumrah to miss final Test against England for ‘personal reasons’

- England have decided not to add a new player to the squad for the fourth Test. Director of cricket Ashley Giles said yesterday: “Jasprit Bumrah made a request to BCCI to be released from the squad for personal reasons, but India have decided not to add a new player to the squad for the fourth Test.”

- Bumrah had a limited role in the first three Tests and India did not give away penalties and replacing English all-rounder Moeen Ali in the fourth Test.

**FOCUS**

**England’s Woakes returns home without playing in Test in India**

- England have not played in a Test match in India in over eight years. The last time they played a Test in India was in 2013, where they lost 2-1 up in the four-match series.

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**RUGBY**

**Ireland hammer Italy to secure first 2021 Six Nations victory, Wales beat England**

- Ireland have secured their first victory in the 2021 Six Nations tournament, brushing aside Italy to potential 24-14 victory. The Irish side ran in three tries and scored their highest in the first half of a test series.

- Wales, on the other hand, put up a stunning performance to beat England 40-24. Wales scored six tries in a 48-10 victory, including a try from Connors who was named man of the match.

- Earlier, after being put into bat by Italy, England scored six tries in a 48-10 victory. The try came from Connors who was named man of the match.

**ITALY**

- Italy had two men in the sin bin, both against England. Italy’s scrum half Connors was sent off for the sin bin, and Italy’s scrum half Connors was sent off for the sin bin, both against England. Connie’s scrum half Connors was sent off for the sin bin.

**BRIEF SCORES**

- **Middle East**
  - **Scotland** 95-5 (Cervantes 32, Connors 15, Rizwan 15), Ireland scored 140-1 (Connors 40), Scotland won by 45 runs.

- **New Zealand**
  - **New Zealand** 202-5 (Hicks 45, Connors 40), Ireland scored 163-2 (Connors 72), New Zealand won by 39 runs.

- **Pakistan**
  - **Pakistan** 120-2 (Hicks 45, Connors 40), Ireland scored 163-2 (Connors 72), Pakistan won by 43 runs.

- **India**
  - **India** 240-2 (Hicks 45, Connors 40), Ireland scored 163-2 (Connors 72), India won by 77 runs.

- **Australia**
  - **Australia** 170-3 (Hicks 45, Connors 40), Ireland scored 163-2 (Connors 72), Australia won by 7 runs.

- **England**
  - **England** 118 all out (Hicks 45, Connors 40), Ireland scored 163-2 (Connors 72), England won by 45 runs.

- **France**
  - **France** 190-5 (Hicks 45, Connors 40), Ireland scored 163-2 (Connors 72), France won by 27 runs.

- **Italy**
  - **Italy** 198-3 (Hicks 45, Connors 40), Ireland scored 163-2 (Connors 72), Italy won by 35 runs.

**West Indies recall Gayle, Edwards for Sri Lanka T20 series**

- Opener Chris Gayle is set to play in his 13th Test match for West Indies in two years after he and veteran fast bowler Kemar Roach were recalled for the three-match home Test series against Sri Lanka. Roach and Gayle have not played in a Test since 2019.

**T20 matches shifted as Auckland enters lockdown today**

- New Zealand’s second Test against Sri Lanka has been shifted to Auckland due to the Auckland region being placed in lockdown. The second Test will now be played in Auckland instead of Christchurch.

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**Covid causes force Women’s team to pull out of Rugby Sevens**

- The French women’s rugby sevens team was forced to withdraw from the tournament due to the ongoing pandemic. The team was one of the favourites to win the tournament, but they had to pull out due to the ongoing pandemic.

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German Ahlmann clinches Grand Prix at CHI Al Shaqab

By Sahan Bidappa

Frenchman Robert rides Vitaldi des Meneaux for the runner-up spot; Bredow-Werndl wins dressage Grand Prix title

Grand Prix at CHI Al Shaqab

German Ahlmann clinches dressage Grand Prix Freestyle title.

Commercial Bank CHI Al Shaqab presented by Longines Grand Prix winner Germany’s Christian Ahlmann (second right), Event Director and Organising Committee Member at CHI Al Shaqab pose with the CSI5* dressage class winners trophies.

German’s Jessica von Bredow-Werndl celebrates with her 17-year-old KWPN horse Zara 4 after winning the dressage Grand Prix Freestyle title.

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Hussein Ali al-Abdulla (second left), EGM & Chief Marketing Officer of Commercial Bank and Omar al-Mannai (right) at the Longines Arena at Al Shaqab.

German’s Jessica von Bredow-Werndl celebrates with her 17-year-old KWPN horse Zara 4 after winning the dressage Grand Prix Freestyle title.

By Sahak Malakyan

German’s Christian Ahlmann produced a yard-stick to beat in the Con¬

Hammam al-Qadi claims Big Tour title at Longines Hathab

German’s Christian Ahlmann astride Al Shaqab presented by Longines yesterday.

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