



Competitors from nine nations set for Oman International Rally which gets underway today

Nasser Al Attiyah leads international field into weekend gravel stage action

TRIBUNE NEWS NETWORK
MUSCAT (OMAN)

THE 2023 Oman International Rally gets underway with a ceremonial start at Muscat Drift Arena from 15.00hrs on Thursday afternoon. This will then be followed by a 3.01km super special stage, starting at 16.07hrs.

The Oman Automobile Association's (OAA) flagship motor sporting event will kick start the FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) once again, with competitors from nine nations set to tackle 13 gravel special stages over the weekend before the finish back at the Muscat Drift Arena on Saturday afternoon. In a route of 613.06km, 229.98km will be timed against the clock.

The defending regional champion Nasser Saleh Al Attiyah and his Andorra-based co-driver Mathieu Baumel top an FIA field of 15 cars. The Qatari will be hoping to earn a record-breaking eighth success on the Oman event to add to his previous wins in 2003-2006, 2015, 2020 and 2022.

Baumel has enjoyed the top step of the podium on two occasions, with Steve Lancaster and Chris Patterson also earning two wins apiece and Spanish girl Alba Sanchez Gonzalez partnering Al Attiyah last year when Baumel was side lined through illness.



A short super special stage will get the action underway in Oman on Thursday afternoon.

Competition for the Volkswagen Polo GTi crew comes from the Oman Rally Team's Abdullah Al Rawahi and his Jordanian co-driver Ata Al Hmoud. They won the Oman event in 2021, the feat making Al Rawahi the second ever Omani national to win a round of the MERC as a driver.

The Czech crew of Petr Kacirek and Petra Rihakova wheel out a Duck Racing Skoda Fabia and Qatar's Nasser Khalifa Al Atya and Italian teammate Giovanni Bernacchini crew a Ford Fiesta R5.

While the Rally2 quartet should fight it out for overall victory, there is strength in depth in an MERC2 section where the multiple champion

Meshari Al Thefiri will be hoping to win back a title that was fought out between the Jordanian duo of Issa Abu Jamous and Ihab Al-Shorafa in 2022.

Ninth and 10th generations of the Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution dominate a category that will also see three further Jordanian drivers - Shadi Shaban, Sheikh Bader Al-Fayez and Shaker Jweihan - take the start.

Local hopes rest on the shoulders of Abdullah Al Zubair and Zakariya Al Aamri in a pair of Subaru Imprezas, while Kuwait's Mohammed Al Zafiri and Yousef Al Dhefiri and Lebanon's Ahmad Khaled add strength in depth to the fight for honours in their Mit-

subishis.

A national rally will run behind the main FIA event and has attracted a provisional nine starters (subject to final scrutineering).

Haitham Al Soomar and Wael Al Shabani topped the standings in 2022 in their Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VIII and return to battle against the likes of Ghaith Al Qasbi and Salim Al Touqi and a Subaru for Faisal Al Rashdi.

There are also a trio of Yamaha YXZs for Oman's Mohammed Al Mazroui and Mutasim Al Balushi and Lebanon's Alain Nawfal, while Abdullah Al Toqi teams up with Austrian WRC star co-driver Ilka Minor in a Toyota Yaris.



Defending regional champion Nasser Saleh Al Attiyah (above) and his Andorra-based co-driver Mathieu Baumel top an FIA field of 15 cars. The Qatari-French combine will be in their Volkswagen Polo GTi.

2023 Oman International Rally - Leading entries

1. Nasser Saleh Al-Attiyah (QAT)/Mathieu Baumel (AND) Volkswagen Polo GTi
 2. Abdullah Al-Rawahi (OMN)/Ata Al-Hmoud (JOR) Skoda Fabia Evo
 3. Nasser Khalifa Al-Atya (QAT)/Giovanni Bernacchini (ITA) Ford Fiesta R5
 4. Ihab Al-Shorafa (JOR)/Yousef Juma (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX
 5. Issa Abu Jamous (JOR)/Emad Juma (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX
 6. Sheikh Bader Al-Fayez (JOR)/TBA Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X
 7. Shadi Shaban (JOR)/Samer Issa (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X
 8. Mohammed Al-Zafiri (KWT)/Suleiman Al-Helal (KWT) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX
 9. Meshari Al-Thefiri (KWT)/Nasser Al-Kuwari (QAT) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X
 10. Abdullah Al-Zubair (OMN)/Taha Soomar (OMN) Subaru Impreza STI
 11. Yousef Al-Dhefiri (KWT)/Carlos Hanna (LEB) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X
 12. Ahmad Khaled (LEB)/Samer Sfeir (LEB) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX
 13. Shaker Jweihan (JOR)/Nancy Al-Majali (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X
 14. Petr Kacirek (CZE)/Petra Rihakova (CZE) Skoda Fabia R5
 15. Zakariya Al-Aamri (OMN)/Mohammed Al-Aamri (OMN) Subaru Impreza STI
- 2023 OMAN NATIONAL RALLY - LEADING ENTRIES:**
17. Haitham Al-Soomar (OMN)/Wael Al-Shabani (OMN) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VIII
 18. Ghaith Al-Qasbi (OMN)/Ahmed Salim (OMN) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VIII
 19. Alain Nawfal (LEB)/Bashar Al-Qassimi (OMN) Yamaha YXZ 1000 R
 20. Mohammed Al-Mazroui (OMN)/Sana Al-Shukaili (OMN) YXZ 1000 R
 21. Mutasim Al-Balushi (OMN)/Ammar Al-Balushi (OMN) Yamaha YXZ 1000 R
 22. Salim Al-Touqi (OMN)/Issa Al-Wardi (OMN) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo VIII
 23. Abdullah Al-Touqi (OMN)/Ilka Minor (AUT) Toyota Yaris
 24. Faisal Al-Rashdi (OMN)/Yaqdhan Al-Rashdi (OMN) Subaru Impreza STI
 25. Musab Soomar (OMN)/Nasr Ibrahim Al-Qasbi (OMN) Kia Rio



Tommy Paul of the US celebrates after beating compatriot Ben Shelton in their Australian Open men's singles quarter-final on Wednesday. (AFP)

Paul gets the better of Shelton

PA MEDIA/DPA
MELBOURNE

TOMMY Paul got the better of fellow American Ben Shelton on Wednesday to reach his first Grand Slam semi-final at the Australian Open.

Both men were surprise quarter-finalists but 25-year-old Paul used his greater experience to secure a 7-6 (6) 6-3 5-7 6-4 victory and book a last-four date with Novak Djokovic.

The run of 20-year-old Shelton, in just his second Grand Slam and on his first trip outside the USA, has been one of the stories of the tournament.

The big-hitting left-hander was certainly not over-awed playing on Rod Laver Arena for the first time but Paul was the steadier of the two and ultimately that was the difference.

Paul said: "This is my first time on this court, my first time in the quarter-finals of a slam. I'm pumped to be there and obviously really excited for whoever I play on Friday. Making the semis of a slam is everybody's dream and I can't believe I'm here right now."

Shelton rallied from a break down in the third set to take it to a fourth but lost his serve in the opening game and could not claw his way back.

Paul, who will break into the top 20 for the first time after the tournament, becomes the first American man to reach the semi-finals here since Andy Roddick in 2009.

With Sebastian Korda also in the last eight, this was the best display by American men at a Grand Slam for nearly 20 years.

Djokovic says he his found best tennis in resounding Rublev win

STATS PERFORM/DPA
MELBOURNE

NOVAK Djokovic felt he played his best tennis in Wednesday's straight-sets win over Andrey Rublev which resulted in his 10th semi-final appearance at the Australian Open.

Djokovic produced a dominant performance as he ran out a 6-1, 6-2, 6-4 victor against Rublev, who has now lost each of his seven career grand slam quarter-finals.

Having missed last year's tournament, nine-time Australian Open champion Djokovic has now won 26 consecutive matches at the event, matching Andre Agassi's record streak in the men's singles draw, set between 2000 and 2004.

Speaking courtside after securing another routine win, Djokovic said his opponent deserved more but said he had hit top form at Rod Laver Arena.

"Overall, I think the scoreline of the first two sets does not speak to the reality of the match, there were some really close games," Djokovic said.

"Andrey's a great opponent, a great player. I have tons of respect for him. He has one of the biggest forehands and is one of the quickest players on the Tour.

"I knew what the game plan was, but it's one thing to imagine how you want to play and another to execute it on the



Serbia's Novak Djokovic reacts on a point against Russia's Andrey Rublev during their men's singles quarter-final match of the Australian Open in Melbourne on Wednesday. (AFP)

court. "If I had to sum it up, in all the important moments and important shots, I found my best tennis. That's what makes me most pleased tonight."

Djokovic described his 6-2 6-1 6-2 demolition of Alex de Minaur in the last 16 as his best performance of the year on Monday, and the Serbian ranked his display against Rublev as a close second.

"I would rank it as number two, but very close to the performance of two nights ago!" Djokovic said.

"I could not be happier with my tennis, honestly. I've been playing very solid from the back of the court and I really love playing under these conditions and on this court.

"I've said it many times, but

I love playing here. It's definitely the most special court for me."

Djokovic's pursuit of a record-extending 10th title at Melbourne Park looked to be in doubt as he struggled with a hamstring injury in the early rounds, but after moving freely on Wednesday, the 35-year-old credited his medical team's efforts.

"On the days off it's important to be smart and wise with the body in these particular circumstances. It's important to recover and get ready for the next challenge," he said.

"I just want to give huge credit to my physiotherapist Miljan [Amanovic], he has been through hell with me over the last 10 days with all the treatments. He deserves huge credit and I'm so grateful to him."



IOC to explore ways to allow Russians at 2024 Games

DPA
BERLIN

THE International Olympic Committee (IOC), in consultations with international federations and athletes' representatives, has decided to explore ways in which Russians and Belarusians can participate in the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris.

"No athlete should be prevented from competing just because of their passport," the IOC said in a statement on Wednesday. "A pathway for athletes' participation in competition under strict conditions should therefore be further explored." An Olympic summit on December 9 opened the door for the return of athletes from Russia and Belarus to international competitions despite Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The participants voted unanimously to consider a request from the Asian governing body OCA to allow athletes from the two countries to participate in its competitions under a neutral flag and without playing the anthems.

OCA justified its offer by saying that in this region of the world there are no longer reasons for suspending Russian and Belarusian athletes.

Conditions for participation of Russians and Belarusians include respect for the Olympic Charter and the sanctions which include the ban on flag, anthem, colours or any other identifications of Russia and Belarus at sports events.

IOC president Thomas Bach had recently repeatedly said that sport should not be politicized and that Russian athletes should not be punished for their country's war.

Quick read

Reyna scores in stoppage time to give Dortmund 2-1 win over Mainz

GIOVANNI Reyna scored in stoppage time to give Borussia Dortmund a 2-1 Bundesliga win at Mainz on Wednesday. Hosts Mainz were in front less than two minutes in as Jaesung Lee headed in a corner from Edimilson Fernandes. But Dortmund levelled almost straight away after Julian Ryerson's strike deflected on Fernandes and found the net. The game then settled down, with Dortmund having the better chances of scoring when Youssouf Moukoko and Niklas Süle went close and Karim Adeyemi came within inches away of giving the guests the lead in the 14th minute, but his effort went over the crossbar. In the second half, Mainz became more dangerous in front of the goal after a round of substitutions, but failed to find a winner. Reyna, however, didn't waste his opportunity and netted a corner flicked on by Sébastien Haller in the third minute of stoppage time. (DPA)

Modric and Kroos understand Real's midfield revamp: Ancelotti

DPA
MADRID

CARLO Ancelotti says Luka Modric and Toni Kroos understand the need to refresh Real Madrid's midfield after the duo found themselves on the bench for last week's win at Athletic Bilbao.

Modric and Kroos were introduced as late substitutes during Madrid's impressive 2-0 win at San Mames on Sunday, with the former Germany man making the points safe with a fine long-range finish.

Modric's tally of 17 starts in all competitions this season has been bettered by team-mates Federico Valverde (24), Kroos (21) and Aurelien Tchouameni (18), while no Madrid midfielder has made more total appearances than Eduardo Camavinga's 27.

Speaking ahead of Thursday's Copa del Rey quarter-final against rivals Atletico Madrid, An-



Real Madrid's Toni Kroos (left) celebrates with teammates after scoring a goal during the Spanish League match in Bilbao on Sunday. (AFP)

celotti said the experienced players in his squad understood the nature of Los Blancos' transition.

"They are professionals and understand the quality of this team," he said of Modric and Kroos.

"I don't need to explain why they don't play. They understand it very well, we talked about it in pre-season. Now is a time of transition for this team. The veterans must have understanding and young players must have patience. That has been key to success in the squad. They are all motivated.

"They [Modric and Kroos] can still play together, I don't have a single doubt. They contribute a lot and will continue to contribute during this season. They are always decisive." Ancelotti is yet to decide who will start in the engine room against Los Colchoneros, who triumphed in a two-legged tie when the rivals last met in the domestic cup back in 2015.

Asked about possible changes in midfield, the coach said: "It could be a part of the rotation that we have to take on for this game.

Tomorrow we have to put together the best possible team, and that's what we'll try to do." The last meeting between the clubs was marred by racist abuse directed towards Vinicius Junior, audible

before and during Madrid's 2-1 win at the Civitas Metropolitano in September.

Vinicius was on the receiving end of several heavy challenges against Athletic last time out, and Ancelotti wants the winger to be afforded greater physical and mental protection. "It is a subject that we are concentrating on," Ancelotti said. "The player is in good physical condition, and mentally you have to protect him. It's very important. Football needs Vinicius, who has an extraordinary talent. You have to protect the physical and mental aspects. He is very motivated and eager to contribute."

Meanwhile, with reports continuing to suggest Ancelotti is a contender to coach Vinicius in international football by taking the vacant Brazil job, the Italian said he had not received any proposal from the Selecao. "So far, we haven't been in touch," he said. "If that contact ever takes place, I will let you know."

BUNDESLIGA

Kimmich salvages point for Bayern with a late strike; Leipzig thrash Schalke 6-1

DPA
BERLIN

JOSHUA Kimmich scored a late goal to save Bundesliga leaders Bayern Munich from a defeat and secure a 1-1 draw with Cologne, while André Silva's brace led second-placed RB Leipzig to their first win of the year with a 6-1 thrashing of Schalke on Tuesday.

Wolfsburg, meanwhile, scored at least five goals for a second consecutive game as they wrecked Hertha Berlin 5-0.

Cologne needed only four minutes to take the lead at the Allianz Arena, as Ellyes Skhiri broke the deadlock after Julian Chabot's header turned into an assist.

Serge Gnabry from close range in the 14th had the best chance for the Bavarians in the first half, but his effort was saved by keeper Marvin Schwäbe.

Schwäbe also saved a powerful shot from Benjamin Pavard in the 44th, and Leon Goretzka wasted the rebound with a weak header.

Bayern were offensively poor throughout the game, but managed to find the equaliser in the 90th minute as Kimmich picked up a pass from Dayot Upamecano and unleashed an unstoppable strike. "The equaliser! It's annoying because of the timing, but it's OK. We go home satisfied with the point," Cologne coach Steffen Baumgart said.

Leipzig also played out a 1-1 draw with leaders Bayern Munich last week as the Bundesliga returned following the winter and World Cup break. But against Schalke, they set the tone early on.

Silva broke the deadlock in the seventh minute with a fierce strike from just outside the area and Benjamin Henrichs added a second some 10 minutes later, before the Portuguese striker completed his brace in the 44th.

The guests concluded the first half with a goal from Timo Werner, his first since returning from an ankle injury that



Bayern Munich's German midfielder Joshua Kimmich celebrates after scoring the equalising goal 1:1 during the German first division Bundesliga match between Bayern Munich and FC Cologne, in Munich, on Tuesday. (AFP)

Bayern lack firepower

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Silva brace

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ruled him out of the World Cup in Qatar.

Schalke pulled one back in the 56th thanks to Soichiro Kozuki, but the reaction came too late after a very poor first half. Leipzig, meanwhile, crowned their performance with a stunner from Dani Olmo in the 83rd and a lovely strike from Yussuf Poulsen in the 89th.

"It was a big result and I wish Reisi (Schalke coach Thomas Reis) all the best for the rest of the season. There is still a lot there for Schalke," Leipzig coach Marco Rose said about the opponents, who sit bottom of the table.

Werner said "it felt really good to start a game again. I'm pleased that I'm playing again and celebrating the wins with the team again."

Wolfsburg also scored early

on with Mattias Svanberg on their way to demolish Hertha 5-0, following a superb 6-0 win over Freiburg at the weekend.

Maximilian Arnold from the spot in the 31st and Jonas Wind three minutes later secured a good lead before the break, while Ridle Baku and Omar Marmoush completed the scoring in the second half.

Elsewhere, Andrej Kramaric's brace saved Hoffenheim a point in a 2-2 draw with Stuttgart. Serhou Guirassy cancelled Kramaric's opener and Wataru Endo thought he claimed victory for Stuttgart in the 77th.

But Stuttgart were left with 10 men when Naouirou Ahamada saw a red card in the 78th. They could not fight the pressure and Kramaric again found the net in stoppage time.

Joelinton gives Newcastle slender advantage against Southampton in League Cup semi-final first leg

DPA
BERLIN

JOELINTON'S close-range finish gave Newcastle United a 1-0 aggregate lead in their League Cup semi-final tie against Southampton.

The Brazilian's 73rd-minute goal settled Tuesday's first leg at St Mary's Stadium in Newcastle's favour though Southampton, who had Duje Caleta-Car sent off late on, had an equaliser disallowed.

Joelinton had a goal contentiously ruled out for handball in the first half and then missed a glorious chance shortly after the restart, but atoned when he converted Alexander Isak's cross.

Video review denied former Newcastle striker Adam Armstrong a leveller less than four minutes later, with Southampton's hopes further dented when Caleta-Car picked up a second booking.

Joe Willock wasted two good opportunities early on, hitting a wild effort over the crossbar following good work from Miguel Almiron before miscuing a volley from Kieran Trippier's cross.

Willock was also involved when Newcastle were denied an opener. Gavin Bazunu parried his shot out to Joelinton, who was contentiously penalised for handball as he fired home the rebound.

Joelinton missed a huge



Contentious goal ruled out

Joelinton had a goal contentiously ruled out for handball in the first half and then missed a glorious chance shortly after the restart, but atoned when he converted Alexander Isak's cross.

chance seven minutes after the restart, somehow blazing over an open goal from six yards out.

He made no mistake from his next chance, finishing into a gaping net after fantastic play from Isak down the right.

Armstrong thought he had denied his old club with a scruffy finish, only for a video review to rule he had handled the ball, and a frustrating outing for the hosts was capped when Caleta-Car received his marching orders for fouling Allan Saint-Maximin.

Newcastle spurned chances to further their advantage in stoppage time, but head into next week's second leg knowing a draw would be enough to book their place in an League Cup final for the first time since 1976.



Newcastle United's striker Joelinton (C) celebrates scoring a goal during the English League Cup semi-final first-leg football match at St Mary's Stadium in Southampton, southern England on Tuesday. (AFP)

Milan thrashed by Lazio, lose more ground in Serie A title race

DPA
BERLIN

MILAN missed the opportunity to close the gap on Serie A leaders Napoli after they were thumped 4-0 by a rampant Lazio at the Stadio Olimpico on Tuesday. Stefano Pioli's men were condemned to a first defeat in seven league matches after goals from Sergej Milinkovic-Savic and Mattia Zaccagni gave the hosts a half-time advantage.

Luis Alberto added a third from the spot after the interval before Felipe Anderson rounded off the scoring as the Rossoneri failed to win for the fifth game in a row in all competitions.

The impressive result sees Maurizio Sarri's Lazio leap from sixth to third and within a point of Milan, who remain 12 points



Lazio's midfielder Mattia Zaccagni celebrates after scoring a goal during a Serie A match at the Olympic stadium in Rome on Tuesday. (AFP)

off Napoli.

Lazio were ahead just four minutes in, Luis Alberto cleverly dummying a Zaccagni pass into

the path of Milinkovic-Savic to coolly stroke into the bottom corner.

Sandro Tonali stung the

palms of Ivan Provedel as Milan looked for a response, but the champions would find themselves two goals down before half-time.

Adam Marusic saw a shot come back off the post after latching onto Pedro's through-ball, but Zaccagni was there to bundle home the rebound for his third goal in three league games. Milan's shaky defending continued to be their downfall in the second half, with Lazio going further ahead when Pierre Kalulu brought down Pedro for a penalty, which Luis Alberto blasted down the middle past Ciprian Tatarusanu.

With Milan staring down the barrel of a heavy defeat, Anderson slotted home after a neat pass from Luis Alberto to further embarrass Pioli's side.

Russia remains banned from European competitions despite talks with UEFA

DPA
BERLIN

FOOTBALL teams from Russia remain banned from European competitions for the time being despite talks between the Russian federation RFU and European football ruling body UEFA.

According to dpa information, a Russian delegation met with UEFA officials in Nyon, Switzerland on Tuesday.

According to the Interfax news agency, the RFU said that the central topic of the meeting was the possible return of Russian teams to international competitions. The dialogue is to be continued and the next round of talks was scheduled for February. UEFA didn't comment on the meeting.

All Russian national teams

The RFU had been discussing a possible withdrawal from UEFA and a switch to the Asian football confederation (AFC). However, the majority of its leadership has decided against leaving UEFA.

and clubs were banned from international competitions organized by UEFA and FIFA at the end of February 2022 due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Recently, the RFU had been discussing a possible withdrawal from UEFA and a switch to the Asian football confederation (AFC). However, the majority of its leadership has decided against leaving UEFA. "The bridges have not been burnt yet," RFU boss Alexander Dyukov said.

Casamento guides Wukair to Ras Rokn Island Cup win



The connection of Wukair with Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club's Racing Manager Abdulla Rashid Al Kubaisi after Nasser Saeed Al Eida's bay horse won the Ras Rokn Island Cup at Al Uqda Racecourse on Wednesday.



Jockey Marco Casamento (2nd left) rides the Jassim Ghazali-trained Wukair during the Ras Rokn Island Cup - Local Thoroughbred Handicap 65-85 at the Al Uqda Racecourse on Wednesday.

TRIBUNE NEWS NETWORK

DOHA

NASSER Saeed Al Eida's Wukair (QA) claimed the Ras Rokn Island Cup winning the 2000m Handicap (65-85) for 4YO+ Local Thoroughbreds by two lengths and a quarter under jockey Marco Casamento on Wednesday.

The Jassim Ghazali-trained 6YO horse completed a double quickening up smartly inside the final furlong of the feature race of Qatar Racing & Equestrian Federation's (QREC) 9th Race Meeting at the Al Uqda

Racecourse. Casamento scored a treble on the day.

QREC's Racing Manager, Abdulla Rashid Al Kubaisi crowned the winners.

The penultimate race: The Handicap (0-75) for 4YO+ Purebred Arabians saw another pillar-to-post victory as Hamad Ahmed Hassan Al Malki Al Jehani's Almashahar (FR) dominated the 2000m contest and found extra at the final bend to kick away and win by six and a half lengths under jockey Arnaud De Lepine, completing a double on the day for trainer Hamad Al Jehani.

Results

(Horse, Trainer, Jockey)

Ras Rokn Island Cup - Local Thoroughbred Handicap 65-85

Wukair, Jassim Ghazali, Marco Casamento

Purebred Arabian Handicap 0-75

Almashahar, Hamad Al Jehani, Arnaud De Lepine

Local Purebred Arabian Handicap 65-85

Afandem, Ahmed Kobeissi, Pramil Arvind Kharat

Purebred Arabian Novice Plate

Sha'alan, Mohammed Ghazali, Marco Casamento

Thoroughbred Handicap 0-75 (Class 5) (Qatari Riders Only)

Cloak And Dagger, Mohammed Ghazali, Saleh Faraj Al-Otaibi

Thoroughbred Maiden Plate (3YO) (Class 6)

Ana Hadi, Hamad Al Jehani, Szczepan Mazur

Thoroughbred Handicap 0-65 (Class 6)

Smart Contender, Md Ghazali, Marco Casamento.

Nasser Hamad Al Naimi's Afandem continued his excellent form with a second straight win as the Ahmed Kobeissi trained 6YO horse finished the 1300m Handicap (65-85) for

4YO+ Local Purebred Arabians two and a half lengths clear under jockey Pramil Arvind.

Trainer Mohammed Ghazali recorded a quick-fire double with his third winner on

the day - Al Ghazali Stud's Sha'alan (FR) winning the 1300m Novice for 4YO+ Purebred Arabians by a length and a quarter under jockey Marco Casamento, who chalked up a double as well.

The 1300m Handicap (0-75) for 3YO+ Thoroughbred saw a very impressive effort from Fatima Bint Sultan Al Dosari's Cloak And Dagger (IRE) as the 7YO gelding bolted by seven lengths, recording a pillar-to-post victory under jockey Saleh Faraj Al Otaibi and giving trainer Mohammed Ghazali his second winner of the day.

Earlier, Noora Racing Limited's Ana Hadi (IRE) took the 1300m Maiden for 3YO Thoroughbreds, for trainer Hamad Al Jehani and jockey Szczepan Mazur, who was in the saddle for the one and a quarter length win.

The day's opening race saw Al Rufaa Racing's Smart Contender (IRE) get off the mark on his second start in Qatar, as he 'smartly' won under jockey Casamento.

The Mohammed Ghazali trained 4YO gelding prevailed by two lengths and a quarter in the 2000m Handicap (0-65) for 3YO+ Thoroughbreds.

Sabalenka to take on unseeded Linette in AO semi-finals



Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka celebrates after her victory against Croatia's Donna Vekic at the Australian Open on Wednesday. (AFP)

PA MEDIA/DPA

MELBOURNE

ARYNA Sabalenka will take on surprise package Magda Linette in the semi-finals of the Australian Open.

Fifth seed Sabalenka has arguably been the most impressive player in the women's draw this fortnight and she maintained that form against Donna Vekic to win 6-3 6-2.

The Belarusian is yet to drop a set in her nine matches in 2023, combining her trademark power with more control and a renewed confidence in her big serve, which was such a liability last year.

The match was closer than the scoreline suggested but Croatian Vekic, playing in only



Poland's Magda Linette celebrates victory against Czech Republic's Karolina Pliskova during their women's singles quarter-final match on day ten of the Australian Open on Wednesday. (AFP)

her second grand slam quarter-final, paid the price for serving 13 double faults and took only one of 10 break points in the first set.

Sabalenka, who had lost five of her six previous matches to Vekic, maintained her perfect record in slam quarter-finals and will now try to reach a first final having fallen three times in the last four.

"Here it feels really special to be in the semi-finals," said Sabalenka, who crunched 38 winners. "It was a tough match. I'm super happy with the win."

Linette continued her surprise run by defeating Karolina Pliskova to reach the semi-finals.

The 30-year-old has upstaged compatriots Iga Swiatek and Hubert Hurkacz and becomes the third Polish woman after the world number one and Agnieszka Radwanska to make the last four in Melbourne.

World number 45 Linette,

who knocked out fourth seed Caroline Garcia in the previous round, produced a composed performance in her first Grand Slam quarter-final to win 6-3 7-5.

Pliskova, seeded 30, made 36 unforced errors including back-to-back double faults in the penultimate game, which helped Linette to break before serving out the victory.

Asked how she was able to stay so calm, Linette said: "I don't know. Maybe I still don't really believe it."

"Just I think also I had so much experience on those big courts before, because almost every grand slam I ended up on a big court one way or another. I played so many big players already."

"It's just nothing really new for me. Just another match. Of course it's way more far in the draw. But still, it kind of feels the same."

Danjuma seals Tottenham loan after Spurs hijack Everton move

STATS PERFORM/DPA

LONDON

ARNAUT Danjuma has joined Tottenham on loan until the end of the season after the north London club hijacked Everton's move for the Villarreal forward.

Danjuma - who was relegated from the Premier League with Bournemouth in 2020 - looked set to join struggling Everton.

Stats Perform understands Everton, who sacked Frank Lampard on Monday, had been expecting Danjuma to arrive at their Finch Farm training base to complete the formalities of his move on Tuesday. He had already undergone a medical with the struggling club.



Dutch midfielder Arnaut Danjuma Groeneveld. (AFP)

Danjuma, whose transfer is subject to international clearance, will provide competition for Son Heung-min, Dejan Kulusevski and former Everton talisman Richarlison to partner Harry Kane in attack as Spurs look to push on for a place in the top four.

The 25-year-old has emerged as a regular goal threat since joining Villarreal in 2021, scoring 22 goals in 51 appearances for the Yellow Submarine.

Since the start of last season, Danjuma is one of just two players in LaLiga - the other being Real Madrid's Vinicius Junior - to hit double figures for goals with both his left (10) and right foot (12) across all competitions.



Women's Indian Premier League: T20 franchises sell for \$472mn

AGENCIES

MUMBAI

THE five franchises for the inaugural Women's Premier League (WPL) in India have been sold for (US\$572.78 million approximately).

The WPL, which takes place in March, is a women's version of the Indian Premier League (IPL), the world's biggest Twenty20 franchise competition.

On Wednesday, the BCCI sold the five WPL teams at an auction in Mumbai, with the owners of Mumbai Indians, Delhi Capitals and Royal Challengers Bangalore, as well as the Adani Group and Capri Holdings winning the bids. Those sides will be based in Ahmedabad and Lucknow respectively.

The owners of four other IPL franchises, Kolkata Knight Riders, Punjab Kings, Rajasthan Royals and Sunrisers Hyderabad, were unsuccessful with their bids.

Former England cricketer

and BBC Test Match Special commentator Isa Guha described the deal as "a landmark day for the women's game."

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) previously sold the media rights for the WPL to Viacom 18 for approximately \$118mn.

BCCI secretary Jay Shah described the deal as "transformative" for women's cricket. "A record-breaking start for the inaugural Women's Premier League and expected nothing less!" former India captain Mithali Raj said on social media. "It will truly revolutionise women's cricket as we know it."

Current India player Smriti Mandhana added that it was a "pioneering move" and a "brilliant step forward for Indian women's cricket".

A player auction will now be held before the tournament, which is expected to take place at the beginning of February.

Each team can sign up to seven overseas players, with England stars such as spin-

ner Sophie Ecclestone and all-rounder Nat Sciver expected to be among the most expensive.

The player registration process has already started, with ex-England spinner and BBC Test Match Special summariser Alex Hartley confirming her application on social media.

Previously, India hosted the Women's T20 Challenge, an invitational event which started as one exhibition match in 2018 before expanding to three teams in 2019.

The 2023 IPL final is likely to be played on May 28, with the start date likely to be March 31 or April 1. ESPNcricinfo has also learnt that the inaugural season of the Women's Premier League (WPL) is likely to be played from March 4 to 24.

The window for the WPL has to be squeezed into the gap between the women's T20 World Cup, which will be played in South Africa from February 10 to 26, and the start of the men's IPL, which will be played on some of the grounds that will host WPL games too.

Quick read

UEFA to change Nations League and European qualifiers formats

European football ruling body UEFA will expand the Nations League with a new knock-out round and change the format of the European qualifiers for the Euros and the World Cup, the body's executive committee decided on Wednesday. After the Euro 2024 in Germany, League A group winners and runners-up in the Nations League will participate in home-and-away quarter-finals, with the winners of these ties qualifying for the Final Four. In the current format, the League A group winners moved directly to the Final Four. UEFA will also add a relegation play-off. The new format of the European qualifiers for the Euros and the World Cup will see teams being drawn in 12 groups of four and five teams. The 12 group winners will qualify directly for the tournaments as usual, while the runners-up will either also qualify directly or participate in play-off matches. "The new format promises to bring more excitement to Europe's national team football competitions that continue to grow from strength to strength," UEFA president Aleksander Ceferin said. (DPA)

QT Slice of the West



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German Business Council Qatar's team visits GET plant in New Industrial Area



Klaus Ertmer, managing director, KEMROC Spezialmaschinen GmbH and managing partner, GET



Henning Zimmerman, chairperson of GBCQ

Also present were Chancellor of the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany Jörg Fürstenau, board members of GBCQ, guests from the German Industry and Commerce Office (AHK Qatar), Qatar Free Zone Authority, Invest Qatar, and members of the local press

MEMBERS of the German Business Council in Qatar (GBCQ) led by GBCQ Chairperson Henning Zimmerman recently visited Qatar-based state-of-the-art German Excavation Technology (GET) industrial plant in the New Industrial Area of Doha.

Also present were Chancellor of the Embassy of the Federal Republic of Germany Jörg Fürstenau, board members of GBCQ, guests from the German Industry and Commerce Office (AHK Qatar), Qatar Free Zone Authority, Invest Qatar, and members of the local press.

On the occasion, Zimmerman highlighted the role of GBCQ in expanding and fostering the business channels in Qatar.

Klaus Ertmer, managing director of KEMROC Spezialmaschinen GmbH and Managing Partner at GET, welcomed the guests and briefed them about the success story of manufacturing state-of-the-art excavator-mounted cutting.

GET, which was founded in 2006 initially for supply to the Qatari and GCC construction markets exclusively, prides itself in being KEMROC's first regional dealer, that since the launch of its production facility in 2016 became KEMROC's primary OEM supplier as well.

GET, with its state-of-the-art and unmatched facility in the region, manufactures specific and high-quality KEMROC compo-

nents and products, acts as the brand's exclusive dealership, and provides best in class aftersales support and services ensuring constant customer satisfaction.

KEMROC designs and develops revolutionary, productive and reliable excavator-mounted cutting attachments, offering smart solutions for applications where conventional methods are either too costly or inadequate.

The distinctive line consists of the patented chain cutters, drum cutters, longitudinal cutters, universal cutters and cutting wheels suitable for various specialized applications and infrastructural works such as trenching, tunneling, drilling, piling, mining, road building, deep shaft cutting, under water cutting, and demolition.

Backed by multiple successes and remarkable sales in the MENA region ever since its inception, GET has broadened its business networks and gone global over the years seeking continuous growth and development, having furthermore sold and exported products made in Qatar to clients in Australia, India, Japan and Germany.

The guests were later invited for a tour through the premises to get familiarised with the production division, the service center, and ultimately the final products through a live demonstration. The guests were later served sumptuous lunch.

'Beauty In An Act' – Fencing workshop with Italian masters



THE Embassy of Italy, with the support of Italian Fencing Federation, Qatar Fencing Federation, and Aspire Academy, will be organising 'Beauty In An Act', a fencing workshop, with Italian Masters at the Aspire Dome, the very same location that in the following days will be hosting the FIE Grand Prix du Qatar in the Épée discipline.

The workshop will provide young fencing amateurs and athletes with the opportunity to train in their techniques – learning from some of the most renowned Italian coaches and athletes from the Italian Fencing Federation. They will include Dario Chiadò, head coach of the Italian National Fencing Team, trainers Roberto Cirillo and Daniele Pantoni, and Massimo Omeri, head fencing coach at Aspire Academy and at the Qatar Fencing Federation. Alongside them, Italian National Team athletes Giulia Rizzi (winner of the last World Cup round in Vancouver), Roberta Marzani, Nicol Fioletta and Gaia Traditi will also be present.

'Beauty in an Act' is a joint initiative resulting from the cooperation between the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the International Cooperation and the Italian Fencing Federation, aimed at promoting Italy's tradition and excellence in fencing through the involvement of athletes and coaches of the National Team.

Historically, Italy has been one of the first countries in which fencing developed, dating back from the Renaissance until the setting of the sport's rules in the XIX century. This tradition is carried on in international tournaments and in the Olympic Games, where Italy holds the record of the most medals ever won, with a score of 130.

AMIR LEADS WELL-WISHERS TO WELCOME KING OF JORDAN

The Amir His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani led well-wishers to welcome HM King Abdullah II bin Hussein of Jordan and his accompanying delegation at the Doha International Airport on a working visit to the country. Also present to welcome the king were Chief of the Amiri Diwan HE Sheikh Saoud bin Abdulrahman Al Thani and Ambassador of Jordan to Qatar HE Zaid Mufleh Al Lawzi. HH the Amir and his brother HM King Abdullah II bin Al Hussein later held a meeting to discuss the means of promoting the fraternal bonds and cooperation between the two countries in various political, economic and investment fields. (QNA)



Prime minister attends Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs opening session, meets guests

QNA
DOHA

PRIME Minister and Minister of Interior HE Sheikh Khalid bin Khalifa bin Abdulaziz Al Thani on Wednesday attended the opening session of the 42nd high-level meeting of the Council of Arab Ministers of Social Affairs, held under the theme 'The rights of persons with disabilities and multidimensional poverty: further implementation of the 2030 agenda for sustainable de-

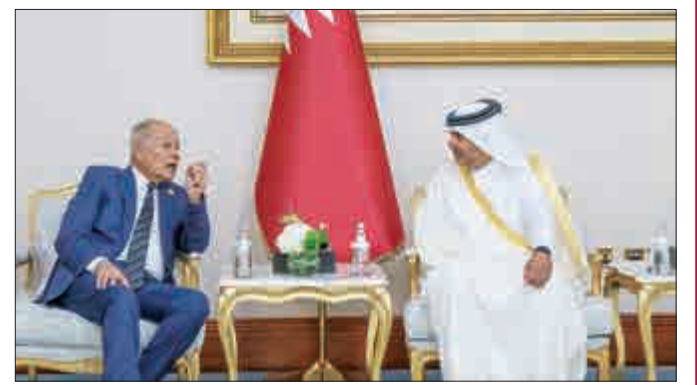
velopment and beyond'. On the sidelines of the event, the prime minister met with Secretary-General of the Arab League Ahmed Aboul Gheit. During the meeting, they reviewed the most prominent issues on the agenda of the 42nd meeting and areas of enhancing the joint Arab cooperation in this field.

He also met with Arab Ministers of Social Affairs and heads of delegations participating in the 42nd meeting of the Council of

Arab Ministers of Social Affairs.

At the outset of the meeting, the prime minister welcomed the guests, wishing them success in the current session of the council.

The meeting also reviewed the most prominent topics on the agenda of the 42nd meeting and their role in fields of childhood, family and rights of elderly people and people with disabilities, as well as areas of strengthening Arab joint action in this regard.



'Poverty eradication a priority'

Continued from page 1

SHE said that the meeting held in Doha aimed to overcome any obstacles or social challenges that might face groups of society, especially persons with disabilities, affirming that the State of Qatar under the leadership of the Amir HH Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani was keen to translate its pledges towards supporting the noble international efforts striving towards

this goal. Eradication of poverty in all its dimensions is a priority for the country's efforts, based on Article 7 of the Permanent Constitution of the State of Qatar, which emphasizes cooperation with peace-loving nations, she said.

She concluded by saying that the meeting is evidence of the keenness of all participants to reach social work to its fullest goals, which contribute to human prosperity and ensure a decent life.

Defence minister participates in inauguration of 'Al Fulk' vessel

QNA
ROME

DEPUTY Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs HE Dr Khalid bin Mohammed Al Attiyah and Minister of Defence of Italy Guido Crosetto participated in the inauguration ceremony of the transportation and strategic support vessel 'Al Fulk' at the factory of Fincantieri Company in the Italian city of Palermo.

The ceremony was attended by Ambassador of Qatar to Italy Khalid bin Youssef Al Sada, Commander of the Amiri Naval Forces HE Major-General (Navy) Abdullah bin Hassan Al Sulaiti, Qatari Military Attache to Italy HE Major-General Hilal Ali Al Mohannadi, along with senior officers in the Qatari Armed Forces.

From the Italian side, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Fincantieri company Claudio Graziano attended the ceremony, along with a number of managers in the company.

The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of State for Defence Affairs and the Italian Minister of Defence held a meeting to discuss military cooperation between the two sides and means of strengthening them.

The Italian minister held a lunch-



banquet in honour of Dr Attiyah and his accompanying delegation.

The meeting and the luncheon ban-

quet were attended by Ambassador of Qatar to Italy Khalid bin Youssef Al Sada, Commander of the Amiri Na-

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