

Ma Long claims Qatar TT Open trophy for second time in a row

Ninth-seed Chen Meng wins Women's Singles and Doubles

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DOHA

DESPITE dominating the Men's event for the last five years, China's Ma Long appears not to be ready to relinquish his crown anytime soon as the 28-year-old won in Doha again for the second time in a row on Sunday.

Playing against compatriot Fan Zhendong in the final of the Men's Singles at the Ali Bin Hamad Al Attiyah Arena, also for the second year running, the Rio Olympics gold medalist eviscerated his world No. 2 opponent (11-8, 11-8, 11-7, 5-11, 6-11, 11-4) to claim the trophy as well as the \$25,000 winner's prize money of the Seamaster 2017 ITTF World Tour Qatar Open.

It was a master-class from the world No.1, who is argu-



QTTA President Khalil Ahmed al Mohannadi (fifth right) with ITTF President Thomas Weikert (fourth left), Chinese Ambassador HE Li Chen (third right) and other dignitaries with the winner of the Men's Singles Ma Long (right, back) and finalist Fan Zhendong during the prize distribution ceremony at the Ali Bin Hamad Al Attiyah Arena in Doha on Sunday. (RAFEK PALAYOOR)

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With the victory, Long is now closer to the enviable 26 ITTF World Tour Men's Singles titles record of Vladimir Samsonov of Belarus in 35 finals.

The world No. 1, who has been at the top of the rankings for 54 months now, is just three short of the lanky Belarusian with his 23 wins.

"I'm delighted with the win. This tournament is a season-opener for me and to have won today is an indication that the season will be good. My friend Fan was very good today and he gave me an initial scare with his taking of the third and fourth game. I hope to continue in this form throughout the year," Long said after his win.

Sunday's final was attended by ITTF President Thomas Weikert, QTTA President Khalil Ahmed al Mohannadi and Ambassador of China to Qatar HE Li Chen.

ably the best two-winged looper in table tennis history, as he raced to a 3-0 lead in just under 45 minutes before Zhendong staged a feeble comeback to reduce the deficit to 3-2.

The sixth game was however a vintage Long in action. The right-handed player, who is first player, male or female, to win the ITTF Star Player of the Year award in consecutive years, secured the first three points before Zhendong elected for "Time Out".

Long thereafter established a 6-3 advantage which was further extended to 10-4 before going for the kill with a delectable backhand which his opponent had no answer for as he took possession of the trophy once more in Doha.



Ma Long, Men's Singles champion with Chen Meng, winner of the Women's Singles in Doha on Sunday.

"We are happy to host this tournament which was for the first time organised entirely with supports from private sponsors. We are delighted that the corporate bodies are

willing to partner with us as we continue to put Qatar on the global map of table tennis," Mohannadi said.

He added that the federation plans to do more both regionally and internationally for the sport as table tennis is one of the most loved global sport with over 200 member-federations of the ITTF.

In the Women's Singles, China's Chen Meng, the ninth-seed, was two time lucky as she defeated her fellow Chinese Wang Manyu (12-10, 11-9, 11-2, 2-11, 11-6) to emerge victorious.

The duo had earlier partnered in the day to win the Women's Doubles event after overcoming the top-seeded Korean combination of Jeon Jihee and Yang Haeyun (11-4, 11-6, 4-11, 11-6) to claim the top prize.

Fast exchanges were the order of the day throughout the match as Meng looked for

the chance to execute her technically very correct top spin attacking play early in the rally.

Countering those attacks was very much the role for Manyu.

The opening two games were both on the proverbial knife's-edge, both finished in favour of Meng; her positive athletic play being rewarded.

Arguably more relaxed, the movement and balance executed was a lesson in technical perfection as Meng established an early lead at 4-1 in the third game.

Seemingly asserting her authority, it was somewhat contrary to expectations that Wang Manyu won the first eight points of the fourth game. Manyu was stable, secure and trademark consistent while Meng made errors.

After a break between games, a highly focused Meng, most deliberate when serving,

as she entered the arena for the fifth game. She went ahead 4-3, Manyu called "Time Out".

Initially the break worked in favour of Meng as she reduced the speed of her play and relied on consistent topspin play with the ball travelling at a safe height over the net. She won the next two points.

The advantage was never relinquished. At 10-6, she held match point, needing just one chance. The game, match and title were all secured.

"We are teammates so we know each other very well, it was a very tough match. Especially in the first two games, I only won by a narrow margin of two points in each game. It was tedious mentally as well to take those two games. The first two games were crucial, so after winning those, it was easier for the remaining of the match," Meng said after the match.

Countdown to EFG Sailing Arabia - The Tour 2017 final

Leaders EFG Bank Monaco, Team Al Mouj Muscat tie in countdown to Dubai

British Team Averda create upset to emerge third during Doha in-port racing

TRIBUNE NEWS NETWORK
DOHA

EFG Sailing Arabia - The Tour title contenders EFG Bank Monaco and Team Al Mouj Muscat continued their podium domination on Saturday in a nail-biting second round of inshore racing.

The rival crews, both vying for the EFG Sailing Arabia - The Tour 2017 trophy, proved themselves experts at boat handling as the eight-strong fleet did battle around a short course off Doha.

Both teams scored a win and a runner's-up finish in the two intense races held in a building breeze of up to 10 knots. The action also saw a welcome return to form for Team Averda (GBR), notching up a third and fourth to claim the final Doha in-port series podium spot.

Team Al Mouj Muscat, led by Christian Ponthieu, opened their scorecards with victory, capitalising on a bad start by EFG Bank Monaco. It looked like they would pull off the double after snatching the lead from their arch rivals in race two when a shackle on the end of EFG Bank Monaco's spinnaker pole came open.

But current EFG Sailing Arabia - The Tour title holders EFG Bank Monaco put their match racing world champion helmsman Mathieu Richard to work and they snuck ahead just on the finish line to reverse the results of the opening race. The equal share means the gap between the two teams in the overall standings remains the same at a slim four points, with only



Action during the in-port race at The Pearl Qatar in Doha on Saturday.

one offshore leg and one in-port race series remaining.

"It was great fun to do some inshore racing after four offshore legs, it's a completely different game," EFG Bank Monaco skipper Thierry Douillard said. "It was an amazing battle between us and Team Al Mouj Muscat but importantly that four-point gap is still there between us. We haven't lost any points to them and we ended the day by rolling them right on the line. That's better for us than for them for sure."

Team Al Mouj Muscat trimmer Will Harris said his team were more determined than ever to overhaul their rivals as EFG Sailing Arabia - The Tour reaches its climax. "It was an incredible fight between us and EFG Bank Monaco," Harris said. "We're a bit gutted to be pipped by them in the second race but

we're happy with how we sailed, and we know this rivalry is going to carry on to the end of the tour. The next leg is worth more than any other leg and we're going for first place for sure. We've proved we can match them offshore and now inshore so we'll fight right to the end."

Team Zain (KUW) inched closer to Team Renaissance in the overall standings thanks to a fifth and a third, keeping their dreams of an overall podium finish alive. "We were a bit rusty in the first race but for the second we were on form," said Team Zain crewman Connor Banks. "Most importantly we put points on Team Renaissance, which at this point of the race is very welcome."

Team Averda's results see them jump up the leaderboard into fifth place ahead of Bi- enne Voile (SUI), Adelsia di

Torres (ITA) and DB Schenker (GER).

Following the racing, a prize giving ceremony was held for Leg 4 and the Doha in-port race series at The Pearl-Qatar. At 205 nautical miles the final offshore stage, starting tomorrow, is the longest of the five legs, and will see the fleet have to pick their way through oil fields and round islands over more than 32 hours at sea.

EFG Sailing Arabia - The Tour 2017 will then reach its climax with an in-port race series in Dubai on March 1.

- RESULTS OF IN-PORT RACE:**
1.EFG Bank Monaco (MON/Thierry Douillard) - 0.75 points
2.Team Al Mouj Muscat (OMA/Christian Ponthieu) - 0.75 points
3.Team Averda (GBR/Andrew Baker) - 1.75 points
4.Team Zain (KUW/Cedric Poulligny) - 2 points
5. Bi- enne Voile (SUI/Lorenz Mueller) - 3 points
6.Team Renaissance (OMA/Fahad Al Hasni) - 3 points
7. Adelsia di Torres (ITA/Renato Azara) - 3 points
8.DB Schenker (GER/Annemette Bes) - 3.25 points

Qatar's Shamari wins 4th Qatargas Under-16 Chess Championship

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QATAR'S Ghanim al Shamari emerged the champion of the 4th Qatargas Under-16 Chess Championship with 8.5 points total at the end of the three-day tournament in Doha on Saturday.

In all, over 160 players representing about 20 countries, including 12 each from Oman and Bahrain, competed in the QR25,000 total prize money event which was held at the Al Muntaza Model Primary School for Boys from February 23.

India's Kumar Govind Anuj came second with 7.5 points while his compatriot Jijo Joy emerged third with 7.0 points.

The tournament, which involved players between 6 and 16 years, was conducted as per the Swiss-system for rapid chess which involved nine rounds with each round lasting 15 minutes and allowing ten

seconds for every move starting from the first move.

"I'm very happy to participate and emerge on top at this tournament. The field was quite strong and all the players I met were quite good but in the end I won. I thank Qatargas and the Qatar Chess Association for putting together this championship which has helped to discover and nurture new talents in Qatar," said Shamari after the win.

For his efforts, he pocketed the winner's QR5,000 cash prize as well as the championship trophy while Anuj, the second-placed, smiled home with QR3,500. The third-placed player went home with QR2,500.

The event was attended by QCA Secretary-General Mohammed al Medaihi, QCA Assistant Secretary-General Mohamad Naser al Sayed, QCA Technical Expert Salman Ahmed al Dori and others.

Speaking to *Qatar Tribune*,

Medaihi said, "We are grateful to Qatargas for their tremendous supports over the last four years which has given birth to what we are seeing today. The turnout at this year's event has been very impressive, which is an indication that chess is rapidly growing in the country. I hope to see more participants at the next edition."

He added that youth development is one of the cardinal objectives of the federation and that all hands are on deck to ensure more Grandmasters emerge from the country with the programmes the federation have lined up over the next five to ten years.

"The tournament has revealed that Qatar has great potentials in this sport and we are ready to provide the necessary support to ensure they maximise their God-given talent. I believe the sky is the limit for our sport in Qatar," Medaihi, who is also Grandmaster, added.



QCA Secretary-General Mohammed al Medaihi (fourth left, standing) and other officials with the winners of the 4th Qatargas Under-16 Chess Championship in Doha on Saturday.