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Rublev rallies past Rune for first Masters title in Monte Carlo

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QNB STARS LEAGUE

Sadd keep winning as they beat Qatar SC 2-0

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Reigning champions Al Sadd continued their winning streak by beating Qatar SC 2-0 in the QNB Stars League at the Qatar SC Stadium on Saturday.

Akram Afif (67th minute) and Ahmed al-Saeed (90+9 minute) scored the goals as Al Sadd raised their tally to 38 points in third place, while Qatar SC stayed on 26 points in sixth place. The match started off strongly and Raoul Sanda almost gave Qatar SC the lead in the eighth minute, but his shot was brilliantly saved by Al Sadd goalkeeper Meshaal Barshim.

Both teams had control in the first half and Qatar SC relied on organised attacks by Jassim al-Jalabi, Bashar Resan, Sanda, Javier Pastore and Javi Martinez, who had a chance in the 23rd minute, but his shot went past the left post of Al Sadd's goal.

Qatar SC goalkeeper Sataa al-Abbasi prevented Moroccan striker Ayoub El Kaabi from taking his team ahead after Musaab Khader went in through the middle of rival defence and the ball reached El Kaabi, who fired a powerful shot that al-Abbasi saved. Both sides many attempts unsuccessfully as the first half ended goalless. Akram came up

with a powerful shot in the 55th minute, but his attempt was thwarted by the Qatar SC goalkeeper. Akram was not to be denied some time later as he found the mark with a wonderful shot from the edge of the penalty area, which went into the far left corner of the Qatar SC goal.

In the last minutes, Al Sadd played with great balance between defence and attack even as Qatar SC intensified their attacks. The Wolves were rewarded by another goal as al-Saeed struck from close range deep into stoppage time.

"It wasn't an easy game, but we managed to score thanks to Akram's goal, which gave us a much-needed boost until we added the second goal by Ahmed," Al Sadd goalkeeper Meshaal Barshim said.

"The team gained three crucial points, which will be valuable for the upcoming stage of the league."

Umm Salal snatch valuable win over Al Markhiya

Umm Salal recorded a valuable 3-2 victory over Al Markhiya in at the Al Duhail Stadium on Saturday. Abdullah Khafifi (31st minute), Ismail Ibrahim (59th minute) and Aleksa Vukanovic (71st minute) scored the goals for Umm Salal, while Ayoub Assal (35th minute) and Driss Fettouhi (69th minute penalty) were Al Markhiya's scorers. Umm Salal thus

moved on to 16 points, whereas Al Markhiya remained on 18 points.

Both teams fought it out from the outset with an aim to move to get valuable points and move away from the last positions.

In the third minute, Al Markhiya almost scored a goal after a cross from Jameel al-Yahmadi, but Umm Salal's Khafifi skilfully evaded the danger conceding a corner kick. In the 16th minute, Al Markhiya suffered a setback when Khaled Radwan was sent off with a direct red card for charging Umm Salal's Yassin al-Bakhit.

However, the numerical shortage did not affect The Oryx's much.

Umm Salal, meanwhile, took the lead through Khafifi past the half-hour mark and Al Markhiya struck back soon through Assal.

In the 42nd minute, Umm Salal coach Talal El Karkouri replaced Abdulrahman Raafat with new Serbian professional Aleksa even as the first half ended 1-1.

Umm Salal went ahead a second time through Ismail Ibrahim, who came up with a superb header. Al Markhiya did not give up and attacked strongly, and were able to draw parity again, through Moroccan Fettouhi from the penalty spot.

The excitement continued and The Orange Fortress struck a decisive blow on Al Markhiya through Aleksa, whose header found the target.



Al Sadd players celebrate their victory over Qatar SC in the QNB Stars League match on Saturday.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Arsenal blow lead again in damaging West Ham draw

MANCHESTER UNITED BEAT RELEGATION-THREATENED NOTTINGHAM FOREST 2-0 TO CLIMB TO THIRD SPOT

AFP
London

Arsenal blew a two-goal lead for the second game in a row as Bukayo Saka's penalty miss proved crucial in the Premier League leaders' damaging 2-2 draw against West Ham yesterday.

Mikel Arteta's side struck twice in the first 10 minutes at the London Stadium thanks to goals from Gabriel Jesus and Martin Odegaard.

But just seven days after squandering a 2-0 advantage in their 2-2 draw at Liverpool, the Gunners again cracked under the pressure of the title race.

Said Benrahma's penalty reduced the deficit for West Ham before the interval and after Saka fired his spot-kick wide early in the second half, Jarrod Bowen volleyed in an equaliser for the struggling hosts. It was a hammer blow for Arsenal, who sit four points clear of second-placed Manchester City but have ceded the title race momentum to Pep Guardiola's team.

"It started extremely well again. We scored two beautiful goals. After that we made a big mistake to not play with purpose to score the third and fourth," Arteta said.

"We just thought we could play around them and keep the result. That gave them hope."

City had closed within three points of the Gunners after beating Leicester 3-1 on Saturday and it is the champions who have the destiny of the title in their hands despite trailing Arsenal for much of the season. City, who have



West Ham United's Jarrod Bowen celebrates scoring their second goal with teammates during their EPL match against Arsenal in London yesterday. (Reuters)

won their last 10 matches in all competitions, have a game in hand on Arsenal.

With a home game against Arsenal looming on April 26, City know they will lift a fifth title in six seasons if they win their remaining eight matches.

By the time Arsenal travel to the Emirates Stadium they will be seven points clear of City if they beat bottom-of-the-table Southampton on Friday.

Yet that gap would still look uncomfortably small to Arsenal

fans fearing their team are in the process of wasting a golden opportunity to win a first title since 2004. While City are battle-tested in handling the tension of the title race, Arsenal's young squad look to be suffering an ill-timed attack of nerves.

"My worry is after 2-0 we made that huge mistake," Arteta said. "We didn't understand what the game required in that moment. We need that ruthless mindset to go and kill a team." Arsenal needed just seven

minutes to take the lead as Odegaard's deft pass found Ben White, who delivered a low cross that Jesus slotted home at the far post. Jesus's fourth goal in his last three games was followed by the Gunners' second three minutes later as they ruthlessly punished West Ham's woeful marking.

Gabriel Martinelli's pin-point cross found Odegaard in acres of space and the midfielder blasted a volley past Lukasz Fabianski from an acute angle six yards out. The turning point came in

the 33rd minute when Arsenal, looking a little over-confident after such a swaggering start, needlessly conceded a penalty.

Thomas Partey surrendered possession to Declan Rice and when the West Ham midfielder picked out Lucas Paqueta's run, Gabriel Magalhaes' mistimed sliding tackle was correctly ruled a penalty despite Arsenal appeals for handball.

Mohamed Salah had missed a penalty against Arsenal last weekend, but they were out of luck this time as Benrahma sent Aaron Ramsdale the wrong way from the spot. Saka should have eased Arsenal's mounting anxiety when Antonio conceded a 50th minute penalty with an outstretched arm that blocked Martinelli's flick.

But instead Saka spiked the tension level even higher with a woeful spot-kick that completely missed the target, a costly blunder that recalled the England forward's Euro 2020 final penalty shoot-out failure against Italy.

Saka held his head in his hands and with Arsenal clearly rattled, David Moyes' side snatched an equaliser in the 54th minute.

Thilo Kehrer guided the ball into the Arsenal area and Bowen was just outside as his volley ricocheted off the turf and skidded past Ramsdale's despairing dive. Michail Antonio nearly won it for West Ham in the closing stages, rising to head Benrahma's cross against the bar.

Later in the day, Manchester United beat relegation-threatened Nottingham Forest 2-0 yesterday to strengthen their push for a top-four Premier League finish. Erik ten Hag's



Manchester United's Diogo Dalot celebrates after scoring their second goal against Nottingham Forest yesterday. (AFP)

men took full advantage of slip-ups from rivals Newcastle and Tottenham the previous day to climb to third in the table, courtesy of goals from Antony and Diogo Dalot.

The teams had already met three times this season, including in a two-legged League Cup semi-final - with United winning on each occasion.

Injured United central-defensive pairing Raphael Varane and Lisandro Martinez were replaced by Harry Maguire and Victor Lindelof, while Dalot came in for Tyrell Malacia.

The visitors, also missing injured top-scorer Marcus Rashford, were forced into a late change when midfielder Marcel Sabitzer was injured in the warm-up and replaced by Christian Eriksen, making his first start since January following an ankle injury.

Forest, who had not won in their past nine games, made four changes. United were quickly out of the blocks and Jadon Sancho had a strike blocked in the

opening moments. The visitors dominated possession but Steve Cooper's Forest were a menace from set-pieces.

Forest goalkeeper Kyleon Navas saved from Bruno Fernandes before a VAR check for a potential penalty at the other end after the ball hit Maguire's arm from a corner. United took the lead in the 32nd minute when Antony poked home after Navas parried a powerful shot from Anthony Martial. Dalot almost gifted Forest an equaliser shortly before half-time after some sloppy play but Taiwo Awoniyi smashed the ball well over.

Fernandes put a header wide from the centre of the box just before the break. United continued to dominate in the second half, with Fernandes and Eriksen pulling the strings.

Portugal international Fernandes produced a stunning curling effort from the left of the box that was pushed on to the bar by Navas and Antony fired just wide. Martial missed a glorious chance to extend United's lead when he headed wide with 20 minutes to go before Forest defender Felipe headed over from just under the crossbar.

United finally got the reward their dominance deserved in the 76th minute when Dalot burst into the box to meet a pass by Antony to score his first Premier League goal.

The win leaves United three points clear of fourth-placed Newcastle after 30 games, and six clear of Tottenham, in fifth.

Forest remain in the bottom three and in danger of returning to the Championship after just one season in the English top flight.

CRICKET

Iyer smashes ton but Kolkata lose to Mumbai in IPL

Ishan Kishan smashes 58 off 25 deliveries to guide his team to a 5-wicket win

AFP
Mumbai

Indian batsman Venkatesh Iyer struck his maiden T20 century yesterday, but it was not enough to stop Kolkata Knight Riders losing to IPL heavyweights Mumbai Indians by five wickets.

Iyer's 104 off 51 balls helped Kolkata to 185-6, a total five-time winners and hosts Mumbai overhauled with 14 balls to spare at the Wankhede Stadium.

Indian opener Ishan Kishan blasted 58 off 25 balls but it was T20 sensation Suryakumar Yadav's quickfire 43 that brought the home crowd to life, as he looked like returning to form after a rough patch.

The left-handed Kishan gave Mumbai a flying start in a 65-run opening stand with Rohit Sharma, who made 20 off 13 balls after coming in as an impact sub.

Kishan was bowled by leg spinner Varun Chakravarthy but Suryakumar, who got a first-ball duck in the previous match, soon took charge to smash three sixes in his 25-ball blitz.

Shardul Thakur denied Suryakumar his fifty, before Tim David steered the chase with an unbeaten 24.

Mumbai started by handing debut caps to Arjun Tendulkar, son of cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar, and South Africa fast bowler Duan Jansen, twin brother of Sunrisers Hyderabad's Marco Jansen.

Earlier the left-handed Iyer struck the second hundred of this IPL season, after Hyderabad's England import Harry Brook hit a match-winning unbeaten 100 last week.

Iyer's knock was the first ton for two-



Kolkata Knight Riders' Venkatesh Iyer plays a shot during the IPL match against Mumbai Indians at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday. (AFP)

time champions Kolkata since former New Zealand captain Brendon McCullum smashed 158 runs in the first ever IPL match in 2008.

Iyer got little support from the other end, but took on the opposition attack

with six fours and nine sixes before departing in the 18th over.

Kolkata's new hero Rinku Singh failed to fire in his 18-ball 18, but West Indies big-hitter Andre Russell hit an unbeaten 11-ball 21 to boost the team's total.

BRIEF SCORES
Mumbai Indians 186 for 5 (Ishan Kishan 58, Suryakumar Yadav 43, Suyash Sharma 2-27) **beat Kolkata Knight Riders 185 for 6** (Venkatesh Iyer 104, Hritik Shokeen 2-34) **by five wickets**

FOCUS

Tendulkar junior makes IPL debut with Mumbai Indians



Mumbai Indians' Arjun Tendulkar (centre) along with teammates celebrate his team's win at the end of the IPL match against Kolkata Knight Riders at the Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters
Mumbai

Arjun Tendulkar, son of batting great Sachin, made his Indian Premier League (IPL) debut for Mumbai Indians in their home match against former champions Kolkata Knight Riders yesterday.

The Tendulkars became the first father-son duo to play the IPL after Arjun, 23, received his cap from Mumbai captain Rohit Sharma.

With Mumbai electing to field after winning the toss, left-arm seamer Arjun opened the attack for Mumbai, conceding five runs in his first over.

Arjun conceded 17 runs in his two overs before being taken off and he did not finish his full quota of four overs.

"Arjun, today you have taken another important step in your journey as a cricketer," Sachin, 49, wrote on Twitter

"As your father, someone who loves you and is passionate about the game, I know you will continue to give the game the respect it deserves and the game will love

you back. "You have worked very hard to reach here, and I am sure you will continue to do so. This is the start of a beautiful journey. All the best!"

Sachin, international cricket's most prolific batsman with 100 centuries, played six seasons with Mumbai Indians and is currently the team mentor.

Arjun, like his father, smashed a century in his first-class debut in December, achieving the feat in a Ranji Trophy match against Rajasthan.

"So happy to see Arjun play for Mumbai ... The champion dad must be so proud .. wish him all the best!" tweeted former India captain Sourav Ganguly who played as Tendulkar's teammate for more than 12 years.

Venkatesh Iyer hammered 104 off 51 balls, the second hundred of this year's IPL, to help Kolkata post 185-6 but Mumbai chased down the target in the 18th over on the back of Ishan Kishan's half-century.

This was the second century by a Kolkata batsman in the history of IPL, coming 15 years after Brendon McCullum's 158 not out in the very first match of the league back in 2008.

BOTTOMLINE

'Bit of revenge' as Hetmyer blitz keeps Rajasthan Royals top of points table

AFP
Ahmedabad, India

West Indies power-house **Shimron Hetmyer's** batting onslaught lit up the IPL yesterday as he fired Rajasthan Royals to a stunning three-wicket win over holders Gujarat Titans.

Hetmyer's unbeaten 26-ball 56 steered Rajasthan to victory,

set up by skipper Sanju Samson, who hit 60 off 32 balls.

"I just really wanted to win against these (Gujarat) guys because they beat us three times (including the final) last year so it was a bit of revenge really," man of the match Hetmyer said.

Chasing 178 for victory, Rajasthan were in trouble at 55-4 when Samson and the left-handed Hetmyer turned on the chase at the world's biggest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad.

Samson took on leg-spinner Rashid Khan in an over and smashed a hat-trick of sixes and then took on another Afghanistan spinner before departing.

Samson said: "When you play some quality opponents on a quality wicket in a quality stadium like this, you expect a great match. I'm very happy to be on the winning side. I think it was very important to rotate the bowlers. They were going hard at our spinners."

Noor Ahmad, a left-arm wrist spinner, came in as impact player for Gujarat and after getting smashed for a six and four got Samson caught out.

But the dismissal only fired up the left-handed Hetmyer who kept up the charge as he and Dhruv Jurel, who hit 18, got 20 runs from an Alzarri Joseph over to near the target.

Hetmyer finished off the chase with a six off Ahmad, an IPL debutant who was given the final

over by Gujarat skipper Hardik Pandya.

Mohamed Shami stood out with figures of 3-25 for Gujarat, who won the title last year in their fairytale debut IPL season.

BRIEF SCORES
Rajasthan Royals 179 for 7 (S Samson 60, S Hetmyer 56*, M Shami 3-25, Rashid Khan 2-46) **beat Gujarat Titans 177 for 7** (D Miller 46, S Gill 45, Sandeep 2-25) **by three wickets**



ONE-OFF TEST

Karunaratne and Mendis make Irish bowlers toil

AFP
Galle, Sri Lanka

Centurions Dimuth Karunaratne and Kusal Mendis made Ireland's wayward bowlers toil yesterday to put Sri Lanka in a commanding position on day one of the first Test in Galle.

At stumps in hot and humid conditions in the sides' first Test series, the hosts were 386-4 with Dinesh Chandimal unbeaten on 18 and nightwatchman Prabath Jayasuriya 12 not out.

After winning the toss and opting to bat, captain Karunaratne completed his 15th Test hundred before making 179 while Mendis made 140, his eighth ton in the five-day format.

"I have been in good nick but a big one had eluded me and it felt good to get to three figures. Once you get settled on this Galle wicket, you can always make runs," Mendis said.

"There's some turn for the spinners and I'm sure as the game progresses the spinners will come into the equation. We have three quality spinners in the side."

Opener Nishan Madushka was caught behind for 29 off Curtis Campher but Karunaratne and Mendis added 281 runs for the second wicket, beating the previous Galle record of 253 by India's Shikhar Dhawan and Cheteshwar Pujara in 2017.

Still seeking their first win since attaining Test status in 2017, Ireland lacked penetration in the attack and there were too many



Sri Lanka's captain Dimuth Karunaratne (left) and Kusal Mendis run between the wickets during the first day of the first Test against Ireland at the Galle International Cricket Stadium yesterday. (AFP)

short and wide balls - which were duly punished.

Failing to make the most of Galle's characteristic turn and bounce, Ireland's bowlers could not apply enough pressure to trouble Sri Lanka.

Dinesh Chandimal not out 18
Prabath Jayasuriya not out 12
Extras: (b 4, lb 2, w 1, nb 1) 8
Total: (four wickets, 88 overs) 386
Fall of wickets: 1-64 (Madushka), 2-345 (Mendis), 3-348 (Mathews), 4-373 (Karunaratne)
Bowling: Mark Adair 17-2-66-1 (w 1), Curtis Campher 12-2-44-1, Andy McBrine 27-2-107-0, Benjamin White 17-0-86-1 (nb 1), George Dockrell 13-0-65-1, Harry Tector 2-0-12-0
Toss: Sri Lanka **Umpires:** Adrian Holdstock (RSA) and Kumar Dharmasena (SRI)

BOXING

Zhang eyes Usyk fight after ending Joyce's unbeaten run

Reuters
London

China's Zhilei 'Big Bang' Zhang set his sights on Ukraine's heavyweight world champion Oleksandr Usyk after dealing Britain's Joe Joyce a first professional defeat on Saturday.

Referee Howard Foster stopped the fight in the sixth of 12 scheduled rounds at London's Copper Box Arena after the ringside doctor had twice inspected Joyce's puffed up right eye, which was almost closed.

"Today belongs to me...I'm 39 years old, but I'm disciplined, I train hard. Next step I'm going for the title," Zhang said through a translator after punching the air and shouting 'Chinese Power'.

Two of the three judges had Zhang ahead at that point.

Joyce, 37, was the WBO 'interim' champion in the division - a title that effectively made him the WBO's mandatory challenger for WBO, IBO, IBF and WBA champion Usyk.

Britain's Tyson Fury holds the WBC title.

Zhang and Joyce are both Olympic silver medallists, the Chinese as a super-heavyweight at home in Beijing in 2008 and the Briton in the same division in Rio de Janeiro in 2016.

The Chinese had his shorter



Zhilei Zhang celebrates winning his fight against Joe Joyce in London on Saturday night. (Reuters)

and lighter opponent in trouble from early on, Joyce providing a static target for Zhang's booming left hand and providing plenty of work for his corner as cuts opened up.

"I'm just disappointed with my performance," Joyce told BT Sport after what was his 16th pro fight.

"The right hand he kept hitting me with. I couldn't get out of the way, so respect to Zhilei Zhang, Big Bang.

"I haven't fought a southpaw for so long...I expected to win like I normally do.

"I'll be back. My journey's not over, this is just a hurdle I may have tripped over so I'll be back!"

TENNIS

Rublev rallies past Rune to win first Masters title

The 25-year-old Russian claims the biggest win of career



Russia's Andrey Rublev celebrates with his trophy after winning the Monte-Carlo ATP Masters Series final against Denmark's Holger Rune yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Monte Carlo, Principality of Monaco

Russia's Andrey Rublev fought back against Denmark's Holger Rune to win his first Masters 1000 title in Monte Carlo yesterday.

The fifth seed rallied from 4-1 down in the deciding set to defeat sixth-seeded teenager Rune 5-7, 6-2, 7-5 after one hour 34 minutes on the red clay of Court Rainier III.

Rublev, 25, claimed the biggest win of his career after losing Masters finals in Monte Carlo and Cincinnati, both in 2021.

"I don't know what to say. Trailing 1-4, 0/30, then saving break points, thinking there is no chance to win. But somehow I did it," said the world number six, who blasted down 33 winners on the way to his 13th career title.

"I was hoping deep inside that I would have one chance," he continued. "Play until the end. I remember the previous finals and when I was losing I thought

I'd have no chance and mentally I was going down. "But today I thought, 'Just believe until the end,' and this is what I was trying to do in the third set, hoping I would have an extra chance to come back and what a way to do it."

Deprived of his national flag after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the player from Moscow thanked the crowd for their support.

"Coming from the country where I come from, to receive such international support, it is enormous," he said.

BIG HITTERS

Rune, 19, was aiming for his second Masters 1000 title after defeating five Top 10 players en route to the title in Paris last year.

The two players had previously played each other twice - the Dane won last year at the Masters 1000 in Paris in the quarter-finals before defeating Novak Djokovic in the final.

In January, it was Rublev who won their Australian Open clash after saving match points in the last 16.

Yesterday, the match between these two fiery big-

hitters failed to live up to expectations compared to the Australian showdown.

The Dane saved seven of the eight break points he faced in the first set, before benefiting from a big unforced error by Rublev on the last game's break point.

The Russian immediately took the lead in the second set to lead 2-0, but Rune came back to 2-2.

In the process, Rublev chained four games to equalise at one set all. Rune seemed to be on a roll to victory in the third set racing to 3-0 and had a double break point to lead 5-1.

But it was the Russian who lined up three games in a row and then managed the break, taking advantage of the nervousness of his opponent, who notably missed two smashes in a row to lead 6-5 and serve for the match.

He gave himself three consecutive match points and concluded with an ace on the second.

Rafael Nadal, an 11-time winner in Monte Carlo, and Carlos Alcaraz missed this key French Open warm-up with injury while top seed Novak Djokovic was knocked out in the last 16.

GOLF

Fitzpatrick soars to lead at PGA Heritage on eagle wings

AFP
Miami

Reigning US Open champion Matthew Fitzpatrick of England fired a PGA Tour career-low, eight-under par 63 to seize the lead after Saturday's third round of the Heritage tournament.

Fitzpatrick's bogey-free round - highlighted by holing out for eagle from 149 yards in a fairway bunker at the par-4 third hole - gave him the 54-hole lead on 14-under 199 at Harbour Town on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina.

"This is a golf course that has shown there are low scores around here this week, and to do that for myself is a big positive," Fitzpatrick said.

World number four Patrick Cantlay fired a 66 to stand second on 200, one stroke ahead of fellow American Jordan Spieth.

World number two Scottie Scheffler, who could recapture the top spot after losing it to Masters winner Jon Rahm last week, fired a 69 to share fourth with fellow Americans Taylor Moore, Mark Hubbard and Jimmy Walker plus England's Tommy Fleetwood.

Spain's Rahm shot 69, fading to a share of 21st on 205. Fitzpatrick sank a six-foot birdie putt at the par-5 second then made his spectacular eagle from the sand.

"It was obviously a great start to the round," Fitzpatrick said. "It puts you in great position, 3-under through three. For me, that's ideally the start you need on a Saturday."

Fitzpatrick blasted out of a bunker within three feet to set up a birdie at the par-5 fifth, then birdied from just inside six feet at the par-3 seventh and made a 23-foot birdie putt at the par-4 eighth.

After adding a six-foot birdie putt at the 13th hole, Fitzpatrick made his final birdie at the par-5 15th, blast-



Matt Fitzpatrick of England smiles on the 18th green during the third round of the RBC Heritage at Harbour Town Golf Links in Hilton Head Island, South Carolina. (AFP)

ing out of a greenside bunker to 16 feet and rolling in the putt. At the par-3 17th, Fitzpatrick sank a 24-foot putt to rescue par.

"It's important for the par save for the round, but just for me personally, I like to have a bogey-free round," Fitzpatrick said.

Fitzpatrick, who first came to the course on family holidays in his youth, likes the layout.

"Aside from Augusta it's my favourite golf course," he said. "I love coming here to play it. I've not had the best results around here but I really enjoy the design, enjoy

the test. It's a great golf course." Cantlay birdied three of the last six holes to shoot a bogey-free 66. "Gave myself a lot of chances and was able to hole some putts on the back nine," Cantlay said. "Made a few I didn't expect to make so it's nice to see some putts go in."

Three-time major winner Spieth also birdied three of the last six to shoot 66 but missed a par putt at 17 from just inside 17 that left him two off the lead.

"I thought it was really solid," Spieth said. "Didn't like dropping one on 17. Wish I hit a better putt, but it was a good day."

SPOTLIGHT

Slovenia edge past Romania in delayed BJK Cup qualifier

Reuters
Astana, Kazakhstan

Slovenia pulled off a remarkable comeback to beat Romania and reach the Billie Jean King Cup finals in a qualifying tie that was held over to yesterday because of rain.

The deciding doubles rubber in Koper saw home pair Kaja Juvan and Tamara Zidansek come from a set down to beat Romanian duo Irina Maria Bara and Monica Niculescu 4-6 6-2 6-4.

Slovenia joined eight other nations who qualified for the 12-nation final that will be contested in November.

Holders Switzerland and runners-up Australia were exempt to the finals while there will also be one wild card nation.

Romania looked in complete control after winning both of Friday's singles rubbers, but Slovenia hit back on Saturday.

Zidansek beat Ana Bogdan 3-6 7-6(4) 7-5 and Juvan overcame Jaqueline Cristian in straight sets to take it to a decider.

Rain halted Slovenia's momentum on Saturday evening but they came back to finish the job yesterday.

The other winners from the qualifiers were: France, Spain, Italy, Czech Republic, Canada, United States, Kazakhstan and Germany.



The United States tennis team celebrates qualifying for the Billie Jean King Cup.

NBA

Sacramento Kings earn first play-off win in 17 years

AFP
New York

De'Aaron Fox scored a game-high 38 points in his NBA post-season debut and teamed with Malik Monk for 28 fourth-quarter points as the Sacramento Kings edged the visiting Golden State Warriors 126-123 on Saturday night in Game 1 of their Western Conference first-round series.

The game marked the Kings' return to the playoffs for the first time in 17 years.

Monk capped a 32-point performance off the bench with two free throws with 2.9 seconds to go, and when Stephen Curry misfired on an open straight-away 3-pointer at the horn, the Kings celebrated a win in their first-ever play-off game against their Northern California rival.

Fox shot 13-for-27 from the field and added five assists and three steals, while Monk did much of his damage at the foul line, going 14-for-14 to complement an 8-for-13 night from the field.

Curry finished with 30 points and Klay Thompson 21 for the Warriors. Curry shot 6-for-14 on 3-pointers and Thompson 5-for-14, but Golden State was just 16-for-50 (32 percent) as a team.

76ers 121, Nets 101

Joel Embiid had 26 points, James Harden added 23 points and 13 assists and host Philadelphia made a franchise play-off-record 21 shots from 3-point territory in a Game 1 victory over Brooklyn.

The Sixers made 21 of 43 treys and eight different players dropped in at least one. Embiid made all 11 of his free-throw attempts and blocked two shots.

It was Harden's 31st career post-season double-double and he finished 7-for-13 on threes. Tobias Harris contributed 21 points for the Sixers, who will host Game 2 today. Mikal Bridges led the Nets with 30 points and Cameron Johnson added 18. The Nets shot 39 of 70 from the field (55.7 percent) and still lost largely because of 20 costly turnovers.

Celtics 112, Hawks 99

Two days after having five stitches removed from a finger on his shooting hand, Jaylen Brown recorded game highs of 29 points and 12 rebounds to lead Boston past visiting Atlanta in Game 1 of their Eastern Conference first-round playoff series.

Brown, an Atlanta native, missed Boston's final two regular-season games after cutting himself while picking up a piece of glass in his home. Jayson Tatum added 25 points and 11 rebounds for the second-seeded Celtics, who received a 24-point performance from Derrick White. Dejounte Murray led the Hawks with 24 points and eight rebounds. Trae Young, Atlanta's leading scorer during the regular season, finished with 16 points.

Knicks 101, Cavaliers 97

Jalen Brunson scored 21 points in the second half for visiting New York, which rebounded with a late surge to edge Cleveland in Game 1 of an Eastern Conference quarter-final series.

The Knicks were forced to rally back after squandering a 10-point fourth-quarter lead. Brunson finished with a team-high 27 points.

Josh Hart (17 points, 10 rebounds) posted a double-double off the bench and scored the go-ahead 3-pointer with 1:49 left for the fifth-seeded Knicks.



De'Aaron Fox of the Sacramento Kings lights the beam after defeating the Golden State Warriors in Game One of the Western Conference first round playoffs at the Golden 1 Center in Sacramento, California. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

Messi scores stunner as PSG beat title rivals Lens

AFP
Paris

Brilliant Lionel Messi goal helped Paris Saint-Germain to a 3-1 home win over Lens on Saturday to surely end any doubt about the outcome of this season's Ligue 1 title race, after an early sending-off left the visitors with a mountain to climb.

Lens, who began the day six points behind league leaders PSG in second place, looked the better team until Ghana midfielder Salis Abdul Samed was dismissed for a dangerous challenge on Achraf Hakimi in the 19th minute.

That changed everything, and by half-time the hosts were out of sight thanks to three goals in the space of 10 minutes from Kylian Mbappe, Vitinha and then Messi, with Przemyslaw Frankowski pulling one back for Lens from a penalty.

Mbappe opened the scoring and Vitinha's long-ranger doubled PSG's lead in the 37th minute. Both goals were good

but Messi's that made it 3-0 was stunning, the Argentine finding a pocket out of space outside the area, feeding a pass to Mbappe and then receiving the France striker's backheel return before slotting beyond goalkeeper Brice Samba and into the far corner.

The result leaves the reigning champions nine points ahead with seven games left, meaning it is surely just a matter of time until PSG secure a French record 11th league title.

"We must not think that it's done and dusted," said coach Christophe Galtier.

"We will need to remain serious and determined to maintain our lead and not give any hope to the teams chasing us."

The win comes at the end of a week overshadowed by allegations of racism against Galtier, who had already been under pressure since PSG's elimination from the Champions League last month. Galtier said on Friday that he was "deeply shocked" by accusations that he made racist and Islamophobic remarks about Nice players when he was in charge there last season.

The allegations surfaced in an e-mail apparently sent by former Nice sporting director Julien Fournier and which have been reported by various French media. AFP has not been able to verify the message.

The affair looks set to hang over the coach and the club in the coming weeks.

"I was very determined and focused on the match, like my players," Galtier said of trying to stay concentrated on the game.

"It was obviously an important match, if not decisive, and so it was important to get the result and enjoy it."

Lens were hoping to take advantage of the leaders' problems and extend a four-match winning run that had got the northern club's supporters dreaming of a first league title since 1998.

They triumphed 3-1 when the teams last met in Lens on January 1 and they started the better of the two sides at the Parc des Princes. Yet their enterprising opening did not bring a goal and they were severely handicapped when Abdul Samed saw red for catching Hakimi with his studs

above the ankle. They were then torn apart with Mbappe firing in off the post on the turn from Vitinha's pass for his 20th league goal this season.

Vitinha then smashed in his first goal in a PSG shirt before Messi took centre stage.

The Argentine's 20th club goal of the campaign was also arguably his finest in two years in a PSG shirt, just as he comes towards what may be the end of his time in France. Lens regrouped in the second half and pulled a goal back when Frankowski converted from the spot after a Fabian Ruiz handball.

Lois Openda remained a menace up front for Lens but they were left with too much to do to and will now focus on trying to hold onto a place in the top three and Champions League qualification.

"I would have liked us to close the gap tonight but even had we done that it would have been very difficult," admitted Lens manager Franck Haise.

"Of course the title is for Paris. There is not much doubt about that."



Paris St Germain's Lionel Messi celebrates scoring their third goal with Kylian Mbappe, Carlos Soler and Nuno Mendes during their Ligue 1 match against RC Lens in Paris. (Reuters)

MOTOGP

Rins wins in Texas as Bagnaia crashes out of the lead

'I was careful at the beginning, I didn't want to make a mistake'

AFP
Austin

Alex Rins won yesterday's attritional Grand Prix of the Americas following a blunder from Ducati's MotoGP world champion Francesco Bagnaia.

Rins capitalised on a fall from leader and pole-sitter Bagnaia to claim the third leg of the season and end Honda's long winless run.

Luca Marini (Ducati-VR46) took second with Fabio Quartararo (Yamaha) in third.

Bagnaia won Saturday's sprint but left the showpiece race in Austin pointless as Marco Bezzecchi who finished sixth extended his lead at the top of the rider's standings.

Rins, a winner for Suzuki at the circuit in 2019, was gifted the lead before the halfway stage of the 20-lap race when Bagnaia's bike hit the Texan tarmac.

Second to Bagnaia in the sprint 24 hours earlier Rins controlled the race perfectly from that moment on for his sixth win in motorcycling's premier class.

"I was trying to push 'Percco' (Bagnaia), in the chicanes pushing so much, so I'm very happy, and so proud of the team," said Rins, beaming from beneath a traditional Texan cowboy hat.

Marini crossed the line almost three and a half seconds back for his best result in MotoGP.

"I was careful at the beginning, I didn't want to make a mistake," he said.

"I had good pace. After Peco's crash I tried to overtake Fabio and catch Alex, but he was so strong and Honda had the best



Alex Rins of Spain and LCR Honda Castrol celebrates as he crosses the finish line for winning the Red Bull Grand Prix of the Americas at Circuit of the Americas yesterday. (USA TODAY Sports)

bike, they were impossible to beat but I'm really satisfied with my result."

Bezzecchi, who won the main event in Argentina, takes an 11 point lead over Bagnaia to the

fourth race of the season in Spain at the end of the month.

Rins moves up to third, six points behind Bagnaia for whom this blunder followed the one he made when nailed on for second

in Argentina. "I don't understand, I'm so disappointed and quite nervous as it wasn't my fault," said a dejected Bagnaia, who was within one point of Bezzecchi in the rider's standings

going into the race. Bagnaia was far from the only faller, with Alex Marquez, Jorge Martin and Aleix Espargaro crashing in the opening lap as only 13 riders completed the race.

LA LIGA

Barca drop more points, Atletico beat Almeria

AFP
Barcelona

Subdued Barcelona could not break down Getafe in a 0-0 draw yesterday, dropping more points but still sitting 11 clear of Real Madrid at the top of La Liga.

Third-place Atletico Madrid beat Almeria 2-1 at home with Antoine Griezmann netting a brace as he continued his sparkling form. Champions Madrid beat Cadiz on Saturday to cut back Barcelona's lead, and with nine games remaining it seems highly unlikely they will catch Barcelona - but Xavi Hernandez's side are limping over the line.

Barcelona drew 0-0 at home against Girona on Monday and followed that up with a second consecutive stalemate, the team still wallowing after their Copa del Rey semi-final thrashing by Madrid earlier in April. The one positive for Barca was a 22nd clean sheet of the season in the top flight, with Getafe, 15th, not creating much danger.

"Here you suffer, because the grass is high, the usual tricks, so it's hard, the clear chances you have - you have to put them away," Barca goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen told DAZN.

"It's a dry pitch, so it's difficult. We did things differently to normal, it's a point which isn't good but it's a point we're adding, obviously."

Xavi echoed Ter Stegen's complaint that the low quality of the pitch played a part in the result, but said Barca could not hide behind it. "It's not an excuse, we weren't accurate, we made chances but we could not finish them," said Xavi.

"But yes, the grass did hurt us, the ball didn't run."

The coach said he was not worried about Barca not finding the net in three consecutive games across all competitions. "That can happen, and it's also been a while since we let in goals," added Xavi.

"It's a very tough place to go, Getafe have a lot at stake, when they sit deep it's very hard, they are organised at the back."

After a slow start, the Catalans created the first clear chance at the Coliseum Alfonso Perez, when Raphinha raced on to a long ball and fired against the post. The rebound fell to Balde, but with the goal gaping, fumbled an effort which struck the same upright. Sergi Roberto pulled up injured, seemingly with a hamstring issue, adding to Barcelona's longest list of absentees.

The league leaders have badly missed explosive winger Ousmane Dembele and creative midfielder Pedri in recent weeks. David Soria saved well to keep out a Robert Lewandowski header just before the break. Lewandowski nodded narrowly wide from an Alba cross before Soria made another solid stop from a rasping Raphinha effort.

Getafe were content with the point, sitting back as Barcelona probed for a breakthrough, although Borja Mayoral almost snatched a winner for the hosts on the break.

Barcelona are still firm favourites to lift the title for the first time since 2019, but should they stumble at home against Atletico next weekend, doubts could creep in.

Getafe are provisionally four points clear of the drop zone, before Valencia, 18th, face Sevilla later Sunday.

Atletico stayed two points behind Real Madrid with a narrow win over Almeria, 17th, which should have been more comfortable than it proved to be. Antoine Griezmann headed Atletico ahead in the fifth minute when Angel Correa nodded on a corner to the back post. Fans at the Metropolitan gave Correa an ovation in the 10th minute, in his first appearance after the death of his mother last week.

Diego Simeone's side were dominant throughout, but Almeria pulled level when Leo Baptistao's shot deflected in off Jose Gimenez.

Griezmann sent the Rojiblancos ahead again before the break, finishing clinically from Yannick Carrasco's pass at the end of a fine team move for his 11th league goal. Carrasco and Griezmann both hit the post in the second half as Atletico looked to kill the game.



Barcelona's Ronald Araujo (right) vies with Getafe's Djene Dakonam during the La Liga match in Getafe yesterday. (AFP)

Celtic hammer Kilmarnock to close in on Scottish title

GLASGOW: Celtic scored four goals and missed a penalty inside the opening half hour as they moved a step closer to retaining their Scottish Premiership title with a 4-1 victory over Kilmarnock yesterday.

Goals from Kyogo Furuhashi and Daizen Maeda and Matt O'Riley's double ensured Celtic need only seven points from their last six matches to seal the title.

The win at Rugby Park restored their 12-point lead over second-placed Rangers.

"Our first half was outstanding - probably as well as we've played all year," Celtic manager Ange

Postecoglou told the BBC. "Second half, we got a bit sloppy and never got into any rhythm. Overall, knowing the challenge here today, really pleased.

"Our football was brilliant, everyone was kind of in-sync. Our finishing composure, apart from the penalty, was excellent." Fraser Murray gifted Celtic a seventh-minute opener with a backpass that was intercepted by Furuhashi.

Joe Wright got back but could only delay the Japan striker, who checked back and drilled into the far corner.

Celtic were two ahead five

minutes later following a lengthy spell of possession. Alistair Johnston got ahead of Murray on the right flank and crossed for Maeda to head home at the far post.

O'Riley made it 3-0 in the 18th minute after being found by Greg Taylor.

Furuhashi missed a great chance to net his 30th goal of the season when he hit the post from the penalty spot after Christian Doidge had caught Taylor with a clumsy challenge.

Another mistake from Murray led to the fourth goal. The former Hibernian player's back-

ward clearance ultimately ended up with O'Riley, who shot into the top corner.

Wide player Murray was taken off in a double substitution that was all about damage limitation. Striker Doidge also made way as midfielder enforcer Alan Power and defender Jeriel Dorsett came on.

The changes stemmed the tide of chances and the relegation-threatened home side pulled a goal back in the final minute of the half following a rare mistake from Callum McGregor. Donnelly dispossessed the Celtic captain inside the box and finally

netted after goalkeeper Joe Hart had saved from him and Danny Armstrong. Oh Hyeon-gyu was given 45 minutes to impress the watching South Korea manager Jurgen Klinsmann as he replaced Furuhashi. The striker just missed O'Riley's cross as he slid in and later fired just wide at the near post after a cross from Rocco Vata. Carl Starfelt missed Celtic's best second-half chance when he sent a free header over from six yards and Tomoki Iwata went close from 25 yards.

(AFP)