

The Peninsula SPORT

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Al Rayyan draw first blood with win over Al Wahda

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Goals from South American duo Gonzalo Viera and Victor Caceres ensured Al Rayyan's quest for a first-ever place in the AFC Champions League knockout phase got off to the best possible start as they defeated Al Wahda 2-1 in their Group D opener yesterday at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium in Doha. Uruguayan defender Viera handed Al Rayyan the lead on 13 minutes after heading in from a corner but Korean full-back Rim Chang-woo restored parity ten minutes before the half-time break after volleying home from another set-piece.

Michael Laudrup's Qatari champions were not to be denied the three points in front of their fans, though, as from yet another dead ball situation — this time a free-kick wide on the right — the ball eventually reached Paraguay

Results	
Group D	Al Rayyan (Qatar) 2 Al Wahda (United Arab Emirates) 1
	Perspolis (Iran) 1 Al Hilal (SA) 1
Group E	Brisbane Roar (AUS) 0 Muangthong United (THA) 0
	Kashima Antlers (JPN) 2 (Kawasaki 64, Suzuki 82) Ulsan Hyundai (KOR) 0
Group F	Western Sydney Wanderers (AUS) 0 Urawa Red Diamonds (JPN) 4 (Koroki 56, Lee 58, Makino 68, Silva 86)
	FC Seoul (KOR) 0 Shanghai SIPG (CHN) 1 (Hulk 53)

midfielder Caceres who headed past Al Wahda goalkeeper Rashed Ali to give Al Rayyan the lead on the hour mark and all three points on the night.

Meanwhile, Brazilian forward Hulk blasted Shanghai

SIPG to a 1-0 victory over FC Seoul but the big-spending Chinese giants needed to survive a penalty and a red card before winning their AFC Champions League opener yesterday.

Hulk's rocket of a strike on 53 minutes got Andre Villas-Boas's team off to a winning start in Group F, where they lie second on goal difference after Urawa Red Diamonds' 4-0 demolition of Western Sydney Wanderers.

In Group E, Kashima Antlers beat Ulsan Hyundai 2-0 and Brisbane Roar were held to a 0-0 home draw by Thailand's Muangthong United.

SIPG have splashed out 60 million euros on Brazilian midfielder Oscar, among other buys, in their bid for glory after they reached last year's quarter-finals under Sven-Goran Eriksson.

But a speculative effort from Hulk and another shot way over

the bar from the Brazilian were the closest SIPG came in a tepid first half in front of a noisy Seoul crowd.

At the other end, Dejan Damjanovic had a chance to finish off a sweeping move from the hosts but the Montenegrin striker shot tamely at goalkeeper Yoo Hyun from close range.

Oscar's most significant moment of the first half came when he petulantly raised his hand to Lee Sang-Ho's throat and shoved the Seoul forward, earning a yellow card.

But the muscular Hulk brought the game to life with a moment of magic on 53 minutes, when he smashed a left-footed shot from well outside the box which swerved into the top corner. Earlier, Japan's Urawa smashed four second-half goals past Western Sydney Wanderers to open their campaign with a thumping win.



Al Rayyan's Gonzalo Viera celebrates after scoring a goal during the Asian Champions League play-off match against Al Wahda at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium in Doha yesterday.

Al Attiyah displays top form, clinches silver at Qatar Open

Armstrong Vas
The Peninsula

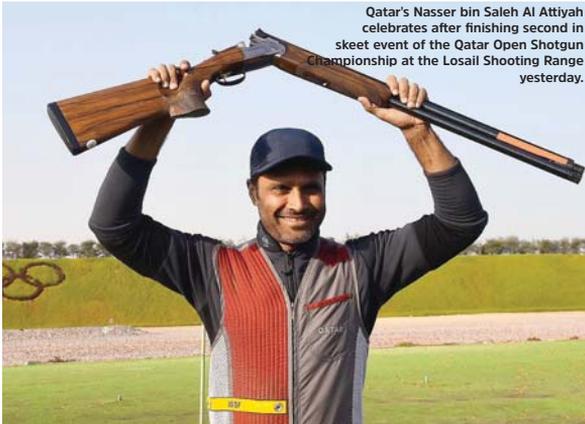
Qatar's Nasser bin Saleh Al Attiyah staged a magnificent rearguard action in the final rounds of the Qatar Open Shotgun Championship to clinch skeet silver at the Losail Shooting Range yesterday.

The 46-year-old, bronze medalist at the 2012 London Olympic Games, who barely squeezed past the qualifying stage through a shoot-out, performed in exemplary fashion in the decisive round to finish behind gold winning Frenchman Anthony Terras.

Al Attiyah, a two-time Dakar Rally champion, made it past the qualifying stage along with Ben Llewellyn of Great Britain after Saif Bin Futais of UAE got eliminated in the three-way shoot-out. The trio finished with a score of 121 in the qualifying round, forcing a shoot-out.

Yesterday's podium finish was a double delight for Al Attiyah who kept to his promise of winning more medals for Qatar

I had promised Sheikh Joaan after we returned from Rio Games that I will win more medals for Qatar ahead of the Tokyo Games: Nasser bin Saleh Al Attiyah



Qatar's Nasser bin Saleh Al Attiyah celebrates after finishing second in skeet event of the Qatar Open Shotgun Championship at the Losail Shooting Range yesterday.

before the 2020 Tokyo Games.

"It is fantastic to win a silver medal. I had promised Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, (President of Qatar Olympic Committee) after we returned from Rio 2016 Games that I will win more medals for Qatar ahead of the Tokyo Games. I have lived up to the promise and hopefully more will follow," said Al Attiyah, who was taking part in his first international event after last year's Olympic Games.

In Rio, Al Attiyah failed to make it past the qualification stage in skeet.

For Al Attiyah, this was his first medal at the Qatar Open Shotgun championship, and the first one after the 2016 Rio Olympic Games.

"I have cut down on a number of races to concentrate on shooting," added Al Attiyah, in response to a question.

On his participation at the upcoming World Cup, Al Attiyah

appeared up beat for the event in the Indian capital city.

"Yes, the good performance in the Qatar Open Shotgun will certainly win me confidence and a boost. I am leaving tomorrow for India," said the ace shooter.

For Qatar, it was their second silver medal of the nine-day championship which concluded yesterday.

Meanwhile, in the final round, Terras, the 31-year-old from Marseille, bronze medal winner at the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing, came with a near perfect display, missing just two targets in the final round on way to the title.

Terras, who shot down 58 targets in the final round compared to Nasser's 55, was delighted to pick up his third gold medal from the Qatar event in five visits.

"It was difficult conditions for shooting. Not an easy competition. It was windy yesterday

(Monday) in the qualifying rounds and today in the second round of qualifying and the final rounds. But, due credit to all the shooters for keeping their focus and getting good scores," said the Frenchman, who finished as winner in the skeet event at the same championship in 2013 and



France's Anthony Terras, winner of the skeet event at the Qatar Open Shotgun championship, celebrates on the podium along with silver medal winner Qatar's Nasser Saleh bin Al Attiyah (left) and third place winner Anton Astakhov of Russia.

Qatar names squad for Asia Rugby Sevens

The Peninsula

Qatar yesterday named a squad to take part in the forthcoming Asia Rugby Sevens Trophy.

The event will be held in Doha from March 3 to 4. The event will be hosted by Qatar Rugby Federation.

The Qatar squad includes players from across the country who have been selected after impressing at various tournaments.

Selected players have each refined their skills at the Qatar Rugby Sevens, Dubai Sevens and XV's Domestic League. The team is set to face Philippines and Nepal on the opening day.

This biggest rugby event in the history of Qatar consists of only one leg making it even more important for teams to win the tournament. The winner of the ARS 2017 will be promoted with a chance at qualifying for the RWCT's in San Francisco in 2018.

QRF President Yousef Al Kuwari congratulated all the players. Kuwari said, "We have a great team of dedicated men who sacrificed so much to get this far. We are a strong outfit with big powerful forwards and equally as big and fast out wide. I believe come finals time we will be there".

Qatar squad includes players from across the country who have been selected after impressing at various tournaments.

Qatar squad

Omer Bahmeed (Stallions), David Ford (DRFC), Isaac Banks (DRFC 2), Tom Featherstone (DRFC1) Bouker Loebech (Stallions), Luke Ward (DRFC 1), Maciej Jan Lenartowicz (DRFC 1), Ismail Ehatmi (Stallions), Rakan Al Mutwaa (Camels), Mubarak Al Malki (Camels), Abdul Kareem Al Muhannadi (Camels) and Amri Shirat (Lions)

Team management
Manager: Samuel Rizo, coach: Usala Buraiaawi, assistant coach: Talal Mujalli and Doctor: Louis Holtzhausen of Aspetar

India, Australia brace for battle in whites

New Delhi
Reuters

The Indian Test juggernaut, with Virat Kohli at the wheel, has crushed almost everything in its path over the last 18 months and Australia will have to conjure up something special if they are to upset the hosts in their four-match series.

With the opening Test between the world's top two Test teams beginning in Pune tomorrow, the odds are stacked heavily in favour of hosts India, who have gone 19 Tests without defeat.

In the final phase of their bumper home season, India are sitting pretty at the top of the



It's a big series for us. I thought England was the biggest for us in the season but having won that 4-0 there is lot of expectation on us: Virat Kohli



Australia's Mitchell Starc (left) and his team-mate Josh Hazlewood stretch during the final day of three-day practice match against India A at the Brabourne Stadium in Mumbai on Sunday.

Test rankings after six consecutive victories.

Significantly, their last three home series victories, over New Zealand, England and Bangladesh, were underpinned by all-round excellence and came on fair surfaces, not the dustbowls on which India typically thrive.

The series against Australia marks the end of India's 13-Test home season and Kohli wants his team to maintain the level

they have been playing at.

"It's a big series for us," Kohli told reporters earlier this month. "I thought England was the biggest for us in the season but having won that 4-0 there is lot of expectation on us."

"The way we have played our cricket as well I think we want to continue that," added India's batting mainstay.

Earlier this month, the 28-year-old became the first cricketer to hit a double century

in four consecutive Test series and his team posted 600-plus totals in three consecutive Tests, another first.

That middle order bat Karun Nair had to be dropped in the one-off Test against Bangladesh despite scoring a triple century in the previous match against England is another indication of the team's batting might.

When India bowl, Ravichandran Ashwin has done

with the ball what Kohli has done with the bat. The off-spinner, currently the top ranked Test bowler, has been in the form of his life, becoming the quickest to the 250-wicket club after achieving the feat in just 45 Tests.

The off-spinner with his bag of tricks will torment Smith and his men, often bowling relentlessly in tandem with spin partner Ravindra Jadeja, with a shoal of fielders hanging around the blade.

Smith is aware of the challenge that awaits Australia, who have lost nine consecutive Test matches in Asia.

"We know it's going to be difficult," he said. "India are a very good team, particularly in these home conditions here. We have prepared very well."

Cricket Australia recruited ex-England spinner Monty Panesar and former India left-arm spinning all-rounder Sridharan Sriram to work with their slow bowlers.

Smith will rely more on the pace duo of Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood, who would have to generate enough reverse swing to be effective on relatively docile Indian tracks.

The visitors can also take heart from the fact that three of the four matches will be played on new venues – Pune, Ranchi and Dharamsala – which will negate some of India's home advantage.

INDIA VS AUSTRALIA TEST SERIES

FIXTURES

(All start at 0400 GMT):
1st Test: Feb. 23-27, Pune
2nd Test: March 4-8, Bengaluru
3rd Test: March 16-20, Ranchi
4th Test: March 25-29, Dharamsala

INDIA

Test ranking: 1
Captain: Virat Kohli
Coach: Anil Kumble
Squad: Kohli, Murali Vijay, Lokesh Rahul, Cheteshwar Pujara, Ajinkya Rahane, Wriddhiman Saha (wicketkeeper), Ravichandran Ashwin, Ravindra Jadeja, Ishant Sharma, Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Umesh Yadav, Karun Nair, Jayant Yadav, Kuldeep Yadav, Abhinav Mukund, Hardik Pandya

Recent form:

Beat Bangladesh in one-off home Test
Beat England 4-0 in five-match home series
Beat New Zealand 3-0 in three-match away series
Beat West Indies 2-0 in four-match away series

AUSTRALIA

Test ranking: 2
Coach: Darren Lehmann
Captain: Steve Smith
Squad: Smith (captain), David Warner, Matt Renshaw, Usman Khawaja, Shaun Marsh, Peter Handscomb, Mitchell Marsh, Glenn Maxwell, Matt Wade, Mitchell Starc, Josh Hazlewood, Jackson Bird, Nathan Lyon, Stephen O'Keefe, Ashton Agar, Mitchell Swepson

Recent form:

Beat Pakistan 3-0 in three-match home series
Lost to South Africa 2-1 in three-match home series
Lost to Sri Lanka 3-0 in three-match away series
Beat New Zealand 2-0 in two-match away series

HEAD TO HEAD:

Total: 90
Australia wins: 40
India wins: 24
Draws: 25
Tied: 1
IN INDIA:
Total matches: 46
India wins: 19
Australia wins: 12
Draws: 14
Tied: 1
Last six Tests:
Sydney Jan, 2015 Drawn
Melbourne Dec, 2014 Drawn
Brisbane Dec, 2014 Australia won by four wickets
Adelaide Dec, 2014 Australia won by 48 runs
Delhi March, 2013 India won by six wickets
Mohali March, 2013 India won by six wickets

Bangladesh recall Mustafizur for SL Tests

Dhaka
AFP

Bangladesh yesterday recalled their left-arm fast bowler Mustafizur Rahman in a 16-man squad for the upcoming two-Test series in Sri Lanka after his prolonged injury lay-off.

The 21-year-old has not played a Test since his debut series against South Africa in 2015 after suffering a series of injuries. He underwent surgery on his shoulder last year.

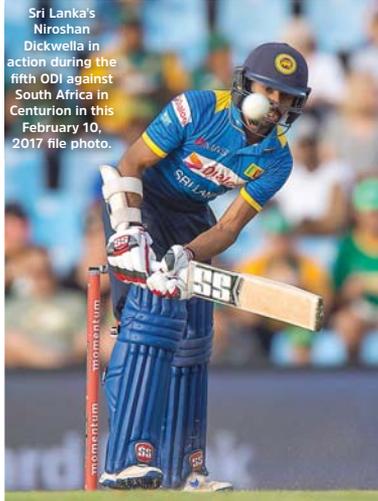
Bangladesh are due to play two Tests against the Sri Lankans – one in Galle from March 7-11 and another in the capital Colombo which starts on March 15 and will be their 100th Test match.

Squad

Mustafizur Rahim (capt), Tamim Iqbal, Soumya Sarkar, Mominul Haque, Mahmudullah Riyad, Shakib Al Hasan, Sabbir Rahman, Liton Das, Tajjul Islam, Taskin Ahmed, Kamrul Islam, Mustafizur Rahman, Mehedi Hasan, Mosaddik Hossain, Subashis Roy and Rubel Hossain

Punished: Sri Lanka's Dickwella gets 2-match ban for another misconduct

Dubai
Reuters



Sri Lanka's opener Niroshan Dickwella has been banned for two limited-over matches after his latest breach of ICC code of conduct, the International Cricket Council said yesterday.

Dickwella was found guilty of "showing dissent at an umpire's decision" during the second Twenty20 International against Australia in Geelong on Sunday, for which he received two demerit points and was fined 30 percent of his match fee.

If a player accumulates four to seven demerit points within a two-year period they are converted into two suspension points, which brings a ban for one test or two one-day internationals or Twenty20s.

Dickwella was given a 50 percent fine and three demerit points in the fourth ODI against South Africa in Cape Town on February 8, and the two additional demerits means he has exceeded the threshold of four

demerits in a two-year period.

The 23-year-old will accordingly miss the third Twenty20 International against Australia in Adelaide on Feb. 22, and Sri Lanka's first ODI against Bangladesh on March 25, the ICC said.

Dickwella was adjudged to have shown dissent when he "kicked the turf and looked at his shoulder for a prolonged period of time" after pausing to view the replay following his dismissal in Geelong, the ICC added.

Australia wicketkeeper Tim Paine was also fined 15 percent of his match fee and given one demerit point for a related incident in the same game.

Paine was found guilty of "using language, actions or gestures which disparage or which could provoke an aggressive reaction from a batsman upon his/her dismissal during an International Match," the ICC added. Sri Lanka have already wrapped up the ongoing series Down Under after winning the first two Twenty20 Internationals.

OCA chief tentatively backs dual host city awards

Sapporo, Japan
AFP

Asia's most powerful sports official has given tentative support to the notion that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) should award the host cities for both the 2024 and 2028 Olympics later this year, an idea which appears to be gaining momentum.

The idea has not been formally proposed by the IOC, and with the 2024 host set to be decided in September, time is running out for what would be

a radical change. But top-ranking Olympic officials, including the IOC President Thomas Bach, have not ruled it out.

The Olympic Council of Asia President Sheikh Ahmad Al-Fahad Al-Sabah, who also holds a key position on soccer's world governing body FIFA, gave his views on the subject during a press conference Tuesday at the Asian Winter Games in Japan.

Sheikh Ahmad said he could not comment on the prospects of such a change in the Olympics but it had happened with other sporting events.

"The IOC executive board have to decide and until they put it on the table we won't comment," he said.

"But as OCA president, we practised this for (the) 2022 and 2026 Asian Games. At FIFA we also practised to have two World Championships: Russia in 2018 and Qatar in 2022."

The spiralling cost of hosting the Olympics has seen a reduction in the number of cities bidding to host it. There are just three candidates in the running for 2024: Paris, Los Angeles and Budapest. There

are growing concerns about Budapest's bid after the city mayor Istvan Tarlos announced last week that he met Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban to review the bid.

If Budapest joined Boston, Rome and Hamburg by pulling out, the IOC would be left with just Paris and Los Angeles. But because both cities presented strong cases, speculation is mounting that the IOC could give the 2024 games to one and the 2028 event to the other.

The struggle to find Olympic hosts has been an

unexpected boon for Asia in recent years.

The region is set to stage the next three Olympics in succession: the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang in South Korea, the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo and the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing.

And Sheikh Ahmad said Asia would be willing to step and host the 2026 Winter Olympics if needed, with Sapporo planning to bid.

"Asia will be ready to host the Olympic Winter Games again," he said. "If there is a lot

who bid (for 2026), we will have to evaluate the situation, but if not, then we have a good chance."

"We are ready to host a third Olympic Winter Games."

The OCA president also flagged the possibility that Oceania nations including Australia could be allowed to compete in the Asian Summer Games from 2022. Australia and New Zealand both accepted invitations to compete at the Asian Winter Games, but on condition they would not be allowed to win medals.

Walcott ends Sutton's FA Cup dream

London
AFP



We did the job. It was not an easy game at all. We have to give them credit because every error we made they took advantage of on this pitch. They played very well: Arsenal manager Wenger



fifth-round game. Arsenal were given several uncomfortable moments on the 3G pitch at Sutton's 5,000-capacity Gander Green Lane ground, which was full to bursting with fans in yellow Sutton T-shirts, hats and scarves.

The home supporters almost had a goal to cheer as well, but Roarie Deacon, who began his career at Arsenal, saw his 25-yard effort cannon back off the bar in the second half.

"It was a dream to watch my team play against Arsenal. I'm



Arsenal's Theo Walcott (centre) celebrates with team-mates Lucas Perez and Gabriel Paulista after scoring their second goal against non-league minnows Sutton United in the FA Cup on Monday.

very, very proud," said Sutton manager Paul Doswell.

"This was our cup final and these players will go down in history at the end of the day."

Wenger will continue to face questions about his future but, for now at least, his dream of winning a record seventh FA Cup remains intact.

He made seven changes to the team humiliated by Bayern in the Champions League, with only goalkeeper David Ospina, Shkodran Mustafi, Granit Xhaka

and Alex Iwobi keeping their places.

For all the international players in Arsenal's ranks, there was no distinct gap in quality between the sides in the early exchanges as the visitors slowly got to grips with the unfamiliar surface.

Arsenal's first shot, a Mohamed Elneny effort that sailed miles off-target, drew hoots of derision from the home fans, but in the 26th minute the visitors went ahead.

Perez swapped passes with Xhaka and then cut in onto his left foot from the right flank before sending in a skidding low cross that evaded everyone to nestle in the bottom-left corner.

Briefly, Arsenal threatened to make their experience count, with Nacho Monreal drawing a smothering save from Sutton goalkeeper Ross Wornor and both Walcott and Alex Iwobi going close. But Arsenal's over-confidence at the back twice

almost gifted Sutton an equaliser. Rob Holding nearly had his pocket picked on the edge of his own box and shortly before half-time Ospina passed the ball straight to Sutton's Adam May, who fired wide with his left foot.

An overhit Holding back-pass that sent Ospina scrambling had Arsenal's fans holding their breath again within seconds of kick-off in the second half.

They gave themselves breathing space in the 55th minute, however, when Monreal crossed low from the left and Walcott turned in his milestone goal from close range.

But if Arsenal thought their second goal would put the game to bed, they were mistaken as Sutton produced their best spell of the game. Maxime Biamou shot straight at Ospina, captain Jamie Collins powered a header over the bar at a corner and Deacon, the ex-Arsenal trainee, cracked a shot against the cross-bar from distance.

The closing stages yielded the surreal sight of Arsenal's Chilean star Alexis Sanchez, one of the world's most feared forwards, making his entrance as a replacement for Iwobi.

"Who are ya?" chanted Sutton's fans, their sense of mischief intact until the end.

Majid set for Al Sadd return

The Peninsula

Al Sadd have confirmed that defender Ibrahim Majid will be available for selection for their round 22 tie against Al Khor.

The club confirmed the news yesterday via their official website, stating that Majid's initial four game ban for his role in an incident against Al Shahaniya had been reduced from four games to two games by the QFA.

The return of the Qatari international defender will be a major boost for Sadd boss Jesualdo Ferrera, who now seemingly has a fully fit side ahead of the title run in.

Al Sadd are currently top of the Qatar Stars League (QSL) standings on goal difference and have a tally of fifty points from 21 QSL games this season.



Al Sadd defender Ibrahim Majid (left) heads the ball during a Qatar Stars League match in this file photo.

Key trio back for Al Ahli

The Peninsula

Al Ahli has confirmed that three key players are in contention to play ahead of their round 22 clash against El Jaish which will be played at Lekhwiya Stadium on Saturday evening.

The club revealed that Meshal Mubarak, Younes Ali and club captain Meshal Abdullah have all recovered from their respective injuries ahead of the game. The news will be a major boost for Brigadeers coach Yusuf Adam, who has seen his side struggle in recent weeks.

Al Ahli are currently in seventh place in the Qatar Stars League (QSL) standings, and have yet to pick up a win in the last three games.

Meanwhile, Mualther SC announced that their star defender Bruno Aguiar will make a comeback ahead of their round 22 clash against Umm Salal on Thursday evening.

The Brazilian defender sat out of his sides 5-0 defeat at the hands of Al Rayyan, serving his one match domestic ban after picking up his fourth booking of the season against Al Khor in round 20. The return of

central defender Aguiar will be a major boost for Stallions boss Phillippe Biro, as the Brazilian defender is considered a key player for the relegation threatened side.

In other team news, Mualther confirmed that three players will be unavailable for the game against Umm Salal after picking up injuries in the defeat to Al Rayyan. The trio of Mohammed Attyiah, Hussain Shehab and Mohammed Al Zowayed will all miss the game.

Mualther are currently in the QSL relegation zone, and have sixteen points from 21 QSL matches.

Wozniacki gets back to work with Dubai win

Dubai
AFP

Two days after playing the Doha final, Caroline Wozniacki plunged straight back to work on Monday at the Dubai Tennis Championships with a 6-2, 7-5 first-round defeat of Darya Kasatkina.

Former WTA world number one Wozniacki had only limited tournament time to adjust to what may be a faster court in the emirate compared to last week's venue.

"Unfortunately I didn't have a bye which I would have loved right now. Anyway, I'm through to the next round. I'm not gonna complain. It's all right. I'm just gonna grind it out," the Dane said.

"It could have had an easier first round. I was really pleased with how I was able to just stay focused out there from the beginning. It's much different conditions here. The ball is flying. The court is faster than in Doha."

"I didn't really know how I was going to play to start off with. Generally, I was pleased with my game."

Olympic champion Monica Puig ignored back pain to defeat Yaroslava Shvedova 6-3, 4-6, 6-4 to reach the second round.

The Puerto Rican, a Doha semifinalist who lost to Wozniacki last week, was stretched out on court for treatment but managed to find her



Denmark's Caroline Wozniacki in action.

reserves to advance past the Kazakh.

"There was just some soreness," world number 42 Puig said.

"I need to get my body as recovered as possible but I'm feeling good after this win."

Puig had lost three of four matches against Shvedova, winning their last in Toronto in 2015.

"It's good to have a match that pushes you a little bit, so then you start getting into the rhythm," she added.

"You really have to be on your toes

in every point -- I'm just happy that I got through today."

Puig's success marked her first Dubai win after a loss in the first round two years ago. She will next play France's Caroline Garcia.

High-ranking seeds led by Angelique Kerber go into second-round action on Tuesday after byes at the Aviation club.

US Open finalist Karolina Pliskova is seeded second ahead of Slovak Dominika Cibulkova.

WTA DUBAI CHAMPIONSHIPS RESULTS

First Round:

- Catherine Bellis (USA) bt Yulia Putintseva (KAZ) 6-1, 7-5
- Monica Puig (PUR) bt Yaroslava Shvedova (KAZ) 6-3, 4-6, 6-4
- Elise Mertens (BEL) bt Tsvetlana Pironkova (BUL) 6-3, 6-2
- Peng Shuai (CHN) bt Lesia Tsurenko (UKR) 6-1, 6-1
- Kristina Mladenovic (FRA) bt Katerina Siniakova (CZE) 6-3, 6-3
- Misaki Doi (JPN) bt Madison Bingley (USA) 6-2, 6-7 (4/7), 6-3
- Katerina Bondarenko (UKR) bt Anyina Sabalenka (BEL) 4-6, 6-4, 6-3
- Ana Konjuh (CRO) bt Zhang Shuai (CHN) 6-0, 6-1
- Lauren Davis (USA) bt Mandy Minella (LUX) 2-6, 6-2, 6-1
- Christina McHale (USA) bt Kiki Bertens (NED) x13 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 6-4
- Caroline Wozniacki (DEN) x10 bt Darya Kasatkina (RUS) 6-2, 7-5
- Alison Riske (USA) bt Coco Vandeweghe (USA) 6-4, 6-4

Teenaged American Catherine Bellis made a winning debut as the 17-year-old beat Yulia Putintseva of Kazakhstan 6-1, 7-5.

The match was the first this season for Bellis, who suffered a strained hamstring as well as a muscle problem after a surprise run to the US Open third round.

China's Peng Shuai ousted Lesia Tsurenko of the Ukraine 6-1, 6-1 while Kristina Mladenovic of France defeated Czech Katerina Siniakova 6-3, 6-3.

Alison Riske took advantage of 11 double-faults, breaking Australian Open semi-finalist Coco Vandeweghe five times to post a 6-4, 6-4 victory.

McIlroy plays with Trump and tunes up for comeback

South Florida
Reuters

World number three Rory McIlroy, eyeing a comeback next week from injury, continued his tune-up with a round with US President Donald Trump in south Florida on Sunday, it was reported.

The Clear Sports and Entertainment company posted a picture on its Twitter feed of Trump with McIlroy, former New York Yankees baseball player Paul O'Neill and Clear Sports Chief Executive Garry Singer. The round reportedly took place at Trump International Golf Club in West Palm Beach.

Trump spokeswoman Sarah Sanders said on Monday: "As stated yesterday, the president played golf. He intended to play a few holes and decided to play longer."

Nine days ago, he and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe played with South African pro golfer Ernie Els, and Trump previously had a round with Tiger Woods.

Northern Irishman McIlroy made it clear during last year's US Presidential campaign that he did not want to be drawn into any public support or otherwise of any of the candidates.

McIlroy, 27, has been out of action since early January, nursing a rib stress fracture. He plans to return next week at the WGC Mexico Championship in Mexico City.

Qatar's Sheikh Ali eyes 2020 Olympics

Rizwan Rehmat
The Peninsula

Qatar's top rider Sheikh Ali bin Khalid Al Thani - who will lead the home charge at next month's CHI Al Shaqab, says the national equestrian squad is eyeing the 2020 Olympic Games which will be held in Tokyo.

Last August, Ali was a member of the Qatar squad that featured in the Rio Games show jumping competition, finishing sixth on the final standings.

"When we qualified for the World Cup in the US, it was a great moment of pride for us, a moment to celebrate but as a rider and a member of the Qatar equestrian national squad, we are already looking ahead," Sheikh Ali said yesterday.

"We have events like the World Cup and the (FEI) Nations Cup but for all of us, we are looking at qualifying for the next Olympic Games in Tokyo," he added at a pre-event news conference at Al Shaqab Arena.

"Our joy of celebration at any event lasts for one night. The following day we look at our next target and that is the qualification for the 2020 Olympic Games. We get congratulated by our family members, by our team management and by people around the region, but we are looking at the next Olympic Games," Sheikh Ali added.

Sheikh Ali joined teammates Bassem Hassan Mohammed, Ali Yousef Al Rumaili and Faleh Suweid Al Ajami at their maiden appearance in the Brazilian capital last August.

The star Qatari rider, distinctively recognizable for his



We have events like the World Cup and the (FEI) Nations Cup but for all of us, we are looking at qualifying for the next Olympic Games in Tokyo: Sheikh Ali



thin and tall frame, said he has a busy schedule to keep the coming few weeks and months.

"We have prepared for the next three events on our schedule. We have outlined the horses that will be taken to events. I have decided on my ride," Sheikh Ali, the de-facto team anchor at the Rio Olympics last year, said.

"We normally don't overtax our rides. We keep them relaxed as far as possible," Sheikh Ali said. "But as a rider, I am passionate about doing well and I always try to win."

"The event in Doha will keep us moving forward in terms of preparation for the World Cup legs and the Nations Cup. We have a busy schedule the coming few weeks," Sheikh Ali added.

Sheikh Ali, who is trained by renowned equestrian Jan Tops, said Qatar's equestrian landscape had witnessed a sea-change in the last few years. From March 2-4, Qatar

will host the 5th edition of the CHI Al Shaqab, the only five-star event held in Asia and the Middle East.

"I would like to thank the stakeholders who back the sport of equestrian. Overall, Qatar benefits hugely from this kind of an event," Sheikh Ali said.

"We are now into its fifth year. This is a very strong competition. There are so many people wanting to learn this sport. You should see the young kids who turn to take lessons. When they turn up at Al Shaqab, they get to learn by participating and by watching the top riders in action.

"We travel to Europe and the US for top-flight events. Now we have the same class event right on our soil," he remarked.

Sheikh Ali said he was thrilled to see Qatar fans get behind the national team riders and the sport in general.

"The sport has grown really fast in Qatar. So many young riders are coming up," he said.



Qatar's show jumping star Sheikh Ali bin Khalid Al Thani is seen in action in this file photo.

Doha gears up for CHI Al Shaqab

The Peninsula

Top international riders and members of the public will come together to celebrate Qatar's rich equine heritage when Al Shaqab hosts the fifth edition of CHI Al Shaqab, its top international competition, from March 2 to 4 in Doha.

CHI Al Shaqab 2017, sponsored by ExxonMobil Qatar, is one of only four international annual equestrian competitions that showcases three or more equestrian disciplines in one event. The prestigious competition will see top-ranking local, regional and international riders compete in Show Jumping CSI 5* and 3*, Dressage CDI 5* and Para-Dressage CPEDI 3* at Al Shaqab's impressive grounds.

Alongside the equine competition, visitors to Al Shaqab will be treated to a host of entertainment and cultural activities that aim to promote a legacy of appreciation for the sport.

Speaking at a press conference held yesterday at Al Shaqab, Omar Al Mannai, Event Director of CHI Al Shaqab, said: "In just five years, CHI Al Shaqab has established itself as one of the top events on the international equestrian calendar, attracting equine enthusiasts from across the globe. The event attracts a great deal of international



Omar Al Mannai, Event Director of CHI Al Shaqab, Saleh Al Mana, Vice President, Government and Public Affairs, ExxonMobil Qatar and Qatar's top rider Sheikh Ali bin Khalid Al Thani pose for a photograph following a press conference held at Al Shaqab yesterday.

interest, which sheds a light on Qatar as a nation with a sporting legacy we can be proud of."

"ExxonMobil Qatar is delighted to sponsor CHI Al Shaqab for the fifth year, and to help promote Qatar as a premier sports event destination with our partner Al Shaqab," said Alistair Routledge, President and General Manager for ExxonMobil Qatar.

Top ranked riders will be competing at CHI Al Shaqab including Qatar's Sheikh Ali Al Thani, world number one Daniel Deusser (Germany),

second-ranked Christian Ahlmann (Germany) and Simon Delestre (France), currently ranked fifth in the world.

Patrik Kitzel (Sweden) won both the Grand Prix and the Freestyle test at Al Shaqab last year, and he'll look to repeat the feat in 2017. Other dressage riders to watch include Carl Hester (United Kingdom), the world's number five, and Inessa Merkulova (Russia), ranked sixth. Several riders will be defending their 2016 crowns in para-dressage, including Ib winner Nicole Den Dulck (Netherlands). It winner Rix van

der Horst (Netherlands), and Philippa Johnson-Dwyer (South Africa), who won the III.

Visitors to the CHI Al Shaqab 2017 can look forward to number of exciting activities and an assortment of food and beverages in the Spectator Plaza. The dedicated entertainment zone will feature something for the entire family including interactive video games, virtual reality sets, FI and horse simulators, face painters, illusionists, pony rides and a daycare centre for toddlers. A range of cultural activities will also be on offer, including henna painters, falcon handlers and traditional food to enable visitors to experience true Qatari hospitality.

Speaking about the value of the event to the community, Sheikh Asmaa Al Thani, CHI Al Shaqab Marketing Director, said: "In addition to being a notable sporting event, CHI Al Shaqab is an invaluable event for the wider community in Qatar. It is an opportunity to discover a sport to those who are not familiar with it, become enthused about horses capabilities, and enjoy an array of additional activities which will be available during these remarkable three days."

This year's event holds special significance since for Al Shaqab, as it marks our 25th anniversary.

CHI AL SHAQAB: SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Thursday, March 2:

9:30 am: Jumping CSI 3*, outdoor arena
10:30 am: Para-Dressage CPEDI 3*, indoor arena
12:30 pm: Jumping CSI 3*, outdoor arena
3 pm: Jumping CSI 5*, outdoor arena
5:45 pm: Jumping CSI 5*, outdoor arena

Friday, March 3:

8:45 am: Para-Dressage CPEDI 3*, indoor arena
9:30 am: Jumping CSI 3*, outdoor arena
2:45 pm: Jumping CSI 3*, outdoor arena
3 pm: Dressage CDI 5* Grand Prix, indoor arena
4:45 pm: Jumping CSI 5*, outdoor arena
7:30 pm: Jumping CSI 5*, outdoor arena

Saturday, March 4:

8:30 am: Dressage CDI 5* Grand Prix Special, indoor arena
9:00 am: Jumping CSI 3*, outdoor arena
10:30 am: Para-Dressage CPEDI 3*, indoor arena
11:30 am: Jumping CSI 5*, outdoor arena
2:15 pm: Jumping CSI 3*, outdoor arena
2:45 pm: Dressage CDI 5*, indoor arena
4:30 pm: Jumping CSI 5*, outdoor arena

MXGP season set to flag off at Losail Circuit

The Peninsula

The 2017 MXGP season is set to begin for the fifth year in succession at the Losail Circuit on Saturday evening with qualifiers lined up for Friday.

The prestigious event has seen a different winner each year in the premier class. In 2013, when MXGP first tore up the hard packed soil of Qatar, it was Clement Desalle on the top step of the podium. Followed Gautier Paulin rising above the competition to claim the first red plate of the year. Then in 2015 it was dominated by Max Nagl who rode at an untouchable level, and last year the soon to be Champion of Tim Gajser started his season in winning form at Qatar.

The defending MXGP world champion, Team HRC's Tim Gajser who put together an amazing and surprising rookie season last year,

will be a top contender this year. The young Slovenian set the world on notice in his debut appearance in the MXGP class here in Losail last year.

This weekend, the 84 of Jeffery Herlings will also be lining up for his 450 debut fresh off of an injury. Although Red Bull KTM Factory Racing did state that he will be healthy and fit to race. The 2015 Champion, Febvre will be lined up in hopes to regain the FIM Motocross World Champion Title but will be up against stiff competition such as Antonio Cairoli who will be just as motivated, having claimed the Championship eight times.

Other riders to look out for are, 777 HRC Honda of Evgeny Bobryshy who in 2016 performed well at the Qatar opener placing 3rd overall. Gautier Paulin who now races for Rockstar Energy Husqvarna Factory Racing. Shaun Simpson, who

Event schedule

Friday: MX2 Free Practice 15:15; MXGP Free Practice 15:45; MX2 Time Practice 17:15; MXGP Time Practice 18:00; MX2 Qualifying Race 20:00; MXGP Qualifying Race 20:50.

Saturday: MX2 Warm up 14:30; MXGP Warm up 15:00; MX2 Race 1 17:15; MXGP Race 1 18:15; MX2 Race 2 20:10; MXGP Race 2 21:10.

will be racing for Wilvo Yamaha MXGP Official Team, Arnaud Tonus, Valentin Guillod riding for Honda Red Moto Assomator, Monster Energy Yamaha Factory MXGP's Jeremy Van Horebeek and Suzuki World MXGP's Kevin Striobos.

In the MX2 category, it will be difficult to predict who is going to shine since the defending MX2 champion Jeffery Herlings, along with Max Anstie, have jumped up to the premier class. Red Bull KTM

Factory Racing has placed their hopes on Pauls Jonass and the MX2 Rookie Jorge Prado Garcia who have now taken over Herlings' spot.

Meanwhile, Team Suzuki World MX2's Jeremy Seewer has his heart set on doing better than the fourth place he got last year. Seewer finished second in the championship last year and is one of the favorites to win this time around. While Kemea Yamaha Official MX2 Team's Benoit Patureau will be also looking to get on the box after struggling last year.

The Americans of Rockstar Energy Husqvarna Factory Racing' Thomas Covington and Monster Energy DRT Kawasaki's Darian Sanayel also have the potential to finish amongst the top five.

All races, including the qualifying races on Friday, will be available LIVE and OnDemand on www.mxgp-tv.com.



Action form last year's MXGP of Qatar at the Losail Circuit.