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## Alcaraz routs Medvedev in final, reclaims No. 1 ranking



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# GULF TIMES

# SPORT



CRICKET

## New Zealand triumph in windy Wellington, sweep series 2-0

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## WARM WELCOME ACCORDED TO ASIAN BEACH HANDBALL CHAMPIONS



The newly-crowned Asian beach handball champions Qatar received a rousing welcome upon their arrival at the Hamad International Airport in Doha yesterday. Qatar on Sunday regained the Asian Men's Beach Handball title - their sixth overall - after defeating Oman 18-14, 16-12 in the final in Bali, Indonesia. Qatar Handball Association (QHA) president Ahmed al-Shaabi and board members received the victorious Qatar team.

CRICKET

# Asia Lions emerge as LLC Masters champions

Lions openers Tharanga and Dilshan's half-centuries blow away the Giants in the final



Asia Lions celebrate with the trophy after winning the Legends League Cricket Masters Qatar 2023 at the Asian Town Cricket Stadium yesterday.

By Sports Reporter

Doha

Asia Lions openers Upul Tharanga and Tillakaratne Dilshan cracked breezy half-centuries to blow away the challenge of World Giants and to emerge as the new champions of Legends League Cricket (LLC) Masters Qatar 2023 at the Asian Town Cricket Stadium yesterday.

World Giants, who has won the inaugural international edition of the LLC Masters in Muscat, Oman, in 2022 were beaten by seven wickets as Asia Lions chased down the modest 148-run target with 23 balls to spare.

President of Qatar Cricket Association Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Saud al-Thani handed over the

winner's trophy to Asia Lions captain Shahid Afridi amidst cheers from the 10,000 strong crowd at the stadium in the presence of Co-owner of Legends League Cricket Yuvraj Khilachand, co-owner and CEO Legends League Cricket Raman Raheja, and Chairman Legends League Cricket Vivek Khushnani.

The architects of Asia Lions' victory were Sri Lankan openers Tharanga and Dilshan, who whipped the World Giants at attack to put on 115 runs-opening partnership in 9.6 overs.

Dilshan cracked 58 off 42 balls (8x4s) while Tharanga scored 57 off 28 balls (5x4s, 3x6s).

Tharanga, who had also scored a 50 against India Maharajas to take Asia Lions into the final, was also adjudged the Player of the Series.

Earlier, Asia Lions restricted World Giants to 147 for 4 despite Jacques Kallis' unbeaten 78 runs off 54 balls with five boundaries and three sixes.

Kallis also had a 92 runs partnership in 11.1 overs for the fourth wicket with Ross Taylor, who hit 32 off 33 balls with three hits to the fence. World Giants, opting to bat, had a disastrous start with South African Morne van Wyk being cleaned up by Pakistan's Abdur Razzak for nought in the third over.

More trouble followed with Giants' Aussie star Shane Watson being trapped leg before two balls later by Razaq.

From being 2 for 9, Giants further slipped to 3 for 19 with opener Lendl Simmons being run out by a throw from Sohail Tanvir for 17 (16 balls; 1x4, 1x6).

It was then that Kallis in support from New Zealander Ross Taylor rebuild the innings.

When Afridi too bowled a tight tenth over for five runs, World Giants could muster only 49 for 3 at the halfway stage.

Although Kallis slog-swept Afridi for a six in the 12th over, runs were still hard to come. Taylor and Kallis recorded their 50-run partnership in 7.3 overs when Kallis hit Thisara Perera for a boundary to fine leg.

Kallis reached his half-century in 41 balls lifting Perera for a six to mid-wicket. Perera struck with the third ball of the 17th over to clean bowl Taylor for 32.

The pair's 92 runs in 11.1 overs lifted World Giants to a challenging total. Paul Collingwood, who joined Kallis, was retired hurt for 6. Kallis then hit an ef-

fortless six to mid-wicket off Tanvir in the 19th over.

In the last over bowled by Udana, Kallis hit two consecutive boundaries off the second and third deliveries to remain unconquered on 78.

Chasing the target, Asia Lions' consistent openers Tharanga and Dilshan cruised smooth.

Dilshan hit Samit Patel's second and third deliveries for boundaries while Tharanga hit the fifth ball for a six over long-on.

They took 16 runs off the first over. In the second, Tharanga pulled Brett Lee for a boundary. World Giants then replaced the costly Patel with Ricardo Powell. Tharanga chopped Powell to the third man for a boundary.

Tino Best, who was introduced for the fourth over, was



Asia Lions captain Shahid Afridi lifts the trophy as president of Qatar Cricket Association Sheikh Abdulaziz bin Saud al-Thani looks on.

also hit by Dilshan through the covers for a boundary. The pair recorded their 50 runs partnership in 4.5 overs with Tharanga hitting Powell for a six.

Tharanga smashed Powell's last ball of the fifth over too for a six to long-on. Dilshan greeted Chris Mpofu with two consecutive boundaries in the sixth over and also scored another off the fourth ball to pile up 72 runs from the powerplay.

Hoping to stop the run flow, World Giants introduced spinner Monty Panesar but too was not spared by Dilshan who drove him through extra cover for another boundary and took 13 runs off the over. Desperately looking for a breakthrough, Brett Lee was introduced for the eighth over. There was no impact of the bowling change. In fact, Lee was elegantly pulled for a boundary by Tharanga.

In the ninth over, Tharanga reached his half-century pulling Best for a boundary.

He had already hit four boundaries and three sixes. The 100-run partnership too came in

8.3 overs.

Asia Lions took the game totally away from World Giants with Dilshan too smashing Best for a boundary to mid-wicket and reaching his half-century in 32 balls with eight boundaries.

The 115 runs partnership ended when Lee had Tharanga clean bowled for 57.

Asia Lions needed only 33 runs in the last ten overs.

Dilshan was bowled out by Samit Patel for 58 when only 16 runs were needed for the victory in 41 balls. Mohamed Hafeez and Misbah Ul Haq steered their team to victory remaining unbeaten with nine runs each.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**Asia Lions 148 for 3 in 16.1 overs** (Upul Tharanga 57, Tillakaratne Dilshan 58) **bt World Giants 147 for 4 in 20 overs** (Jacques Kallis 78 n.o, Ross Taylor 32, Abdur Razzak 2 for 14) **by 7 wickets.**  
**Player of the Match:** Abdur Razzak  
**Player of the series:** Upul Tharanga

CRICKET

# New Zealand win in Wellington, sweep series 2-0

The home side wins by an innings and 58 runs with a day to spare

Reuters  
Wellington

New Zealand completed an innings and 58-run victory over Sri Lanka in the second Test in blustery Wellington yesterday to sweep the series 2-0 as the South Asian side's resistance finally broke late on day four.

Having been asked to follow on, Sri Lanka needed 416 runs to make the hosts bat again but were bowled out for 358 in their second innings at the Basin Reserve to the relief of Tim Southee's side.

"Tomorrow's weather wasn't looking flash," Southee told reporters of a rainy day five forecast. "The guys were a bit heavy in the legs but we're very pleased to have it wrapped up with a day to spare."

The inaugural World Test Championship holders, New Zealand's title defence ended long before but they finished the cycle on a high with three straight wins, including a pair of absolute thrillers against England in Wellington and the series-opener in Christchurch.

It was no coincidence that talisman Kane Williamson was key in all three wins.

New Zealand's finest batter was named Man of the Series, having scored 215 in Wellington after steering the Black Caps home with an unbeaten century in the final-ball win in Christchurch.

Henry Nicholls was Man of the Match in Wellington for his unbeaten 200 as New Zealand piled on 580 for four in their declared first innings after Sri Lanka captain Dimuth Karunaratne won the toss and elected to field.

Sri Lanka's hopes of a first win in the country since 2006 all but ended when their batters managed only 164 in reply.

Yet they showed pride and grit to frustrate New Zealand on a day four blighted by severe wind gusts.

A stiff northerly was so strong that the host broadcaster stood a camera crew down for safety, leaving footage from only one end of the pitch.

"The way we bowled I think we are not deserving to win because we bowled so many loose balls and gave the freebies to the Kiwis," Karunaratne told reporters.

"The way the guys batted (today) I'm really proud of that but we have many things to improve."



New Zealand's captain Tim Southee holds the Test series trophy during day four of the second Test against Sri Lanka at the Basin Reserve in Wellington yesterday. (AFP)

Though victory appeared well beyond Sri Lanka when they resumed on 113 for two in the morning, there was some hope they might bat out the day and even save the match with the help of day five rain.

After Karunaratne's 51 late on day three, Kusal Mendis (50) and Dinesh Chandimal (62) made fifties, and number six Dhananjaya de Silva ploughed on to the cusp of a century by tea.

However, a wicket before and after the tea-break, including De Silva's dismissal for 98 with a botched scoop off Michael Bracewell, put the game back in New Zealand's hands as Sri Lanka fell to 318 for seven.

Led by a 110-ball vigil for 20 by Kasun Rajitha, the tail did well to thwart New Zealand's bowlers for hours longer than they would have hoped.

Southee (3-51) blew all three of New Zealand's reviews trying to close out the

game but the skipper made up for it by taking the last two wickets, with Williamson taking the final catch in the slips to dismiss Rajitha as light waned.

After their calamitous first innings, Sri Lanka batted bravely but five of their top seven batters fell trying to attack short balls, including the skipper, Mendis and Chandimal.

All-rounder De Silva may be especially rueful with his final shot after falling two runs short of his 10th century.

"Those things happen," said Karunaratne. "Unfortunately he couldn't get the hundred but he batted really well."

**SCOREBOARD**  
**NZ 1st innings 580-4 declared**  
**Sri Lanka 1st innings (all out, 164) followed on**  
**Sri Lanka 2nd innings (overnight 113-2)**  
O. Fernando c sub b D Bracewell 5

D. Karunaratne c Conway b Southee 51  
K. Mendis c Williamson b Henry 50  
K. Mathews c M. Bracewell b Tickner 2  
D. Chandimal c D. Bracewell b Tickner 62  
D. de Silva c Nicholls b MG Bracewell 98  
N. Madushka c Southee b Tickner 39  
K. Rajitha c Williamson b Southee 20  
P. Jayasuriya c Tickner b MG Bracewell 2  
L. Kumara c M. Bracewell b Southee 7  
A. Fernando not out 0  
**Extras (lb6, nb2, w14) 22**  
**Total (all out, 142 overs) 358**  
**Fall of wickets:** 1-26 (Fernando), 2-97 (Karunaratne), 3-113 (Mendis), 4-116 (Mathews), 5-242 (Chandimal), 6-318 (Madushka), 7-318 (De Silva), 8-338 (Jayasuriya), 9-354 (Kumara), 10-358 (Rajitha)  
T. Southee 27-13-51-3, M. Henry 29-8-59-1, M. Bracewell 42-14-100-2, D. Bracewell 18-3-58-1, B. Tickner 26-6-84-3  
**Toss:** Sri Lanka

FORMULA ONE

## Mercedes targeting big gains, says Wolff



Reuters  
Jeddah

Formula One champions Red Bull are in a league of their own but once-dominant Mercedes can see big gains ahead after going back to the drawing board with their car.

Speaking to reporters at last weekend's Saudi Arabian Grand Prix, team principal **Toto Wolff** said he would have no shame if the revamped car ended up resembling a Red Bull, so long as it was quick.

"We are just storming full steam ahead now and changing things," said the Austrian.

"We are making really big steps at the moment with our R&D, with our understanding in the (wind) tunnel, that is really big steps because we just needed to have the confirmation in Bahrain that we got it wrong.

"I think if we continue to do the big steps that we've already done in the last 10 days then I think we come to a stage where we are really able to respond."

George Russell and seven times world champion Lewis Hamilton finished fourth and fifth in Jeddah, still a long way off Red Bull and behind Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso but ahead of both Ferraris.

In Bahrain, the March 5 season-opener, they were the fourth

fastest team. Red Bull have won both races to date one-two, dropping only one point for a fastest lap.

Double world champion Max Verstappen went from 15th to second in Saudi Arabia, powering past Hamilton - who said on Saturday he felt "at a bit of a loss" with the car - as if lapping a back-marker.

"The kind of gains that are coming in, in our R&D and in aero, are much bigger than we've had over a long time," said Wolff after Russell qualified fourth before moving up to third on the Saudi Arabian starting grid.

"We've unlocked some potential because we simply look at things from different angles now. We have a different perspective, because of our learnings of the Bahrain test and race."

Wolff said he did not want to sound "foolishly optimistic" but all the car's visible aerodynamic surfaces were being reconsidered.

"The car is being turned upside down at the moment and there's a lot of goodness that we see," he added.

"We see low hanging fruit with things that are encouraging."

"We have no dogmatism of how the car should look like. It just needs to be the quickest possible race car.

"If that car looks like a Red Bull... I don't care. I will have no shame if it's quick."

FOCUS

## Pacer Starc won't be trying new tricks

Reuters  
Mumbai

Mitchell Starc said he has not deviated from his game plan in over a decade and after taking five wickets against India on Sunday there seems little reason to change things as Australia ramp up their preparations for this year's World Cup.

Starc claimed 5-53 for his ninth five-wicket haul in one-day internationals, his swing playing a key role in limiting India to a total of 117 before Mitchell Marsh and Travis Head sealed the win, setting up a series finale in Chennai tomorrow.

"My plan hasn't changed for 13 years: bowl full, hit the stumps, try and swing it," Starc told reporters. "That's been my role for a long time, to try and get wickets up front in the powerplay. At times that means I'm probably more expensive, but I'm trying to bring in all modes of dismissal, so it's certainly not a new game



plan these last two games." Starc said Australia would focus on winning the series before turning their attention to the 50-overs Cricket World Cup, which will take place in India in October and November. "We now move on to Chennai, where we've got a chance (in) the decider... once we get past that game and then it's probably more of a focus on the World Cup," Starc said. "There's parts of this series where the World Cup will be in the back of your mind, but I think for this group, we've still got a chance to win a one-day series in India, which is pretty special."

## Finch to captain San Francisco in MLC, Seattle sign De Kock

**London:** Former Australia skipper Aaron Finch will captain the San Francisco Unicorns in the inaugural edition of the United States' new Twenty20 tournament, while South Africa's Quinton de Kock will play for the Seattle Orcas. Finch and De Kock were among six overseas signings announced during Major League Cricket's (MLC) 'Domestic Player Draft' on Sunday, in which each of the six teams picked nine US-based players. "So excited to be a part of @MLCricket @SFOUnicorns," tweeted Finch, who captained Australia in white-ball cricket before announcing his retirement from internationals last month. The 36-year-old will be joined by his former teammate Marcus Stoinis at the Unicorns as well as Victoria fast bowler Brody Couch, whose mother is American, making him eligible for the draft. Fast bowler Liam

Plunkett, who was part of the England side that won the 50-overs World Cup in 2019, was also picked by the Unicorns in the draft. Plunkett's wife is American. De Kock, who previously captained South Africa across all three formats, will line up for the Orcas alongside Australia all-rounder Mitchell Marsh. DC Freedom also announced two overseas signings, bringing in Sri Lankan spin bowling all-rounder Wanindu Hasaranga and South African fast bowler Anrich Nortje. More overseas signings will be announced over the next few weeks. In the draft, US internationals Monank Patel and Steven Taylor were snapped up by MI New York, while former Canadian captain Nitish Kumar went to the Los Angeles Knight Riders. The MLC tournament will be played between July 13-30 in Dallas.

SPOTLIGHT

## AAB concludes Chess Open FIDE-Rated Tournament

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Abdullah Abdulghani & Bros. Co. (AAB), the distributor of Toyota and Lexus in Qatar, hosted the seventh edition of its Chess Open FIDE-Rated Tournament, in collaboration with Qatar Chess Association (QCA), at the Qatar Chess Association Training Centre recently.

This year, the FIDE-Rated Tournament saw a record turnout of chess players in Qatar, where a total of 130 participants ranging from age 6 years old and above, battled for the championship and special prizes.

The tournament was played in 7-Round Swiss System format of standard chess over two consecutive weekends. The tournament results are linked for individual rating purposes with the World Chess Federation (FIDE).

The Championship title of the 7th Edition of the tournament was clinched by Gyana Sai Santhosh of India. The 2nd place went to fellow Indian, Pranav Pradeep Nair and Sanjid Latheef, also from India, took 3rd place. Loyola Rolenson of the Philippines got placed at 4th and Elishev Ivan of Russia came in 5th place. The winners of the first five places received trophies and cash prizes. Further-



Qatar Chess Association (QCA) President Mohamed al-Mudahka and Abdullah Abdulghani & Bros. Co. (AAB) officials with prize winners.

more, the "Best Qatari Male" award went to Erfan Mohamed Firdaus while the "Best Qatari Female" went to Khouloud al-Khelaifi.

In addition, the "Best Qatari U20" went to Aljamaat Khaled, the "Best Qatari U16" went to Al-Mansouri Fahad, and "Best Qatari U12" went to Al-Janahi Ibrahim.

QCA President Mohamed al-Mudahka and QCA members were present at the prize giving ceremony. Leading the AAB

team was Dr Eiman al-Ansari, Government & Public Affairs Director.

The AAB Chess Open, Qatar's first FIDE Rated Open Chess Tournament, is a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiative geared towards developing the community through sports.

The tournament is organised every year to maintain the enthusiasm and interest of chess aficionados in Qatar. It provides a platform for both rated players to raise their world ratings, and for

unrated players to become rated. Edition 7 produced 12 newly rated players. So far, this tournament has elevated 77 players to achieve international ratings since the first edition was played in 2018.

"We at AAB remain committed to social improvement through various sports activities and our long-time partnership with the QCA is a testament of our corporate social responsibility as an organisation," said Abdulghani Nasser al-Abdulghani, AAB CEO.

## Bangladesh-Ireland ODI washed out after record innings by Mushfiqur

**Sylhet, Bangladesh:** The second one-day international between Bangladesh and Ireland was called off due to rain in Sylhet yesterday after the home side posted their highest-ever ODI total. The rain prevented Ireland from starting their innings after the hosts reached 349-6 thanks to Mushfiqur Rahim's century, the fastest ODI ton by a Bangladeshi batsman.

Match officials called the game off shortly after 8:30pm (20:30 GMT) with no prospect of the weather improving at Sylhet International Cricket Stadium. Bangladesh, fresh from beating England 3-0 in T20s, are 1-0 up in the series with one match remaining on Thursday. Mushfiqur was unbeaten on 100 off just 60 balls, while Najmul Hossain and Liton Das added 73 and 70 runs respectively.

This helped the hosts break their record of 338-8 set in only the previous match, which they won by 183 runs. Sent in to bat first, Bangladesh began cautiously in slightly overcast conditions before Liton and skipper Tamim Iqbal grew in confidence to put on 42 runs. Tamim was run out for 23 with a direct throw from Mark Adair before Liton and Najmul added 101 runs for the second

wicket. Graham Hume, Ireland's most successful bowler with 3-58, removed Shakib Al Hasan (17) and Najmul in successive overs after Curtis Campher took the wicket of Liton. However, Mushfiqur and Towhid Hridoy then took the bowling by storm to add 128 runs in just 13 overs for the fifth wicket.

TENNIS

# Alcaraz routs Medvedev to bag Indian Wells trophy

“It feels amazing to lift the trophy here, to recover the No 1. I would say this has been the perfect tournament”

**AFP**  
Indian Wells

Spain's Carlos Alcaraz swept past Daniil Medvedev 6-3, 6-2 on Sunday to win the Indian Wells ATP Masters 1000 and secure his return to number one in the world.

US Open champion Alcaraz ended Medvedev's 19-match winning streak, denying him a fourth title in as many tournaments to ensure he will supplant Australian Open champion Novak Djokovic atop the rankings.

“It feels amazing to lift the trophy here, to recover the No 1,” Alcaraz said. “I would say this has been the perfect tournament.”

Serbia's Djokovic, barred from entering the US because he hasn't been vaccinated against Covid-19, sat out Indian Wells and will miss the Miami Open starting this week, where Alcaraz is the defending champion.

Alcaraz, 19, who became the youngest world number one ever after his triumph at Flushing Meadows last year, claimed his third Masters 1000 title and joined compatriot Rafael Nadal as the only players to win at least three as a teenager. Nadal won six before turning 20.

He was unstoppable on Stadium Court, breaking through what he'd called the “wall” of Medvedev's formidable defences.

Medvedev, coming off titles in Rotterdam, Doha and Dubai, could find no answer as Alcaraz fired winners from all over the court, defying the windy conditions.

“Daniil obviously didn't play at his best level, but I'm very happy for my performance and how I played this tournament.”

He said the big change in him since a semi-final defeat to Nadal last year at Indian Wells was his



Carlos Alcaraz of Spain poses with the trophy after defeating Daniil Medvedev of Russia during the final of the BNP Paribas Open at the Indian Wells Tennis Garden in Indian Wells, California. **Right:** Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan poses with the winner's trophy after defeating Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus during the women's final. (AFP)

comfort level on the game's biggest stages. “I think my tennis didn't improve so much since last year. What I improve a lot is to not take the pressure, just to play relaxed. That, for me, is the most important thing. That's why I show a great level, because I feel like I have no pressure. I enjoy.”

Medvedev certainly wasn't able to ratchet up the pressure on him. A stinging backhand winner gave Alcaraz an early break in the opening set as he raced to a 3-0 lead.

He gave himself a set point with a sharply angled forehand volley and sealed it with an unreturnable serve, then won the first 10 points of the second set on the way to a 4-0 lead.

He didn't face a break point as he polished it off in one hour and 11 minutes, a diving volley win-

ner giving him match point that he converted with another service winner.

“I expected a tougher match,” he said. “Against him is always a tactic match, and I did perfect today. That's why it looks easy - but it wasn't.”

Alcaraz has returned to number one despite a late start to the year. Injury forced him to miss the Australian Open, where Djokovic claimed a record-equalling 22nd Grand Slam title.

Since launching his season in February Alcaraz has won a title in Buenos Aires and reached the final in Rio de Janeiro. But to stay at the top he'll have to successfully defend his Miami title over the course of the next two weeks.

Medvedev, a former world number one and US Open winner himself, was disappointed

that he didn't play his best, but pleased to get past the fourth round at Indian Wells for the first time, despite twisting his ankle in a win over Alexander Zverev and cutting his thumb in another tumble against Alejandro Davidovich Fokina.

“Why didn't I play my best? I don't know. Maybe it was his ball. Maybe it was the wind, was pretty windy today, and for him it was easier to go through this wind, and that's normal. But the week was amazing,” added Medvedev never a fan of the slow hard courts of Indian Wells.”

## Rybakina beats Sabalenka to claim Indian Wells title

Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina beat a misfiring Aryna Sabalenka 7-6(11) 6-4 on Sunday to claim the Indian Wells title and



avenge her loss to the Belarusian in the Australian Open final.

Rybakina, playing in her first WTA 1000 tournament final, saved three set points in the opening frame and was never really tested in the second where she cruised to a victory that will send her to a career-high seventh in the rankings.

The triumph in the California desert was the fourth career WTA singles title for the 23-year-old Rybakina and her first against second seed Sabalenka in five attempts.

“It's actually the first time it went my way (against her) so we'll see, hopefully we are going to play many more finals,” Rybakina said during the trophy presentation before Sabalenka stepped in and joked: “I'll make sure it was the last one.” Ry-

bakina, who beat defending champion and world number one Iga Swiatek to reach the final, dropped serve when Sabalenka landed a forehand lob just inside the baseline for a 3-2 lead followed by a routine hold that gave the Belarusian control.

But the Kazakh 10th seed did not back down and immediately held at love to steady the ship before Sabalenka handed back the break with an untimely double fault that leveled the match at 4-4 from where the duo remained on serve to force a tie-breaker.

Despite her struggles, Sabalenka had her chances during the opening frame where she squandered three set point chances but also turned aside five set points.

Sabalenka's 10th double fault

gave Rybakina her sixth set point of the opening frame at 12-11 in the tiebreak from where she closed it out when the Belarusian sent a forehand long.

Rybakina used a pair of breaks to bulldoze her way to a 5-2 lead in the second set before Sabalenka produced a sizzling stretch to get within 5-4.

But Rybakina sensed her opportunity and closed the deal on her first championship point opportunity when Sabalenka sent a service return into the net.

“I didn't serve that well, and it started to get a little bit more windy and I didn't adjust my serve,” said Sabalenka.

“Of course I felt like she stepped in a little bit and started playing a little bit more aggressive.”

GOLF

# Moore lifts first PGA title at Valspar Championship

**Reuters**  
Palm Harbour, Florida

After his two chief competitors missed must-have putts at the 72nd hole, Taylor Moore was the last man standing at the Valspar Championship and won his first PGA Tour title on Sunday in Palm Harbor, Florida.

Moore shot a 4-under 67 in the final round to finish at 10-under 274. He beat Adam Schenk (70 Sunday) by one shot and Jordan Spieth (70) and Englishman Tommy Fleetwood (70) by two.

“(I was) just in compete mode, and watching the guys finish - maybe in a play-off, maybe not,” Moore told the NBC broadcast. “But it's so cool. It's so awesome. It's what I worked for.”

The 29-year-old Moore recovered from a wayward tee shot at the par-4 18th at Innisbrook Resort's Copperhead Course and saved a 5 1/2-foot par. That made him the leader in the clubhouse while Schenk and Spieth were finishing up behind him.

Schenk was tied with Moore at 10 under but also drove left at No 18. Spieth was 9 under at the time and needed a birdie and a Schenk par or worse to join a play-off.

But after Schenk laid up, both Schenk and Spieth landed their approach shots short of the pin and on the wrong side of a slope in the green, their balls rolling back and off to the side.

Spieth's 51-foot birdie putt to tie Moore missed, and he flubbed his 4-foot par comebacker. Schenk hammered his par putt from 47 feet, and he had the right line but it was rolling too fast and it glanced off the cup and the pin.

“Second place being my best finish ever, I haven't had a ton of top 10s on the PGA Tour,” Schenk



Taylor Moore of the US celebrates with the trophy after winning the final round of the Valspar Championship at Innisbrook Resort and Golf Club in Palm Harbour, Florida. (AFP)

said. “So, I mean, I want to close one out some day, but how many chances am I going to have, so (I thought) I'm not leaving this putt short. I'm getting it to the hole. I did and it was on line. It would have been amazing if it went in, but luckily, it hit the pin or else I would have been another 4, 5 feet behind.”

On a day when only seven players broke 70, Moore shot his second round of 67 of the week. He began the day two off Schenk's lead but made five birdies - three on the back nine - and just one bogey.

Moore's previous best finish in a non-team event on tour was a T5 at last August's Wyndham Championship.

“I really wasn't worried about everybody else with how tricky

this place is. I was just really trying to focus on me and my conversations with my caddie and what I was doing. I might have been under the radar to some people watching, but I felt like I was in the golf tournament from the time I teed off today and was just excited to control what I could control and get it done.”

Schenk made four birdies and three bogeys on the day. He converted crucial par saves down the stretch before the fateful bogey at the last.

Spieth, the 2015 Valspar winner, had three birdies and no bogeys through 15 holes. He survived a bad drive at the par-4 sixth by saving par, and he made a stellar up-and-down from the greenside bunker at the par-3 15th, placing his second shot in-

side 3 feet of the cup. But then Spieth struck his drive into the water at the par-4 16th and had to take a drop far behind the start of the fairway. He managed to sink a bogey putt from nearly 15 feet to fall to 9 under.

“I made two bad swings today. I got away with the one on 6 and I didn't get away with the one on 16,” Spieth said. “Fought hard from there and made a nice bogey and then a nice couple shots on the last couple, and that 18th pin is just brutal there. You just can't rely on having to birdie that hole to that pin.”

Wyndham Clark shot 70 finished fifth at 6-under 278, and two-time defending champion Sam Burns posted a 67, his best round of the week, to take sixth place at 5-under 279.

## DANNY LEE PREVAILS IN PLAY-OFF TO WIN AT LIV TOURNAMENT IN ARIZONA

**Marana, Arizona:** New Zealand's Danny Lee fired a 2-under 69 in the third round before prevailing in a four-man play-off on Sunday to win LIV Golf Tucson in Marana, Arizona.

Lee closed his round with back-to-back birdies to finish with six against four bogeys on Sunday, leaving him tied with Mexico's Carlos Ortiz, Brendan Steele and Louis Oosthuizen of South Africa at 9-under 204 after 54 holes.

A 25-foot birdie put on the second play-off hole then sealed the victory for Lee, who hadn't won on a tour in eight years.

“Last win I had was 2015 at Greenbrier. That was also a four-man play-off,” Lee said. “Maybe it was a coincidence, I don't know. But it feels pretty amazing right now.”

Despite coming up just short as an individual, Ortiz was able to celebrate as a member of Fireballs GC, which finished at 25 under to finish atop the leaderboard in team action. Sergio Garcia, Abraham Ancer and Eugenio Chacarra joined Ortiz in relishing the victory. 4Aces GC

(21 under) and Lee's squad, Iron Heads GC (19 under), finished in second and third, respectively. “It's great,” Ortiz said of having his team pull out a win. “I think we've been pretty solid. We did well in Mayakoba, we finished terrible and we ended falling from the podium to sixth place, so it was nice revenge here.”

Ortiz also shot the low round on Sunday, notching a 6-under 65.

Outside of the three-way tie for second place in individual play, Charles Howell III recorded an even-par 71 in the third round to finish fifth at 8-under 205. Spain's Garcia (73 on Sunday), Kevin Na (71), Australian Matt Jones (69) and Mito Pereira of Chile (67) all tied for sixth at 7 under, two strokes off the lead.

Peter Uihlein, Matthew Wolff and South African Branden Grace finished T10. Second-round leader Marc Leishman of Australia shot a 6-over-par 77 on Sunday, causing him to slide down the leaderboard and finish in a five-way tie for 13th.

FOCUS

# Els posts 3rd Champions win with one-shot victory at Hoag

**Reuters**  
Newport Beach, California

**E**rnie Els returned to the site of one of his two career Champions wins to earn a third, bettering the field by a single stroke Sunday to win the Hoag Classic at Newport Beach, California.

The South Africa native shot a final-round 6-under 65, vaulting ahead of 12 golfers with the best scorecard turned in by any player Sunday (tied with American Scott McCarron). He had zero bogeys on the day in finishing 13 under for the tournament.

“It's been a long run, I've played good golf, especially last year,” Els said. “I had, I don't know how many top-10s I had, but it was many. I had a couple seconds. Getting close and not winning gets a little, you know, and then having a chance now today and missing the short



putt (on 15), they were kind of not great feelings coming through me.”

Els, who previously won the Hoag Classic in 2020 along with the SAS Championship that same year, came out scorching, with three birdies among his first four holes. He then finished strong, adding to his birdies on 2, 3 and 4, by pocketing birdies on 7, 16 and 18 to complete the comeback.

The final birdie of the day, in a

pressure-filled situation on 18, might have been his most impressive. His bunker shot that set up a 15-foot putt for the win was his shot of the day.

Americans Doug Stricker (4-under 67) and Steve Barron (1-under 70) tied for second one stroke back at 12 under. Stricker, like Els, also managed a birdie on 18, one of four on the day for him in a bogey-free round.

Germany's Bernhard Langer, who came into the day with a one-shot lead and an opportunity to become the Champions Tour's sole all-time winner, had a disappointing finish to his tournament with a final-round 73.

Langer remains tied with Hale Irwin with 45 all-time victories. Dicky Pride (67), Rob Labritz (68) and Spain's Miguel Angel Jimenez (71) tied for fourth at 11 under. Langer and McCarron finished tied for seventh at 10 under with four other golfers.

## QATAR MOTORSPORT ACADEMY STUDENTS SHINE



Three Qatar Motorsport Academy (QMA) students - Bader al-Sulaiti (Max Class), Taha Hassiba (Max Class) and Tameem Hassiba (Junior Max Class) - took part in the UAE Rotax Max Challenge Round 7.2 at Al Ain Raceway. Among the young Qatari drivers, Bader al-Sulaiti impressed throughout the race weekend, placing himself in the 10th position in the qualifying round and then climbing up to seventh in the pre-final. However, a crash in the final dragged him to the 18th position while Taha finished 14th, 27.076s adrift of the winner of the Max Class - Italian Filippo Parmeggiani. Meanwhile, Tamim, competing in the Junior Max Class, also showed promise, finishing in the 21st position - 18.839s behind the race winner.

### PSG lead in Ligue 1 cut after home defeat against Rennes

**PARIS:** Paris Saint-Germain's march towards another Ligue 1 title was slowed on Sunday as they went down 2-0 at home to Rennes, a result that allowed Marseille to close the gap on the leaders to seven points with 10 games remaining. Kylian Mbappe had an effort disallowed for off-side before Karl Toko-Ekambi put Rennes in front with a magnificent strike right on half-time. Arnaud Kalimuendo made it 2-0 three minutes after the restart against his former club, as PSG - faced with a defensive injury crisis - slumped to a first home league defeat of the campaign. It is the Parisians' fourth Ligue 1 loss this season, all of them in 2023, and the second time they have been beaten by Rennes. They also lost when the teams last met in Brittany in January.Marseille responded by winning 2-1 away to Reims later, with Alexis Sanchez scoring twice. "A defeat is always upsetting. Obviously I can't be happy with the way the match went but in the context, with the number of players we had out, we knew we were going to have difficult moments in defence," said PSG coach Christophe Galtier. PSG only have a ninth Ligue 1 title in 11 seasons left to play for after being knocked out of the Champions League in the last 16 by Bayern Munich. Galtier has insisted that the prospect of what would be a French record 11th top-flight title is sufficient motivation for his team, but their performance indicated otherwise. "The objective is to win the league. Will this defeat mean the board will consider my future?

Maybe. But everything needs to be put into context," Galtier added when asked about his position. "There are no excuses but there are reasons for it." The result allowed Rennes to reclaim fifth place from Lille in the fight for European qualification. "To beat Paris twice in the same season says something about us. If we are capable of taking six points out of six against such a team, it means we have progress to make so we can do that in 90 percent of our matches," said Rennes coach Bruno Genesio. PSG have been severely hampered by injuries, with Neymar recovering from ankle surgery and their defence decimated. Achraf Hakimi, Presnel Kimpembe, Marquinhos, Sergio Ramos and Nordi Mukiele were all sidelined, leaving an almost unrecognisable back line featuring 17-year-old El Chadaille Bitshiabu. PSG have usually been able to rely on their attack for inspiration but Mbappe could not add to his 19 league goals this season and Lionel Messi was denied by veteran Rennes goalkeeper Steve Mandanda, who was in fine form. Cameroon international Toko-Ekambi, brought up in Paris as a PSG fan, opened the scoring with an emphatic finish past goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma after latching onto a long ball forward. The home side were left facing an uphill struggle as they conceded again just after the interval, with Lesley Ugochukwu's low centre being turned in by Kalimuendo.

(AFP)

#### FOOTBALL

# Xavi ‘proud’ after Clasico, Barca move 12 points clear of Real

‘Twelve points clear at the top of La Liga, we are having an extraordinary league campaign’

AFP  
Barcelona

Barcelona snatched a 2-1 Clasico win over Real Madrid with Franck Kessie's late goal on Sunday to move 12 points clear at the top of La Liga. The victory dents Madrid's ambitions of retaining the title and leaves the Catalans close to lifting the trophy for the first time since 2019. Carlo Ancelotti's Madrid took the lead through a Ronald Araujo own goal but Barcelona pulled level when Sergi Roberto tucked home just before half-time. Both sides had chances to win the game and Marco Asensio struck for Madrid, but the goal was ruled offside by VAR, before Alejandro Balde set up Kessie in the 92nd minute. "It's not definitive but it's a very important step," Xavi told reporters. "Twelve points clear at the top of La Liga, we are having an extraordinary league campaign, I am very happy for that and proud to watch the team play." The build-up to the match was overshadowed by Barcelona's corruption charge in the "Caso Negreira" refereeing scandal. Madrid joined Spanish prosecutors' complaint against Barcelona last week and their president Florentino Perez snubbed the game for the first time in over 20 years, amid rising tensions between the two Spanish giants. That fed the match's intensity, both on and off the pitch, in Xavi's sixth Clasico as Barcelona



Barcelona's Franck Kessie celebrates with teammates after scoring his team's second goal during the Spanish league match against Real Madrid CF at the Camp Nou stadium in Barcelona yesterday. (AFP)

coach but only his first at Camp Nou. Xavi asked fans to make the stadium a pressure cooker and they responded, selling it out, whistling Madrid in possession and conjuring one of the best at-mospheres of the season. However, they fell behind in unfortunate circumstances. Araujo deflected Vinicius' cross in at the near post, with Ter Ste-

gen helpless. Araujo, playing at right-back to counteract the Brazilian, has enjoyed his duels with Vinicius in the past but this time the winger triumphed, albeit fortuitously. Barcelona supporters became enraged by his emphatic celebration in front of them. It was the first goal from open play Barcelona have conceded at Camp Nou in La Liga all season

long, and only the second strike at home and ninth overall. Barcelona complained defender Nacho, already booked, should have been sent off for a hand-off on Raphinha. The hosts did not get their wish, but were building up steam and found the breakthrough just before half-time, from an unlikely source. Selected in place of injured

midfielder Pedri, Sergi Roberto was in the right place at the right time to control a loose ball in the box and arc it beyond Courtois. Barcelona had significantly more possession than in their cup win over Madrid and significantly more chances, but Madrid nearly won it. Madrid substitute Asensio fired home but the goal was ruled out for offside after a nervy wait for VAR instruction. "We did not win because of an offside that we're still doubtful about," complained Ancelotti. "I was not so sure. We have doubts about it, and we go back to Madrid with this doubt." Barcelona seemed content with the draw but Kessie's last-gasp strike sparked wild celebrations at Camp Nou. "I don't have the feeling (the league is won) but I understand the fans singing 'campeones' - it's a considerable advantage but we can't relax," added Xavi. "The atmosphere was extraordinary, how the fans supported the team." Earlier Real Sociedad held on to fourth place with a 2-0 win over Elche on Sunday. They are under pressure from Real Betis and Villarreal who both won too. Betis, fifth, are three points behind the Basque side after they beat Mallorca 1-0, while Villarreal, sixth, thrashed Osasuna 3-0 on the road and sit four points behind the Andalusians. Sevilla fell to a disappointing 2-0 defeat at Getafe as their topsy-turvy season continued, leaving Jorge Sampaoli's side 14th and two points above the drop zone.

#### SERIE A

## Kostic fires Juve past Inter as Napoli continue title march

AFP  
Milan

Filip Kostic continued Juventus' push towards Serie A's European places with the only goal in Sunday's 1-0 win at Inter Milan, a result which also meant Napoli extended their lead to 19 points thanks to a 4-0 thrashing of Torino. Serbia winger Kostic rifled home the winner 22 minutes into an underwhelming encounter at the San Siro, his third league goal of the season enraging Inter who couldn't believe it wasn't ruled out for an Adrien Rabiot handball. Inter coach Simone Inzaghi described the goal as "unacceptable in the VAR era", saying that he could "barely speak" about the match such was his outrage at the decision. VAR officials took several minutes to decide there were no images which confirmed the handball and give Kostic's strike, allowing seventh-placed Juve to move up to 41 points, seven from the Champions League positions. "The referee's decision should be accepted, when they go well for you and when they don't," said an irritated Juve coach Massimiliano Allegri to DAZN when pressed on his view of the incident. Allegri's side are hoping their 15-point penalty for illicit transfer activity is overturned as that would put them second, a position now occupied by Lazio who won a tense Rome derby 1-0. Inter have been wildly inconsistent all season and their ninth loss of the campaign came against a Juve team missing a host of injured or unfit players. Napoli now only need 15 more points to guarantee the league title, even if Lazio win all of their remaining 11 matches. Without the deduction, Juve would still trail Napoli by 15 points. The only negatives for Juve were substitute Federico Chiesa limping off with seven minutes remaining and Leandro Paredes being red carded alongside Inter's Danilo

D'Ambrosio as tempers flared after the final whistle. Victor Osimhen took his league-leading goal tally to 21 with two towering headers with Khvicha Kvaratskhelia scoring a 35th-minute penalty in a simple win for champions-elect Napoli at Torino. Kvaratskhelia also laid on Tanguy Ndombele's first Serie A goal in the 68th minute following great hold-up play from Osimhen as Napoli took another step towards a first league title since 1990 in front of an army of fans in Turin. "No one deserves this more than the Napoli fans... I'm really happy to put a smile on their faces," Osimhen told DAZN. It seems only a matter of time before Napoli seal a historic Scudetto, one which will follow a campaign of breath-taking football that has Osimhen convinced they can also win the Champions League. Once Kvaratskhelia rolled in his 14th goal of the season, Torino offered up no resistance. They dropped down to 11th, level on 37 points with Bologna and ninth-placed Fiorentina, who won their seventh straight match in all competitions 1-0 over Lecce. Lazio are Napoli's closest challengers thanks to Mattia Zaccagni's 65th-minute winner which ensured his team did the double over 10-man Roma. A typically fiery derby clash was prefaced by tensions between supporters and police and a Lazio fan display quoting William Shakespeare's play Henry V. But the on-pitch spectacle left a lot to be desired, especially after Roger Ibanez saw red in the 32nd minute for two daft tackles. That was the first of what would end up being five red cards, each team having a staff member sent off near half-time before Roma's Bryan Cristante and Lazio's Adam Marusic were also dismissed following a post-match scuffle. Roma were denied a leveler seconds after Zaccagni put Lazio ahead, Nicolo Casale's own goal ruled out after Chris Smalling had strayed offside to the dismay of their fans and the delight of Lazio's.

## RAMSEY BACKS WALES TO PROSPER IN POST-BALE ERA

Aaron Ramsey believes a new generation of Wales players can forge their own success after Gareth Bale's retirement. Midfielder Ramsey is the new national captain, replacing former Real Madrid and Tottenham forward Bale, who called time on his career in January. Bale, Wales' record goal-scorer and most-capped player, was not the only senior star to quit international football after the World Cup in Qatar. Chris Gunter, Joe Allen and Jonny Williams also retired from Wales duty after a golden era that included a run to the Euro 2016 semi-finals. Wales manager Rob Page is ushering in a new era and Ramsey is confident there are enough

emerging youngsters to keep his country in contention during the Euro 2024 qualifying campaign. "Gareth, Joe, Jonny, Gunts have been instrumental for us over the years and will forever be a part of Welsh history," Nice midfielder Ramsey, 32, said yesterday. "We will be forever grateful for what they brought to this team, this nation, and we'll miss those players around the place. "But football is forever changing and there'll be opportunities for these younger players to step up and show what they're capable of. Hopefully now we can create our own history." Wales are hoping to make a third successive appearance at the European

Championship in Germany next year. They face Croatia in Split on Saturday before hosting Latvia on March 28. Armenia and Turkey complete the Group D line-up. The qualifiers follow a poor 2022 World Cup campaign in Qatar. Page's side scored only once and finished bottom of their group in their first appearance at a World Cup since 1958. "It was disappointing," said former Arsenal and Juventus player Ramsey. "You have a big build-up going into it, the first time for many years Wales had qualified. "You want to go there and show what you are capable of doing, but we didn't quite get to the level we are used to." Tottenham defender Ben Davies

has been ruled out of the two qualifiers, replaced in the squad by Morgan Fox. **Richarlison, Marquinhos out of Brazil-Morocco friendly** Tottenham forward Richarlison and Paris Saint-Germain defender Marquinhos will both miss Brazil's friendly against Morocco on March 25 due to injury, joining star Neymar on the absent list, the team said. The new injuries leave the five-time world champions without a string of top players as they prepare to take on surprise World Cup semi-finalists Morocco in Tangier in their first match since Qatar. Richarlison, 25, left the pitch in tears Saturday after suf-

fering an injury early in Tottenham's 3-3 draw at Southampton. "National team doctor Rodrigo Lasmar contacted Richarlison's club, and established that the athlete will not be fit to play for the friendly," the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) said in a statement late Saturday. Marquinhos, 28, is still recovering from a muscle injury in his abdomen and will not be fit in time, it added. Interim Brazil coach Ramon Menezes called up 22-year-old Yuri Alberto of Sao Paulo club Corinthians to replace Richarlison and 26-year-old Bremer of Juventus to replace Marquinhos, the CBF said. It will be Yuri Alberto's first cap.

(AFP)



Juventus' Filip Kostic celebrates after scoring against Inter Milan in Milan on Sunday. (Reuters)