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CRICKET

Leach strikes before Pope leads England nearer NZ sweep

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TENNIS

Djoko, Nadal lead title chase at all-change Wimbledon

AFP London

Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal headline the title chase at Wimbledon where eight-time champion Roger Federer, the world's top two players as well as valuable ranking points will all be missing.

Djokovic is bidding for a seventh title at the All England Club to move level with US great Pete Sampras. Nadal, fresh from a 14th French Open victory and a record-extending 22nd major, is halfway to the first men's calendar Grand Slam in more than half a century. The season's third Slam tournament has already made political waves even before the first ball is served on Monday.

The decision to ban Russian and Belarusian players in the aftermath of the invasion of Ukraine means there is no place for world number one Daniil Medvedev or eighth-ranked Andrey Rublev. Both the ATP and

WTA, who control the men's and women's tours, retaliated by stripping ranking points from the tournament.

For the first time since his debut in 1999 - notwithstanding the Covid-cancelled 2020 edition - Federer will be a no-show as the 40-year-old recovers from knee surgery.

Also missing is Germany's world number two Alexander Zverev, who suffered serious ankle ligament damage in an horrific injury in his French Open semi-final against Nadal.

Djokovic and Nadal, ranked three and four, are therefore the top seeds meaning if they are to face each other for the 60th time, it can only be in the final.

'EXTRA MOTIVATION'

Djokovic, the champion in 2011, 2014, 2015, 2018, 2019 and 2021, will be playing in his final Slam of the year. His refusal to be vaccinated against Covid-19 will rule him out of the US Open later this year. "As of today I'm not allowed to enter the States under



Serbia's Novak Djokovic. (AFP)

these circumstances. That is an extra motivation to do well here," said Djokovic who gets play at Wimbledon underway on Monday against Kwon Soon-woo of South Korea.

A bruising quarter-final loss to Nadal at the French Open which saw him deposed as champion in Paris will also provide extra motivation. Nadal won the last of his two Wimbledon titles in 2010 having captured his first with an epic triumph over Federer two

years earlier. The 36-year-old Spaniard arrives at Wimbledon with the Australian and French Opens secured. He is halfway to becoming only the third man - and first since Rod Laver in 1969 - to complete a calendar Grand Slam. Nadal has endured a bitersweet relationship with Wimbledon. Two titles have been accompanied by three lost finals as well as injury-enforced absences in 2004, 2009, 2016 and 2021. There was a question mark over



Spain's Rafael Nadal. (Reuters)

his durability for the two weeks at Wimbledon having played the entire French Open with his troublesome left foot anaesthetised. Nadal has since undergone a course of radiofrequency stimulation, a treatment aimed at reducing nerve pain in his foot. "I can walk normal most of the days, almost every single day," said the 36-year-old Spaniard who faces Argentina's Francisco Cerundolo in his opening match tomorrow. "When I wake

up, I don't have this pain that I was having for the last year and a half."

BERRETTINI WAITS

Should Djokovic or Nadal falter, then Italy's Matteo Berrettini, runner-up to Djokovic in last year's final, would be the most likely beneficiary. World number 11 Berrettini has won back-to-back grasscourt titles at Stuttgart and Queen's. "I don't know if I'm the favourite as Novak and

Rafa (Nadal) are always there; Rafa has already won two Slams and no-one expected him to win in Australia," said 26-year-old Berrettini of his Wimbledon chances. "I don't feel like I'm the favourite but I know I can do it, I can't pull the wool over people's eyes."

Of the remaining top 10, French Open runner-up Casper Ruud has lost in the first round on his two previous trips to Wimbledon. Stefanos Tsitsipas has fallen at the first hurdle three times out of four but is fresh from a maiden grasscourt title in Mallorca on Saturday. Spanish teen star Carlos Alcaraz only made his main draw debut in 2021, reaching the second round.

Felix Auger-Aliassime made the last-eight last year while 10th-ranked Hubert Hurkacz, the champion on grass in Halle last weekend, was a semi-finalist in 2021.

On the way, the Polish player defeated Federer in the quarter-finals which was the Swiss star's last appearance on the tour.

MOTORSPORT

Bagnaia wins Dutch MotoGP, Quartararo crashes out

Bagnaia wins Dutch MotoGP, Quartararo crashes out

AFP Assen, Netherlands

Italy's Francesco Bagnaia won the Dutch MotoGP yesterday to reignite his title challenge after championship leader Fabio Quartararo crashed out of an incident-packed race.

Frenchman Quartararo fell twice, flipping spectacularly over his handlebars in the second incident although he walked away afterwards, shaking his fists in anger at his error.

Bagnaia, in contrast, stayed out of trouble on his Ducati to record his third victory of the season and a welcome full points score after failing to finish in the last two races.

"I am so happy after two difficult races," the Italian said.

In a great day for Italian riders, Marco Bezzecchi on a Ducati for Valentino Rossi's VR46 team was second while Spanish rider Maverick Vinales rounded out the podium in the 11th race of the 20-season. Quartararo heads into the summer break with a 21-point lead over Aleix Espargaro, who was fourth yesterday.

The Frenchman fell on the fifth then on the 13th lap out of 26 in front of an enthusiastic crowd in the Netherlands.

Even if he quickly got back on his feet, he had to give up after this second accident.

The Frenchman got off to a bad start and was quickly overtaken by Aprilia rider Espargaro.

It was while he was trying to recover second place, in an attempt on the inside of a bend, that Quartararo lost control of



Italy's Francesco Bagnaia celebrates after the Dutch MotoGP race at the TT circuit in Assen yesterday. (AFP)

his Yamaha, ending up in the gravel although he was soon back in the saddle, albeit in last place. But a few laps later, his race was over after an acrobatic tumble.

CHANGE OF FORTUNE

"I made a rookie's mistake. I attacked as it is was the last lap and the last bend," Quartararo said of his first fall, which he said had left something feeling "not right" with his bike.

As soon as the race was over he apologised to Espargaro for forc-

ing him off the track in the fifth lap. This was the first time since 1994 that Yamaha have failed to score a point at Assen. For Bagnaia, taking the chequered flag was a welcome change of fortune.

This was the fourth time in six races he had claimed pole, but he had failed to finish in three of his past four outings.

He won his last two completed races - at Jerez and Mugello - but like Quartararo on Sunday was visibly angry last weekend af-

I made a rookie's mistake. I attacked as it is was the last lap and the last bend'

ter crashing out of the German MotoGP, where his French rival prevailed.

Runner-up to Quartararo in the championship last year, he had looked poised to challenge for the title just a few weeks ago, but subsequently slipped to 91 points off the pace before this round of the season at the circuit known as the "Cathedral of Speed".

Ahead of the next race at Silverstone on August 7 the 25-year-old from Turin moved

up from sixth to fourth, cutting the gap to Quartararo to 66 points.

In third overall is Johann Zarco, who said he had suffered a "very difficult" day after trailing in 13th on his Ducati-Primac.

"It was really hard maintaining my pace and little by little I slipped out of the fight," he said.

"So I'm disappointed, obviously, but it's good to get another three points on the board and to see I'm still in third place in the standings. But it's no fun to come in an exhausted 13th!"

RESULTS

1. Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati) 40 mins 25.205sec, 2.2. Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Ducati-VR46) at 0.444sec, 3. Maverick Vinales (ESP/Aprilia) 1.209, 4. Aleix Espargaro (ESP/Aprilia) 2.585, 5. Brad Binder (RSA/KTM) 2.721, 6. Jack Miller (AUS/Ducati) 3.045, 7. Jorge Martin (ESP/Ducati-Pramac) 4.340, 8. Joan Mir (ESP/Suzuki) 8.185, 9. Miguel Oliveira (POR/KTM) 8.325, 10. Alex Rins (ESP/Suzuki) 8.596

Principal retirement

Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) World championship standings

Riders

1. Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) 172 points, 2. Aleix Espargaro (ESP/Aprilia) 151, 3. Johann Zarco (FRA/Ducati-Pramac) 114, 4. Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati) 106, 5. Enea Bastianini (ITA/Ducati-Gresini) 105, 6. Brad Binder (RSA/KTM) 93, 7. Jack Miller (AUS/Ducati) 91, 8. Joan Mir (ESP/Suzuki) 77, 9. Alex Rins (ESP/Suzuki) 75, 10. Miguel Oliveira (POR/KTM) 71

Wimbledon struggles to avoid shadow of Russia ban

It's been nine years since Sergiy Stakhovskys stunned Roger Federer at Wimbledon in a Centre Court seismic shock.

This weekend Stakhovskys is 2,500km away from London, dressed in fatigues rather than tennis whites. The 36-year-old is armed, desperately fighting to hold back Russia's invasion of Ukraine. "This used to be us.... Now this is our @Wimbledon.... Last night 62 rockets were launched to attack different cities in Ukraine. #stoprussia #boycotrussia #helpukraine @TheDolgo," tweeted Stakhovskys.

In his tweeted photographs, Stakhovskys is seen shaking hands with Federer after his 2013 victory.

Also pictured is Ukrainian compatriot Alexandr Dolgoplov after his match against Federer at Wimbledon in 2017. Both men are retired from tennis; both are now in the military. Wimbledon, which starts today, has banned all Russian and Belarusian players from this year's tournament.

That ruled out men's world number one Daniil Medvedev and eighth-ranked Andrey Rublev.

On the women's side, three of the top 20 are missing - Aryna Sabalenka, Daria Kastakina and two-time major winner and former number one Victoria Azarenka. Stakhovskys wants Russians banned from all sports. However, six-time Wimbledon champion Novak Djokovic believes that would be a step too far.

"I just don't see how they have contributed to anything that is really happening. I don't feel it's fair," said Djokovic, adding that Russian and Belarusians be allowed to play under neutral flags.

That's what happens in the week-in, week-out ATP and WTA tours. When Wimbledon announced its ban, the two tours retaliated by stripping the tournament of ranking points.

"In terms of the response from the ATP, I didn't really agree with it. I just don't see

who it helps," said two-time Wimbledon champion Andy Murray.

"All the players have still showed up to play here, so I don't see how it puts the ATP in a stronger position moving forwards."

In a further move, Wimbledon said it will provide tournament tickets to Ukrainian refugees living in the local areas of south-west London. All England Club officials will also donate £250,000 (290,000 euros/\$306,000) to the refugees' charity.

That humanitarian gesture, however, hasn't softened Nick Kyrgios' belief that the ban was ill-advised.

"I don't think it was a good idea to ban the Russian players. Medvedev is the best we have in our sport right now," said the Australian player.

"Whenever we have cameras on and a lot of people tuning in, you want our best players to be on showcase for the sport to grow."

"I'm disappointed they're not here. It's weird not seeing Medvedev here."

US superstar Serena Williams opted to sidestep the controversy. "Another heavy subject that involves a tremendous amount of politics, from what I understand, and government. I'm going to step away from that," said the seven-time Wimbledon champion. Despite the official ban, there are still plenty of Russian-born players taking part at Wimbledon.

Alexander Bublik was born in Gatchina and Mikhail Kukushkin hails from Volgograd but they represent Kazakhstan. Yulia Putintseva and Elena Rybakina also play for Kazakhstan despite being born in Moscow.

One player has got round the Russia-Belarus ban with a last-minute switch.

Moscow-born Natela Dzalamidze, a 29-year-old doubles player, last week changed her nationality from Russian to Georgian and will compete in the women's doubles at Wimbledon with Serbia's Aleksandra Krunic.

THIRD TEST

Leach bags 10-for as Pope, Root lead England recovery

The home team just 113 runs away from a 3-0 clean sweep of New Zealand side

AFP
Leeds, United Kingdom

Jack Leach took 10 wickets in a Test for the first time in his career before Ollie Pope and Joe Root set about leading England's charge to a series whitewash of New Zealand at Headingley yesterday.

England were 183-2 at stumps on the fourth day of the third and final Test, needing just a further 113 runs to reach a target of 296 on Monday's last day.

Pope was 81 not out and Root, on his Yorkshire home ground, 55 not out, with the third-wicket pair having shared an unbroken stand of 132.

England will be firm favourites to wrap up a 3-0 series success over Test world champions New Zealand after chasing down stiff targets of 277 and 299 in five-wicket wins at Lord's and Trent Bridge respectively.

Alex Lees was run out attempting a needless single when New Zealand captain Kane Williamson's throw was well gathered-in by bowler Trent Boult.

Zak Crawley's innings ended in familiar fashion when, having made 25 that included 24 runs in boundaries, he tamely chipped spinner Michael Bracewell to Williamson at cover.

Former captain Root came in with England 51-2. Even while presiding over a run of just one win from 17 Tests prior to this series that prompted his resignation as captain, Root's own form never dipped - in 2021 he scored 1,708 Test runs at a superb average of 61.

Such was New Zealand's desire to dismiss Root they wasted two of their three reviews this innings off successive Tim Southee deliveries in near-identical attempts to get clearly correct not out lbw decisions overturned when the star batsman was on one.

Root further delighted fans who had been told they could attend the fifth day for free - as was the case in Nottingham last week - with an outrageous reverse-



England's Ollie Pope turns to set off on another run during play on day 4 of the third Test against New Zealand at Headingley Cricket Ground in Leeds, northern England, yesterday. (AFP)

ramp six off left-arm quick Neil Wagner. Pope, whose fifty came off 66 balls, showed his class by hitting three fours off consecutive Wagner deliveries, including a superb straight drive. And with Headingley bathed in sunshine, the last over of the day saw Root complete a 78-ball fifty with a legside boundary off Bracewell. Selected ahead of Ajaz Patel, a front-line spinner, Bracewell had expensive close figures of 1-70 in 11 overs. When Leach bowled Boult to end the innings, Blundell was left stranded shy of what would have been his second hundred of the series on 88 not out.

SCOREBOARD
New Zealand 1st Innings 329

England 1st Innings
New Zealand 2nd Innings
T. Latham c Bairstow b Overton 76
W. Young c Pope b Potts 8
K. Williamson c Bairstow b Potts 48
D. Conway c Pope b Root 11
H. Nicholls c and b Leach 56
D. Mitchell lbw b Potts 88
T. Blundell not out 9
M. Bracewell c Crawley b Leach 2
T. Southee b Leach 13
N. Wagner c Billings b Leach 4
T. Boult b Leach 0
Extras (b9, lb2, nb2, w4) 17
Total (all out, 105.2 overs) 326
Fall of wickets: 1-28 (Young), 2-125 (Latham), 3-152 (Conway), 4-153 (Williamson), 5-161 (Nicholls), 6-274 (Mitchell), 7-291 (Bracewell), 8-305 (Southee), 9-305

(Wagner), 10-326 (Boult)
Bowling: Broad 24-7-63-0; Leach 32-2-12-66-5; Potts 25-5-66-3 (1w); Overton 14-2-61-1 (1nb, 3w); Stokes 4-0-30-0 (1nb); Root 6-0-29-1
England 2nd Innings (target: 296)
7 A. Lees run out (Williamson/Boult) 9
25 Z. Crawley c Williamson b Bracewell 25
81 O. Pope not out 81
55 J. Root not out 55
13 Extras (b5, lb6, nb2) 13
183 Total (2 wkts, 39 overs) 183
Fall of wickets: 1-17 (Lees), 2-51 (Crawley)
Bowling: Boult 9-2-37-0; Southee 12-4-32-0; Bracewell 11-0-70-1; Wagner 7-1-33-0 (2nb);
Match position: England need a further 113 runs to win with eight wickets standing

SECOND TEST

Roach runs through Bangladesh top order after 250th Test wicket



Kemar Roach of the West Indies celebrates picking up his 250th Test wicket after the dismissal of Bangladesh's Tamim Iqbal for 4 runs during the third day of the second Test at Darren Sammy Cricket Ground in Gros Islet, Saint Lucia. (AFP)

AFP
Gros-Islet, Saint Lucia

Kemar Roach became just the sixth West Indian to claim 250 Test wickets as the senior pacer swept through the top order of the Bangladesh second innings before rain intervened again on the third day of the second and final Test at the Daren Sammy Stadium in St Lucia yesterday.

Wicketless through the visitors' first innings of 234 on Friday, Roach made amends second time around with the wickets of Tamim Iqbal, opening partner Mahmudul Hasan Joy and Anamul Haque to leave Bangladesh at 32 for three, still 142 runs away from making the West Indies bat again.

For the Bangladeshis, whipped by seven wickets in the first Test in Antigua a week earlier, there was at least a moment of supreme satisfaction on another otherwise disappointing day as Khaled Ahmed claimed his first five-wicket innings haul in Test cricket as the West Indies were eventually dismissed for 408 in their first innings.

With the early wickets of Raymon Reifer and Nkrumah Bonner a day earlier, the medium-pacer removed Alzarri Joseph in the rain-shortened morning session before ending the innings

on a damp afternoon by getting top-scorer Kyle Mayers for 146 and then ending the innings by having last man Jayden Seales caught behind to finish with figures of five for 106 off 31.3 overs.

West Indies had started the day already well placed at 340 for five but suffered an immediate setback when Joshua da Silva, who had contributed 29 in a 96-run sixth-wicket partnership with Mayers, fell leg-before to Mehidy Hasan Miraz.

Joseph's equally swift demise to Khaled brought in Roach, who finished unbeaten on 18 as the wickets tumbled at the other end.

Mayers' second Test century - his first was a monumental unbeaten 210 on debut against the same opponents in Chattogram in February of last year - spanned just over five hours in which he faced 208 deliveries, striking 18 fours and two sixes before lifting a catch to Shoriful Islam at mid-on off Khaled.

Any expectation of top-order Bangladesh resistance in the second innings evaporated when Tamim essayed an expansive off-drive for wicketkeeper Da Silva to take the catch and give Roach his 250th Test wicket.

He then had Mahmudul taken by Jermaine Blackwood at third slip before earning an lbw verdict against Anamul just as rain was sweeping across the ground again.

India captain Rohit Sharma down with Covid ahead of deciding England Test

NEW DELHI: India Test captain Rohit Sharma tested positive for Covid-19 just days before the rescheduled fifth Test against England, the country's cricket board said yesterday. "Rohit Sharma has tested positive for Covid-19 following a Rapid Antigen Test (RAT) conducted on Saturday," the BCCI tweeted. "He is currently in isolation at the team hotel and is under the care of the BCCI Medical Team." The right-handed batsman had been playing in a four-day warm-up match against Leicestershire but did not bat in their second innings on Saturday's third day. He scored 25 in the first innings on Thursday. The rescheduled fifth Test of last year's series begins on Friday at Edgbaston, Birmingham, giving little time for the 35-year-old to recover. The match was originally due to have been played

last September at Old Trafford in Manchester, but a coronavirus outbreak in the India camp forced the Test to be postponed. India lead 2-1 after four matches and can win their first Test series in England since 2007 should they avoid defeat. Also yesterday, it was announced that England wicketkeeper Ben Foakes has tested positive for Covid-19, with Kent's Sam Billings taking his place for the remainder of the ongoing third Test against New Zealand. Foakes did not take the field on Saturday's third afternoon at Headingley after complaining of a stiff back, but later returned a positive test after a check at the team hotel. Jonny Bairstow, who has spent a large part of his Test career keeping wicket, deputised behind the stumps during New Zealand's second innings.

FOCUS

India see off Ireland in rain-affected T20I

AFP
Dublin

Hardik Pandya got off to a winning start as India captain as the tourists chased down Ireland's 108-4 to win a rain-affected T20 international by seven wickets yesterday.

The first match of a two-game series in Malahide was reduced to 12 overs per side due to a rain-delayed start. Pandya won the toss and inserted the hosts with the forecast of more rain prompting him to favour the chase. Ireland got off to a terrible start as captain Andy Balbirnie was out for a duck

before Paul Stirling (4) and Gareth Delany (8) also fell inside the first four overs. However, Harry Tector's 64 not out, aided by Lorcan Tucker's 18 off 16 balls, at least allowed Ireland to set a respectable total.

India also stumbled early on in their reply as Craig Young took the wickets of Ishan Kishan and Suryakumar Yadav. But they were never in trouble with the required rate as Deepak Hooda smashed an unbeaten 47.

BRIEF SCORES
India 111 for 3 (Hooda 47*, Kishan 26, Young 2-18) beat Ireland 108 for 4 (Tector 64, Chahal 1-11, Bhuvneshwar 1-16) by seven wickets** 12-over game



Indian players celebrate a wicket during the Twenty20I against Ireland at Malahide Cricket Club in Dublin yesterday. (AFP)

BOTTOMLINE

Squash player's switch to England shows Egypt's athlete exodus

AFP
Cairo

Egyptian squash player Mohamed el-Shorbagy was called a traitor and a sellout when he announced this month he had joined the English national team.

Yet the athlete is not the first Egyptian to compete under a foreign flag, with experts saying the choice illustrates a pervasive problem of athletes feeling underpaid and under-equipped.

"There is only football and a few team sports" that garner support, Hossam Hamed, former wrestler and coach of Egypt's national team, said.

Other athletes, particularly those in individual sports, have to deal with "obsolete regulations" and "minimal payments, even after medals and international victories".

He says Egyptian athletes joining other national teams are "re-belling against a painful reality". Explaining his choice, el-

Shorbagy said "England gave me all the support I needed", in contrast to his home country, where "no one paid him any mind" for years.

Currently world number 3, the Alexandria native is one of Egypt's most decorated squash players, spending 50 months as the world number one in a country that consistently dominates the sport on a global level. Five of the world's top 10 men athletes are Egyptian, in addition to el-Shorbagy, as well as the top three women athletes.

But the champion is far from the first to trade in the Egyptian flag, with a history of athletes in weightlifting, wrestling, equestrian, boxing and handball doing the same.

In 2018, after butting heads with the Egyptian Wrestling Federation, wrestler Mahmoud Fawzy joined team USA following several Arab and African gold medals.

In a country where two thirds of the population live below or just above the poverty line, sport



can be a way out. Weightlifters and wrestlers who start training in barebones youth centres in low-income neighbourhoods, Zariq explained, "look to foreign nationalities in pursuit of money and better social status". "How can the reward for an

Olympic gold medal be a million pounds (\$54,000), after all the years of training and preparation that have gone in?"

In Egypt, where football reigns and Mohamed Salah wears the crown, other athletes are green with envy.

"In football, some players earn up to a million dollars a year, without even having to win a competition," Zariq derided.

Handball has seen a rare reversal of the trend, according to Yasser Labib, former captain of the national team and head of the

handball team at Al Ahly Club, which together with its rival Zamalek dominate the African Champions League.

In the 1990s, he explained, they were haemorrhaging players, with Egyptian athletes playing all over the world except in Egypt.

"This is no longer the case," he told AFP. "Salaries have increased, contracts have become more professional, and players no longer want another nationality, but only to play in European leagues," while remaining on the Egyptian national team.

The key, he told AFP, is to put an end to the parochial quarrels within federations, and increase funds dedicated to athletes.

It is a tall order for the Egyptian government, currently caught between double-digit inflation and a crippling devaluation.

In 2019-2020, only \$21.3mn was earmarked by the government for all sports federations in a country with a 103-million-strong population, according to official figures. In contrast, the

budget in a country like France clocks in at around a billion dollars.

But experts say the solution can come from sponsors, though support needs to be sustained. All too often, Hamed says, sponsors see a player as "just a product they can profit off of for revenues or advertising, but as soon as he is injured, it's all over."

Amir Wagih, former squash champion and national team coach, thinks support needs to continue after athletes retire, including through "job offers".

Squash players, as opposed to weightlifters and wrestlers, usually hail from higher-income communities, trained in elite neighbourhood sporting clubs and leveraging their victories into scholarship opportunities at top-tier American and European universities.

Wagih says it is not money these athletes are pursuing in their foreign careers, but opportunities for "a better future after retirement" they would not have in their home country.

GOLF

Schauffele leaves it late to retain Travelers lead

'It will be fun. I've been looking forward to playing with Pat in the final round'

AFP
New York

Xander Schauffele produced a late birdie spree to hold onto a slender lead at the PGA Tour's Travelers Championship on Saturday with a three-under-par 67.

Schauffele, who led by five shots after Friday's second round, will take a one-shot advantage into the final round at TPC River Highlands in Cromwell, Connecticut.

But the 28-year-old from California left it late to ensure he would remain on top of the leaderboard on Saturday with a pair of birdies on the 16th and 17th holes to drop to 17 under for the tournament.

He rolled in a 16-foot birdie putt at the par-three 16th and then drilled an iron from the fairway to a few feet for a further birdie on the 17th.

That ultimately allowed Schauffele to finish the day just in front of red-hot Patrick Cantlay, who had a bogey-free seven-under-par 63 to move to 16 under.

Schauffele is looking forward to a final round duel against close friend and Ryder Cup playing partner Cantlay.

"It will be fun. I've been looking forward to playing with Pat in the final round," he said.

"We don't get paired together very often in regular tournaments, only in those team ones.

"So there's a certain level of comfort we have playing with each other and hopefully that pays off and hopefully we can make a lot of birdies."

Cantlay was similarly enthused by the prospect of a final day shoot-out with his friend.

"We actually haven't played that much together in tournament play, maybe only three times in the last three, four years. So it will be good to go out there again with him," Cantlay said.



Xander Schauffele of the US plays a shot on the 18th hole during the third round of Travelers Championship at TPC River Highlands in Cromwell, Connecticut. (AFP)

Top scores at Travelers Championship

- 193 - Xander Schauffele 63-63-67
- 194 - Patrick Cantlay 64-67-63
- 196 - Sahith Theegala 67-65-64
- 197 - Kevin Kisner 67-64-66
- 198 - Martin Laird (SCO) 63-69-66, Lee Kyung-Hoon (KOR) 68-64-66
- 199 - Michael Thorbjornsen-a 68-65-66, Webb Simpson 64-69-66, JT Poston 62-70-67, Nick Hardy 67-64-68
- 200 - Scottie Scheffler 68-67-65, Lee Hodges 68-65-67, Matthew NeSmith 65-67-68, Harris English 66-65-69

"It's always nice to be out with him, if he's on my team or if he's not. I'm going to go out there tomorrow and try as hard as I can and let the chips fall where they may"

Sahith Theegala is three off the lead on 14 under after his six-under-par 64.

The highlight of Theegala's round came with a brilliant eagle three on the par-five 13th, when he reached the green in two before rolling in an 11-foot putt.

The only blemish on an otherwise flawless round came at the 18th, where he

made bogey. Kevin Kisner is one behind Theegala on 13 under after his four-under-par 66.

Scotland's Martin Laird is tied for fifth with Lee Kyung-hoon on 12 under.

Laird and Lee both carded four-under-par 66s.

Four players including first round co-leader JT Poston are tied for seventh on 11 under, while Scottie Scheffler heads a quartet on 10 under after a five-under-par 65.

But there was more disappointment

for Northern Ireland's Rory McIlroy. The four-time major-winner who shot an eight-under-par 62 in the first round had fallen away on Friday after a second round that included a quadruple bogey eight on the 12th hole.

McIlroy navigated his return to the 12th safely on Saturday with a par, but was already struggling after making a double-bogey and bogey on the front nine.

Two more bogeys on the 14th and 16th holes left him tied for 31st place on six under, 11 shots off the lead.

FOCUS

South Korea's Kim Min-kyu clinches Open for first title



Kim Min-kyu of South Korea poses with the trophy after his victory in the Kolon Korea Open at Woo Jeong Hills Country Club in Cheonan yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Cheonan

South Korea's Kim Min-kyu won the national title at the Korea Open Golf Championship yesterday, clinching his first victory on home soil.

Kim claimed the title after a fierce battle, with the final round of the Asian Tour event at Woo Jeong Hills Country Club in Cheonan going to a playoff.

The 21-year-old headed into his penultimate hole tied in first place at five-under-par, but his drive veered left and out of the course.

The final round went to a three-hole aggregate playoff,

sending Kim and Cho Min-gyu back to the 16th hole, with the pair vying for their first career titles.

Both Kim and Cho missed the green at the 18th, but while Cho missed his par putt, Kim slotted in his birdie putt to win the national title.

"To be honest, this is unreal," Kim said. "I was tense but the results were really good. I feel amazing," he told reporters.

Kim's victory secures him a spot in the 150th Open at St. Andrews in Scotland from July 10 to 17 and 450,000,000 won (\$349,000) in prize money.

The Korea Open has been held every year since 1958, but the 2020 edition was cancelled due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

FINAL ROUND SCORES AT KOREAN OPEN

Cheonan: Leading scores after yesterday's final round of the Asian Tour's Korean Open at Woo Jeong Hills Country Club in Cheonan (par 71, KOR unless stated):

- 280** - *Kim Ming-kyu 72-71-68-69, Cho Min-gyu 71-70-67-72
- *Kim Ming-kyu won after three-hole playoff
- 281** - Jarin Todd (USA) 69-69-73-70, Lee Hyung-jun 71-68-71-71
- 282** - Junseok Lee (AUS) 72-72-66-72
- 283** - Moon Kyong-jun 69-70-74-70, Kim Tae-ho 72-72-70-69, Lee Tae-hee 72-66-73-72, Ok Tae-hoon 69-69-70-75, Sarit Suwannarat (THA) 71-72-67-73
- 284** - Seo Yo-seop 77-67-70-70, Lee Jung-hwan 68-71-71-74,
- 285** - Hong Soon-sang 69-73-73-70, Kim Jun-sung 72-69-72-72, Hwang#859 Jae-min 68-74-71-72, Lee Sang-hee Lee 69-68-75-73
- 286** - Kim Bi-o 72-69-74-71, Chan Shih-chang (TPE) 73-72-70-71, Hwang Jung-gon 71-73-71-71, Bae Yong-jun 74-71-69-72

SPOTLIGHT

Chun falters but still has three-shot lead at Women's PGA Championship



AFP
Bethesda

In Gee Chun saw her lead chopped in half on Saturday but she still managed to hold a three-stroke advantage entering the final round of the KPMG Women's PGA Championship at Bethesda, Maryland.

Chun shot a 3-over 75 after opening with rounds of 64 and 69 at Congressional Country Club. The South Korean sits at 8-under 208 as she pursues her third career major title.

Lexi Thompson (70) and South Koreans Hye-jin Choi (70) and Sei Young Kim (71) are tied for second

at 5 under. Australia's Hannah Green (72) is fifth at 4-under 212.

Chun had three birdies, four bogeys and a harmful double-bogey on the par-5, 16th hole during a shaky overall round. "It was a little tough out there," Chun said.

"I'm so proud of myself because I hang in there after I had double bogey on 16. After I made two pars and then I'm so proud of that, yeah."

Chun entered the round up six shots and was still leading by five before the problems on 16. One of her troublesome shots was an 8-iron that sailed over the green.

"I was trying to forget about it when it's done," Chun said of the hole.

Thompson carded four birdies and two bogeys. Three of the birdies came in a four-hole stretch on the back nine.

"Overall, it was a very steady day," Thompson said. "I feel like there was two iffy holes. Basically No 9 and No 10 where I had some good saves in there. Overall very steady, and I took advantage of a few birdie putts that I had on the back nine and made a longer putt, I guess, on 15, whatever it was, for birdie."

Choi also had four birdies and two bogeys. Both her bogeys were on the front nine.

"My goal today was to not be too aggressive and actually play safe, and I think that led to a good result,"

Choi said. "It was very hot today, so it was difficult, but I'm glad to have finished with a good round today."

Kim had two birdies - on No 6 and No 7 - and one bogey (No 17) during a round of mostly pars.

"I'm just trying to best my play on the course," Kim said.

Green had three birdies and three bogeys.

Jennifer Kupcho, who won the first major of the season - The Chevron Championship in the spring - is among four golfers tied for sixth at 3-under 213. She shot 74 on Saturday. Kupcho had four birdies but hurt herself with six bogeys to fall five shots off the pace.

"Definitely far," Kupcho said of

her deficit. "Just go out there and play my game. I mean, I can't really control anything, honestly, where I'm just here to be here.

"I'm exhausted. One more day, and then it's an off week."

Also tied for sixth are Jennifer Chang (73), Canada's Brooke Henderson (73) and Thailand's Athaya Thitikul (68).

US Women's Open champion Minjee Lee (73) of Australia is tied for 10th at 2-under 214 with Northern Ireland's Stephanie Meadow (72).

World No 1 Jin Young Ko (71) of South Korea is part of a seven-way tie for 12th place at 1 under.

No 2 Nelly Korda (72) is tied for 29th place at 1-over 217.

ATHLETICS

McLaughlin books World Championships berth with 400m hurdles record

AFP
Eugene

Sydney McLaughlin punched her ticket to the athletics World Championships with a world record 51.41sec victory in the 400m hurdles at the US trials on Saturday.

McLaughlin shaved five-hundredths of a second off the world record of 51.46 she set in winning Tokyo Olympics gold last August 4, delivering a dominant performance at Eugene's Hayward Field that saw runner-up Britton Wilson cross the line more than a second back in 53.08sec.

Shamier Little was third in 53.92.

The trio will represent the US on the same Hayward Field track in July - when reigning World Champion Dalilah Mohamed also aims to defend her title.

With a bye as champion Mohamed - who beat McLaughlin in Doha in 2019 but took silver behind her in Tokyo - received a waiver to skip the trials to re-

cover from a hamstring injury. McLaughlin showed she didn't need her great rival to push her to new heights in this championship season.

Her performance capped a day of 11 finals and a farewell to the US championships for Olympic great Allyson Felix - 21 years after she ran in her first.

Felix finished sixth in the 400m, making her almost certain to earn consideration for a relay at the World Championships.

Felix is calling time on a career that includes 29 world and Olympic medals - including seven Olympic golds.

After a gritty semi-final performance to earn a place in the final, Felix - greeted by a massive ovation - clocked 51.27sec.

Talitha Diggs, daughter of four-time Olympian Joetta Clark-Diggs and the NCAA collegiate champion, used a powerful finishing kick to win the women's 400m in 50.22, overhauling early pace-setter Lynna Irby and Kendall Ellis in the final 20 meters. Ellis took second in 50.35 and Irby was third in 50.67.



Sydney McLaughlin sets a world record in the final of the Women 400m Hurdles during the 2022 USAF Outdoor Championships at Hayward Field in Eugene, Oregon. (AFP)

Michael Norman, seeking World Championships gold to help expunge the memory of a disappointing fifth-place finish at the Tokyo Games, delivered an emphatic victory in the men's 400m with a world-leading

43.56sec. NCAA collegiate title holder Champion Allison broke 44 seconds for the first time, taking second in 43.70, with Randolph Ross third in 44.17.

World record-holder Keni Harrison won the 100m hurdles

in another world-leading time of 12.34sec.

Alaysha Johnson was second in 12.35 and Alia Armstrong was third in 12.47.

World champion Nia Ali opted out of the final but will complete

the formidable US contingent in the event next month.

In other events, world 200m champion Noah Lyles clocked 19.95sec to top the first-round times, and revealed he was rebounding from a bout with Covid. Lyles said he learned after his win in New York on June 12 that he had coronavirus, not realizing until after the event that his muscle soreness and chills were symptoms of illness. "To be honest I'm so in shape I'm not too worried about it," Lyles said.

Erriyon Knighton, who owns the fastest time in the world this year of a 19.49, was second-fastest in the heats in 20.08.

Reigning 100m world champion Christian Coleman advanced to the semis with a time of 20.13 but said he still wasn't sure if he'd pursue a 100-200 double at worlds. Fred Kerley, who dazzled with a 9.76sec semi on the way to winning the 100m on Friday, booked his 200m semi-final spot with a time of 20.29.

Abby Steiner, coming off a world-leading 21.80sec to win the NCAA collegiate title this

month, topped the women's 200m heat times in 22.14sec.

Tokyo Olympics silver medalist Gabby Thomas, who owns the third-fastest time in history, made it safely into the semis with the seventh-quickest time of the day 22.59.

Sha'Carri Richardson, who shockingly failed to advance from the 100m heats on Thursday, also advanced with a time of 22.69 - finishing second to Thomas in their heat. Reigning world champion and Tokyo Olympics silver medalist Grant Holloway and Devon Allen stayed on course for a 110m hurdles showdown with the top two times in the heats.

Holloway, whose American record of 12.81 is one one-hundredth off the world record, won his heat in 13.11sec, second-fastest of the round ahead of recently crowned NCAA champion Trey Cunningham's 13.13. Philadelphia Eagles wide receiver Allen, who stunned Holloway with the third-fastest time in history of 12.84sec in New York two weeks ago, won his heat to qualify third-fastest in 13.27.

WIMBLEDON

Home favourite Raducanu relishing Centre Court debut

'It's always my dream to step out on Centre Court. It's something I've always wanted to do and started playing tennis for'

Reuters
London

When Emma Raducanu competes at Wimbledon this week, she will return to the venue of not only one of her most cherished moments last year when she made her Grand Slam debut but also one of her most harrowing.

Before Raducanu became a household name last year, the teenager was ranked 338 in the world when she received a wildcard and she reached the last-16 against all odds even as British hopes faded as her compatriots made early exits.

She coped surprisingly well with the pressure but her fairy-tale Wimbledon debut ended in distressing circumstances when she was forced to retire in the fourth round after suffering breathing difficulties.

As debates raged over whether the youngster was up to the task of handling pressure on the big stage, they were quickly put to rest two months later after she became the first qualifier to win a Grand Slam when she lifted the US Open.

Now having played a year on Tour, battle-hardened Raducanu is ranked 11th in the world but she has also been humbled in some respects by recent results and injuries. But the 19-year-old is no longer a stranger to pressure as she welcomed the prospect of kicking off the women's action in Centre Court against Alison Van Uytvanck.

"It's always my dream to step out on Centre Court. It's something I've always wanted to do

and started playing tennis for," said Raducanu who has never hit on Centre Court.

"This year I get such a special feeling walking around the grounds, I definitely feel that people are behind me. Even from some of the people working on the tournament, they're like, 'You got this; just cheering me on, that's pretty special.'

"One of the perks is I don't need to cross the road at Aorangi to practice now on like Court 28 or something."

Another British hope being viewed with cautious optimism is former champion Andy Murray who has fought defiantly after career-threatening hip surgery to rise up to 51st in the rankings.

A run to the final in Stuttgart has made the unseeded Scot a dark horse in the draw but whether his body can go the distance in five-set matches remains to be seen as the 35-year-old takes on James Duckworth in the opening round.

Top seed Novak Djokovic, who lost his number one ranking for a second time this year, will start his campaign against Kwon Soon-woo without having played a single competitive match on grass following his quarter-final run at the French Open. Ons Jabeur won the tune-up tournament in Berlin and rose up to number two in the rankings but a knee injury that forced her to pull out of Eastbourne has put a question mark on her credentials.

"My knee, I always had trouble with it... But overall everything is good. Hopefully I'll be 100% on Monday," she said ahead of her first round match against Mirjam Bjorklund.



Britain's Emma Raducanu returns the ball during a training session at The All England Tennis Club in Wimbledon, southwest London, yesterday. (AFP)

Favourite Swiatek says still figuring out grass

Poland's world number one Iga Swiatek is the red hot favourite to win the Wimbledon title but admits that grasscourt tennis is something she is still trying to figure out. That admission will offer hope to her rivals but the bad news is the 21-year-old has done a pretty good job of figuring everything out so far in her stunning early career. Only four years ago she won the Wimbledon junior title and since then has turned herself into a dominant force on the WTA Tour, so much so that she has two French Open titles and is currently on a 35-match winning streak, featuring six titles.

Those were on hard courts and clay and the switch to the All England Club lawns will be a stern challenge.

"Honestly I still feel like I need to figure out grass. Last year, for sure, it was that kind of tournament where I didn't know what to expect," Swiatek told reporters on Saturday. "Then match by match I realised maybe I can do more and more. Still this year I only played, like, 10 days on grass, so it's not a lot. I didn't have a lot of time to prepare. "But I'm just trying to stay open-minded and kind of take positives from the situation and realise that I can play without any expectations."

Swiatek, who reached the fourth round last year, begins her quest against Croatian qualifier Jana Fett, ranked 254. That clash will open play on Centre Court tomorrow - the traditional slot for the reigning champion. With Australian Ash Barty having quit the sport, that honour has been given to Swiatek and few could begrudge her.

"We didn't really request that. I know that there has been some discussions about who should open, and I feel really privileged that I've been chosen," she said.

"There are many players here who have won Wimbledon... It's a great thing for me. I wasn't expecting that because still I only made it to



the fourth round last year and that's my best result.

"Hopefully it's going to be a good show." Swiatek has not played a match since beating American Coco Gauff in the French Open final, having taken the decision to rest after her incredible streak of victories.

"It was just the best decision for me to stay in a good shape," she said. "Basically I stayed home because after being on tour I feel like this is the best way for me to recover."

"It was hard to chill out and not do anything because I felt like my adrenaline was up. I felt like I still needed to get some tasks done and have some goals, like clean the house. "But I didn't have to worry about eating good or sleeping good, so that was pretty nice."

DRESS CODE

Wimbledon doesn't care what looks cool: Kyrgios

Reuters
London

Nick Kyrgios would rather wear all black when competing at Wimbledon instead of adhering to the all-white dress code, with the Australian saying yesterday that the Championships were out of tune with what looks 'cool' on court.

The grasscourt major is famous for its strict dress code and does not even allow players to wear off-white or cream, while the measuring tape comes out to ensure the trim of colour on necklines or sleeves are no wider than a centimetre.

"I always want to wear all black, obviously," Kyrgios said with a smile at a news conference ahead of his first round

match with British wildcard Paul Jubb.

"But I don't think it's something that's going to change, I don't know."

"I think it would be cool to allow, like, a black headband or black sweatband. I think it would look cool. Obviously Wimbledon doesn't really care what looks cool... I don't think it will ever change."

But the prestige associated with Wimbledon was still enough to lure Kyrgios to compete despite the lack of ranking points this year due to the ban on Russian and Belarusian players.

The decision essentially reduced Wimbledon to an exhibition event but the major's organisers are also dishing out record prize money to the tune of 40.3mn pounds (\$49.42mn).

Kyrgios, who said he did not agree with the ban as the sport's number one ranked Daniil Medvedev would not be playing, added that he did not pick tournaments based on the ranking points on offer.

"As a kid, when I watched Wimbledon, when I wanted to play it, I wasn't thinking about ranking points. I was thinking about playing in the most prestigious tournament in the world. That's all I'm here for," he said.

"There's people that are (saying) 'I'm not going to play Wimbledon because of ranking points. I'm going to go play a challenger that week!'"

"When I'm sitting with my kids in the future, I'm not going to be proud to say I played a challenger instead of Wimbledon. I will choose to play Wimbledon every day of the week."

FOOTBALL

Bale confirms MLS move to LAFC



Wales' Gareth Bale. (Reuters)

AFP
Los Angeles

Wales captain Gareth Bale confirmed his move to Major League Soccer's Los Angeles FC on Saturday following his departure from Spanish giants Real Madrid.

Bale confirmed his plans to join LAFC in a post on Twitter following widespread reports earlier Saturday about the move.

"See you soon, Los Angeles," the 32-year-old wrote. An accompanying video showed Bale wearing an LAFC shirt and cap.

Earlier the Los Angeles Times said Bale will be eligible to play for LAFC from July 1.

ESPN reported that Bale will fly to Los Angeles at the end of next week to sign a deal which runs to the end of this season, with an option for an additional year.

Bale was once the world's most expensive player and has spent the last eight seasons with Real Madrid, winning three domestic championships and five Champions

League titles.

The Welshman has scored 139 league goals in his club career with 39 goals in 106 internationals for Wales.

Bale played a pivotal role in helping Wales qualify for this year's World Cup, where they will face the United States, England and Iran in the group stage in Qatar.

It marks the first time Wales have qualified for the tournament since the 1958 finals.

Bale's signing comes as LAFC bid to build on a strong start to the MLS season.

The California club lead the Western Conference standings with 30 points from 15 games.

Bale will be the second high-profile international signing the club has made in recent weeks. Former Juventus and Italy international Giorgio Chiellini joined the club earlier this month.

News of Bale's decision to head to Major League Soccer comes just days after reports in Britain indicated he was in talks with Cardiff over a possible move.

His former club Tottenham and Newcastle were also mooted as possible destinations.



Tsitsipas says he proved doubters wrong with first grasscourt crown

Stefanos Tsitsipas believes he has proved a point to his critics ahead of Wimbledon by winning his maiden grasscourt title at the Mallorca Championships.

The Greek world number six beat Spaniard Roberto Bautista Agut 6-4 3-6 7-6(2) in the final of the ATP 250 event on Saturday ahead of the year's third Grand Slam, where he has never gone past the fourth round.

"People doubted that I can play on grass... it's fair to say. I never doubted myself. I insisted that I can play on this surface and it remains one of my favourite surfaces tennis has to offer. I was confident about it," Tsitsipas told reporters yesterday.

"I proved myself last week that it's not a surface I don't like. I like playing on grass, probably more than on clay."

"Last year was difficult for me. I didn't play a single match before Wimbledon on grass. I was trying to play on grass like I did on clay, which was a huge mistake. Technique-wise, tactics-wise, it all fell apart."

Tsitsipas, who lost to American Frances Tiafoe in the Wimbledon first round last year, said he watched videos to analyse his weak points.

"None of it made sense. I could also tell that from the practice sessions I had, the friendly matches that I did before, everything seemed to be a bit off," the 23-year-old added.

"With minor adjustments, you can always get back to where you want it to be. For me, it's a new start here at Wimbledon. I see myself a little bit different in terms of how I perceive this surface in particular."

"The thing that I hope for this year is just to get past the first round and see where that leads after."

Tsitsipas said he did not consider himself a title contender yet, with last year's runner-up Matteo Berrettini the in-form player among those who have not won the title.

Qatar handball team qualify for 2023 ANOC World Beach Games



Qatar's handball team have qualified for 2023 ANOC World Beach Games after beating Uruguay 2-0 (19-18, 18-16) in the fifth-place match at the 2022 Men's Beach Handball World Championships in Greece yesterday.