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CRICKET | Page 2

Robinson strikes again as England wrap up Pakistan series victory



PREMIER LEAGUE | Page 4

Fernandes treble inspires Man Utd rout, Chelsea beat Brighton

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SPORT

TENNIS

Pegula cruises past Ruse, Krejckikova crashes out as US Open begins

Page 3

SPOTLIGHT

Qatar to send 243 athletes to Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games

Qatar will be represented by 184 men and 59 women at Asian Games, which will begin from Sept. 19

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar will participate in the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games 2026 with a delegation of 243 athletes, the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) announced yesterday.

The delegation comprises 184 men and 59 women, along with 142 members of the technical and administrative staff. Qatar will compete in 26 sports and 32 disciplines at the Games, which will be held in Japan from September 19 to October 4.

The Qatari athletes will compete in athletics, football, basketball, 3x3 basketball, handball, volleyball, beach volleyball, squash, padel, taekwondo, judo, artistic gymnastics, golf, shooting, swimming, jiu-jitsu, esports, sailing, equestrian, karate, fencing, archery, wrestling, boxing, weightlifting and table tennis.

The QOC also announced the launch of the Mirqab platform, which will serve as a central hub for news, updates, information and services related to Qatar's participation in the Games. It also revealed plans for 'Qatar House', a dedicated venue that will promote Qatari culture and provide a meeting point for delegations and the public throughout the Games.

The Aichi-Nagoya Games will also serve as an important preparation for Qatar's hosting of the Asian Games in Doha in 2030. Ahmed Yousef al-Darwish, head of Qatar's administrative delegation, said preparations had been carried out thoroughly and began immediately after the conclusion of the previous edition in Hangzhou, China.

"A large working group has been formed to follow up on all aspects of Qatar's participation in coordination with the sports federations, with the aim of providing the best possible conditions for the athletes and delegations," al-Darwish said.

"Our main goal is to ensure that Qatar is represented in an honourable manner. With the conclusion of these Games, attention will turn to Doha, which will host the next edition in 2030. Therefore, Aichi-Nagoya is an important milestone not only from a sporting perspective but also in preparing for our own hosting."



FROM LEFT: Head of the media delegation for the Aichi-Nagoya Asian Games Abdullah Mohammed al-Marri, Head of Qatar's administrative delegation Ahmed Yousef al-Darwish, deputy head of Qatar's administrative delegation Iman al-Emadi and member of the administrative delegation Najji al-Omari at a press conference.

The Aichi-Nagoya Games will feature 41 sports, 68 disciplines and 460 events across 53 competition venues and 75 training facilities. Al-Darwish highlighted the growing role of women in Qatari sport, noting that female athletes account for about 31 percent of the country's participating athletes.

He described the figure as a positive indicator of the continued development of women's sport and their growing presence across different disciplines.

Iman al-Emadi, deputy head of the administrative delegation, said the team had been working closely with all participating sports federations to complete logistical arrangements and ensure the athletes have the necessary facilities and equipment.

She also stressed the importance of women's participation and expressed hope that the Qatari female athletes would contribute to the medal tally and proudly represent the country.

Abdullah Mohammed al-Marri, head of the media delegation, described the Games as a significant milestone and a fi-

nal test for Qatar ahead of the 2030 Asian Games in Doha. He said the event would provide Qatari athletes with valuable opportunities to compete against Asia's best and measure their progress while challenging for medals.

Al-Marri said 'Qatar House' would open on September 19 and remain operational until the closing of the Games on October 4. The venue will showcase Qatar's culture and achievements and provide a platform for interaction with visiting delegations and the public.

It will also host celebrations honouring Qatari athletes who achieve notable results during the Games. Najji al-Omari, a member of the administrative delegation, said preparations had focused on ensuring the mission was fully equipped, including accommodation, transportation and other logistical requirements.

"The objective is to create the right environment for the athletes so they can concentrate fully on their competitions, perform at their best and achieve the desired results," he said.



Qatar athletes will compete in 26 sports and 32 disciplines at the Asian Games.

HORSE RACING

Wathnan Racing's Leading Change remains unbeaten with Group 1 win

Wathnan Racing's Leading Change, the unbeaten three-year-old colt, took another major step forward by winning the Group 1 DraftKings Travers Stakes over 2000m on dirt at Saratoga, New York. The race, reserved for three-year-olds, attracted a strong field of ten runners.

Trained by Brad H. Cox and ridden by Manuel Franco, Leading Change maintained his perfect record with a very determined performance at the highest level. The colt came into the race unbeaten after only two career starts. He made a winning debut over seven furlongs before stepping straight into Group 3 company for his second appearance when winning the Group 3 Indiana Derby over 1700m on dirt at Indiana Grand.

His victory at Saratoga therefore gave Leading Change a third win from three starts and the first Group 1 success of his young and promising career. The performance was even more impressive as he defeated two leading Triple Crown contenders, Napoleon Solo and Golden Tempo.

Leading Change broke sharply and went straight to the front in



Manuel Franco rides Wathnan Racing's Leading Change to Group 1 DraftKings Travers Stakes win at Saratoga, New York.

the early stages before allowing Napoleon Solo to take over after around two furlongs. Franco then settled the colt in a prominent position, travelling close to the leader as the field made its way down the back straight.

Around three furlongs from home, Leading Change was pushed along and briefly looked outpaced as Napoleon Solo continued to travel strongly in front. However, the colt responded well

to his jockey and began to make progress again approaching the final two furlongs.

Napoleon Solo still held the advantage entering the final furlong, but Leading Change continued to close under pressure.

In the final strides, Leading Change got the better of Napoleon Solo to regain the lead and score by half a length. Napoleon Solo finished second, with Golden Tempo staying on to take third.

FOCUS

F1 Qatar Grand Prix: Paddock Club sells out as ticket demand surges

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The F1 Paddock Club for the Formula 1 Qatar Airways Qatar Grand Prix 2026 has officially sold out, reflecting the strong demand building ahead of the penultimate round of the season.

The Qatar GP, taking place from November 27 to 29, has delivered thrilling wheel-to-wheel racing throughout. As the season enters its second half, five different drivers from three teams have already stood on the podium, ensuring there is still everything to play for as the championship battle intensifies.

With Paddock Club now fully booked, fans are encouraged to act quickly across the remaining ticket categories, several of which are already selling out. Tickets remain available across a full range of three-day categories for the race weekend, from grandstand seating around the circuit to general

admission access at Lusail Hill, though quantity is limited, with one section of the Main Grandstand already sold out. Every ticket includes entry to the Fanzone, food court, post-race concerts, and merchandise outlets, along with complimentary shuttle service, free parking, and a dedicated taxi pick up and drop off zone.

Tickets for the remaining Main Grandstand sections are available for QR2,000, while North Grandstand tickets are priced at QR1,500. Tickets for the Turn 2, Turn 3, and Turn 16 Grandstands are available for QR1,000 each, while General Admission tickets for Lusail Hill are available for QR600.

For fans still seeking a premium experience, LIC's Premiere Hospitality offering remains open, including Lusail Hill Lounge, F1 Experiences Champions Club, and the newly added Novikov Doha experience, featuring the restaurant's signature Pan Asian and Italian menu. Tickets and hospitality packages are available exclusively through the official LIC website at tickets.lisc.qa.



CRICKET

England trounce Pakistan by 194 runs to win series

Robinson takes four wickets, Shakeel falls short of a fine century

AFP
London

Ollie Robinson led the way once more as England clinched a series win over Pakistan with a thumping 194-run win in the second Test at Lord's on Sunday despite Saud Shakeel's fine 97.

Pakistan were dismissed for 194 on the fourth day, having been set an improbable victory target of 389, to give England an unbeatable 2-0 lead in a three-match series.

This was England's first multi-match Test series win since a 2-1 success in New Zealand more than a year ago. Player-of-the-match Robinson finished with overall figures of 8-35 in 26 overs, his 4-24 on Sunday following the seamer's sensational 4-11 during Pakistan's meagre first-innings 110.

"It was about keeping the stumps in play and nibble it either way," said Robinson during the presentation ceremony. For Joe Root, it was another dominant win at the start of his second spell as England's permanent Test captain with yesterday's success following an innings and 103-run rout of Pakistan at the skipper's Headingley home ground last week.

"It feels good and the way we have done it as well has been pretty convincing," said Root.

"Then to have three guys (Jofra Archer, Josh Tongue, Gus Atkinson) who can bowl 90 mph (145 kmh) and Ollie Robinson looks horrendous (to face) in these conditions," he added, with England looking to complete a whitewash in next month's third Test at Edgbaston. Pakistan captain Babar Azam was clear where this match was won and lost. "In the batting, we weren't up to the mark (in the first innings)," he said. "Saud Shakeel showed his class and dedication in the second innings."

Sussex captain Robinson produced a pair of double strikes on Sunday either side of Shan Masood and Shakeel checking England's progress with a fourth-wicket partnership of 97. Robinson took two wickets in four balls to leave the tourists 7-2, before express quick Archer dismissed Azam. But from the dire position of 14-3 before lunch, Shakeel and fellow left-hander Masood kept England at bay.

Robinson, however, eventually had Masood lbw for a gritty 26. And 111-4 became 115-5 when Mohammad Rizwan was lbw to Robinson carelessly slogging



England's Ollie Robinson (centre) and team-mates appeal for a LBW decision against Pakistan's Shan Masood on day four of the second Test at Lord's cricket ground in London yesterday. (AFP)



Pakistan's Saud Shakeel plays a shot yesterday. (AFP)

across the line. Shakeel, 78 not out at tea, went to 86 by hooking Tongue for six and, two balls later, another superb hook off another the fast bowler saw him into the 90s. Shakeel pulled the fifth ball of the over to go to 96 only for his 122-ball innings to end soon afterwards when, trying to reach three figures in style, he swung Tongue straight to Harry Brook at deep square leg. Pakistan were now effectively eight wickets down with Imam-ul-Haq still sidelined by the calf problem that meant the opener was unable to bat in Pakistan's first innings.

Tongue then cemented his reputation for polishing off the tail by bowling Khurram Shahzad before ending the match when he had Mohammad Ali caught in the slips by Brook. Pakistan had hoped Masood and Azam Awaits would see

off the new ball on a still seam-friendly pitch. Awaits, however, was lbw to Robinson and, three balls later, Abdullah Shafique was bowled for a duck by a superb delivery from the paceman, which angled in and moved away late to hit off stump.

Archer's brutal bouncer then had Azam in a horrible flap, with the ball looping to Jordan Cox at second slip.

Earlier, Mohammad Abbas finally achieved a coveted place on the Lord's honours boards with a five-wicket haul as England were dismissed for 208.

Abbas, 36, had come close before with a trio of four-wicket returns, including his 4-73 in England's first-innings 290. But he went one better yesterday with 5-57 after starting the day with three wickets in the innings.

Dan Lawrence had added just four runs to his overnight 50 not out when he was bowled by Abbas before the veteran seamer had Robinson well caught by wicket-keeper Rizwan, standing up to the stumps. An elated Abbas was mobbed by his team-mates before kissing the turf in celebration.

BRIEF SCORES: England 290 (Smith 61, Cox 55, Abbas 4-73) and 208 (Lawrence 54, Abbas 5-57) **beat Pakistan 110** (Awaits 46, Robinson 4-11, Archer 3-26) **and 194 for 9** (Shakeel 97, Robinson 4-24, Tongue 3-46, Archer 2-73) **by 194 runs.**

FOCUS

Suryakumar rues omission after T20 World Cup success

Reuters
New Delhi

Former India captain Suryakumar Yadav said he was disappointed at being dropped from the national T20 side months after leading India to a successful defence of their men's T20 World Cup title.

The 35-year-old took charge in 2024, guiding India to 42 wins in 50 completed T20 internationals and helping them become the first team to retain the men's T20 World Cup crown.

The final victory over New Zealand in March was his last T20 appearance for India and he was replaced as captain by Shreyas Iyer.

"The guy they've picked, I have played a lot of cricket with him. I know he's a good player, good human being, good captain also," Suryakumar said on Aakash Chopra's YouTube show.

"So, I didn't resent the decision but was disappointed be-

cause we didn't lose a series for two years, won Asia Cup, T20 World Cup - you want the same thing to go forward.

"When everything is going well, then why the change?"

India lost their first T20 series to Ireland in June and were thrashed 4-0 by England under Iyer, with a 3-0 victory over Zimbabwe their lone series win since lifting the World Cup.

Suryakumar scored only 242 runs in nine World Cup matches at an average of 30.25 after struggling in the lead-up to the tournament.

He managed only 270 runs for Mumbai Indians in this year's Indian Premier League.

"For one-and-a-half months I kept thinking, how can this happen? How is it possible? We just won the World Cup. Yes, IPL wasn't as good as how I wanted," he said.

India are due to play three one-day internationals and five T20 matches against West Indies from September 27, with the squad yet to be announced.



Suryakumar Yadav led India to their third T20 World Cup title. (Reuters)

Germany edge Spain to retain World Cup



Germany players celebrate on the podium after winning the FIH World Cup at Belfius Hockey Arena in Wavre, Belgium, yesterday. Germany successfully defended the title as Michel Struthoff scored the only goal of yesterday's final against Spain. Struthoff ran across the Spanish goalkeeper before turning the ball into the net one minute before the end of the third quarter to see the Germans to a record-equalling fourth World Cup, matching the tally of Pakistan. German goalkeeper Jean-Paul Danneberg played a crucial role with key saves amid some stout defence, seeing off four Spanish penalty corners. Argentina finished third in the tournament by beating co-hosts the Netherlands 2-1 in the bronze medal match earlier in the day.

BOXING

Hrgovic claims heavyweight title

Reuters
London

Croatian Filip Hrgovic pulled off a stunning comeback to beat British prodigy Moses Itauma by technical knockout to claim the vacant IBF world heavyweight title in thrilling fashion at London's O2 Arena on Saturday.

Outpointed over the first eight rounds, the 34-year-old Croatian turned the tide in the ninth, taking advantage of his young opponent's exhaustion to force the stoppage in the ninth round to become Croatia's first heavyweight world champion.

Itauma came into Saturday's bout with 12 knockouts in 14 professional fights unbeaten, and it looked like he was about to add a 13th as he pounded his opponent with powerful punches to the head and body. Attempting to become the second-youngest heavyweight champion of the world behind Mike Tyson, the 21-year-old's fast hands connected repeatedly with Hrgovic's head, but the Croatian displayed tremendous resilience, despite being on the receiving end of a standing eight count early in the fight.

Itauma landed a stunning uppercut as the bell sounded to end the fifth round, but Hrgovic managed to recover, and he played with



Filip Hrgovic poses with the title belt after winning the IBF world heavyweight bout against Moses Itauma in London. (Reuters)

fire again at the end of the sixth as Itauma pounded him late in the frame. Worn out from his efforts, Itauma slowed as the fight wore on and Hrgovic pounced in the ninth, forcing the young Briton back onto the ropes and overwhelming him with shots, forcing the referee to call off the fight as the towel came in from Itauma's corner.

"He's an amazing fighter, I want to thank him for accepting this fight, to give me a chance to become a new star in the heavyweight division. I am the present,

and he is definitely the future," Hrgovic said. "He's an amazing fighter, he's one of a kind, he's the best I've been in the ring with, but he needs more experience. He gassed out ... I knew that I have that pace in my favour."

Hrgovic said he wants a unification fight against WBC champion Agit Kabayel, who stepped into the ring to congratulate the new champion, but promoter Frank Warren quickly killed that idea, saying that he must fight Frank Sanchez next.

Mas wins Vuelta a Espana stage nine

Spain's Enric Mas made a late attack on the climb to Alto de Aitana to win stage nine of the Vuelta a Espana yesterday, as the Movistar rider retained his overall lead and the red jersey. Mas, who took the lead after Tadej Pogacar crashed out on Saturday, lived up to the red jersey as he won his first Grand Tour stage since 2018, preserving his energy throughout the mountainous ride and flawlessly executing the final attack. Briton Oscar Onley (Netcompany Ineos) followed Mas into the final kilometre but lost the sprint to the finish line and had to settle for second place. Slovenian Primož Roglic (Red Bull-Bora-Hansgrohe), who is second in the overall standings, came in third. Four-time Vuelta winner Roglic trails Mas by a minute and 18 seconds in the general classification. Felix Gall, who finished fourth on the day, remained third overall.

LEADERS IGNORE EARLY MOVES

Hours before the ninth stage began, Roglic's compatriot Pogacar posted a picture of himself in a hospital bed on Instagram, set to the 1977 song "Stayin' Alive" by the Bee Gees. Mas, wearing the red jersey for the first time, stayed in the peloton along with his closest general classification competitors as they ignored early attacks. By the time the riders started



Team Movistar's Spanish rider Enric Mas celebrates winning the 9th stage of the Vuelta a Espana, a 187.4km race between Villajoyosa and Alto de Aitana in Confrides, yesterday. (AFP)

the climactic 22 km climb to Alto de Aitana, several breakaway riders had split into groups, with Pogacar's UAE Team Emirates-XRG teammate Pavel Sivakov and Marcel Camprubi (Pinarello-Q36.5) leading the charge four minutes ahead of the peloton. Sivakov, who finished ninth in 2024, pushed ahead with 10 km remaining, as Camprubi scrambled to follow the Frenchman. Halfway up the climb, about 20 riders including Mas and other red jersey contenders were rapidly reducing the gap to the runaway leader, with Gall's Decathlon CMA CGM teammate Gregor Muehlberger setting the pace. With just a minute between them

and Sivakov, Gall attacked and others including Mas and Roglic followed. They caught Sivakov and effortlessly moved past him as Santiago Buitrago launched an attack with about four kilometres left in the stage. Soon after, Mas launched his own attack as Oscar Onley kept up with him, while Roglic followed them into the final kilometre. Mas, who had refused to celebrate or wear the red jersey on Saturday after Pogacar's crash, finally celebrated as he crossed the finish line, raising his arm to cheering spectators, with Onley just behind him. The race continues tomorrow with a hilly 184.7 km ride from Alcaraz to Elche de la Sierra.

SPOTLIGHT

Emotional Federer inducted into Hall of Fame

AFP
New York

A tearful Roger Federer said he was still writing his love letter to the sport that “meant the world” to him on Saturday as the 20-time Grand Slam champion was inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame in Newport, Rhode Island.

Federer, who was inducted alongside broadcaster and journalist Mary Carillo, reflected on his storied career in a speech that brought him to tears a few times.

“This is one of the greatest honours of my life,” said Federer.

“They call this the Hall of Fame, but fame was never the goal.

“My goal was to spend my life doing something I love ... with people who love it as much as I do.”

The Swiss captured a men’s-record eight Wimbledon titles and spent 310 weeks as the world

number one. He also won six Australian Open crowns, five U.S. Open titles and one French Open title.

And he did it all while playing with elegance, a signature headband - apparently wearing more than 5,000 of them during his career, he quipped in his address - and almost always two pairs of socks.

“Tennis meant the world to me. Not just playing, not just winning, but creating something new,” said Federer, who retired in 2022 with 103 ATP Tour titles.

“It’s a mentality I have. I used to play serve and volley, I had a transition game, I played way beyond the baseline sometimes, or on top of the baseline.

“And I would even try to sneak up on my opponents on my return, and some call it the SABR (Sneak Attack by Roger) today.

“This is what was important to me on the court, but so much of what was really important happened off the court.”

The 45-year-old got emotional

while thanking his coaches, doctors and family, including wife Mirka, who praised Federer for his character off the court as husband, father and friend.

As his name entered the Hall of Fame, Federer said he was proud that Switzerland was coming with him, recalling how he loved watching tennis as a 13-year-old ball boy in Basel.

“I’m still writing my love letter to tennis, and my time as a player is done, but tennis will always stand at the intersection of everything I care most about,” he said.

“My family, our friendships, the past 40 years, the future we’re building - tennis, for me, is responsible for it all. So this is not a goodbye.”

The Swiss said he was “incredibly lucky” to have played with different generations of tennis players, from Andre Agassi and Lleyton Hewitt to Andy Roddick, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic.

But he added that his induction was not only an opportunity

to look back on his career, but also ahead to the future of the game.

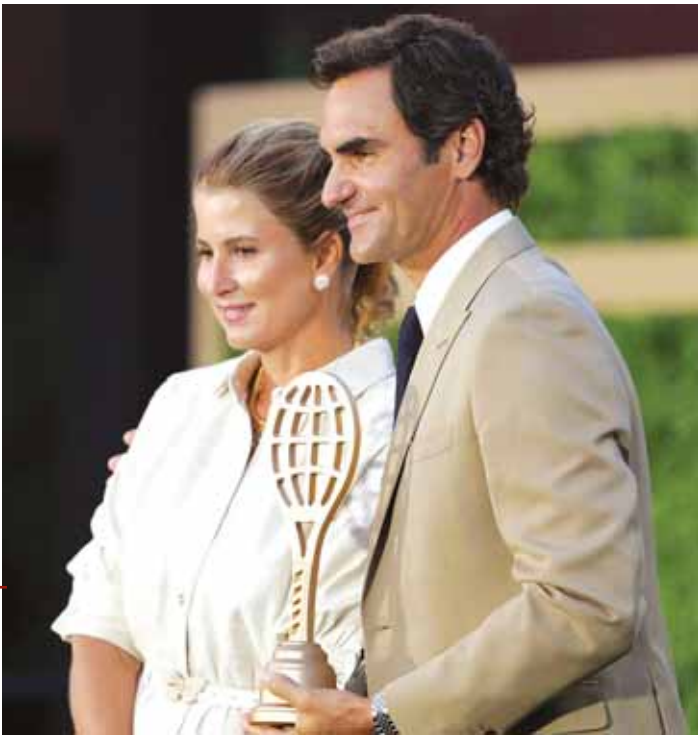
“We all leave the court eventually, but the sport keeps evolving,” said Federer.

“And as the pace of professional tennis speeds up, as the sport becomes even more global, I so hope it will keep some of that amateur spirit. Keep the camaraderie among the players.

“I hope the players will stay young at heart and stay true to their authentic selves, and always remember, never stop asking questions or taking risks.

“Do things with the game, we’ve never seen before. Keep pushing this sport we love to the next level and keep getting better, better, and better.”

Inductee Roger Federer and wife Mirka pose for a photo during the International Tennis Hall of Fame 2026 Induction Ceremony in Newport, Rhode Island. (AFP)



MOTORSPORT

In-form Marquez wins Aragon GP to cut Martin’s lead

‘You always have to believe the bike you’re riding is the best’



Ducati Lenovo Team’s Marc Marquez (also inset) celebrates winning the Aragon MotoGP at the Motorland circuit in Alcaniz, Spain, yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Alcaniz, Spain

Marc Marquez claimed a dominant victory at the Aragon MotoGP to put himself firmly in the title hunt yesterday, with Pedro Acosta finishing second and Marco Bezzecchi third.

Seven-time MotoGP champion Marquez has a strong record at the MotorLand circuit and climbed to second in the overall standings behind Jorge Martin, who came fifth.

Last year’s winner Marquez trails his Spanish compatriot by just 19 points, knocking Italian Bezzecchi down to third, 24 points behind Martin.

It was Marquez’s fourth win of the season, all of those coming within the last six races as he reignited his title bid in spectacular fashion, and a sixth victory from six races for Ducati in Aragon between sprints and Grands Prix.

“Once I got the lead I put my foot down and turned up the pressure and opened the gap so that there would be no doubt about victory,” said home favourite Marquez, who finished 1.754 seconds clear of the field. Aprilia riders Bezzecchi and Martin started well and took a 1-2 but Marquez quickly repassed Martin to move into second. The Spaniard admitted he made a “huge mistake” by forget-

RESULTS	
1. Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati) 41 minutes 10.969 seconds	2. Pedro Acosta (ESP/KTM) at 1.754, 3. Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Aprilia) 3.629, 4. Alex Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 8.687, 5. Jorge Martin (ESP/Aprilia) 12.572, 6. Fermin Aldeguer (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 17.687, 7. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 23.136, 8. Enea Bastianini (ITA/KTM-Tech3) 25.741, 9. Diogo Moreira (BRA/Honda-LCR) 25.899, 10. Brad Binder (RSA/KTM) 26.441, 11. Jack Miller (AUS/Yamaha-Pramac) 27.206, 12. Joan Mir (ESP/Honda) 27.999, 13. Alex Rins (ESP/Yamaha) 28.276, 14. Luca Marini (ITA/Honda) 29.794, 15. Johann Zarco (FRA/Honda-LCR) 30.003, 16. Pol Espargaro (ESP/KTM-Tech3) 35.874, 17. Lorenzo Savadori (ITA/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 49.761, 18. Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) 51.657
Did not finish: Franco Morbidelli (ITA/Ducati-VR46), Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati), Raul Fernandez (ESP/Aprilia-Trackhouse), Toprak Razgatlioglu (TUR/Yamaha-Pramac)	

ting to turn off his rear ride height device after Turn 1 at the start, allowing Bezzecchi and Martin to usurp him. Bezzecchi built an advantage of eight-tenths but Marquez snatched the lead on lap six at Turn 15, the pair brushing wheels out of the corner, allowing KTM rider Acosta in to snatch second.

“We were going 330 or 340 (kilometres per hour), and it’s incredible with these bikes because there was a moment when we were side by side, I wanted to pull away, he wanted to pull away and couldn’t. The bikes were locked together,”

explained Marquez. Bezzecchi said his rival had more power to help him capitalise in that crucial moment.

“I heard Marc Marquez’s engine when we were side by side on the straight, but with his experience and the extra power of his bike he was able to get the better of me,” said Bezzecchi. “It is a shame I lost second straight away to Pedro. I would have preferred to fight harder for runner-up but I am still very happy.”

Francesco Bagnaia and Franco Morbidelli both crashed out, while

Raul Fernandez retired to the garage. Marquez extended his advantage to more than a second on lap 14 and continued to pull away from Acosta, stretching it to 1.4sec by lap 16 and finishing nearly 1.8sec ahead.

“We’re in the World Championship, we’re a team, and you always have to believe the bike you’re riding is the best,” added Marquez. “That’s what I have in my head.”

Marc brother, Alex Marquez came in fourth, ahead of Martin, Fermin Aldeguer and Fabio Di Giannantonio, who is fourth overall.

TENNIS

Pegula cruises past Ruse, Krejckikova crashes out as US Open begins

Reuters
New York

Highest-ranked American Jessica Pegula cruised into the U.S. Open second round while 27th seed Barbora Krejckikova crashed out, as the year’s final major got underway yesterday with a record purse of \$108mn up for grabs.

Dozens of ticketholders were lined up long before the action kicked off and the home crowd was rewarded as world number three Pegula beat Romania’s Elena-Gabriela Ruse 6-3 6-2 in the first match at the showpiece Arthur Ashe Stadium.

The 2024 finalist will play the winner of a meeting between American wildcards Venus Williams and Sofia Kenin, who are due to close out the night session on Ashe later in the day.

The twice Grand Slam winner Krejckikova became the first seeded player to exit the tournament, saving six match points before succumbing to Uzbekistan’s Kamilla Rakhimova 7-6(4) 6-2 on the outer courts.

Rakhimova, who has never made it past the third round at the majors, will play the winner of Monday’s match between Japan’s Aoi Ito and Spain’s Oksana Selekhmeteva.

Italian Jasmine Paolini survived a scare to get past Slovenia’s Veronika Erjavec 6-3 3-6 6-4 in the opening match at Louis Armstrong Stadium, firing off 36 winners to just 13 from her opponent.

The 2024 Wimbledon and French Open finalist will play the winner of a match later on Sunday between her compatriot Lucrezia Stefanini and Ukrainian Dayana Yastremska.

Guests piled into Flushing Meadows under pristine playing conditions, as the tournament entered its second year in a 15-day format with the first round played over three days.

Czech Jiri Lehecka kicked off the action on the Grandstand with a 6-1 7-6(5) 4-6 6-2 win over Spain’s Pablo Carreno Busta, as an injury-tinged men’s field lost yet another player when the 2022 finalist and 19th seed Casper Ruud withdrew from the tournament, citing a persistent back injury.

He joined world number one Jannik Sinner and Brazilian fan-favourite Joao Fonseca among the injured absentees in Flushing Meadows.

Organisers added an extra day to the schedule in 2025 following years of runaway demand for tickets and U.S. Tennis Association chief executive Craig Tiley said that the \$108 million purse, the largest in tennis history, was aimed at giving players a fair share of the revenue. The 24-times Grand Slam winner Novak Djokovic will kick off the night session on Ashe against Argentine Mariano Navone.

With Sinner out of the tournament and defending champion Carlos Alcaraz coming to New York after a long injury layoff, this year presents a prime chance for the 39-year-old Serb to add one more major trophy to his haul.



Jessica Pegula of the United States celebrates a point against Elena-Gabriela Ruse of Romania during the first round match of US Open in New York yesterday. (AFP)

Three-up Toyota ace Pajari roars to Paraguay Rally win

Sami Pajari earned a third straight win with a rampant triumph at the Rally of Paraguay yesterday as his late charge for the world rally championship title gathered momentum.

Finn Pajari, in a Toyota, moved up to second in the WRC standings after adding to his victories in Estonia and Finland.

After 11 of 14 rallies, Welshman Elfyn Evans still leads the standings for the world title by 20 points from Pajari.

Evans finished fourth in his own Toyota on the treacherous red earth of Paraguay’s plains as Hyundai driver Hayden Paddon of New Zealand came second with Adrien Fourmaux of France third.

“It was not an easy rally, not easy for the drivers, but nevertheless not easy for the team,” Pajari said after the rutted gravel tracks on the plains caused relentless punctures.

The 24-year-old Pajari said he was proud but was focussed on trying to catch Evans.

“We are still trying to do the best we can in the championship, which is also not going too bad at the moment, so happy for that,” said Pajari.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Fernandes treble inspires United rout of Ipswich

Chelsea extend Alonso’s perfect start with victory over Brighton

AFP
London

Bruno Fernandes starred with a hat-trick in Manchester United’s 5-2 rout of Ipswich, while Chelsea extended Xabi Alonso’s perfect start with a thrilling 4-3 win against Brighton.

Fernandes shone as he ensured United bounced back from their humiliating 2-0 defeat at Hull on the opening weekend of the Premier League season.

Boss Michael Carrick was in danger of another embarrassing loss to a promoted club when Leif Davis put Ipswich ahead at Old Trafford with a 29th minute strike that canonned in off the crossbar.

But the Fernandes show started in the 40th minute after Marcelino Nunez’s slip allowed Matheus Cunha to pick out the United captain for a sumptuous finish. United went in front in the 56th minute when Jacob Greaves was pressured into an own goal. Greaves deflected Harry Maguire’s shot into his own net, with Ipswich’s appeals for handball against the United defender snubbed by VAR.

Completing a miserable five minutes for Greaves, the Ipswich defender conceded a penalty with his foul on Cunha and United captain Fernandes stepped up to slot home from the spot. Fernandes sealed his treble in the 68th minute, sweeping in from close-range after Kobbie Mainoo and Bryan Mbeumo had shots blocked.

It was Fernandes’s second league hat-trick for United following his treble against Leeds five years ago. Fernandes was not finished and Bryan Mbeumo scored from his pass with a lob that clipped the bar and dropped over the line in the 82nd minute. Chuba Akpom’s stoppage-time tap-in was little consolation for out-classed Ipswich, who were beaten for the first time since returning to the top-flight.

“It was a massive result for us. We lost three points last week. First game at home, the fans have been waiting for this,” Fernandes said. “Scoring goals is the best feeling in football. Doing a hat-trick at home with our fans is something I’m proud of. I hope I can do much more and help my team-mates score too.”

Joao Pedro, Morgan Rogers and Cole Palmer all scored when Alonso’s reign as Chelsea boss kicked off with a 3-2 win at Fulham on Monday. And Pedro and Palmer were back on target, while Rogers teed up Chelsea’s second



Manchester United’s Bruno Fernandes scores against Ipswich Town in Manchester. (Reuters)

goal, scored by Pedro Neto, as the Blues held off a rally from Brighton at Stamford Bridge.

Emiliano Martinez made his Chelsea debut in goal just hours after sealing his move from Aston Villa. But there was no place for his Argentina team-mate Enzo Fernandez, who could still leave Chelsea for Manchester City before Tuesday’s transfer deadline.

“We have to be aware until Tuesday evening what is going to develop. We’re not sure. We are preparing for all scenarios,” Alonso said of Fernandez. “I’m sure that, whatever happens, from Wednesday we will have a good enough squad to compete in the Premier League.”

Romeo Lavia profited from a mix-up between Bart Verbruggen and Mats Wieffer to prod in Chelsea’s opening goal from a corner. Neto then turned in Rogers’s cross before Pedro rounded off a brilliant Chelsea counter-attack that began inside their own box.

Martinez was beaten moments later by a blistering volley from Malick Yalcouye. Pedro turned Pascal Gross’s cross into his own net just after the hour mark.

A moment of genius from Palmer eased Chelsea’s nerves as he curled into the bottom corner from outside the area after a fine solo rune. Gross headed in a stoppage-time consolation for Brighton, but Chelsea join Manchester City and Hull as the only sides to take six points from their opening two games.

Brentford were on course to also maintain their perfect start when Kevin Schade’s audacious flick opened the scoring away to Leeds.

But Dominic Calvert-Lewin turned in Lukas Nmecha’s driven cross to salvage a point and Leeds’s unbeaten start to the campaign.

Sunderland got off the mark with a 1-0 victory over Fulham thanks to Wilson Isidor’s winner 15 minutes from time.

LA LIGA

Bellingham, Mbappe fire as Real Madrid ease to Malaga win

AFP
Madrid

Jude Bellingham and Kylian Mbappe both struck as Real Madrid’s perfect start to La Liga under Jose Mourinho continued in a 4-0 cruise against Malaga on Sunday.

Los Blancos scored three times in just over 10 minutes in the first half to open up a comfortable lead over the Andalusian visitors to the Santiago Bernabeu.

Sandwiched between Bellingham and Mbappe’s strikes was an own goal by Malaga goalkeeper Alfonso Herrero, while Arda Guler tapped in a fourth late on.

“I’ve got the freedom to go higher or lower if we need, I’m enjoying myself a lot,” Bellingham told Real Madrid TV of his attacking midfield role under Mourinho.

The former Birmingham and Borussia Dortmund star was given a standing ovation from the fans when he was substituted in the second half. “It’s an honour to play for this club and in front of these fans and the ovation was very nice,” added Bellingham.

After two victories in their opening two games and with superstar trio Mbappe, Bellingham and Vinicius Junior starting the season well, Madrid’s confidence was high. Mourinho rotated, making five changes to the team that started their opening matches, giving Trent Alexander-Arnold and Marc Cucurella among others their first starts this season.

Bellingham opened the scoring after 19 minutes with an excellent solo goal, beating two defenders before drilling through Herrero’s legs. Bellingham forced the second goal seven minutes later, after Herrero denied Mbappe.

The England international headed the rebound towards goal and defender Carlos Puga desperately tried to clear off the line, with the ball bouncing in off the unfortunate stopper Herrero. Mbappe rattled home the third with a volley from Alexander-Arnold’s cross for his fourth goal of the campaign, leaving him top of Spain’s scoring charts.

Promoted side Malaga threatened just before half-time, with Rafa Rodriguez striking the post after a corner was played to him, and Chupe hitting the side netting. Madrid cruised through the second half, with Bellingham hitting the outside of the post as they occasionally threatened to extend their lead.

They only managed to get a fourth late on, when Vinicius teed up substitute Guler to finish from point-blank range.

“The second half was more about managing the game, at a lower tempo,” Mourinho said. “Malaga were calmer on the ball, but every time we stepped up the pace, it always felt like we could score one or two more. One of our objectives was to keep a clean sheet.”

Today, champions Barcelona host Rayo Vallecano in their third match of the campaign, having comfortably won their opening games.



Real Madrid’s Jude Bellingham scores past Malaga’s goalkeeper Alfonso Herrero during the La Liga tie at Estadio Bernabeu in Madrid. (Reuters)

SERIE A

Como spoil Allegri’s Napoli home debut



Como’s Anastasios Douvikas scores against Napoli. (Reuters)

AFP
Naples, Italy

Como pulled off their latest feat of Serie A giant-killing as a 2-1 win at the Stadio Diego Armando Maradona ruined Napoli head coach Massimiliano Allegri’s home debut. Martin Baturina fired Cesc Fabregas’s enterprising side into a deserved lead in the 17th minute as chances fell at both ends in soaring temperatures in Naples.

Rasmus Hojlund’s brilliant strike drew the hosts level on the half-hour mark, but his good work was quickly undone when a defensive mix-up led to Anastasios Douvikas scoring for the second game in a row.

Kevin De Bruyne, who inspired Napoli to an opening win over Genoa with a goal and assist from the bench, was unable to turn the tide after coming on early in the second half.

Como survived late pressure to hold on as Stanislav Lobotka’s stoppage-time strike was ruled out for offside. “It is a very valu-

able win... the first half was very good and in the second we understood that we were facing champions, and we held out,” Fabregas said.

Fabregas’s side upset the established order in Italian football last season by qualifying for the Champions League for the first time, where they were drawn against the likes of holders Paris Saint-Germain, Barcelona and Manchester United.

But the Spanish coach admitted that he is hoping for more new signings before the transfer window closes on September 1, to help cope with a busy schedule.

“Obviously, I’m expecting a striker,” Fabregas said. “Douvikas can’t play both the league and the cups. We suffered a lot with (Alvaro) Morata last year, for months he was out injured. Playing every three days at this level isn’t easy.”

Como, who were held by Udinese in their opener, moved up to four points in the Serie A table, two behind early frontrunners AC Milan and Juventus, while last season’s runners-up Napoli remained on three points.

ROUND-UP

Suzuki sends Freiburg past Bremen

AFP
Berlin

Japan’s **Yuito Suzuki** scored a sensational hat-trick as Freiburg cruised to a 4-1 home win over Werder Bremen, while Schalke lost to Augsburg on their Bundesliga return.

Suzuki opened the scoring with a header from a corner before Igor Matanovic added another with a great long-range effort for the Europa League finalists just before the break.

The forward then scored two goals inside seven minutes early in the second-half. Suzuki was on hand to dink in a Derry Scherhant cross with 48 minutes played and was again in the right spot to turn in a no-look Matanovic pass for a first Bundesliga hat-trick.

Bremen offered little in attack despite returning Germany striker Niclas Füllkrug starting up front and were only able to pull back a late goal through Dariusz Stalmach with 14 minutes remaining.

In late game, seven-time German champions Schalke suffered in their first top-flight match in 1,191 days, going down 3-0 away at Augsburg and finishing with 10 men.

Michael Gregoritsch gave Augsburg the lead after 18 minutes and the visitors hopes of getting back into the match took a hit when Ron Schallenberg saw red for a last-man foul.

Anton Kade added another with 11 minutes remaining and Rodrigo Ribeiro rounded out the victory with a superb stoppage time strike.

Next Saturday, defending champions Bayern



Munich travel to Schalke’s Veltins Arena home, where the Bavarians have not lost since 2010.

PARIS FC THUMP NICE IN LIGUE 1

Former Chelsea boss Lionel Rosenior led his new charges Paris FC to a 3-0 home thumping of Nice in Ligue 1.

Newly-recruited Malian striker Lassine Sinayoko broke the deadlock from the penalty-spot on 20 minutes, Samir Chergui doubled that after a blistering counter-attack after 51

minutes, while Vincent Marchetti pounced on a loose ball late on to make it 3-0.

Former Strasbourg boss Rosenior was brought back to France following his torrid experience at Chelsea by the multi-billionaire Arnault family, owners of the Louis Vuitton brand and Paris FC. After opening the season with a goalless draw at Troyes, the win lifted PFC top of Ligue 1 ahead of later matches.

WATKINS JOINS AL HILAL FROM VILLA

England forward Ollie Watkins has left Aston Villa to join Al Hilal, his new Saudi club announced. The deal is worth a reported £50mn (\$68mn) and follows Villa’s signing of Senegal forward Nicolas Jackson from Chelsea. Al Hilal said the 30-year-old Watkins had signed a three-year deal and will be in line to play in their league match against Al Ahli on Tuesday.

He joins a squad including former Ballon d’Or winner Karim Benzema and Crysencio Summerville, who signed from West Ham earlier in the transfer window.

Watkins has scored seven goals in 24 appearances for England. Villa coach Unai Emery had criticised Watkins for refusing to play in last weekend’s 4-0 defeat to Brighton to open their Premier League campaign as he sought to force through his move to Al Hilal.

But Emery said on Friday that there were no hard feelings.

Watkins began his career at Exeter City in League Two before he moved to Brentford in the Championship. He then joined Villa, where he spent six fruitful seasons, culminating in a Europa League victory last season.

Alvarez returns to Atletico team training after illness

Madrid: Wantaway Atletico Madrid striker Julian Alvarez returned to group training after recovering from the illness that kept him out of training earlier this week and Saturday’s 3-1 La Liga win over Sevilla.

With two days remaining before the transfer window closes at midnight Tuesday, the Argentina international is back with the squad as Barcelona continue to

pursue his signature. Atletico have repeatedly ruled out negotiating Alvarez’s departure to Barcelona, with director of football Mateu Alemany reiterating the club’s firm stance on Saturday. “The club has been very clear and very firm,” Alemany said.

“The plan is very clear,” he continued. “(Alvarez) had a few days when he wasn’t feeling well, he already trained (by himself

on Friday), and we hope he’ll reintegrate with us quickly and be available, I hope, for the next league match.”

Chief executive Miguel Angel Gil Marin said Thursday that Atletico would “not negotiate with Barcelona under any circumstances”, a position backed by the club’s board.

Spanish media have reported that a move to England could pro-

vide an alternative, although that option is not believed to appeal to 2022 World Cup winner Alvarez, who said this summer he would like to leave Atletico.

Alvarez was jeered by the club’s own supporters last weekend when he came on against Villarreal as a substitute, and he walked off down the tunnel by himself while his team-mates applauded Atletico’s fans.