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FOOTBALL / PREMIER LEAGUE

Haaland's debut headlines opening weekend of season

'We know what the standard is and we will reach the standards as quickly as possible and maintain what we have done always'

AFP
Manchester

Arsenal's trip to Crystal Palace lifts the curtain on the new Premier League season today, with Erling Haaland's debut in the English top flight the highlight of the weekend as champions Manchester City travel to West Ham.

Haaland has been the marquee arrival to the Premier League from over £1bn (\$1.2bn) spent on transfer fees ahead of the new campaign.

The Norwegian is expected to further strengthen Pep Guardiola's side, who have won the title in four of the last five seasons.

However, Haaland and City's season did not get off to a good start as perennial title rivals Liverpool won the Community Shield 3-1 last weekend.

A trip to the London Stadium is a good early season test of City's revamped squad with Julian Alvarez and Kalvin Phillips also coming in to replace the departed Oleksandr Zinchenko, Fernandinho, Raheem Sterling and Gabriel Jesus.

West Ham nearly denied City the title last season as they led 2-0 at half-time in the penultimate game of the campaign before the visitors rallied to salvage the point which won them the league.

The Hammers have also strengthened with the signing of Italian international striker Gianluca Scamacca as David Moyes' men look to close the gap on the top four after qualifying for Europe in the past two seasons.

"We know what the standard is and we will reach the standards as quickly as possible and maintain what we have done always," said Guardiola. "I don't feel, because we know each other well, that we are far, far away."

"But the games against West Ham and after Bournemouth will dictate our level and what we have to do."

HAALAND EMBRACING LIFE OUT OF HIS 'COMFORT ZONE'

Erling Haaland has warned the contenders to Manchester City's title that he will only improve in the competitive environment of English football. The 22-year-old had his pick of top clubs after scoring 86 goals in 89 games for Borussia Dortmund, but said the demands of playing under Guardiola was behind his reason for choosing City.

"As a young player, playing for Pep

Guardiola, playing for the best club in England, I have to keep developing and get better at a lot of things," Haaland told Sky Sports.

"That's what I like a lot about football, you can always develop, you can always get better at the game."

The English champions are already Haaland's fifth club after spells at Bryne, Molde and Red Bull Salzburg before joining Dortmund.

"Part of the game is to get out of your comfort zone which is something I've been doing and something I like because then you develop more as a human being as well," he added.

"I'm a player that's hungry for goals, that gives 100 per cent, that wants to win every single game. They are simple things but also really important things."

After the hype around his arrival, Haaland had a debut to forget, missing a glorious chance towards the end of City's defeat to Liverpool in the Community Shield.

However, he said he will not let that affect him as he prepares to make his first Premier League appearance this weekend.

"You are a kind of entertainer. You get judged every single week for what you do on the pitch and you have to deliver and do your best," he said.

"For me as a striker, this is something I cannot stress about because if you think too much, you might end up doing things you don't want to do."

"It's going to be tough and this is the charming thing about the Premier League. It's a beautiful, hard competition, that's why it's the most popular league in the world."

CHELSEA 'NOT READY'

Chelsea's visit to Everton tomorrow pits together two sides who have reason to fear the season ahead at different ends of the table. The start to Chelsea's new era under the ownership of Todd Boehly's consortium has not gone smoothly with manager Thomas Tuchel blaming

an exhausting schedule on a pre-season tour to the US and a lack of signings for feeling "not ready" for the new season.

Tuchel is also unhappy with a number of key players, including captain Cesar Azpilicueta, still looking to leave the club before the end of the transfer window.

Chelsea were thrashed 4-0 in pre-season by Arsenal in Orlando, but Everton suffered an even more embarrassing 4-0 defeat to Minnesota United on their tour to the States.

After narrowly surviving last season, the Toffees have since sold Richarlison to Tottenham. But Everton have beaten Chelsea on each of the Londoners' last four trips to Goodison Park.

TEN HAG'S FIRST IMPRESSION

Should Chelsea fail to hit the heights they previously have under Tuchel, Manchester United will be one of the sides hoping to take their place in the top four. A 4-0 thrashing at the hands of Brighton in May summed up a miserable season for the Red Devils as they finished sixth.

Erik ten Hag has the chance to make a good first impression as United boss when the Seagulls visit Old Trafford. But hopes of a new dawn for United have been dashed by another difficult summer off the field.

Cristiano Ronaldo has made his desire to leave clear, but a buyer cannot be found for the five-time Ballon d'Or winner, while United's prolonged chase of Barcelona midfielder Frenkie de Jong appears set to fail.

Liverpool, who won that curtain raiser 3-1, are also in London and will expect to make a winning start against promoted Fulham. New signing Darwin Nunez scored against City and could line-up against Marco Silva's side.

New Arsenal signing Gabriel needs time to adapt: Arteta



New signing Gabriel has enjoyed an impressive pre-season at Arsenal but manager Mikel Arteta tempered expectations before Premier League opener at Crystal Palace, saying the Brazilian striker still needs time to settle in.

Jesus netted seven times in five games during pre-season after joining Arsenal from Manchester City, where he scored 95 goals in 236 appearances in all competitions and played an important role in their four Premier League-winning campaigns.

"The role that Gabi has here is going to be very different to the role in his previous club. That needs some adaptation and some time," Arteta, who worked with Jesus as assistant coach under Pep Guardiola at City, told reporters yesterday.

"When you bring top players from top clubs and they have been extremely successful over the years, they are going to expect that... He is an enormous talent, a player with a mentality that is so contagious and he is going to give us a lot."

"He has done fantastically well and we are all surprised at how quickly he has done it, but we have to share that responsibility."

Arsenal have so far completed the signings of Oleksandr Zinchenko, Fabio Vieira, Marquinhos and goalkeeper Matt Turner. Arteta indicated there could be room for

more arrivals before the transfer window closes on Sept. 1.

"It's always been my team. We have changed the squad," Arteta said. "The players we have are more specific and better to the way we want to play."

"We are really active as you can see with ins and outs. Everything is still open, it's a long window... Players are going to have the need to leave, some others to move and everything is open still."

Left back Kieran Tierney is still making his way back after a knee surgery in April while right back Takehiro Tomiyasu and new signing Vieira have not featured during pre-season due to injuries.

British media reported attacking midfielder Emile Smith Rowe is still nursing a groin injury and will not travel to Selhurst Park. Arteta said he hoped three of those four players will be training later on Thursday and could be in contention to face Palace and declined to specify who would miss out.

Palace, managed by former Arsenal captain Patrick Vieira, beat Arsenal 3-0 in April last season but Arteta was more optimistic about today's trip to south London.

"They showed last season how tough they are and how difficult they are to beat and how consistent they were at home as well... Hopefully, we learnt a lot of lessons that day," Arteta said.



Erling Haaland

FIXTURES (all times GMT)

Today Crystal Palace v Arsenal (1900)	Nottingham Forest, Tottenham v Southampton (all 1400), Everton v Chelsea (1630)
Tomorrow Fulham v Liverpool (1130), Bournemouth v Aston Villa, Leeds v Wolves, Newcastle v	Sunday Man Utd v Brighton, Leicester v Brentford (both 1300), West Ham v Man City (1530)

FOCUS

Conte sets sights on Premier League, Champions League glory at Tottenham

AFP
London

Antonio Conte has set high expectations for his first full season as Tottenham manager by declaring his ambition to win both the Premier League and Champions League.

The Italian previously described his achievement in getting Spurs into the top four last season as a "miracle."

But after a summer of heavy investment with the signings

of Richarlison, Yves Bissouma, Djed Spence, Ivan Perisic, Clement Lenglet and Fraser Forster, Conte is aiming much higher this season.

"Why not Premier League and the Champions League?" Conte said with a smile ahead of his side's first league game of the season at home to Southampton tomorrow.

"My target and the club's target is to improve. It's the process we started seven months ago. If you get a place in the Champions League it doesn't mean you've achieved your target"

Conte has won the league in each of his last three club managerial spells at Juventus, Chelsea and Inter Milan.

However, he also has a reputation for not laying down roots. His short stays at all three clubs came to acrimonious ends.

That scenario appeared to be playing out again when Conte threatened to walk away from Tottenham just months after taking charge during a run of four defeats in five league games in January and February.

But the 53-year-old insisted he is committed to building a

legacy at Spurs. "I said I want to build something important with this club because I like to win," he added.

"My experience brings me to say we're going in the right direction."

"At the same time I know the club needed another step to be competitive with the top teams in Europe."

"For this reason we have to not be presumptuous or arrogant. We have to work, work, work to improve on the pitch and outside of the pitch to become a top club."



SPOTLIGHT

Cricket to make case for 2028 LA Games this month

The International Cricket Council to make a presentation to LOC of LA Olympics

Reuters
New Delhi

The International Cricket Council (ICC) will make a presentation to the Los Angeles Olympics organisers later this month in its bid for the sport to return to the Games after a gap of 128 years, sources have said.

Cricket has been shortlisted for potential inclusion at the 2028 Los Angeles Games along with baseball-softball, flag football, lacrosse, breakdancing, karate, kickboxing, squash and motorsport.

Teams would play Twenty20 cricket – the sport's shortest international format which has inspired the lucrative Indian Premier League and similar franchise-based competitions in other countries.

The host city can include any sport but needs approval of the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

The governing body is likely to take a final decision at the IOC session in Mumbai next year, said one of the sources which had direct knowledge of the matter.

Twenty eight sports feature in the initial programme announced by the 2028 Games organiser in December.

Cricket has not been played at the Olympics since its maiden appearance in the 1900 Games at Paris, where Britain beat a team of mostly English expatriates representing France by 158 runs to win gold.

Despite initial obstruction from the powerful English and Indian cricket boards, the game has started to gain entry to multi-sports gatherings around the world.

Women's Twenty20 is being played at the ongoing Commonwealth Games in Birmingham and cricket will also part of the delayed Asian Games in Hangzhou



A computer-generated image of a cricket stadium to be built in the city of Los Angeles. Reports earlier this year said India's India movie superstar Shah Rukh Khan's The Knight Riders Group (KRG) will be instrumental in building this world-class cricket stadium in partnership with Major League Cricket in the US.

next year. It will also feature in the Africa Games in Ghana and the Southeast Asian Games in Cambodia next year.

Considering cricket's low profile in the United States, many believe it has better chances of making the cut for the 2032 Olympics in Australia.

The ICC, however, is determined to grow the game in the United States – which is cricket's third largest broadcast market after India and Britain due to the Indian and Pakistani diaspora. It believes

the 2028 Olympics would make the perfect showcase.

Olympic sports remain in cricket's shadow in the sub-continent, so the ICC has based its bid around cricket's unrivalled popularity among the region's billion-plus fans.

Women's Twenty20 has already proven a big hit on its Commonwealth Games debut with a record 150,000-plus tickets sold.

"Being in multi-sport games, wheth-

er it is the Commonwealth Games or the Asian Games or the African Games, putting cricket into these multi-sport events is good for the growth of our game," ICC chief executive Geoff Allardice told reporters last week.

Allardice was merely echoing the sentiments shared by several former players.

"Great to see T20 cricket in Commonwealth Games. Next destination – Olympics," tweeted former India player Mohammed Kaif.

FOCUS

Qatar beat Djibouti at Chess Olympiad



Youssef Mohamed al-Mutawa

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's national team yesterday posted their third victory at the Chess Olympiad in Chennai.

Qatar beat Djibouti, ranked No. 177 in the world, with a score of 0-4.

Al Annabi were represented by Hussein Aziz, Ghanem al-Sulaiti, Youssef Mohamed al-Mutawa and Rayan Irfan.

Ali Gomaa, Abdullah Hussein, Mohamed Dima and Mohamed Joumana represented Djibouti in the sixth-round clash in Indian city of Chennai.

Earlier in the tournament, Qatar beat Papua New Guinea and Bolivia while losing against Denmark, Finland and Iraq.

Qatar will now play against the 87th-ranked South Korean team today in the seventh round.

"Qatar's goal will be to achieve their fourth victory," al-Mutawa said.

"The team has been able to achieve great results during this



edition of the Chess Olympiad especially as we faced top teams," al-Mutawa said.

Around 185 teams representing 180 countries are taking part in the tournament.

"Qatar players will continue to look for better performances in the future events after we are done with this high profile tournament.

"Good results are key to player development. We also want our players to improve their rankings. We have come here to learn and improve and I am happy to say we are doing exactly that," al-Mutawa said.

BOXING

Australian great Famechon, 77, dies

AFP
Sydney

French-born Australian boxing legend Johnny Famechon, who became world featherweight champion during a short but stunning career, has died aged 77, officials said yesterday.

Famechon was considered one of Australia's greatest boxers, becoming WBC featherweight champion in 1969 after he beat Cuban Jose Legra on points at the Royal Albert Hall in London.

He defended his title twice against Japan's former world flyweight and bantamweight king Fighting Harada over a career that saw him win 56 of his 67 professional fights, including 20 knockouts.

He retired at just 25 after surrendering his title to Mexican Vicente Saldivar in 1970.

"I am so sorry to learn of the passing away of Australian box-

ing icon Johnny Famechon," WBC president Mauricio Sulaiman said on Twitter. "May he rest in eternal peace."

Born Jean-Pierre Famechon in Paris before his parents migrated to Australia when he was five, he was known for his silky defensive skills which earned him the nickname "poetry in motion".

"You talk about them doing state funerals for certain people, if anyone deserves one then 'Fammo' certainly does," fellow Australian boxer Jeff Fenech, who won world titles in three weight divisions, told the Sydney Morning Herald.

"He was beautiful to watch, just so skilful. He was like Floyd Mayweather, one of those guys who hit and never got hit."

Famechon suffered a stroke and an acquired brain injury in 1991 when he was hit by a car in Sydney, but returned to near full health. He was inducted into the World Boxing Hall of Fame in 1997.

TENNIS

Saville upsets Pegula as Halep, Hurkacz fall in Washington

AFP
Washington

Australia's Daria Saville upset top-seeded defending champion Jessica Pegula 7-5, 6-4 on Wednesday at the ATP and WTA Washington Open, where Hubert Hurkacz and Simona Halep also exited.

World number 88 Saville ripped the seventh-ranked American in hot and humid conditions while Romanian third seed Halep retired with illness down 7-5, 2-0 to Anna Kalinskaya.

"I stayed really composed," Saville said. "I managed the energy really well. It was very hot. But I thought it's hot for everyone so get on with it."

Polish second seed Hurkacz crashed out in his second-round match at the US Open hardcourt tuneup, falling to Finland's Emil Ruusuvuori 6-4, 7-6 (7/3).

Wimbledon runner-up Nick Kyrgios of Australia defeated US 14th seed Tommy Paul 6-3, 6-4 to book a third-round date with US fourth seed Reilly Opelka.

World number 63 Kyrgios, whose most recent title came at Washington in 2019, broke to open and close the first set. Paul's fourth double fault gave the Aussie a match point and his forehand shot beyond the baseline gave Kyrgios the victory in 85 minutes.

Saville booked a quarter-final match against Canadian qualifier Rebecca Marino, who beat Germany's Andrea Petkovic 6-3, 3-6, 6-1.

The 28-year-old Russian-born Aussie won her only WTA title at the 2017 Connecticut Open but dispatched Pegula in 98 minutes for her second top-10 win of the year after downing Ons Jabeur at Indian Wells in March.

"Everyone's attitude is I'm here to win the tournament and I'm no different," Saville said. "I'm playing really good tennis right now. I'm excited for more."

Saville fell to 627th in the world rankings after Achilles tendon surgery that sidelined her for most of last year. Now she's into her third quarter-final of the year after Miami and Guadalajara.

"I'm happy," Saville said. "It creates good reputation. Players are going to say,



Paula Badosa of Spain reacts to defeating Elizabeth Mandlik during the Mubadala Silicon Valley Classic at Spartan Tennis Complex in San Jose, California. (AFP)

"She's playing well. She has some good wins this year."

Ruusuvuori, set to rise one shy of his career-high to 43rd in the world rankings, denied Hurkacz on all four breakpoint chances to advance after one hour and 44 minutes.

"I just tried to hang in there and stay as tough as can," Ruusuvuori said. "Long rallies, they really drain you and you start to feel dizzy during the points. Very tough."

His third-round foe will be Sweden's Mikael Ymer, who ousted 15th seed Asian Karatsev 6-4, 3-6, 6-4 after eliminating three-time Grand Slam champion Andy Murray in round one.

Japan's Yoshihito Nishioka ousted Aussie 11th seed Alex De Minaur 3-6, 7-6 (8/6), 6-2. The world number 96 will next face seventh seed Karen Khachanov.

US third seed Taylor Fritz beat Australia's Alexei Popyrin 6-4, 6-3 to book a third-round match against British 16th seed Daniel Evans.

World number 13 Fritz comes off a five-set Wimbledon quarter-final loss to Rafael Nadal and two weeks in a boot with a stress fracture in his left foot.

MEDVEDEV REACHES MILESTONE ON WINNING RETURN IN LOS CABOS

World number one Daniil Medvedev acknowledged reaching a "nice" milestone as, playing his first tour match since June, he beat qualifier Rinky Hijikata 6-4 6-3 in Los Cabos, Mexico to record his 250th professional singles win.

Medvedev, who sat out Wimbledon due to an All England Club ban on Russian players, closed the match out in just over 90 minutes, with Hijikata showing resilience by saving five breakpoints over the course of the two sets.

"Somebody told me this a few days ago ...otherwise I would not have known," Medvedev said of the milestone. "For sure I want more victories but that's also nice to have 250. We'll try to get more."

The win also helps Medvedev get back into the hardcourt groove as he ramps up preparations for his US Open title defence, with his previous match on his preferred surface having come in the Miami Open in March. "It's definitely not that easy to play after you stop for a while..." Medvedev said.

"Sensations were not bad. I could have

just broken a little bit more, but when you win, everything is fine. I have to play like this in the next matches."

Medvedev next faces Lithuania's Ricardas Berankis in the quarter-finals.

BADOSA, JABEUR REACH SAN JOSE WTA QUARTER-FINALS

Second-seeded Paula Badosa survived a scare on the way to a 6-2, 5-7, 7-6 (7/5) victory over US qualifier Elizabeth Mandlik on Wednesday in the WTA hardcourt tournament in San Jose, California.

After comfortably pocketing the first set with two breaks of serve, Spain's Badosa went down an early break in the second against her 240th-ranked opponent, who is the daughter of four-time Grand Slam champion Hana Mandlikova.

She broke back, but was broken again in the 11th game to give Mandlik a chance to serve out the set and extend the match.

After breaking for a 4-3 lead in the third, Mandlik twice had a chance to serve for the set, but they traded service breaks in the final three games to send it to the tiebreaker, in which world number four Badosa won the last five points to seal the victory.

Badosa will next face the winner of tonight's marquee clash between four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka and sixth-seeded American Coco Gauff.

Japanese superstar Osaka is unseeded as she plays her first tournament since falling in the first round of the French Open, where she was battling a left Achilles tendon injury. Gauff, the French Open runner-up, is seeded sixth.

Third-seeded Tunisian star Ons Jabeur, playing her first match since her historic runner-up finish at Wimbledon, pulled away late to beat American Madison Keys 7-5, 6-1.

Jabeur will face either Veronika Kudermetova or Claire Liu in Friday's quarter-finals. Jabeur got off to a strong start with an early break for a 2-0 lead before Keys surged to a 5-3 lead. Jabeur responded by winning 10 of the next 11 games.

"I'm grateful that I played at night because it's slower and it helps me a little bit with the conditions," Jabeur said. "I knew it was going to be a tough match for me. I just tried to stay low."

Hendricks leads South Africa to 21-run victory over Ireland

Bristol: South Africa opener Reeza Hendricks scored a fourth successive Twenty20 International half-century on Wednesday to help his side to a 21-run victory over Ireland. Hendricks struck 10 fours and a six in his 74 from 53 balls as South Africa, who had elected to bat, posted 211 for five in their 20 overs. It follows his three half-centuries in the 2-1 series win over England last week. Ireland were in the chase until the 17th over of their innings after an excellent 78 from 38 balls by Lorcan Tucker, who put on 86 for the sixth wicket with George Dockrell (43 from 28 balls).

But when those two fell in consecutive deliveries, their effort fizzled out as they ended on 190 for nine, with spinners Keshav Maharaj (2-29) and Tabraiz Shamsi (2-37) the pick of the South African bowlers. South Africa's batting innings was also boosted by a superb 56 from 27 balls from Aiden Markram as he struck five sixes on the small County Ground, while new find Tristan Stubbs blasted a breezy 24 off 11. The second and final match will

be played at the same venue today.

BRIEF SCORES
South Africa 211-5 (R Hendricks 74, A Markram 56; G Delany 2-31) **beat Ireland 190-9** (L Tucker 78, G Dockrell 43; K Maharaj 2-29, W Parnell 2-36, T Shamsi 2-37) **by 21 runs**

New Zealand beat the Netherlands in second T20I
The Hague: New Zealand yesterday beat the Netherlands by 16 runs in the first T20I at the Voorburg Cricket Club. Batting first, New Zealand posted a total of 148 for the loss of 7 wickets following Martin Gupthill's 45 and Jimmy Neesham's 32. Chasing 149 for a victory, the Netherlands were bowled out for 132 in 19.3 overs.

BRIEF SCORES
New Zealand 148-7 (M Gupthill 45, J Neesham 32; S Ahmad 2-15) **beat Netherlands 132 all out, 19.3 overs** (B de Leede 66, S Edwards 20, B Tickner 4-27) **by 16 runs**
Series: New Zealand lead two-match series 1-0

FOCUS

Mickelson among 11 to file suit against PGA Tour

AFP
New York

A cadre of golfers, including Phil Mickelson and Bryson DeChambeau, filed an anti-trust lawsuit against the PGA Tour yesterday.

Eleven golfers now on the LIV Golf Series joined the lawsuit, which challenges their suspension from the PGA Tour.

Three of the 11 – Talor Gooch, Hudson Swafford and Matt Jones – are seeking a temporary restraining order to be allowed to participate in the FedEx Cup playoffs, which begin next week.

That trio qualified for the playoffs but were banned after joining LIV, a competing circuit considered a direct threat to the PGA Tour.

In addition, Abraham Ancer, Ja-

son Kokrak, Carlos Ortiz, Pat Perez, Ian Poulter and Peter Uihlein are listed along with Mickelson and DeChambeau in the lawsuit.

Multiple media outlets obtained copies of the lawsuit, first reported on by *The Wall Street Journal*.

“As part of its carefully orchestrated plan to defeat competition, the Tour has threatened lifetime bans on players who play in even a single LIV Golf event,” the lawsuit says.

“It has backed up these threats by imposing unprecedented suspensions on players (including the Plaintiffs) that threaten irreparable harm to the players and their ability to pursue their profession.

“It has threatened sponsors, vendors, and agents to coerce players to abandon opportunities to play in LIV Golf events. And it has orchestrated a per se unlawful group boycott with the

European Tour to deny LIV Golf access to their members.”

The FedEx Cup playoffs begin with the St. Jude Classic in Memphis next week. The top 125 players are eligible to play – except for those who opted to play in LIV events.

Gooch is No. 20 in points, Swafford is 63rd and Jones No. 91.

“Banning Plaintiffs and other top professional golfers from its own events degrades the Tour’s strength of field and diminishes the quality of the product that it offers to golf fans by depriving them from seeing many top golfers participate in Tour events,” the lawsuit reads.

“The only conceivable benefit to the Tour from degrading its own product in this manner is the destruction of competition. Indeed, the Tour has conceded its nakedly anticompetitive purpose in attacking and injuring the players.”

PGA Tour commissioner Jay Monahan addressed the lawsuit in a memo sent to current tour members, a copy of which was obtained by *Golf.com*.

“Fundamentally, these suspended players – who are now Saudi Golf League employees – have walked away from the Tour and now want back in. With the Saudi Golf League on hiatus, they’re trying to use lawyers to force their way into competition alongside our members in good standing,” the memo said.

Monahan encouraged current tour members to speak publicly on the matter, “if you are so inclined.”

“This is your Tour, built on the foundation that we work together for the good and growth of the organisation ... and then you reap the rewards. It seems your former colleagues have forgotten one important aspect of that equation,” the memo concluded.



COMMONWEALTH GAMES

World champion Dennis wins gold in time trial

Former Tour de France winner Geraint Thomas bags bronze despite crash

AFP
Birmingham

Australia’s two-time individual world time-trial champion Rohan Dennis won Commonwealth Games gold yesterday as former Tour de France winner Geraint Thomas took bronze despite a crash.

Dennis’s victory over the 37.4-kilometre course in 46min 21.24sec made it a clean sweep for Australia after favourite Grace Brown won the women’s event (40min 5.20sec) over 28.8km.

Dennis, the 2014 Commonwealth silver medalist, made it to the top of the podium after winning in Wolverhampton.

“I’ve finally got that top step,” said the 32-year-old, who won silver in the team pursuit on the track at the 2012 Olympics. “It’s taken 12 years, since Delhi (2010 Games).

“I definitely didn’t come close to that top step there but 12 years later I finally got it. But it is a different feeling being on that top step.”

Thomas’s hopes of adding time-trial gold to the road race title he won in 2014 were dashed when he fell early in the ride.

He picked himself up but had to settle for bronze behind England’s Fred Wright, who took silver.

The 2018 Tour de France winner said he had only himself to blame for the fall.

“I did a recon (reconnaissance) ride, but that was in traffic with no barriers up so it was pretty pointless really.

“I was thinking it was a sweeping left and suddenly it was barriers with a leg sticking out.”

He added: “Sometimes it’s bad luck, but today I’ll take it on the chin and say it was my fault. It’s frustrating, but to still come away with a medal is satisfying.”

Thomas, who finished third in the Tour



Australia’s Rohan Dennis in action during the men’s individual time trial final at the West Park, Wolverhampton, Britain, yesterday. (Reuters)

de France last month, has another chance of gold in Sunday’s road race.

However, the 36-year-old faces a formidable rival in the form of the Isle of Man’s Mark Cavendish.

“Once we start it won’t be friendly at all,” said Thomas. “Cav has got a strong team around him and it’s a good course for him. It is going to be a war of attrition.”

Brown said she had tried not to think too much about having “the target” of being favourite on her back.

“It’s a landmark” said the 30-year-

old. “From an Australian perspective, to be a gold medalist at a Commonwealth Games is something Australian sport acknowledges.”

“That’s super special despite the fact cycling in the Commonwealth Games isn’t huge.”

Meanwhile two-of-three members of the Sri Lanka Commonwealth Games team who had been reported missing have been located,” the West Midlands police said yesterday.

The Sri Lanka National Olympic Committee confirmed the missing ath-

letes were wrestler Yoda Pedige Shanith Chathuranga, judoka Marappulige Chamila Dilani and judo official Tikiri Hannadige Duminda Asela De Silva.

The West Midlands police would not confirm the names of which members had been found and were continuing their investigation into the third missing person.

“Two people – a woman in her 30s and a man in his 40s, were reported missing on Aug. 1,” said the West Midlands police in an email to Reuters.

“Both have now been located and are no longer missing.”

SPOTLIGHT

Australians eye Paris after gold rush in Birmingham

AFP
Birmingham

Emma McKeon, Ariarne Titmus and the rest of Australia’s swimming team are heading home after a stellar Commonwealth Games with their eyes firmly set on the 2024 Olympics.

Australia won 25 of 52 golds in the Birmingham pool, with their established stars supported by an exciting cast of up-and-coming talents, including teenager Mollie O’Callaghan.

McKeon was the headline performer. She won six golds, a bronze and a silver to take her career Games tally to 20 medals – more than any other athlete in Commonwealth history.

Her 14 golds are also a record. Titmus swept the women’s 200m, 400m and 800m freestyle events and was also part of the winning team in the 4x200m freestyle relay.

Kaylee McKeown won four golds while Elijah Winnington was one of the standout male performers.

Australia did not have the US team to contend with in Birmingham. Yet the quality and depth of Australia’s squad, with swimmers who skipped the World Championships in Budapest in June returning, will make their greatest rivals take notice two years away from the Olympics.

Titmus, speaking a day after the end of the swimming, said fierce competition within the squad pushed them to greater heights. The 21-year-old, who won 200m and



Australian medalists Mollie O’Callaghan, Emma McKeon, Chelsea Hodges and Kaylee McKeown pose during the medal ceremony for the women’s 4x100m medley relay swimming final in Birmingham. (AFP)

400m freestyle gold at last year’s Tokyo Olympics, said it was often tougher to qualify for the Australian team than to reach Commonwealth finals.

“Just to get onto the team is a task in itself and people like Mollie are up and coming and pushing you along and it’s great motivation,” she said.

“And as I’m getting older I feel as though I’m becoming more and more hunted but that’s a good thing I think. It keeps me on my toes, keeps me motivated and I’m excited to see how much better I can get.”

Titmus said her focus had switched immediately af-

ter Tokyo to the 2024 Olympics in Paris – where she is expected to go head to head again with US star Katie Ledecky.

“There’s always hype around it because it’s such an amazing rivalry,” said the Australian, who skipped the world championships to focus on the Commonwealths.

“Who would have thought that two women would be swimming as fast as we are over the 400m at the same time? But I think it’s good also having younger girls coming up. I used to be one of those younger ones who was coming up so it’s great for the sport.”

O’Callaghan won four gold medals and two silvers in Birmingham, including the 100m freestyle. The 18-year-old, who came away from last year’s Covid-delayed Olympics with two relay golds and won the 100m individual freestyle in Budapest in June, said she now felt she belonged on the team. She too said she was focused on Paris.

“Last year was about learning and getting experience. I absolutely loved being on a relay team,” she said. “I’ve gained so much experience and so much support I just can’t wait.” O’Callaghan said the great strength of the Australian team was that “there’s always going to be someone coming up”.

“I guess it’s the support, and the previous swimmers and the current swimmers who guide us and I guess the depth in Australia definitely pushes us to do more and achieve more and I think it’s mainly those factors that make us so great in Australia.”

Team spokesman Ian Hanson said another reason for Australia’s success was their coaching.

MOTOGP

Quartararo heads into Silverstone battling penalty and history

AFP
Silverstone

MotoGP returns from its mid-summer break with championship leader Fabio Quartararo aiming to resume his own winning streak while ending the long run of different victors at Silverstone.

The French world champion’s three-race streak ended in spectacular fashion in Assen at the end of June and he will still be dealing with fallout from that race at Silverstone.

He crashed twice in the Netherlands. The second time he ended his race by flipping over the handlebars of his Yamaha after 15 laps.

The first crash, when he slid on a corner and forced his nearest rival in the championship, Aleix Espargaro, into the gravel, could prove costly on Sunday.

He was judged at fault and still has his long lap penalty for the crash to serve.

“I am really looking forward to Silverstone,” Quartararo said on his team’s web site.

“I won there last year. This time will be tricky because we know that we have that long-lap penalty. But if I’m really honest, that only motivates me to do even better.”

While winning last year might give Quartararo confidence, it also highlights one of the statistical oddities of the British Grand Prix.

No one has won the race twice in a row since Jorge Lorenzo in 2012 and 2013, a total of seven races because the 2018 (heavy rain) and 2020 (Covid-19) events were cancelled.

Quartararo dominated last year as he won on the way to the world title.

This year he leads Spaniard Espargaro, who turned 33 at the end of July and is having a breakout season, by 21 points.

After his brush with Quartararo pushed him down to 15th



in Assen, Espargaro fought back on his Aprilia, completing a daring double overtake at the end to finish fourth and claim 13 points, but complained “I lost a victory.”

Esparago calculated that he was better off than if he had finished first and Quartararo second and gained just five points.

Yet he lamented that he did not collect a second MotoGP win after his first, in his 200th race, in Argentina in April.

“I have just one victory in my career, so I would prefer to gain five points and have the victory.”

Francesco Bagnaia, who chased Quartararo home in last season’s championships is fourth in the standings – behind fellow Ducati rider Johann Zarco – after winning in Assen.

Last year his 14th place at Silverstone, after tyre problems, ultimately left the Italian with too much ground to make up in the title race.

At the moment, he is 66 points off the lead.

Quartararo said the five-week break had done him good, although he made clear he had not just been relaxing.

“I’m happy to start riding again,” he said.

“I used the summer break to get some rest, but I also put in a lot of hours of training. My mind was always still on returning to action in the best shape possible.”

MOTOGP STAR DOVIZIOSO TO RETIRE EARLY

Paris: Andrea Dovizioso, three-times runner-up in the MotoGP world championship, announced yesterday his plan to retire next month after the San Marino Grand Prix.

The winner of 24 races across all categories and 125cc world champion in 2004 is bowing out after a tricky first half of the season during which he has totalled only 10 points for Yamaha’s RNF satellite outfit.

The Japanese team’s test rider Cal Crutchlow will replace Dovizioso following San Marino for the remaining six rounds of the campaign.

Dovizioso, 36, was called up halfway through last season to succeed Franco Morbidelli when he was promoted to Yamaha’s factory bike.

Yamaha managing director Lin Jarvis singled out Dovizioso’s “great expertise, experience and methodical nature” when they offered him a deal until the



end of 2022 midway through last year. “Unfortunately, Andrea has struggled to extract the maximum potential out of the M1 and thus the results have not been forthcoming, which has created understandable frustration for Andrea,” Jarvis explained. He has raced for Honda (2008-2011), before a first stint with Yamaha (2012) and then Ducati until 2020.

Qatar beat Oman in GCC Youth Basketball Championship



Qatar registered their fifth consecutive win in the GCC Youth Basketball Championship in Dubai. Qatar defeated Oman 82-32 in their group match on Wednesday to keep their title hopes alive. In other fixtures of the day, Kuwait edged out hosts the UAE 39-37 and Saudi Arabia secured a comfortable 71-63 victory over Bahrain.

SPOTLIGHT

Unvaccinated Djokovic officially out of Montreal ATP event

AFP
Montreal

Wimbledon champion Novak Djokovic, whose refusal to be vaccinated against Covid makes him unable to enter Canada, has officially withdrawn from the ATP hardcourt tournament in Montreal, organisers said yesterday.

The Serb star's unvaccinated status made it unlikely he would play in the prestigious ATP Masters tournament, just as it means he will probably miss the US Open starting later in August as the United States also requires visitors to the country to show proof of vaccination.

Montreal Masters tourna-



ment director Eugene Lepierre had said earlier this month he did not expect Djokovic to play. "Either the Canadian government is going to change the rules regarding vaccination or he is going to roll up his sleeves and get the vaccine. But I don't think any of those scenarios are realistic," Lepierre said.

Germany's Oscar Otte has also withdrawn from the tour-

nament which starts Monday with Benjamin Bonzi of France and Australia's Wimbledon runner-up Nick Kyrgios moving into the main draw, Tennis Canada said.

In addition, three-time Grand Slam champion Andy Murray was handed a wild card yesterday, along with Belgian David Goffin and Canadians Vasek Pospisil and Alexis Galarneau.

Britain's Murray, a former world number one who won the Canadian title in 2009, 2010 and 2015, has been rising in the rankings this season from 134th to 50th.

He reached finals in Sydney in January and Stuttgart in June, but fell in the first round in Washington earlier this week to Sweden's Mikael Ymer.

FOOTBALL

Paris St Germain's stars expected to dominate again

'IN ALL MODESTY, I TELL YOU, I CAME TO PARIS TO WIN EVERYTHING'



(From left) Paris St Germain's players Sergio Ramos, Lionel Messi, Neymar, Kylian Mbappe, head coach Christophe Galtier and Marquinhos walk in for a kids soccer clinic during the team's tour of Japan in Tokyo on July 18, 2022. (Reuters)

Reuters
Paris

A leaner and fitter Lionel Messi, similarly rejuvenated Neymar and Kylian Mbappe staying after signing a new contract makes Paris St Germain runaway favourites to retain their Ligue 1 title when the French league season kicks off today.

Last season, the Parisians romped to the title with a 15-point advantage over second-placed Olympique de Marseille despite Messi failing to impress, Neymar and Mbappe being unsettled and Sergio Ramos missing most of the campaign.

But their galaxy of stars look to have turned a corner and have shown a new lustre, evident on a pre-season tour to Japan and in

last Sunday's emphatic 4-0 Super Cup win over Nantes.

It suggests the chasm between PSG and the rest of Ligue 1 could be even bigger this season, despite a change of coach with Mauricio Pochettino replaced by Christophe Galtier.

"Once you are at PSG, you have an obligation to achieve results," Galtier said on his arrival at the club last month.

"I'm very ambitious. I came to Paris to win. There are three domestic trophies: we have to win them. You have to break records. And, in all modesty, I tell you, I came to Paris to win everything," Galtier said.

Galtier was the last coach to break PSG's hegemony when he took Lille to the title two seasons ago and will have to balance domestic dominance with their Champions League ambitions.

PSG begin their campaign at

Clermont tomorrow with the first game of the Ligue 1 season on Friday when Olympique Lyonnais host promoted Ajaccio.

Meanwhile Paris St Germain have signed Portugal international midfielder Renato Sanches from Lille on a five-year deal, the French Ligue 1 champions said yesterday.

PSG did not disclose the fee but reports in the French media said they had paid Lille 15m euros (\$15.35mn) for the 24-year-old, who has represented Portugal 32 times scoring three goals.

A product of the Benfica youth academy, Sanches made his senior debut during the 2015-16 season with the Lisbon side, helping them to the Portuguese League and League Cup double.

He joined German Bundesliga giants Bayern Munich in 2016, playing only 53 times for the

Bavarian side during a trophy-laden spell. He also had a stint on loan at Swansea City. A move to Lille followed in 2019 and Sanches won the French league title two years later.

LYON CHALLENGE

Lyon's eighth place last season was their worst since 1996 but Dutch coach Peter Bosz has strengthened his squad with the likes of Alexandre Lacazette, back from Arsenal, Bayern Munich's Corentin Tolisso and Nicolas Tagliafico of Ajax Amsterdam.

The club also have a new American owner, John Textor, who has promised supporters: "We want to win titles here. We are going to show up and we are going to spend".

It significantly improves their chances of being able to chal-

lenge with the likes of Marseille, Monaco and Stade Rennes.

Marseille fired volatile coach Jorge Sampaoli and replaced him with former Croatia international Igor Tudor despite their second place finish last season.

Monaco, who were held at home on Tuesday by PSV Eindhoven in the first leg of their Champions League third qualifying round tie, have boosted their attack with two new signings. Switzerland's Brel Embolo has arrived from Borussia Muenchengladbach and Japan's Takumi Minamino from Liverpool to assist Wissam Ben Yedder who scored 25 goals last season.

Rennes were fourth last season, scoring 82 league goals, and are expected to repeat that attacking approach in this campaign.

BUNDESLIGA

Rivals desperate to break Bayern's stranglehold

Reuters
Berlin

Bayern Munich have dominated the Bundesliga for a decade and when the champions open their new season against Eintracht Frankfurt today few will be betting against them winning a record-extending 11th consecutive league crown.

Despite the departure of striker Robert Lewandowski, Bayern do not look weaker than last year having brought in French forward Mathys Tel, Dutch defender Matthijs de Ligt, striker Sadio Mane and Ajax Amsterdam duo Ryan Gravenberch and Noussair Mazraoui.

They have already won their first piece of silverware, beating RB Leipzig 5-3 on Saturday in the German Super Cup, and will go into the opener against Europa League champions Eintracht with their confidence high.

"I was in Leipzig and saw Bayern's performance. One has to say that their attack was impressive," said Hans-Joachim Watzke, CEO of Borussia Dortmund.

"They have an unusually good team, invested immense amounts of money and so they are the top favourites. Everyone apart from Bayern fans want to see Bayern not win the title," Watzke told ARD television. Runners-up last season, Dortmund's own title hopes have suffered a major setback after Sebastian Haller, their

replacement for elite striker Erling Haaland, was ruled out for months.

Haller joined last month but two weeks later the Ivory Coast international was sidelined following the discovery of a testicular malignant tumour that required surgery and now will need chemotherapy.

The Ruhr valley club, who also signed talented Germany forward Karim Adeyemi, will be looking for a replacement for Haller but that will not happen before their season-opener on Saturday against fellow Champions League club Bayer Leverkusen.

RB Leipzig coach Domenico Tedesco hopes his players will kick off the season against VfB Stuttgart on Sunday in the same manner they finished the second half of the last campaign.

Tedesco took over with Leipzig in the lower part of the table and led them to a fourth-place finish, as well as steering them to the German Cup, the club's first major trophy.

Leipzig have also managed to hold on to Bundesliga Player of the Season Christopher Nkunku, despite several top European clubs interested in signing the France midfielder.

Leipzig have moved to tighten up at the back with the addition of Germany international David Raum.

"I can play in the Champions League here. You can win titles with this club as the German Cup showed last season," Raum said. "RB Leipzig is a big club with enormous prospects and a big future."

Bayern are still team to beat even without Lewandowski: Klinsmann

Bayern Munich are still the team to beat in the Bundesliga even without top striker Robert Lewandowski or a direct replacement, former Bayern and Germany coach Juergen Klinsmann said, a day before the Bundesliga season starts.

The Poland forward, who scored 344 goals for Bayern in 375 games during his eight years at the club, joined Barcelona in a deal worth 45 million euros last month after forcing a move from the German club.

But even without him the Bavarians, who kick off their league campaign against Eintracht Frankfurt today, remain favourites for a record-extending 11th consecutive Bundesliga title, Klinsmann, who also played for Bayern, said.

"Lewandowski's departure will change dramatically the dynamic of Bayern," Klinsmann told an international media round table yesterday. "Losing him is a big deal, a big deal for the entire Bundesliga, to lose such a high profile player. But the solution for right now, putting pieces on more shoulders, is probably the right way to go right now. Overall as a roster it's the team in the Bundesliga, they are the favourites for another title," he said. Bayern have brought in French forward



Mathys Tel, Sadio Mane from Liverpool where he played as a centre forward last season, Dutch defender Matthijs de Ligt, and Ajax Amsterdam duo Ryan Gravenberch and Noussair Mazraoui. Club bosses have also said they could still bring in a direct replacement for Lewandowski.

"Playing without a real number nine is very unusual for a traditional Bayern Munich. They have the quality in the roster but it's going to be a different Bayern," Klinsmann said.

He said Borussia Dortmund, runners-up last season, and German Cup winners RB Leipzig will again be Bayern's main challengers but it will depend on their ability to remain consistent throughout the season, a vulnerability for both that proved decisive last season.

British fan recovers luxury watch after Paris Champions League mayhem

It's never too late: A British fan robbed of his watch in the crowd chaos at the Champions League football final in Paris last May - a huge embarrassment for France - has been reunited with the timepiece after it was found by police, prosecutors said yesterday.

The Breitling watch worth several thousand euros was among several items recovered from a suspected thief who was arrested during the fiasco that marred the match between Liverpool and Real Madrid.

As fans massed at the Stade de France stadium just north of Paris, organisers kept thousands out because of suspected fake tickets, creating bottlenecks at entry gates that prompted police to fire tear gas and pepper spray.

After the game, supporters were preyed on by local gangs as they made their way to local transport connections, with many reporting pickpocketing, muggings and threats.

"In one operation on the night of the final, several objects that clearly had been sto-

len were seized. Investigators were able to identify the owner of a luxury watch," prosecutor Eric Mathais in the Paris suburb of Bobigny said on Twitter.

"Contact was established with him and, during a visit to France, he was able to recover his watch at the Bobigny courthouse on Tuesday," he said.

Around 240 complaints have been filed with police over the violence, which sparked concerns over the French authorities' ability to ensure security at two major upcoming events, the Rugby

World Cup next year and the 2024 Paris Olympics.

"I'm hopeful that some of the perpetrators of these aggravated robberies will be identified and judged," Mathais said. An enquiry by the French Senate into the mayhem concluded last month that organisers were to blame, not supporters, undermining claims by the police and Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin. Paris police chief Didier Lallemant was replaced in the aftermath.

(AFP)