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CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

# Guardiola warns of Bayern belief in miracle comeback

Germans were thrashed 3-0 by Man City in the first leg of their quarter-final tie

**AFP**
Munich

Manchester City coach Pep Guardiola insisted yesterday that opponents Bayern Munich believe they can pull off a miracle and overturn a three-goal deficit against his side to reach the Champions League semi-finals today.

"I worked here at Bayern and I know the mentality of this club. It's everywhere, it's in the skin of the club. They believe they can do it," said Guardiola, who was head coach at Bayern from 2013 to 2016 before joining City. The German giants were thrashed 3-0 by City in the first leg of their quarter-final tie in Manchester last week, and are now facing what seems to be mission impossible ahead of the return fixture in Munich.

"It will be a miracle if we pull it off, but we can't just talk a miracle into existence," admitted Bayern coach Thomas Tuchel yesterday. "Our first priority is to win the first half. If we can win both halves and we get the luck which we didn't get in the first leg, then everything is possible," said Tuchel.

"It's a difficult task and we shouldn't make it more difficult by looking only at the top of the mountain," he added, and encouraged his players to get the fans onside. "We need to bring the crowd with us so they can create the kind of energy which you get in games where special things happen," he said.

The Bayern boss, whose side also slumped to a disappointing 1-1 draw at home to relegation candidates Hoffenheim on Saturday, admitted his players were not in their best form. "We've looked a bit cramped and lacking confidence recently, but in football things can change very quickly," he said.

Bayern can count on the return of striker Eric-Maxim Choupo-Moting, who missed Bayern's last three games with a knee injury but took part in training yesterday. "We'll have to see how his knee reacts to our final session, but if we get the green light he is definitely an option," said the Bayern coach.



Manchester City's Erling Haaland (centre) and John Stones at a training session in Manchester yesterday. *(Reuters)*

Senegal international Sadio Mane will also return to the squad after he was suspended for a dressing room altercation with teammate Leroy Sane in Manchester last week. Tuchel insisted that Bayern had put the episode behind them, while City midfielder Gundogan warned that it could even help the German side.

"Sometimes an episode like that can have a positive effect. That's what Bayern will be hoping for," said Gundogan.

The German international also insisted that a Bayern comeback was not off the cards. We know from our experience in the past that everything is still possible. This competition is something special, you can get incredible results. We are taking it seriously because we are playing against one of the best teams in Europe," he said. Bayern defender Benjamin Pavard, meanwhile, pointed to the unlikely Champions League comebacks made by Liverpool in 2019 and Barcelona in 2017 as proof that Bayern still had a chance of reaching the last four.

"We've seen the remontadas (comebacks) there have been in the past, so why not us?" said the French international. "We are ready, the crowd will be important and we are going to do everything to win this match," he added.

SPOTLIGHT

## Inzaghi wants Inter to forget domestic crisis with semis within reach

**AFP**
Milan

Simone Inzaghi said yesterday that Inter Milan need to put their dreadful Serie A form behind them as they stand on the verge of eliminating Benfica and reaching the Champions League semi-finals. Inter have a two-goal lead following a superb first-leg display in Lisbon and are heavy favourites today to make the last four for the first time since they were last crowned European champions in 2010.

Last week's win at Benfica was Inter's only victory in their last eight matches and Inzaghi's team, who sit outside the Champions League places in Serie A, have lost their last three home games without scoring a single goal. However they are having another positive season in cup competitions and will have an all-Italian semi-final against either Napoli or AC Milan to look forward to if they don't collapse at the San Siro. "We're aware of our cup runs and that our league situation isn't what we wanted," Inzaghi told reporters.

"We are getting bad results but things aren't bad in terms of performances, we are still creating chances. The defeats are already in the past, we need to focus on tomorrow night. We know what kind of team we are facing. Tomorrow is a very important and difficult match."

Inter's bad form has led to talk that Inzaghi could be sacked at the end of the season, as not qualifying for next season's Champions League would damage the club's finances. "If you read things before the match with Barcelona (in the group) it was the same, as it was before Porto (in the last 16)," added Inzaghi. "I'm used to it. As long as they criticise me and not my players I'm fine with it... it's part of the job."

Benfica, who haven't reached the Champions League semis since 1990, lost their Portuguese league games before and after the first-leg loss. Even though they helped send Juventus down to the Europa League this season they have never been Inter in European competition.

"It's difficult to overturn a 2-0 deficit but if we score first it could change the direction of the match," said Benfica coach Roger Schmidt. "We need to have a balanced approach to the match without forgetting that we need to attack. We had our chances last week too, but didn't make the most of them. We need motivation, sharp minds and to leave all emotions off the pitch. It is time to prove we belong here, otherwise we'll be out of the Champions League."

Benfica head into the match after three consecutive losses in all competitions, but they remain top of the Portuguese Primeira Liga, four points ahead of second-placed Porto.



Inter Milan coach Simone Inzaghi during training. *(Reuters)*

ATHLETICS

# Road to World Championships redemption begins in Doha for De Grasse

In an intriguing matchup over 200m, Olympic champion Andre De Grasse of Canada will go up against world 400m champion Michael Norman of USA, world 100m champion and Olympic silver medallist Fred Kerley of USA, and Olympic and world 200m silver medallist Kenny Bednarek also of USA at the Doha Diamond League Meeting on May 5.

De Grasse, a six-time Olympic medallist, had an interrupted build-up to the World Athletics Championships in Eugene last summer after injury and illness hampered his preparations.

While Norman, Kerley and Bednarek enjoyed individual success, the 28-year-old – who reached the 100m semi-final and later withdrew from the 200m – had to settle for 4x100m relay gold.

Having linked up with new coach John Coghlan at the end of last year, the world silver (200m) and bronze (100m) from Doha in 2019 is now focused on a return to the podium in Budapest in August.

"Looking ahead to another World Championships this year and then the Olympics in 2024, it's important that I'm in a good place physically and mentally. I felt like I needed to switch things up and moving to a new coach is like a fresh start for me," said the Canadian 200m record holder (19.62).

"While it was special to win the relay in Eugene, I've got unfinished business at the Worlds. Everything about my set up is still pretty new, but I'm grateful after a tough 2022 that we've got time to figure things out and prepare well, and I'm excited to get back on the track in Doha against some of the best guys on the circuit."

At the Wanda Diamond League meeting in Doha 2022, Kerley – who has a legal best of 19.76 for 200m – clocked a windy 19.75 to finish runner up to eventual world champion Noah Lyles, with De Grasse in fourth. At the 2021 event, Bednarek, who has a best of 19.68, got the better of De Grasse with the pair finishing first and second respectively. Norman, a former world under-20 200m champion, has a best of 19.70 from the Diamond League meeting in Rome in 2019. The versatile sprinter won the Doha 400m in 2021, with Kerley third.

In addition to De Grasse and the talented American trio, the men's 200m at the Doha Meeting will include Joseph Fahnbulleh (LBR), the NCAA champion over 100m and 200m and Liberian record holder (19.83) who finished fourth over 200m at the World Championships, and Andrew Hudson (JAM), the NACAC champion over 200m with a best of 19.87.

Fahnbulleh's season has already got off to a fast start with a 9.98 100m PB at the Tom Jones Memorial in Gainesville, Florida, on 15 April, his first ever sub-10 performance.

The 2023 Wanda Diamond League comprises 14 meetings in total, starting with Doha at the Qatar Sports Club on 5 May and concluding with a single final across two days in Eugene (16-17 September).




The 200m Olympic champion Andre De Grasse of Canada.

SPORT

CRICKET

# Sri Lanka wipe out wilting Ireland in first Test

## 'WE FOUGHT IN STAGES BUT NOT ENOUGH. WE ARE LEARNING WHAT IT MEANS TO PLAY TEST CRICKET'

**AFP**
Galle, Sri Lanka

Ten wickets in the match from Prabath Jayasuriya helped Sri Lanka thrash Ireland by an innings and 280 runs yesterday, in one of the biggest winning margins in Test history.

In Sri Lanka's biggest win as well as Ireland's worst defeat to date, the visitors were bundled out for 168 on day three in a humid seaside Galle stadium after being made to follow-on.

"We fought in stages but not enough. We are learning what it means to play Test cricket," Ireland captain Andrew Balbirnie said.

"Hopefully we'll learn quickly and put up a better fight in the next game."

"I know this is our biggest Test win but what matters to me is winning Test matches and not the margins," Sri Lanka skipper Dimuth Karunaratne said.

"(Ireland) are new to this format and they are still learning about this format. But I think they were really good and in future they will be a good team as well."

It was the 12th-largest innings victory in Test history, behind England's win over the West Indies in 2007 by an innings and 283 runs.

Sri Lanka's previous biggest win was when they hammered Zimbabwe by an innings and 254 runs in 2004 in Bulawayo.

Ireland have now lost all five of their matches since securing Test status in 2017. Their previous biggest defeat was to England by 143 runs in 2019.

In the first Test between the two sides, Sri Lanka made Ireland's fielders toil from the start, racking up 591 for six in their first innings before declaring on day two.

Karunaratne top scored with a masterful 179 while Kusal Mendis posted 140. Dinesh Chandimal and Sadeera Samarawickrama then hit unbeaten hundreds.

Sri Lanka then had Ireland on the ropes on 4-2 before bowling them out for 143 with Jayasuriya taking a career-best 7-52 and Lorcan Tucker top-scoring with 45.

With a first-innings lead of 448, Sri Lanka enforced the follow-on, reducing them to 40-5 before lunch but Harry Tector and Curtis Campher resisted with a 60-run stand.

The partnership was broken when Nishan Madushka pulled off a good reflex catch at short leg to dismiss Campher for 30 and give Ramesh Mendis his second wicket in the innings.


Sri Lanka's Prabath Jayasuriya (right) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Ireland's Lorcan Tucker during the third day of the first Test at the Galle International Cricket Stadium yesterday. *(AFP)*

Mendis finished with four wickets, becoming after his 11th appearance the joint-fastest Sri Lankan to get 50 Test wickets alongside off-spinner Dilruwan Perera.

Tector, a tall 23-year-old right-handed batter, looked impressive with solid defence despite copping a nasty blow on the ribs from an Asitha Fernando delivery.

But his promising innings was cut short when he pushed one to mid-off and hurried for a single but there was no response from the non-striker.

Midway down the pitch, he turned back, slipped and despite a dive couldn't save himself, departing for 42.

Jayasuriya bagged another three scalps, including the final one to fall, trapping Ben White leg-before for one.

"All I try to do is to keep things simple. Bowl to good lines and lengths and don't offer too many loose balls and create pressure by bowling in the right areas," Jayasuriya said. "When you do that you get wickets. Galle has been a great venue for me."

**SCOREBOARD**

**Sri Lanka first innings 591/6 decl)**
**Ireland first innings (overnight 117-7)**

| | |
|---|---|
| James McCollum b Jayasuriya | 35 |
| Murray Commins b V. Fernando | 0 |
| A Balbirnie c Madushka b V. Fernando | 4 |
| Harry Tector c de Silva b Jayasuriya | 34 |
| Curtis Campher c Mendis b Jayasuriya | 0 |
| Moor c Samarawickrama b Jayasuriya | 14 |
| Lorcan Tucker lbw b Jayasuriya | 45 |
| George Dockrell lbw b Jayasuriya | 2 |
| Andy McBrine lbw b Mendis | 7 |
| Adair st Samarawickrama b Jayasuriya | 0 |
| Ben White not out | 0 |
| **Extras: (nb2)** | **2** |
| **Total: (all out, overs 52.3)** | **143** |

**Fall of wickets:** 1-0 (Commins), 2-4 (Balbirnie), 3-74 (Tector), 4-74 (Campher), 5-85 (James McCollum), 6-92 (Moor) 7-108 (Dockrell), 8-143 (Tucker), 9-143 (Adair), 10-143 (McBrine).
**Bowling:** Asitha Fernando 5-2-9-0, Vishwa Fernando 9-2-38-2, Prabath Jayasuriya 23-10-52-7, Ramesh Mendis 14.3-3-40-1 (nb2) Dhananjaya de Silva 1-0-4-0.

**Ireland second innings**

| | |
|---|---|
| J McCollum c de Silva b Jayasuriya | 8 |
| M Commins c R. Mendis b V. Fernando | 0 |
| Andy Balbirnie c de Silva b V. Fernando | 6 |
| Harry Tector run out | 42 |
| Lorcan Tucker lbw b Jayasuriya | 6 |
| Peter Moor c Madushka b R. Mendis | 0 |
| C Campher c Madushka R. Mendis | 30 |
| George Dockrell lbw b R. Mendis | 32 |
| Andy McBrine c K. Mendis b R. Mendis | 10 |
| Mark Adair not out | 23 |
| Ben White lbw b Jayasuriya | 1 |
| **Extras: (b5, lb3, w1, nb1)** | **10** |
| **Total: (all out, overs 54.1)** | **168** |

**Fall of wickets:** 1-0 (Cummins), 2-8 (Balbirnie), 3-24 (McCollum), 4-32 (Tucker), 5-40 (Moor), 6-100 (Campher), 7-108 (Tector), 8-131 (McBrine), 9-167 (Dockrell), 10-168 (White)
**Bowling:** Prabath Jayasuriya 24-1-6-56-3, Vishwa Fernando 4-2-3-2, Ramesh Mendis 20-1-76-4 (nb1), Asitha Fernando 3-0-15-0 (w1), Dhananjaya de Silva 3-0-10-0.

FOCUS

# Kohli fined after high-octane IPL clash against CSK


Royal Challengers Bangalore's Virat Kohli (right) celebrates with teammates after the dismissal of Chennai Super Kings' Ruturaj Gaikwad (not pictured) during the IPL match in Bengaluru on Tuesday. *(AFP)*

**AFP**
New Delhi

Indian cricket star Virat Kohli was fined yesterday for breaching the IPL code of conduct, after his side Royal Challengers Bangalore went down to Chennai in a nail-biting match.

Kohli's wild celebration of Chennai batsman Shivam Dube's wicket at a crucial point of the high-scoring game on Monday resulted in the sanction, according to media reports.

The fiery 34-year-old was fined 10 percent of his match fee after admitting to the offence, organisers said, without detailing what rule the batsman broke.

The tense match in front of a raucous capacity Bengaluru crowd witnessed a record-equalling 33 sixes and was finally won by Chennai Super Kings, led by M S Dhoni, by eight runs.

One of the best batsmen of the modern game, "King Kohli" has often run into trouble with his aggressive approach and no-holds-barred emotions on the cricket pitch.

He has had numerous run-ins with opposing players and was once reprimanded after hitting a plastic chair with a bat following his dismissal during an IPL match. He escaped a fine.

According to media reports this week, Kohli has fallen out with India's former cricket chief Sourav Ganguly with the two men reportedly "unfollowing" each other on Instagram.

Kohli quit as Indian T20 skipper in late 2021 and in January 2022 was sacked from the one-day captaincy and gave up leading the Test side too after a reported fall-out with Ganguly.

**Bangalore's Maxwell rues narrow loss in IPL run-fest**

Glenn Maxwell relishes being part of exciting games but the Royal Challengers Bangalore all-rounder did not hide his disappointment following their narrow defeat in Monday's Indian Premier League (IPL) thriller against Chennai Super Kings.

It rained 33 sixes, equalling the league record, and a total of 444 runs were scored in a clash between two of the most popular IPL sides which was decided in the final over.

Eight sixes came off Maxwell's bat as the Australian smashed 76 off 36 balls but it was not enough to avoid an eight-run loss for his side. Chennai amassed 226-6 with Devon Conway (83) and Shivam Dube (52) scoring hitting 11 sixes between them. Bangalore lost two early wickets but Maxwell and skipper Faf du Plessis (62) plundered 126 runs in 10 overs to turn the match on its head. Once they fell in successive overs, Chennai clawed back into the contest and restricted Bangalore to 218-8.

"It was a pretty exciting game of cricket regardless of how you look at it," Maxwell told reporters. "There's always going to be a winner or loser. Unfortunately we just fell a little bit short."

"It's a little bit disappointing. We did so well to get so close and we were in the position where we probably should have won the game."

IPL

# All-rounder Green stars as MI beat SRH by 14 runs

**AFP**
Hyderabad

Australia's Cameron Green hit his maiden half-century in the Indian Premier League and took one wicket to lead Mumbai Indians to a 14-run win over Sunrisers Hyderabad yesterday.

The day - April 18 - marked the 15th anniversary of the T20 league, which began in 2008 and has grown to be the world's richest cricket tournament.

Rohit Sharma's Mumbai remain the most successful franchise with five trophies in the men's edition and moved to sixth in the 10-team table after three successive wins.

Green, a big buy for Mumbai after being bought for $2.11mn in the auction, steered the team to 192-5 with an attacking 64 following his promotion to number three in Hyderabad.

Aiden Markram-led Hyderabad were bowled out for 178 in 19.5 overs despite a whirlwind 36 by Heinrich Klaasen and Mayank Agarwal's 48.

Needing 20 in the final over, Mumbai handed the ball to Arjun Tendulkar, son of legendary Sachin Tendulkar, and the left-arm quick bowled a perfect over and got his maiden IPL wicket to seal the match.

But it was the 1.98m (6 feet, 6 inches)-tall Green, who stood out with key partnerships including a stand of 56 off 28 balls with Tilak Varma, who hit a 17-ball 37.

Green struck three successive boundaries to reach his maiden IPL fifty and followed it up with a six and along with fellow Australian Tim David took the total past 190.

South African's left-arm quick Marco Jansen took two wickets but missed a face off with his twin brother Duan Jansen, who made his IPL debut for Hyderabad in the previous match but did not make the XI for this game. In Hyderabad's chase, Arjun started with the new ball for Mumbai to bowl two economical overs in his second IPL outing after his debut on Sunday.


Mumbai Indians' Cameron Green celebrates after scoring a half-century during the IPL match against Sunrisers Hyderabad in Hyderabad yesterday. (AFP)

But it was Jason Behrendorff's left-arm pace that got two key wickets including Hyderabad's England import and previous-match centurion Harry Brook for nine.

Wickets kept tumbling and Green worked with the ball as well when his pace bowling got Markram back in the pavilion for 22.

Klaasen and Agarwal attempted to raise the hopes in their stand of 55 but their departure triggered the final slide for Hyderabad. Behrendorff and impact player Riley Meredith claimed two wickets each while David took four catches.

**BRIEF SCORES**
**Mumbai Indians 192 for 5** (Green 64*, Kishan 38, Tilak Varma 37, Jansen 2-43) **beat Sunrisers Hyderabad 178** (Agarwal 48, Klaasen 36, Meredith 2-33, Behrendorff 2-37, Chawla 2-43) **by 14 runs**

CYCLING

# Tour champion Vingegaard extends Jumbo-Visma deal

**AFP**
The Hague

Tour de France champion **Jonas Vingegaard** has signed a fresh deal with Jumbo-Visma that runs until 2027, the Dutch cycling team said yesterday.

The 26-year-old Dane edged Tadej Pogacar to the Tour de France title in 2022 after an epic struggle, and was runner-up to the Slovenian the season before.

"I'm excited to continue growing within the team," said Vingegaard, a former fish factory worker.

"The feeling I had, standing on top of the podium, was fantastic.

"My goal is to go for many more wins. In the Tour but also



in other races to come." He joined in 2019 and has since played a key part in Jumbo becoming cycling's most powerful team, alongside riders including Primoz Roglic and Wout van Aert.

Vingegaard was the toast of Denmark last July when the Tour de France opened with three days in the Scandinavian country.

The Danes cheered him along every metre of the opening individual time-trial around Copenhagen. They held an even bigger party in downtown Copenhagen when he came back from France with the fabled yellow jersey.

"I have had a fantastic journey with the team. This is where I can fulfil my full potential," he said.

A delighted Jumbo general manager Richard Plugge said Vingegaard was the cornerstone of the team's immediate future.

"Jonas is a fantastic fit for us: he is eager to learn and easy to coach, and also pushes us ahead as a team.

"He was a rough diamond when he first came to the team. Together, we developed significantly, ultimately winning the Tour de France."

## Olympic champions McKeown, Stubblety-Cook fire up at Australian swimming championships

**Gold Coast, Australia:** Olympic champion Kaylee McKeown blitzed to the 100m backstroke title at the Australian swimming championships yesterday, with fellow world record holder Zac Stubblety-Cook also throwing down the gauntlet in the 200m breaststroke.

McKeown, who set a new world record over 200m last month, touched in a sizzling 57.90 seconds as she builds to the world championships in Japan in July.

She now owns the two fastest times this year ahead of key challenger, American Regan Smith.

The 21-year-old was always in charge at Queensland's Gold Coast, but was pushed hard by Mollie O'Callaghan, who posted a personal best 58.42 a day after winning the 100m freestyle crown.

"The last 25 was definitely testing, the legs burning, but I love racing and I love the feeling of that burn," said McKeown, who won 100m and 200m backstroke gold at the Tokyo Olympics.

Asked what she planned to focus on in the lead-up to the world championships, she replied: "Just keep training hard, it's not a secret."

Olympic champion Stubblety-Cook was also on fire, hitting the wall in 2:09.03, nearly three seconds outside his own world record set at the same event in 2022. But it was still the quickest this year.

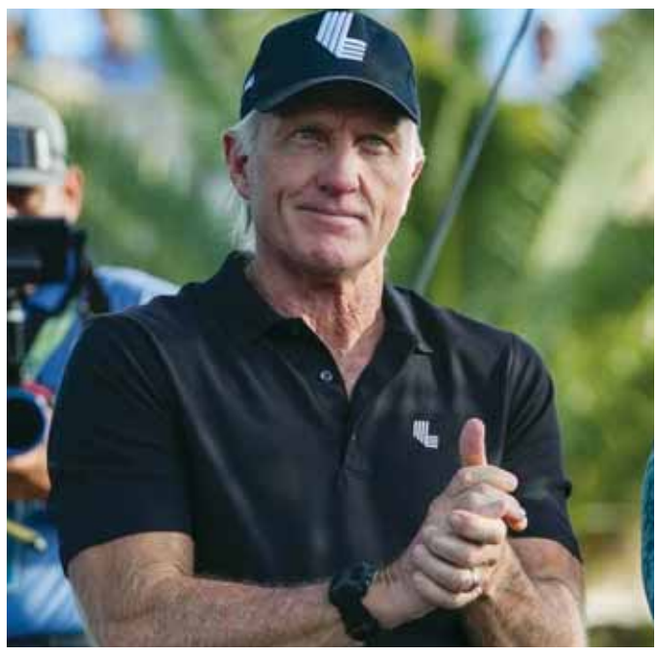
"Bringing it home is my strength and I just need to stick to that and enjoy the last lap," he said after again putting his foot to the floor over the final 50m to pull away. Stubblety-Cook won the 100m breaststroke title on Monday.

In other events, Shayna Jack won the women's 50m splash and dash in 24.45 ahead of Meg Harris (24.55). Veteran Cate Campbell came third in an encouraging 24.88 at her first major meet since the Tokyo Olympics.

FOCUS

# Australia accept LIV Golf with sell-out crowds

**AFP**
Adelaide



The rebel LIV Golf tour has faced resistance from traditionalists and sparked a civil war in the sport, but many in Australia are embracing it with the nation's inaugural event this week a sell-out.

Tour boss **Greg Norman** has long wanted to see top-level golf as a regular feature in his homeland, which has been starved of big tournaments and high-profile players, largely because of its isolated location.

Although LIV is controversially backed by Saudi money and seen as gimmicky with its 54-hole no-cut format, Australian golf fans have jumped at the chance to see major winners in action.

Dustin Johnson, Phil Mickelson and Brooks Koepka will all tee off in Adelaide, along with home hero and British Open champion Cameron Smith. They will do battle from Friday to Sunday at The Grange Golf Club for the richest tournament ever on Australian shores – $20mn in prize money across individual and team formats.

Ground passes for all three days quickly sold out, forcing organisers to release extra tickets to cater for demand.

Such is the interest, for the first time since LIV took shape and sparked turmoil last year, the gates will be opened for paying fans to watch the Pro-Am, featuring all 48 players tomorrow.

"Since the first day we announced our league was coming to The Grange, the response and support from the people of Australia has been overwhelming," said Norman, a two-time major winner who claimed his first title as a professional at The Grange in 1976. LIV Golf is reportedly considering a second event in Australia in 2024 to capitalise on demand, with talk of a third in the future. Two-time Masters champion Bubba Watson said there was untapped potential in Australia as the circuit seeks to broaden its appeal outside the United States, where interest in LIV has been more tepid.

"When people want us there (in Australia), then, yeah, we obviously want to be there as many times as we can to make them happy," the American told Australian media last week.

"Nobody's bad-mouthing us down there."

LIV later this month will roll on to Singapore, with Spain, England and Saudi Arabia also on the schedule.

LIV, which split the elite golf world by luring away top stars from the US PGA Tour and DP World Tour (formerly the European Tour), completed its first season in October.

Bankrolled by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, LIV has signed up famous names on big money but also caused acrimony and legal battles with US and European golf powerbrokers.

In contrast, the much smaller PGA Tour of Australia has said it respects the decision of Smith and other Australians who defected to LIV and said they would always be welcome to play on home soil.

Not everyone is happy though to have LIV in Australia for the first time.

Federal independent MP Rebekha Sharkie, who represents the electorate of Mayo, south of Adelaide, said: "I don't think it's a good look at all."

But the players are talking up what LIV means for golf in Australia now and in the future.

The US PGA Tour has never ventured to the country and while the European Tour has, those have been co-sanctioning low-key events.

Two-time Australian Open winner Matt Jones said: "Australia has been starved for some real quality fields for golf tournaments for a long time, especially the international players."

Fellow Australian Marc Leishman said part of the reason he moved to LIV was the prospect of more quality tournaments at home.

"It's a big part, among other reasons, why a lot of us guys came over, to be able to take golf back to Australia, spend more time here," he said. "Growing up, I remember watching Greg Norman and Steve Elkington and Ian Baker-Finch and all those guys.

"Kids nowadays don't get too much of a chance to do that, particularly around Australia."

TENNIS

# Alcaraz brushes aside Borges in Barcelona

THE TOP SEED SWEPT ASIDE THE WORLD NUMBER 79 FROM PORTUGAL 6-3, 6-1

**AFP**
Barcelona



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz returns the ball to Portugal's Nuno Borges during the ATP Barcelona Open yesterday. *(AFP)*

World number two Carlos Alcaraz began his belated build-up to the French Open with an emphatic second-round win over Nuno Borges at the Barcelona Open yesterday.

The Spanish teenager was back in action after hand and back problems forced him to pull out of last week's 2023 debut on European clay at the Monte Carlo Masters.

The top seed swept aside the world number 79 from Portugal 6-3, 6-1 to set up an all Spanish last-16 clash with either Bernabe Zapata Miralles or Roberto Bautista Agut.

"I feel great," said Alcaraz, playing on the surface for the first time since Rio de Janeiro in February.

Alcaraz pulled out of Monte Carlo with the injuries that had hampered his last appearance, in the semi-finals in Miami where he succumbed to Jannik Sinner.

Alcaraz arrived in Miami as the world number one after success at Indian Wells, but was knocked off the top of the ATP rankings by Novak Djokovic after the loss to Sinner.

The 19-year-old's bid to successfully defend a tour-level title for the first time got off to the best possible start, as he despatched Borges in 63 minutes on the court named after Rafael Nadal, another absentee from Monte Carlo.

Aside from unforced errors that enabled Borges to reclaim a break in the eighth game, Alcaraz showed little sign of rustiness. He allowed the Portuguese only one more game in a lop-sided affair.

The 2022 US Open champion converted five of seven break points to continue his quest for a third title of the season after Indian Wells and Buenos Aires.

"Moving well, hitting the ball really well so I feel a lot of confidence playing here in Barcelona," said Alcaraz. "It's a really special place for me."

Also yesterday, Casper Ruud kick-started his 2023 Barcelona Open Banc Sabadell campaign with a successful revenge mission.

The third-seeded Norwegian held off American Ben Shelton 6-2, 7-6 (1) to book a third-round spot at the ATP 500 in Catalunya.

"He was playing great, and I think I was playing great," said Ruud. "I played a perfect first set and he was making maybe a few too many mistakes. But I think all throughout the second set was tough games, tough rallies."

**Dominic Thiem advances in Munich**

Dominic Thiem advanced to the second round of the BMW Open in Munich yesterday. The former World No. 3 led Constant Lestienne 6-3 and was serving at Ad/40 in the first game of the second set when the Frenchman retired due to a left calf injury.

"It was a surprising end, not the way I wanted," Thiem said in his on-court interview.

"But it's okay and on to the next one."

The Austrian is making his first appearance in Munich since 2016, when he reached the final.

Thiem is happy to be back at the ATP 250, where he is pursuing his first title since the 2020 US Open.

"Of course I love to play here. The memory of snow in the first round, the break because of heavy snowfall is very funny. I'll have it in my head forever, so I really like to remember that and also the week in 2016 was great," Thiem said.

"Just a little bit sad when Philipp Kohlschreiber went by with the winner's car.

"It was tough, but obviously I love to play here and very happy to be in the second round."

Thiem will next play Swiss Marc-Andrea Huesler, who battled past Briton Kyle Edmund 7-6(3), 4-6, 6-3.

Another Swiss, qualifier Alexander Ritschard, eliminated in-form German Jan-Lennard Struff 7-5, 7-5.

It was the second tour-level victory of the season for Switzerland United Cup team member Ritschard, who nearly had his right arm amputated when he was 22.

In other action, Hungarian Marton Fucsovics rallied past German wild card Max Hans Rehberg 4-6, 7-6(6), 6-3. A home favourite reached the second round when Oscar Otte defeated Argentine Sebastian Baez 6-3, 7-5.

## Zheng 'really excited' about WTA's China return

**Shanghai:** Zheng Qinwen welcomed the WTA's decision to end its China boycott over concerns about Peng Shuai and the world number 25 said she is looking forward to showcasing her skills on home soil for the first time at Tour level.

The governing body of women's tennis suspended tournaments in China after former doubles number one Peng stated in a now deleted 2021 social media post that a senior former Chinese government official had sexually assaulted her.

Peng briefly disappeared from public view after her post but made an appearance at the Beijing Winter Olympics last year and conducted an interview with French publication *L'Equipe*.

The WTA, which had sought a formal investigation into Peng's allegations and an opportunity to meet her privately, said last week it will resume operations in China this year.

"I'm so happy the tournaments in China will finally be back because I'm really excited to play in front of my people," the 20-year-old told reporters after her 6-4 6-4 win over American Alycia Parks at the Stuttgart Open on Monday.

"I really miss China because it has been a long time, I never have time to come back there. Since the tournaments have started, I will have more time to go back to my hometown and meet all my family and to show my tennis over there."

Zheng, who was named WTA Newcomer of the Year in 2022, has previously only played WTA qualifying matches in China at events in Wuhan and Tianjin in 2019.

Zheng, who next faces Iga Swiatek in Stuttgart, said she was unaware of Peng's whereabouts and that she had never talked to her before.

"But I think she's pretty well in China. Honestly, I don't know how she is. I just focus more on myself," she said.

## Joel Embiid scores for 76ers in play-off win



Philadelphia 76ers center Joel Embiid (21) reacts after a score against the Brooklyn Nets during the third quarter in game two of the 2023 NBA play-offs at Wells Fargo Center. The 76ers won 96-84. *(USA TODAY Sports)*

## Formula One stewards dismiss Ferrari's penalty petition after Australian Grand Prix

**London:** Formula One stewards dismissed a Ferrari petition to review the penalty that dropped Carlos Sainz from fourth to 12th at this month's Australian Grand Prix.

The four stewards upheld their original decision after a virtual meeting yesterday to consider whether to review the matter.

Ferrari had needed to present a "significant and relevant new element" but, after considering telemetry data and witness statements, the officials decided the Italian team had failed to do so.

"There is no significant and relevant new element which was unavailable to the parties seeking the review at the time of the decision concerned. The petition is therefore dismissed," they said.

Sainz was deemed "wholly to blame" for the first corner collision with Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso, who ended up third, at the final restart of the triple red-flagged race.

The Ferrari driver, who was punished during the race without a hearing, said at the time it was the "most unfair penalty I've seen in my life".

The drop meant Ferrari, the sport's oldest and most successful team, drew a blank from the third round of the season after Charles Leclerc retired on the opening lap.

The stewards, who heard from Ferrari boss Fred Vasseur, Sainz and racing director Laurent Mekies, said the decision was made in-race because they deemed it clear who was at fault.

They found the telemetry data presented to be "at best ambiguous" and felt it in fact corroborated the decision to find Sainz wholly to blame. The Spaniard had said he had to brake harder because his car's tyres were cold, with a slow formation lap contributing to that problem, and he also had the sun in his eyes.

The stewards said all drivers had to adapt to the track and tyre conditions.

"Logic would dictate that the position of the sun would have equally impacted other drivers too. It is not a justifiable reason to avoid a penalty for a collision," they said.

Ferrari said they were disappointed by the outcome.

Meanwhile Audi's preparations to enter Formula One in 2026 are picking up speed and a prototype power unit will run on the test bench before the end of the year, the German manufacturer said yesterday.

The Volkswagen-owned brand announced last October that it was taking a stake in the Sauber Group, whose Swiss-based team are competing this season as Alfa Romeo with Ferrari engines.

Formula One will have a new power unit from 2026, with the focus on sustainability and a more cost-efficient future, when Sauber will become the factory Audi team.

Speaking at presentation in Shanghai, Audi board member Oliver Hoffmann said the Formula One project had "really taken off in recent months."

More than 260 specialists were already working at the powertrain facility in Neuburg an der Donau. "By the end of the year, the hiring of staff should be completed, and the team will consist of more than 300 employees."



Ferrari's Carlos Sainz Jr during the third red flag during the Australian Grand Prix at Melbourne Grand Prix Circuit, Melbourne, Australia on April 2, 2023. *(AFP)*

PREMIER LEAGUE

# Klopp hails Liverpool as Leeds hit for six

## Victory was Liverpool's first in six games since they beat United 7-0 in March



Liverpool's Diogo Jota (second left) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Leeds United during the Premier League match on Monday. *(AFP)*

**Reuters**
Leeds, England

Liverpool's 6-1 mauling of Leeds United at Elland Road on Monday was their best performance of the season according to manager Juergen Klopp, who has not ruled out a push for a Champions League place in the final weeks of the campaign.

The victory was Liverpool's first in six games in all competitions since they beat Manchester United 7-0 in early March, as they inflicted a record home Premier League defeat on hapless Leeds who are battling against relegation.

"I think it's the best game we've played this season from all different perspectives," Klopp said. "We forced a lot of errors, sensational goals and counter-pressing, the best game for long time. There were a couple of tough moments, we conceded an unnecessary goal, but these things happen. Apart from that we were in control of the game."

Liverpool have also beaten Bournemouth 9-0 in the Premier League and Rangers 7-1 in the Champions League this season, but Klopp said he will always judge his players on performance rather than the number of goals they score. "I'm not bothered about scoring six, it's about the performance. This was a winning performance," he said.

"We can be super offensive orientated if we react in the right moment. I can't explain why our counter-pressing didn't work (earlier this season) but tonight it clicked. I'm not sure how many goals we scored after we won the ball back - that makes all the difference."

Liverpool are nine points behind Newcastle United who are in the fourth Champions League qualification place and Klopp said all they can do is keep winning in their eight remaining matches and hope the teams above them slip up.

"They can win all their games and we win all our games and there is no chance to change anything," he said.

"We have to play really good football. If we do, we will get results and then we see where we end up on the table."

### GRACIA CALLS FOR COMPOSURE AFTER ANOTHER HOME MAULING

Leeds United must find more composure in defence in their battle to avoid relegation, according to manager Javi Gracia, whose side conceded five or more goals in a second successive league game for the first time in their history on Monday. Leeds were cut apart by a rampant and ruthless Liverpool in their 6-1 loss at Elland Road, which followed a 5-1 home defeat by Crystal Palace in their previous Premier League match.

Leeds now have the worst defence in the top flight with 60 goals conceded in 31 games and are only two points above the relegation zone ahead of a trip to Fulham on Saturday. "It's hard to accept the game today, the result as well," Spaniard Gracia, who took over in February, said.

"We lost composure during the game. Maybe the first goal opened the game and maybe came from a handball (by Liverpool's Trent Alexander-Arnold) but after that there is nothing to say, we have to improve for the next game."

Gracia was surprised at his side's woeful defending in the last few weeks. "It's something we need to work on and try to improve," he said. "It's something we didn't do in the previous games and now we are in the most important part of the season. We have to be more solid and defend better."

Leeds were booed off the pitch at the final whistle by those fans still inside Elland Road and Gracia acknowledged there was no quick fix to their defensive frailties beyond heightened effort and concentration. "We played today against a very good team. They played much better, they deserved the result and we tried but it was impossible to do it better," he said.

"The only message (to the players) is to try to play better next game, try and get a better result and this way they (the supporters) will be with us. There is only one way. Try to work hard and try to improve," Gracia added.

SPOTLIGHT

# Arsenal can handle title stress as City close in, vows Arteta

**AFP**
London

Arsenal's bid to win the Premier League for the first time since 2004 is in danger of imploding, but Mikel Arteta remains adamant the leaders can cope with the pressure of the title race. Arteta's side blew a two-goal lead for a second successive game as West Ham hit back to snatch a 2-2 draw at the London Stadium on Sunday.

After squandering the same advantage in last weekend's 2-2 draw at Liverpool, the Gunners once again paid the price for taking their foot off the gas. Although Arsenal are four points clear of second placed Manchester City, it is the champions who have all the momentum heading into the final weeks of a gripping title battle.

With a home game against Arsenal looming on April 26, City know they will be crowned champions if they win their last eight games. Ominously for Arsenal, Pep Guardiola's men have already beaten them twice this season, winning 3-1 at the Emirates Stadium in the league in February, just weeks after knocking the Gunners out of the FA Cup with a 1-0 victory in Manchester.

For Arsenal to no longer be in control of their own destiny is a bitter pill for Arteta to swallow after the north Londoners' long spell at the top this term. Arteta concedes Arsenal's untimely collapses against West Ham and Liverpool were self-inflicted wounds, with the Spaniard especially frustrated by the way his players took their strong position for granted on Sunday.

But he refuses to accept it was the tension of being chased so relentlessly by City that provoked the calamitous results. "I'm certain it is not the pressure. It is we misunderstood what was needed in that moment," he said.

"It was very different to Liverpool in terms of the pattern of play. But that is the next stage, you have to play with the same purpose when it is 2-0. You have to have more composure to finish the game. When you drop your level so quickly the game is there for the opponent."

Before the summit meeting with City, Arsenal host Southampton on Friday. A victory over the bottom of the table Saints would move Arsenal seven points clear of City, who don't play in the league next weekend due to their FA Cup semi-final against Sheffield United on Saturday.

Fuelled by Erling Haaland's record-breaking goal-spree City - winners of their last 10 games in all competitions - have the edge in the remaining matches after the Arsenal showdown. Their toughest tests could come on trips to Fulham and Brentford, although their progress in the Champions League might also pose a distraction.

Arsenal's trickiest fixtures could be a daunting visit to Newcastle and a home game against in-form Brighton, while a London derby against struggling Chelsea can't be taken for granted.

Arteta doesn't believe Arsenal's young squad are running out of steam towards the end of their unexpected title bid. But he will spend the days leading up to the Southampton game searching for answers to the blip that threatens to ruin their dream season. "Fatigue? No. The best way to put it is to convince the team they can do it. We have to dig very deep and find the solution," he said.

"We stopped playing with the purpose to score a third and fourth one. It looked too easy. We gave them hope and credit to West Ham, they took it. We need that ruthless mindset to go kill a team and we haven't done it."



Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta. *(Reuters)*

## Roma name former Olympiakos executive Souloukou as CEO

**Rome:** Serie A club AS Roma yesterday named former Olympiakos Piraeus CEO Lina Souloukou as their new Chief Executive Officer and General Manager, effective immediately.

Her appointment came a day after Roma sacked their previous CEO Pietro Berardi, due to reported disagreements between him and the club's ownership. "Lina is an experienced, respected and trusted leader in both football and business and we are delighted to welcome her into the AS Roma family", club owners Dan and Ryan Friedkin said in a statement.

Souloukou was CEO of Olympiakos during 2018-2022 and has been a member of the European Club Association (ECA) executive board since 2019. Roma are third in Serie A and have reached the Europa League quarter-finals in which they will look to overturn a 1-0 deficit in their second-leg match at home to Feyenoord tomorrow.

On Monday, Roma sacked Berardi, a decision taken days after prosecutors seized documents at the Serie A club as part of a probe into possible financial irregularities in transfer deals. Roma said in a brief statement that they had "terminated all relations" with Berardi "with immediate effect." The statement did not give a reason.

A club source said the decision had "no connection" with the prosecutors' investigation. "There is a divergence in the vision for the future of the club between President (Dan) Friedkin and Berardi," the source said, asking not to be named.

On April 5, prosecutors seized documents at Roma and Lazio, their city rivals, and fellow Serie A club Salernitana in swoops related to aspects of transfer deals at all three clubs, including the methods used to set transaction prices. Roma have denied any wrongdoing and said they was "cooperating with the competent authorities and hopes that full clarity will be provided on the matter as soon as possible".

The investigations follow a probe launched by prosecutors in Turin into alleged false accounting on player transfers that in January led a sports court to dock Juventus, Italy's most successful soccer club, 15 points.

ROUND-UP

# Man United defender Martinez undergoes surgery

Manchester United defender Lisandro Martinez said he has successfully undergone surgery after being ruled out for the remainder of the season due to a fractured metatarsal bone. Martinez, who made 45 appearances for United this season in all competitions, was carried off the pitch during their 2-2 draw with Sevilla in the Europa League.

In a post on Instagram, Martinez said the operation "went really well" and that he was now focusing on recovery. The 25-year-old's injury comes with United looking to cement third place in the Premier League and capture the Europa League and FA Cup titles.



Manchester United defender Lisandro Martinez fractured his metatarsal bone during the Europa League match against Sevilla last week.

### MAN CITY TO EXPAND ETIHAD TO OVER 60,000 CAPACITY

Manchester City have submitted a planning application to expand the capacity of their Etihad Stadium to more than 60,000, while adding a hotel, museum and other facilities in a £300mn investment. The plans will add around 7,000 new seats to the stadium as well as a new covered fan zone, club shop, museum and 400-bed hotel. Last week, the Etihad was included on the list of 10 stadia which would host matches if the UK and Ireland's joint bid for organising Euro 2028 is successful, with the bid quoting a planned new capacity of 61,000.

"Over several months we have been developing concepts and designs for a best-in-class fan experience and year-round entertainment and leisure destination at the Etihad Stadium and are delighted to have now submitted a planning application to Manchester City Council," said City's managing director of operations Danny Wilson

"As with all club developments, ensuring our local community benefit is a key priority and we believe these proposals will deliver long-term economic and social opportunities, building on the regeneration work delivered in East Manchester by City Football Group since 2008."

Since an Abu-Dhabi backed takeover 15 years ago, the area around the Etihad has been transformed. The Etihad Campus, which comprises the club's training ground and office headquarters, opened in 2012 and a previous expansion of the Etihad's south stand was completed in 2015.

### SPANISH REFEREES ASK LA LIGA FOR 'RESPECT'

Spanish referees yesterday demanded "respect", after a recent rise in complaints from top-flight clubs and from Liga officials about officiating. "As the professional referees of Spanish football we want to convey our deep concern about the unfortunate situation that has been created," the Technical Committee of Referees (CTA) said in a statement.

"We regret the unceasing attacks by La Liga and its main leaders," added the CTA statement saying referees are the targets of "a perfectly calculated and organised campaign."

The criticism has intensified since a case involving Barcelona and the former head of the CTA, Jose Maria Enriquez Negreira. Last month Spanish prosecutors charged the Catalan club with corruption after payments of more than 7.3mn euros to a company owned by Negreira were uncovered earlier this year. Liga clubs will hold an extraordinary meeting on Wednesday where Barcelona president Joan Laporta is due to speak. Spanish media have reported that the clubs will also consider making the CTA independent of La Liga.

The CTA said it already was independent. "Our profession works with autonomy and professionalism for the good of refereeing. The leaders of La Liga cannot permanently lament a crisis of confidence in Spanish soccer and at the same time collaborate in generating it through violent criticism of referees.

"That," it added "only leads to the devaluation of our soccer. We ask La Liga and its leaders for respect and institutional responsibility in the face of an unprecedented situation," said in the statement.

### CHAMPIONS LEAGUE CHASERS ATALANTA HELD AT FIORENTINA

Atalanta slipped up in their bid to reach next season's Champions League after being held 1-1 at Fiorentina in Serie A on Monday. Gian Piero Gasperini's side had the chance to move level on points with fifth-placed Inter Milan with a win in Florence and looked good after Joakim Maehle poked the away side ahead eight minutes before the break.

But Arthur Cabral earned Fiorentina a point and extended his team's unbeaten record to 14 matches by rolling home a 56th-minute penalty following Rafael Toloi's handball. A win would have greatly improved sixth-placed Atalanta's top-four hopes after Inter and AC Milan both dropped points at the weekend.

They are four points behind Milan, who sit fourth and could only draw 1-1 at Bologna on Saturday. Fiorentina meanwhile are ninth and seven points behind the Europa Conference League spot currently held by Atalanta.

### ARGENTINA TO REPLACE INDONESIA AS U-20 WORLD CUP HOSTS: FIFA

Argentina will host the Under-20 World Cup from May 20 to June 11, FIFA said Monday, after taking the tournament from Indonesia just weeks before kick-off. Having been awarded hosting rights, Argentina will also participate in Indonesia's place. The team had failed to qualify on merit. "FIFA is delighted to announce that this year's edition of the FIFA U-20 World Cup will take place in Argentina, as the home of the world champions opens its doors to tomorrow's superstars of world football," FIFA president Gianni Infantino said in a statement.

FIFA withdrew hosting rights from Indonesia last month after protests against Israel's participation the tournament. Indonesia and Israel do not have formal diplomatic relations, and support for the Palestinian cause in the world's most populous Muslim-majority nation runs high. Argentina put itself forward as an alternative host, and FIFA conducted an on-site inspection of facilities last week.

The draw will take place on April 21 in Zurich. Hours before Monday's FIFA announcement, the Argentine government expressed its full backing for the hosting bid by the Argentine Football Association (AFA). This despite the country facing deep economic woes, with tens of billions in IMF debt and year-on-year inflation exceeding 100 percent.

World champions Argentina have won the most Under-20 World Cups, with six in total.