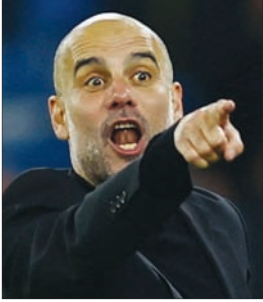




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Rubio wins delayed, shortened Giro stage 13



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Premier League most important title for City, says Guardiola



Saturday, May 20, 2023
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GULF TIMES SPORT

TENNIS

Ukraine's Kalinina outduels Russia's Kudermetova to reach Rome final

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JORDAN RALLY

Al-Attiyah in second place as al-Rawahi takes shock lead

Qatari now trails by 2min 33.4sec at the night halt and will be hard-pushed to make up the deficit on the final day

By Sports Reporter
Dead Sea, Jordan

Oman's Abdullah al-Rawahi and local co-driver Ata al-Hmoud were the shock leaders of the Jordan Rally after a dramatic day's action across world-class special stages that wound their way through the Dead Sea and Jordan Valley areas at the lowest place on earth yesterday.

The Skoda Fabia Evo crew looked to be heading for second place until runaway leaders, Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah and his co-driver Mathieu Baumel, suffered a broken right-hand front driveshaft on the start line of the second pass through the gruelling Jordan River stage, dropped 2min 39sec and finished the loop of three stages in two-wheel drive. The Qatari now trails by a daunting 2min 33.4sec at the night halt and will be hard-pushed to make up the deficit on the final day.

Al-Rawahi said: "We started not as we expected. We wanted to be closer to Nasser on the first loop. Unfortunately, we lost a lot on the second stage. Then he had a fault with his car and we managed to take the lead. It's a good lead for tomorrow. We will go in now with a different strategy to try and keep that lead. Nothing is impossible. These stages are some of my favourite and tomorrow's stages are quite familiar as well. Let's see how it goes..."

Al-Attiyah added: "Day one, we started three stages very smooth and we are leading and then we had an issue with a driveshaft for three stages. We have been quiet to manage to finish all the stages. I am happy to start again tomorrow. It will be another target and we try to push. The race will be interesting. We need to be flat out. It is always nice to win Jordan!"

Kuwait's Meshari al-Thefiri teamed up with Qatar's Nasser al-Kuwari and was embroiled in an enthralling duel with the Lebanese crew of Roger Feghali and Joseph Matar for the first four



Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah and his co-driver Mathieu Baumel, who suffered a broken right-hand front driveshaft on the start line of the second pass, dropped 2min 39sec and finished the loop of three stages in two-wheel drive.

stages. Feghali led until stage three and then al-Thefiri hit the front. Despite trimming the lead in SS4, the Lebanese then suffered an alternator belt failure on his Mitsubishi in the fifth speed test and al-Thefiri was able to coast through to finish the day in third overall and first in MERC2.

Al-Thefiri said: "I am happy for this

result. We work hard. We take more experience and the set-up for the car is ready before the rally. I will drive the same and hold position. I am comfortable now. This rally is very tough."

The leading Jordanian driver Shaker Jweihan and his Omani co-driver Taha al-Zadjali are fourth, 1min 54.1sec adrift of the defending MERC2 cham-

pion. Jweihan added: "It was a tough day. Jordan River was the stage of the day. I am driving on a normal gearbox. I was trying to be in the mix and trying to be up there if anything happened - and it happened with Roger. I know the stages tomorrow and they are tricky with a lot of crests. Hopefully, we will keep the pressure on."



Oman's Abdullah al-Rawahi and local co-driver Ata al-Hmoud in action at the Jordan Rally yesterday.

Sheikh Bader al-Fayez and Emad Juma are classified fifth in their Mitsubishi and Shadi Shaban and Samer Issa round off the top six.

Today, the leg two will be fought out over two loops of three special stages, starting with the 12.58km of Bahath from 10.24hrs. Runs through Suwayma (11.08km) and Ma'in (17.00km) follow from 10.57hrs and 11.54hrs before a lunchtime return to the Dead Sea service park for a regroup and service. The three specials will be repeated at 13.55hrs, 14.28hrs and 15.25hrs before the ceremonial finish in the spectacular location on the shores of the Dead Sea at the Dead Sea Marriott Resort and Spa.

POSITIONS AFTER SS7:

1. Abdullah al-Rawahi (OMN)/Ata al-Hmoud (JOR) Skoda Fabia Evo, 1hr 25min 49.2sec; 2. Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah (QAT)/Mathieu Baumel (AND)

Volkswagen Polo GTI R5, 1hr 28min 22.6sec; 3. Meshari al-Thefiri (KWT)/Nasser al-Kuwari (QAT) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X, 1hr 30min 15.6sec; 4. Shaker Jweihan (JOR)/Taha al-Zadjali (OMN) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X, 1hr 32min 09.7sec; 5. Sheikh Bader al-Fayez (JOR)/Emad Juma (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X, 1hr 36min 48.6sec ; 6. Shadi Shaban (JOR)/Samer Issa (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX, 1hr 37min 00.2sec; 7. Zakariya al-Aamri (OMN)/Mohamed al-Mazroui (OMN) Subaru Impreza, 1hr 38min 56.4sec; 8. Ahmad Khaled (LEB)/Joseph Kmeid (LEB) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX, 1hr 40min 00.6sec; 9. Mustafa al-Atari (JOR)/Zeid Abu Zaid (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X, 1hr 40min 42.8sec; 10. Ihab al-Shorafa (JOR)/Yousef Juma (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX, 1hr 54min 02.9sec; 11. Salem al-Dhafeeri (KWT)/Fares al-Thefiri (KWT) Subaru Impreza, 1hr 59min 05.1sec

FOOTBALL

Marquinhos extends Paris Saint-Germain contract to 2028

AFP
Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France

Paris Saint-Germain captain and Brazil defender Marquinhos has extended his contract until 2028, the club announced yesterday. "The 29-year-old Brazilian defender and the Red and Blue will continue their adventure together until June 30, 2028," Qatari-owned PSG said in a statement.

Marquinhos joined the club from Roma in 2013 when he was just 19. He has become an indispensable part of the PSG set-up and was a member of the side that reached the 2020 Champions League final. "I am very happy to announce this contract extension but also very proud," said Marquinhos. "This is a very special moment for me," he added, saying he was "convinced that we will continue to achieve great things together in the years to come".

With Lionel Messi on the point of leaving and speculation surrounding the futures of Neymar and Kylian Mbappe, the decision of Marquinhos to throw his weight behind PSG has been welcomed by the club. "This is already

very good news for the club, for me as coach and for the fans," said Christophe Galtier in a press conference. "It is an example. I am finishing his 10th season. He is one of the best central defenders in the world, he has been omnipresent for 10 years. It's a strong signal sent to everyone."

PSG were beaten by Bayern Munich in the last 16 of this year's competition but are on the verge of wrapping up their ninth Ligue 1 title in 11 years.

PSG BREATHING EASIER AFTER BACK-TO-BACK WINS SAYS GALTIER
PSG have slightly eased the pressure on their shoulders after recovering from a stumble in their Ligue 1 campaign and claiming successive wins as they bid to retain their title, coach Galtier said. PSG, who are six points clear of second-placed Lens with three games remaining this season, lost three out of four home games during a poor run in March and April including a 3-1 defeat by Lorient.

However, their bid to win a ninth French title in 11 years appears to be back on track after free-scoring displays against Ajaccio and Troyes in recent weeks. "I'm not sure how much

pressure there is on us, but I'm sure we'll be able to get the points we need," Galtier told reporters ahead of tomorrow's trip to 16th-placed Auxerre.

"The fact that we played a fairly successful match at Troyes and that we were able to win against Ajaccio last weekend, that takes the pressure off a little. But the players have been very serious in their work throughout the week."

Galtier also bemoaned his side's injury problems up front, highlighting PSG's inability to consistently play their strongest attacking lineup of Messi, Mbappe and Neymar. Messi and Mbappe have both missed league games due to minor injuries, while Neymar has been ruled out for the rest of the season after ankle surgery in March.

"Concerning Messi, Mbappe and Neymar, as soon as I took over it was an objective to be able to associate them together," Galtier said. "Unfortunately, with the World Cup, injuries and fatigue, we were not able to take advantage of them throughout the season. "Every time they were on the pitch, PSG were very good. We had a very interesting attacking game. But that's part of a season."



Marquinhos (left) poses with Paris Saint-Germain president Nasser al-Khelaifi and club jersey yesterday.

CYCLING

Rubio wins delayed Giro stage 13 as bad weather continues

Organisers forced to change the route due to adverse weather conditions

Reuters
Milan

Einer Rubio thwarted Thibaut Pinot and Jefferson Cepeda to win the shortened 74.6km-stage 13 of the Giro d'Italia yesterday after a bizarre delayed start, with organisers forced to change the route due to adverse weather conditions.

Colombian rider Rubio (Movistar) delivered a perfectly-timed sprint in the final kilometre to earn his first Grand Tour stage win in style, while Geraint Thomas retained the leader's maglia rosa jersey.

In a three-way duel on the slopes of Crans Montana, Pinot and Cepeda attacked in turns during a thrilling final ascent before Rubio dug deep and caught both of his fellow escapees with a late burst.

"It will take time for me to realise that I won a stage of the Giro d'Italia. I didn't believe I'd do it," said Rubio, who raised his arm above his head and pointed to the sky as he crossed the finish line.

"It's been difficult with the bad weather. But I had to keep going. I knew that Pinot was very strong, Cepeda as well. I had to finish with him and play it well tactically."

Rubio finished six seconds ahead of Pinot (Groupama-FDJ), with Cepeda (Education-EasyPost) another six seconds behind.

The race has been plagued by dreadful weather and organisers had already removed the climb up the Great St Bernard Pass from the 13th stage shortening the 207km route to 199km due to snow and the risk of avalanches.

Riders made their scheduled departure under heavy rain at Borgofranco d'Ivrea but quickly re-boarded their team buses, before organisers re-routed the start of the stage to Le Chable, at the bottom of the brutal Croix de Couer climb.



Movistar Team's Colombian rider Einer Rubio celebrates as he arrives to cross the finish line to win the 13th stage of the Giro d'Italia 2023 cycling race yesterday. (AFP)

"Given the adverse weather conditions, especially on the Italian side, the Commission decided to meet the athletes' requests by applying the Extreme Weather Protocol," organisers said.

Ineos Grenadiers rider Thomas finished ninth and two-second lead over Slovenian Primoz Roglic (Jumbo-Visma). Joao Almeida (UAE Team Emirates) re-

mained third overall, 22 seconds behind.

"Primoz is probably happy to leave me in the Maglia Rosa for a few more days," Thomas said. "I expect something more from him next week."

Stage six winner Mads Pedersen, who was second in the standings for the points jersey, dropped out of the race after falling ill overnight, becoming the latest rid-

er to abandon this year's Giro. "Mads had a troubled night with a cough. He woke up this morning with a sore throat and tracheitis and is not fit to race," his Trek-Segafredo team said earlier yesterday.

Today's stage 14 features a top-category climb near the start in Sierre but then is almost entirely flat on the rest of the 193-km ride to Cassano Magnago.

SPOTLIGHT

Kohli not interested in 'fancy shots' with WTC final looming



Royal Challengers Bangalore's Virat Kohli plays a shot during the IPL match against Sunrisers Hyderabad in Hyderabad on Thursday. (AFP)

Reuters
New Delhi

With the World Test Championship (WTC) final just weeks away, Virat Kohli says he has no intention of tinkering with his technique to add "fancy shots" to his arsenal for the Indian Premier League (IPL).

The India stalwart smashed 100 off 63 balls as the Royal Challengers Bangalore chased down their target to beat Sunrisers Hyderabad by eight wickets on Thursday.

The former India captain has piled up 538 runs from 13 matches to sit fourth in this season's leading scorers list but his strike rate of 135.85 is modest for a top-order batter.

Kohli has hit 15 sixes compared to 36 by his captain, and the season's top scorer, Faf du Plessis, and 30 by team mate Glenn Maxwell.

"I've never been a guy who tries so many fancy shots, because we have to play 12 months of the year," Kohli said after collecting the Player of the Match award. "For me, it's not (about)

playing fancy shots and throwing my wicket away.

"We've got Test cricket after the IPL, so I've got to stay true to my technique and find ways to win games for my team, something that I take a lot of pride in."

Kohli had guided India to the final of the inaugural WTC in 2021 where they lost to New Zealand. He has since been replaced by Rohit Sharma as skipper but his form will be crucial to India's hopes of beating Australia at the Oval to claim Test cricket's biggest prize.

Kohli's knock saw him equal Chris Gayle's record of six IPL centuries while Bangalore, fourth in the points table, inched closer to a playoff berth.

Kohli brushed off criticism of his strike rate and said his record speaks for itself.

"I don't really care about what anyone says on the outside, to be honest, because that's their opinion," Kohli said.

"When you're in that situation yourself, you know how to win games of cricket, and I've done that for a long period of time.

"It's not like when I play I don't win games for my team. It's playing the situation that I take pride in."

BADMINTON

China set to face Japan in Sudirman Cup semi-finals



China's Shi Yuqi hits a return against Indonesia's Anthony Sinisuka Ginting during their 2023 Sudirman Cup quarter-final. (AFP)

AFP
Suzhou, China

Defending champions China will face Japan in the semi-finals of badminton's Sudirman Cup after they continued an impressive run through the tournament with a comprehensive victory over Indonesia yesterday.

China, who are clear favourites to retain the trophy for a record 13th time, ran away with the match 3-0.

Zheng Siwei and Huang Ya-qiong got off to a shaky start in the mixed doubles before coming back to win 13-21, 23-21, 21-11.

Compatriots Shi Yuqi and Chen Yufei then sealed the deal with their singles matches, sending off Anthony Sinisuka Ginting and Gregoria Mariska Tunjung in two sets.

This year's edition of the biennial event, staged in the eastern Chinese city of Suzhou, carries extra weight because results count towards qualification for the 2024 Paris Olympics.

Japan's course to the semi-final has been more torturous than the hosts, with the team scraping past Thailand 3-2.

Women's world number one

Akane Yamaguchi lost to Thailand's Pornpawee Chochuwong 19-21, 21-17, 21-11 - another disappointing defeat after she was dispatched on Wednesday by South Korean An Se-young. But Japan managed to claw their way back, with captain Takuro Hoki claiming a tense fifth match.

It was a bad day for the sport's top players.

The men's world number one, Denmark's Viktor Axelsen, had to withdraw from his singles game against Malaysia's Lee Zii Jia after an injury to his left hamstring.

It was salt in the wound for the European champions, who were knocked out of the tournament 3-1.

Malaysia progress to face South Korea today, after the four-time champions defeated Taiwan 3-1 in their yesterday morning quarter-final.

South Korea's decisive blow was delivered by An in her singles battle with Tai Tzu-ying where she triumphed 21-13, 22-20.

The final of the hugely popular week-long tournament, the first major international sporting event held in China since Beijing ditched its tough zero-Covid policies in December, will take place Sunday.

CRICKET

Hetmyer and Jaiswal dump Curran's Punjab out of IPL play-off race

AFP
Dharamsala, India

Shimron Hetmyer and Yashasvi Jaiswal starred as Rajasthan Royals dumped Punjab Kings out of the IPL yesterday, capping a poor season for the league's most expensive ever player Sam Curran.

The nail-biting four-wicket win in Dharamsala gave Rajasthan hope of qualifying for the knockout phase of the competition although their fate depends on other matches this weekend.

Curran, who cost Punjab a hefty \$2.23mn, fell one run short of what would have been only his second 50 of the tournament as Punjab put on 187-5 with Navdeep Saini taking 3-40 for Rajasthan.

In reply for the Royals, Curran's England teammate Jos Buttler fell for his latest duck of his lacklustre season, caught leg-before to a vicious inswinger by Kagiso Rabada.

But Jaiswal, the IPL's second-highest run scorer this year behind Faf du Plessis, and who last week hit a 13-ball 50, continued in his stellar form with yet another half-century. Rajasthan captain Sanju Samson fell for two to Rahul Chahar but rock-solid Devdutt Padikkal made 51 before falling to a stunning catch on the circle by Harpreet Brar off Arshdeep Singh.

Hetmyer almost saw the Royals home in a tense final phase that saw the West Indian exchange sharp words with Curran when he was given out caught behind, only to be reprieved on review. Hetmyer departed for 46 off 28 but he and Riyan Parag (20) had done enough, with impact player Dhruv Jurel (10) finishing the job with a six off Rahul Chahar with two balls remaining.

BRIEF SCORES

Rajasthan Royals 189 for 6 (Padikkal 51, Jaiswal 50, Hetmyer 46, Rabada 2-40) **beat Punjab Kings 187 for 5** (Curran 49*, Jitesh 44, Saini 3-40) **by 4 wickets**



Rajasthan Royals' Shimron Hetmyer plays a shot during the IPL match against Punjab Kings at the Himachal Pradesh Cricket Association Stadium in Dharamsala yesterday. (AFP)

Ponting wants India, Australia to replicate 'Bazball' in the WTC final

New Delhi: England could not make the final of the World Test Championship (WTC) but their 'Bazball' approach is something batting great Ricky Ponting longs to see when India and Australia clash in the one-off contest at the Oval next month. England's chances of qualifying for the WTC final evaporated after debacles in Australia and West Indies last year with skipper Joe Root stepping down as part of their 'red-ball reset'.

Ben Stokes took over the test captaincy while former New Zealand captain Brendon 'Baz' McCullum was handed the coaching reins and England have since won 10 of the 12 tests under the dynamic duo.

They did so playing an ultra-aggressive brand of cricket that puts entertainment above outcome and threatens to redefine how test matches are played. "I think the cricket-loving world deserves to see an unbelievably good Test match with a result," Ponting said of his expectations for the WTC final beginning on June 7. "The really refreshing thing that I've seen in world Test cricket in the last two years has been the way that England played - this all-out, win-at-all-costs sort of approach." "I'm a cricket-lover, I'm a cricket-watcher, I'm a cricket commentator, so I want to see cricket played the best way it can be. I think what England have done, they played Test match cricket the best way it can be played." Ponting said the India-Australia rivalry had grown more intense since the late 1990s, especially after India found a steady supply of quality pace bowlers.

TENNIS

Ukraine's Kalinina outduels Russia's Kudermetova

Emotional match as the Ukrainian player reaches her second career final

AFP
Rome

Anhelina Kalinina of the Ukraine reached the second WTA final of her career with a 7-5, 5-7, 6-2 defeat of Russia's Veronika Kudermetova at the Italian Open yesterday.

The winner then gave a shout-out to her country, invaded by Russia last year, as she moved into the title match at the Foro Italico.

"It's absolutely important to try and win every match, (considering) what Ukraine is going through," she said. "I hope I can give a small light and maybe some positive emotions to my country."

The number 47 will play for the title against either Jelena Ostapenko or Elena Rybakina, the reigning Wimbledon champion.

Kalinina will be the lowest ranked finalist at the tournament since 1986 and will rise to her equal career-high ranking of 28th.

It took her nearly three hours to go through in a match played 72 hours after she won another marathon in the quarter-finals.

"I don't feel my legs, I've played so much tennis last couple of days - all three-setters," the winner said.

"I'm barely walking but I'm happy to be able to go through. I need to recover for the final, the tournament is still not over.

"It's an amazing feeling battling to go through. Competing at this level is new for me."

The Ukrainian dominated the third set after a back-and-forth battle in the earlier chapters on the clay.

Kalinina saved eight break points over two games in the first set before finally taking a 4-3 lead with a break to love.

Kudermetova stayed in touch, delivering two aces to trail 4-5, with Kalinina subsequently broken as she tried to serve out the set. But the Ukrainian came good on a second chance, winning it 7-5 after 66 minutes thanks to 18 unforced errors from her opponent. The second set began with a pair of love holds before Kudermetova handed over a break for 3-2 to Kalinina from a long forehand.

The Ukrainian who lost her only previous WTA final two years ago in Budapest



Ukraine's Anhelina Kalinina is interviewed after winning her semi-final against Russia's Veronika Kudermetova at the Rome Open yesterday. (Reuters)

was broken to love while serving for the match, with a recharged Kudermetova taking a 6-5 lead.

She quickly captured one more game after winning 16 straight points to throw the match into a deciding third set. Kudermetova saved three break points but fell short on a fourth to lose serve in the opening game of the third set as she went down to defeat.

Swiatek 'plays it safe' with Rome retirement ahead of French Open

Iga Swiatek said she was taking no chances with her fitness ahead of her French Open title defence later this month after the world number one retired from her

Italian Open quarter-final due to a thigh issue.

Top seed and two-time defending champion in Rome, Swiatek was tied 2-2 with Elena Rybakina in the deciding set on Wednesday when she decided she could not continue.

The Pole had attempted to carry on playing with her leg strapped up after a medical timeout but said she felt pain while stretching on court.

"For me, the most important thing is to kind of play it safe and not exploit my body so much in such a difficult conditions, after having to play few matches in night session and after midnight," Swiatek said in a statement.

"To be ready for Roland Garros I need to recover right now.

"I'm going to take a couple of days off. With my quarter-final loss, I have also time to then practice right before the tournament.

"I'm happy right now to have few days off because since Stuttgart I wasn't really able to recover with that tight schedule that we have on the WTA."

Swiatek won the Stuttgart Open in April when she beat world number two Aryna Sabalenka. The Belarusian got her revenge in the Madrid final earlier this month.

The French Open runs from May 28 to June 11.

SPOTLIGHT

Medvedev downs Hanfmann, to meet Tsitsipas in semis



Russia's Daniil Medvedev reacts during his quarter-final against Germany's Yannick Hanfmann. (Reuters)

Rome
Reuters

World number three Daniil Medvedev produced a dominant performance against German qualifier Yannick Hanfmann to reach his first Italian Open semi-final, cruising to a 6-2 6-2 victory on Thursday.

Medvedev, who has described himself as a "hard court specialist", had never won a match in Rome before this year's tournament but has produced some of his best tennis to reach the last four on clay for the first time since Monte Carlo in 2019.

"I am feeling great," Medvedev said. "I said before the tournament I was feeling really great in practice.

"It is always a danger to say this if you lose the first round and you think, 'Why did I say this? But I am proving it.'"

Medvedev soaked up Hanfmann's powerful hitting and controlled the baseline exchanges, dominating with his big first

serve to wrap up the win in an hour and 20 minutes.

"He was struggling more than me and I am happy with the win and being in the semis," Medvedev said of Hanfmann, who upset Monte Carlo champion Andrey Rublev and ninth seed Taylor Fritz to reach the last eight.

"I knew I had to put as many balls into the court as possible because he plays aggressively. Maybe he didn't play his best match but that is how it works... I am happy I could neutralise his attacking style."

Medvedev will meet world number five Stefanos Tsitsipas who triumphed over Borna Coric with a commanding 6-3, 6-4 win later in the evening.

"He's been playing well and I'm playing also," Tsitsipas said on court on the upcoming clash against Medvedev.

"I feel good on court, regardless if it's a night session or a day session and I really hope to bring the best out of me against him.

"I feel like he's playing better than the years before."



Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas celebrates winning a point against Croatia's Borna Coric in their quarter-final at the Rome Open. (AFP)

Juventus to stand new trial over alleged salary wrongdoing, undue links with other teams

Milan: Italy's football association (FIGC) said yesterday Juventus would have to stand a sport trial for alleged irregularities in the club's payments to players as well as undue relationships with player's agents and other clubs.

The new sports trial, which could cost further sporting penalties, including more points deductions, adds to a separate one the club are already facing, for which a new ruling is expected tomorrow.

As part of the ongoing case, centred on the club's transfer dealings, Juventus were given a 15 point penalty in January which was later scrapped by Italy's top sports body ordering football authorities to hold a new hearing. With three games left to play this season, Juve are second in Serie A with 69 points, behind champions Napoli. Any points deduction could push Juve, Italy's most successful club, out of the qualifying spots for lucrative European competitions.

On Thursday, Seville beat Juventus in the semi-finals of the Europa League. As part of the new sport trial ordered against Juve, which also involves former and current club's executives including former chairman Andrea Agnelli, FIGC prosecutors allege that they agreed to pay players back most of their Covid-19 related wage cuts without properly accounting for it.

Juventus, who earlier said they had "correctly applied the relevant international accounting standards", yesterday declined to make further comments.

Injury-cursed Jones to leave Man United after 12 years

Injury-plagued defender Phil Jones will leave Manchester United at the end of the season after 12 years with the Old Trafford club. United announced Jones' troubled time in Manchester will end when his contract expires in June. The 31-year-old, who joined from Blackburn in 2011, played 229 times, scoring six goals for United and helping them win one Premier League title, an FA Cup and the Europa League. Jones, who is yet to decide whether he will carry on playing, wrote on Twitter: "It's not a time to be sad. It's a time to look back, for me and my family, and be happy that I managed to live a dream at United. I can always say to my family and friends that not many people get to play for this club, to always be in its history and to be able to look back with such happy memories."

Jones has not played in over a year and managed only 13 appearances since the start of the 2019-20 season. "I wish I could have played more. I wish I could have given more to the many squads I played alongside," he said. "I will say, from the bottom of my heart, I did everything I could."

"I've said before that I found it hard to even speak to my teammates because I was hurt that I couldn't help them. Sometimes, in life, things happen that we don't like, but we have to learn to accept it and be at peace in our minds that we did everything we could to overcome the challenges."

GOLF

Scheffler, Hovland charge at PGA as DeChambeau tees off

AFP
Rochester, United States

Second-ranked Scottie Scheffler and Norway's Viktor Hovland made birdie-birdie starts to leap atop the leaderboard as Bryson DeChambeau teed off in yesterday's second round of the PGA Championship.

Scheffler, last year's Masters winner, dropped his approach inches from the hole at the first and sank a nine-foot birdie putt at the second to seize the lead at Oak Hill on five-under par after four holes.

Fellow American DeChambeau, the 2020 US Open champion who has made the break to the Saudi-backed LIV golf circuit, fired a four-under par 66 in Thursday's opening round to grab the 18-hole lead but was among the last to begin his second round on the formidable layout in windy and rainy conditions.

World number 11 Hovland, seeking his first major title, made birdie putts from just outside 10 feet at the first and just inside 20 feet at the second to match DeChambeau on four-under before falling back with a bogey at the third.

Canada's Corey Conners was also on three-under, one stroke ahead of 2011 PGA Championship winner Keegan Bradley with England's Justin Rose and Canada's Taylor Pendrith in the clubhouse on one-under 139 for 36 holes.

"Best putting day I've had in a long time," Pendrith said of shooting 69. "If I had an average or bad putting day, it could have been ugly. Definitely kept me in it."

Rose, the 2013 US Open champion, sank a 15-foot birdie putt at the 10th, sank a 26-footer for birdie at the 12th and



Scottie Scheffler of the US plays his shot from the fourth tee during the second round of the 2023 PGA Championship at Oak Hill Country Club in Rochester, New York, yesterday. (AFP)

made another from just outside 20 feet at 16 to launch his second round.

But the 2016 Rio Olympic champion stumbled with bogeys at 18, six and seven to shoot 70.

Rose, a winner in February at Pebble Beach for his first triumph since 2019, has 11 top-10 major finishes since capturing his only major title a decade ago at Merion.

"I think it went pretty well," Rose said. "Golf course was tough today. This is just

going to be four days of kind of getting the most out of each day."

World number one Jon Rahm, the reigning Masters champion from Spain who opened with a 76, made a six-foot birdie putt at the second to reach five-over, right on the projected cut line.

Reigning US Open champion Matthew Fitzpatrick of England, who also opened on 76, was just over the expected cut line.

Four-time major winner Rory McIlroy, chasing his first major victory since 2014,

shot a first-round 71 and began his second round with three pars.

Jordan Spieth, a three-time major winner trying to complete a career Grand Slam by winning this week, made a four-foot birdie putt at the second to stand on two-over for the tournament. The American is battling a left wrist injury.

Cameron Smith, the reigning British Open champion, fired a 72 Thursday and sank a 20-foot birdie putt at the second to stand one-over overall.

SPOTLIGHT

Premier League most important title for City: Guardiola

‘Premier League is the important competition because it’s over 10, 11 months’

Reuters
Manchester

Treble-chasing Manchester City can tick the first box by capturing their third consecutive Premier League title this weekend in what Pep Guardiola said was the most important and difficult of the three trophies to win. City can clinch the league without even kicking a ball if Arsenal lose at Nottingham Forest today and if not they can hoist the trophy by beating Chelsea tomorrow at the Etihad Stadium.

“The Premier League is the most important competition because it’s over 10, 11 months. We are lucky to be at home with our people to take it,” Guardiola said yesterday. “The last one is the most difficult, because there are a lot of emotions. We would not forgive ourselves if we became distracted.”

Guardiola likely will not watch Arsenal’s game. “I don’t think so,” he said. “We have a game the day after. In my mind, I would like to think we have to win that to be champions. Celebrating with our people in the stadium would be the best.”

It would be easy to be distracted after City destroyed European powerhouse Real Madrid 4-0 on Wednesday to win their Champions League semi-final 5-1 on aggregate. They have two more trophies to play for with the FA Cup final coming up versus Manchester United on June 3 and the Champions League final a week later in Istanbul. A triumph in the European showcase would be their first.

Asked if his team had calmed down since Wednesday, Guardiola said: “Calmed down? It’s non-stop, the most difficult thing (is coming). Tennis players say to serve to win Wimbledon is the most difficult one. On Sunday the game is in our hands.”

While City have won 11 consecutive Premier League games and are unbeaten at the Etihad Stadium in 19 straight stretching back to mid-November, Guardiola said the run of success comes from consistently rising to the occasion. He expects no different this weekend.

Guardiola was asked about a video that showed midfielder Kevin De Bruyne yelling “Shut up!” at him during Wednesday’s game. The manager walked back to City’s bench seemingly nonplussed after the exchange. “The action with Kevin I love it, we shout at each other. I like it. Sometimes it’s a little bit flat, I like this energy,” Guardiola said. “It’s not the first time, you don’t see, but he shouts at me in training. This is what we need. After that he becomes the best. (Ilkay Gun-



Pep Guardiola’s Manchester City can clinch the league without even kicking a ball if Arsenal lose at Nottingham Forest today and if not they can hoist the trophy by beating Chelsea tomorrow at the Etihad Stadium. (Reuters)

dogan) lost the ball, Kevin too, we didn’t need that in the game... It’s football, we can do it. These things must happen to be competitive.”

City will close the league season with matches at Brighton & Hove Albion on Wednesday and Brentford on May 28.

ARTETA HITS BACK AT CRITICISM OF ARSENAL’S TITLE COLLAPSE

Meanwhile, Mikel Arteta insists Arsenal deserve respect for their unexpected Premier League title challenge despite the collapse that allowed Manchester City to move into pole position. It is a bitter pill to swallow for Arteta after his team led the title race for much of the season. The Gunners have endured criticism of their failure to hold off City, with last weekend’s dismal 3-0 defeat against Brighton sparking questions about the character of Arteta’s squad.

But, in a thinly-veiled dig at their de-

tractors, Arsenal boss Arteta said his team had surpassed expectations by pushing treble-chasers City so hard.

“We have shown this season,” Arteta replied when asked if Arsenal can be title contenders again next season.

“We’re still there, with two games to go (City have three as they have a game in hand) we can still be champions against probably the best team in Premier League history. For 10 months we’re still there. There’s two games still to go and we’re not going to bottle that for sure.

“What happens next season will depend on what we do, how we evolve and how we start. That prediction is very difficult to do today.”

Arteta did concede improvements will need to be made to his young team before Arsenal can expect to hold their own in the Champions League next season. “At the level that we want? No. We didn’t have the capacity to do that as well with

the Europa League so it’s part of that evolution,” he said.

Meanwhile, Arteta said discussions over the future of Granit Xhaka will wait until the end of the season. Xhaka is approaching the final 12 months of his contract and has been linked with a move to Bayer Leverkusen. The Switzerland midfielder played for four years with Borussia Monchengladbach before he moved to Arsenal in 2016.

FIXTURES (1400 GMT UNLESS STATED)

Today: Tottenham v Brentford (1130). Bournemouth v Man Utd. Fulham v Crystal Palace. Liverpool v Aston Villa. Wolves v Everton. Nottm Forest v Arsenal (1630)
Tomorrow: West Ham v Leeds (1230). Brighton v Southampton (1300). Manchester City v Chelsea (1500)
Monday: Newcastle v Leicester (1900)

BUNDESLIGA

Dortmund’s Bellingham doubtful for Augsburg match, says Terzic

AFP
Munich, Germany

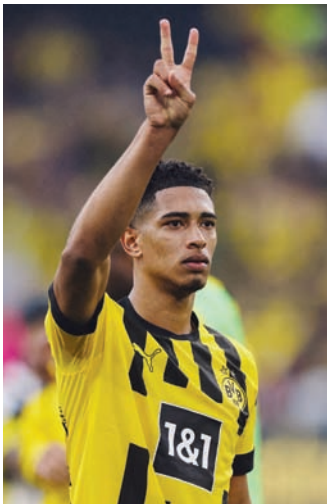
Jude Bellingham is injured and unlikely to figure for Borussia Dortmund this weekend in a blow to the club’s battle with Bayern Munich for the Bundesliga title. Dortmund, one point behind the perennial champions with two games to play, travel to Augsburg tomorrow, with Bayern hosting Freiburg 24 hours earlier.

The England international’s importance to Dortmund was evident in last Saturday’s win over Borussia Moenchengladbach, when the 19-year-old was asked to take a penalty with his side leading 1-0. Bellingham, who has been linked with a move to Real Madrid this summer, converted for his 14th goal of the season in all competitions, and Dortmund won 5-2 to stay on Bayern’s heels.

But he emerged from the game complaining of knee pain. Dortmund coach Edin Terzic conceded “there’s a big question mark, we’ve just got to wait and see.” “Since the game Jude hasn’t been able to train with us. It’s not going to be any good if I pick him and he says after four minutes that he’s not right,” added Terzic.

I’LL HAVE NO PROBLEM CELEBRATING TITLE ON THE COUCH SAYS BAYERN’S TUCHEL

Bayern Munich coach Thomas Tuchel said he will be happy to win the first Bundesliga title of his career without his team kicking a ball as long as the Bavarians bag their 11th straight league title. Bayern



take on third-placed RB Leipzig today and will go four points clear of second-placed Borussia Dortmund with a win. A Dortmund defeat at Augsburg tomorrow would seal the title for Bayern with a game to spare.

“I have no problem with that at all,” Tuchel, who has also coached Mainz 05 and Dortmund in the Bundesliga, told a press conference when asked if winning the title while sitting on a couch would take away some of the excitement. “As long as we win the title, I don’t care at all how it happens. As long as it happens,” he said.

Tuchel, who left Germany to coach Paris St Germain and Chelsea, took over at Bayern from Julian Nagelsmann at the end of March but his team then crashed out of the German Cup and Champions League in the last eight. He is, however, two wins away from guaranteeing his first German league crown, in what is the toughest domestic season for Bayern in years.

Tuchel won the domestic league in France and the Champions League with Chelsea but has won only a German Cup with his Bundesliga teams.

FIXTURES

(All times 1330 GMT unless stated) Today: Hoffenheim v Union Berlin, Werder Bremen v Cologne, Schalke v Eintracht Frankfurt, Hertha Berlin v Bochum, Bayern Munich v RB Leipzig (1630)
Tomorrow: Mainz v Stuttgart, Augsburg v Borussia Dortmund (1530), Bayer Leverkusen v Borussia Moenchengladbach (1730)

EUROPA LEAGUE

Sevilla beat Juventus to face Roma in final

AFP
Seville, Spain

Erik Lamela propelled Europa League specialists Sevilla into the final once again with a 2-1 victory over Juventus on Thursday, sealing a 3-2 aggregate triumph in a gripping clash. Lamela headed home in extra-time to complete an impressive comeback for the record six-time winners of the competition, who will face Jose Mourinho’s Roma in Budapest on May 31 after they edged past Bayer Leverkusen.

Dusan Vlahovic fired visitors Juventus ahead in the second half, two minutes after coming on as a substitute, but Suso smashed home from outside the area to take the game to extra-time. Lamela connected perfectly with Bryan Gil’s cross in the 95th minute to delight the Ramon Sanchez-Pizjuan, and Sevilla held on to reach the final for the first time since 2020. “A lot of things went through my head, good moments, bad moments. It was a unique moment,” Lamela said. “Now we are a step away, it’s a great opportunity. It’s a night I will remember forever, it’s something incredible to play here, in front of all these fans.”

Juventus failed to set up an all-Italian final against Roma, but Italy still has with one representative in each of the three European finals. Inter Milan reached the Champions League showdown against Manchester City by seeing off rivals AC Milan on Tuesday, while on Thursday Fiorentina beat Basel to reach the Conference League final where they will face West Ham.

Defeat is concerning for Juventus, who are second in Serie A but braced for a potential points deduction which could knock them out of the top four. Winning the Europa



Sevilla players celebrate after their win over Juventus in the Europa League semi-final second leg at the Ramon Sanchez Pizjuan in Seville, Spain. (Reuters)

League would have been an alternative route to Champions League qualification. Massimiliano Allegri’s side, without the injured Paul Pogba, were significantly better than in the first leg but fell short. “You have to put them in the back of the net when you have the chances,” Allegri said. “The boys played a good game, but it was a European semi-final, we had to give a little more.”

He said his young Juventus side paid the price for their lack of experience compared to Sevilla.

Sevilla, who dominated in Turin but were pegged back at the death in the 1-1 draw, shaded the first half but Juventus threatened on the counter. Juventus goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny produced a superb save to claw out a Lucas Ocampos header at his

near post. At the other end his counterpart Yassine Bounou produced an equally strong fingertip stop to tip a Moise Kean effort onto the post. Sevilla were fuming before half-time when Juan Cuadrado sliced down Oliver Torres and no penalty was awarded by VAR, despite replays indicating the foul began in the area.

Gleison Bremer’s header scraped the post as the Italians pushed harder to break the deadlock in the second half. Substitute Vlahovic made Juventus’ pressure count as he burst away from two Sevilla defenders and dinked the ball past Bounou.

However Sevilla substitute Suso levelled from outside the area, carving out some space before launching a rocket into the top corner.

EUROPA CONFERENCE LEAGUE

Dutch club AZ apologises for ‘black evening’ after attack on West Ham fans

Reuters
Alkmaar, Netherlands

Dutch club AZ Alkmaar apologised for a “pitch black evening” after sections of their own support attacked family and friends of the West Ham United squad celebrating their success in Thursday’s Europa Conference League semi-final. Home supporters broke through a fence and attacked the West Ham contingent seated in a reserved section behind their own team’s dugout at the AZ Stadium.

A brawl ensued in which West Ham players, including captain Declan Rice, attempted to intervene, with several running to the aid of relatives.

Police and stewards were quickly on the scene to prevent further confrontation and calm was restored after 10 minutes. “While everyone hoped for a historic European match, it turned into a pitch black evening due to the events occurring at the referee’s final whistle,” AZ said in a statement. “It turned into a night to reflect on with shame. Not because of the football game played, but because of the behaviour of some visitors.

“Unfortunately, we cannot use the word ‘supporters’ for these people. What happened is beyond all bounds. The club again sincerely apologises to West Ham United and the thousands of well minded AZ supporters who have also been inconvenienced by the misconduct.”

The club said that together with the police, Public Prosecution Service, and Alkmaar’s municipality they would review footage to evaluate “exactly what

happened, how it could have happened and what needs to be improved”.

AZ added that appropriate consequences would follow for those responsible. Dutch police yesterday said they had not yet made any arrests but will review images to see if there was any criminal liability that might warrant an arrest. There were also incidents outside the stadium, including around Alkmaar’s train station, police said.

The coach and players of AZ condemned sections of their support who participated in the attack. “It’s annoying, it doesn’t belong in our stadium. Preferably in no stadium,” said AZ coach Pascal Jansen, whose side lost 1-0 on Thursday as West Ham completed a 3-1 aggregate victory to reach the final against Fiorentina in Prague on June 7. “I feel shame. You have to control your emotions, even on a night with a defeat.”

West Ham manager David Moyes said the incident had overshadowed the Premier League club’s achievement. “There was nothing we could do, or that West Ham as a club could do. Like anyone, if you saw your family members in trouble then you’d go and help out and that was the situation,” Moyes said. “Unfortunately it’s taken up a lot of the news and time. But we’re not letting it take away from the fact we reached the final, which is a brilliant achievement.”

There was a similar incident in London last week when AZ supporters, including the family of coach Jansen, were accosted by West Ham fans after they celebrated the goal scored by the Dutch club in the first half of the first leg.



Supporters of AZ Alkmaar and West Ham United clash in the stands after the UEFA Conference League semi-final match. (AFP)