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Denz wins stage 2 as Thomas loses pink jersey



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Rune rallies past Ruud to reach Rome final



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GULF TIMES SPORT



FOOTBALL

Leipzig beat Bayern to hand Dortmund title edge

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SPOTLIGHT

Al-Rawahi wins Jordan Rally, al-Attiyah finishes second

By Sports Reporter
Dead Sea, Jordan

Abdullah al-Rawahi became the first Omani ever to win the Jordan Rally after a dramatic fightback by Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah was thwarted by punctures on the closing stages of a pulsating Jordan Rally yesterday.

Al-Rawahi and local co-driver Ata al-Hmoud had taken a lead of 2min 33.5sec into the final six special stages in the Dead Sea and Jordan Valley areas in their Skoda Fabia Evo. But al-Attiyah and Mathieu Baumel launched a full-scale fightback during the morning and reduced the deficit to 1min 20sec at the midday service point.

The pendulum appeared to have swung in the Qatari's favour when the Oman Rally Team crew clocked out of service three minutes late and incurred a 30-second time penalty, reducing the deficit to 50 seconds. But al-Attiyah was forced to change a punctured tyre on the first test after the restart and then punctured again with al-Rawahi reaching the finish 7min 04.2sec clear of the struggling defending champion.

With the pressure off on the final stage, it enabled al-Rawahi to secure his third career MERC win and al-Hmoud became the first Jordanian to win his home rally since Amjad Farrah and Khalid Zakaria prevailed on a dramatic final stage way back in 2004. Al-Rawahi's third success drew him level with the late Bjorn Waldegard, Jean-Pierre Nasrallah and Abdullah Bakhashab in the regional Hall of Fame.

Al-Rawahi said: "It's been a very



FROM LEFT: Jordan Rally runners-up Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah and Mathieu Baumel, winners Abdullah al-Rawahi and Ata al-Hmoud and third-placed Meshari al-Thefiri and Nasser al-Kuwari pose on the podium yesterday.

tough weekend for us. The stages were really nice and we enjoyed them. We managed to win this rally. The second day was difficult, actually starting first on the road. Nasser was trying to keep the pressure but we held on. Well done to my team. They have worked really hard this weekend. It's an amazing feeling. When I started rallying my first rally was here in Jordan, so it's a big thing for me. I have been gaining so

much experience against the champion. Every rally we learn a lot, especially from the pressure we were in this weekend. We won the first rally and now this one. We will keep pushing and see what happens."

Al-Attiyah added: "This is my favourite race but, this year, it was not easy. Day one and day two, we were struggling a little bit with the problems. Today we had two flat tyres in

the same stage and we tried to manage three stages with punctures and we had only one spare. We made it happen. It was important to finish and we finished second. Well done to Abdullah, he did an amazing race. Still, we are leading the championship and we look ahead to Lebanon. I am disappointed at one point but, on the other, I am happy to finish."

Meshari al-Thefiri teamed up with

Qatar's Nasser al-Kuwari and were the class of the MERC2 field for the third successive event this season. The Kuwaiti rounded off the podium places and finished 6min 49.2sec clear of fourth-placed Jordanian Shaker Jweihan and his Omani co-driver Taha al-Zadjali. Al-Thefiri said: "Very happy to win in MERC2. It was a tough day because I keep pole position and it was difficult to drive. Finally, we finished

without any issues and we look forward to the next round."

After Sheikh Bader al-Fayez and Emad Juma left the road on the second stage of the morning, that opened the door for Shadi Shaban and Samer Issa to finish fifth. The Lebanese pairing of Ahmad Khaled and Joseph Kneid rounded off the top six and finished fourth in MERC2. Up-and-coming Jordanian talent Mustafa al-Atari was seventh overall. Support for this year's event comes from Zain Jordan, Hala and Bliss FM.

- FINAL POSITIONS**
1. Abdullah al-Rawahi (OMN)/Ata al-Hmoud (JOR), Skoda Fabia Evo 2hr 24min 18.3sec;
 2. Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah (QAT)/Mathieu Baumel (AND), Volkswagen Polo GTI R5, 2hr 31min 22.5sec;
 3. Meshari al-Thefiri (KWT)/Nasser al-Kuwari (QAT) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X, 2hr 32min 55.5sec;
 4. Shaker Jweihan (JOR)/Taha al-Zadjali (OMN), Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X, 2hr 39min 44.7sec;
 5. Shadi Shaban (JOR)/Samer Issa (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX, 2hr 41min 46.1sec;
 6. Ahmad Khaled (LEB)/Joseph Kneid (LEB) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX, 2hr 48min 18.6sec;
 7. Mustafa al-Atari (JOR)/Zaid Abu Zaid (JOR), Mitsubishi Lancer Evo X, 2hr 52min 10.0sec;
 8. Ihab al-Shorafa (JOR)/Yousef Juma (JOR), Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX, 3hr 02min 36.6sec;
 9. Salem al-Dhafeeri (KWT)/Fares al-Thefiri (KWT) Subaru Impreza 3hr 18min 30.7sec;
 10. Fadi Dahshan (JOR)/Yazan Juma (JOR) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX 3hr 26min 28.8sec;
 11. Sami Fleifel (JOR)/Samer Sfeir (LEB) Mitsubishi Lancer Evo IX 3hr 34min 04.0sec

FOOTBALL

Arsenal defeat hands Man City Premier League title

MAN UNITED AND NEWCASTLE ON BRINK OF SEALING TOP FOUR PLACES AFTER LIVERPOOL DRAW

AFP
Nottingham, United Kingdom

Manchester City won the Premier League for the fifth time in six seasons after second-placed Arsenal lost 1-0 at Nottingham Forest yesterday. A second consecutive defeat for the Gunners left Mikel Arteta's men still four points adrift of City with one game left for them to play.

Taiwo Awoniyi's winning goal also had huge ramifications at the bottom of the table as Forest are now safe from relegation in their first season back in the top flight for 23 years. Arsenal topped the table for the majority of the season but have collapsed down the final straight, winning just two of their last eight games. "Congratulations to City for winning the championship. Obviously, it's a really sad day for us after everything we've done in the season but now we have to face the reality," said Arteta. "We should have been better as a team and in the last few weeks we have fallen short."

City's title triumph could be the start of a treble as Pep Guardiola's men face Manchester United in the FA Cup final and Inter Milan in the Champions League final next month. They also became just the fifth side to win three consecutive English top flight titles.

City's ascent to the dominant force of the English game since an Abu Dhabi-backed takeover transformed the club's fortunes in 2008 has been accelerated during Guardiola's reign. The former

Barcelona and Bayern Munich boss has now won 11 league titles in 14 seasons as a coach.

But City's stranglehold on the title threatens to turn a league that prides itself on its competitiveness into a one-horse race. Arsenal pushed the defending champions most of the way but crumbled in the decisive final months of the season to allow City to canter over the line with three games to spare.

The visitors rarely even looked like scoring as a raucous atmosphere at the City Ground roared Forest onto survival. Arteta's decision to name an experimental back four without any recognised full-backs backfired inside the first 20 minutes. Morgan Gibbs-White teed up Awoniyi to dink home his fifth goal in three games over Aaron Ramsdale. Forest were then happy to retreat and defend their lead, but Arsenal were a shadow of the vibrant side that shone in the early months of the season.

Arteta's squad is the second youngest in the Premier League and they have run out of steam just as City have hit top speed. The newly-crowned champions are unbeaten in 23 games in all competitions, including a 4-1 thrashing of Arsenal when the sides met in a top-of-the-table clash last month.

At the other end of the table, Forest move six points clear of the drop zone meaning two from Everton, Leeds or Leicester will join Southampton in the Championship next season.

Earlier, Manchester United and Newcastle are on the brink of qualifying for next season's Champions League after Liverpool's 1-1 draw against Aston Vil-



Arsenal's manager Mikel Arteta looks on during the Premier League match against Nottingham Forest yesterday. (AFP)

la, while Everton remain in relegation danger despite their dramatic 1-1 draw at Wolves yesterday.

United's 1-0 victory at Bournemouth, combined with Liverpool's failure to beat Villa, left Erik ten Hag's men and Newcastle within touching distance of ensuring Premier League top four finishes. Fourth-placed United and Newcastle, in third, are both three points clear of fifth-placed Liverpool, who have only one game left. Newcastle

can seal their spot with a draw or win against Leicester tomorrow or Chelsea on May 28.

United take their turn at securing the lucrative top four place against Chelsea on Thursday and Fulham next weekend. Liverpool's final game of the season is against relegated Southampton, but although they have a superior goal difference to United if they finish level on points, they are likely to have to settle for a place in the Europa League.

At the Vitality Stadium, United took the lead in the ninth minute when Casemiro spun to meet Christian Eriksen's cross with an acrobatic bicycle kick from close-range. United were unbeaten in their previous 134 league matches when leading at half-time and that remarkable sequence continued as they held firm after the interval.

At Anfield, Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp was watching from the stands as he served a touchline ban following his

recent rant about referee Paul Tierney. Villa wasted a 22nd-minute penalty when Ollie Watkins fired wide after the striker was brought down by Ibrahim Konate.

Despite Watkins' miss, Unai Emery's team went ahead in the 27th minute through Jacob Ramsey's volley from Douglas Luiz's cross. Roberto Firmino and James Milner, set to leave Liverpool at the end of the season, came on for their Anfield farewells in the closing stages. And it was Brazilian forward Firmino who rescued a point with his close-range finish in stoppage-time.

Yerry Mina's last-gasp equaliser boosted Everton's hopes of avoiding playing in the second tier for the first time since 1954. Sean Dyche's men fell behind after 34 minutes when Adama Traore's shot was pushed out to Hwang Hee-chan, who netted from close-range. Mina bundled in Everton's leveller nine minutes into stoppage-time to leave the fourth bottom Toffees two points above the relegation zone. Third bottom Leeds would go above Everton with a win at West Ham today, while second bottom Leicester would also leapfrog Dyche's team if they beat Newcastle tomorrow.

Tottenham's season to forget hit a new low with a 3-1 home defeat against Brentford. Ryan Mason's side took the lead through Harry Kane's 28th league goal this season, but a Bryan Mbeumo brace and Yoane Wissa's late strike left them floundering in eighth place.

In another match, Fulham and Crystal Palace shared a 2-2 draw at Craven Cottage

CYCLING

Denz wins second Giro stage, Thomas loses pink jersey

‘THE GOAL WAS TO GET INTO THE BREAKAWAY AND AIM FOR THE STAGE WIN’

AFP
Cassano Magnago, Italy

Bora Hansgrohe rider Nico Denz won his second stage in three days in the Giro d'Italia yesterday, edging a dramatic sprint in Cassano Magnago after a long breakaway in the rain.

In a photo finish, the German crossed the line barely half a wheel ahead of Canadian Derek Gee (Israel Premier Tech) in the 14th stage.

French rider Bruno Armirail, meanwhile, took the leader's pink jersey from Geraint Thomas who crossed the line in the company of his teammates, 21 minutes 16 seconds behind the stage winner.

All three riders were part of a breakaway of 27 that got away from the peloton almost from the beginning of the 194km stage at Sierre, before splitting into several small groups.

Alberto Bettiol (EF Education-EasyPost) was third while French national time-trial champion Armirail (Groupama-FDJ) rolled in 50 seconds after the winner to become the first Frenchman since Laurent Jalabert in 1999 to lead the Giro.

"That wasn't really the plan," said Armirail, 29, more normally a domestique for the likes of Thibaut Pinot.

"The goal was to get into the breakaway and aim for the stage win. I can't believe I'm taking the pink jersey."

Armirail holds a lead of just

under two minutes from Thomas as they head into Sunday's stage 15.

Denz admitted on Thursday that he had planned to win that day's stage but this second win leant itself more to opportunism as the breakaway built an impregnable lead over the peloton in difficult conditions.

"I had the opportunity to go for the break again today, which I used," he said.

"When Bettiol launched I jumped on his wheel and went through to the line. Again, crazy!"

"It was so tough today. Down from the pass I had three jackets on, I was so cold. It was really disgusting.

"In the end it's just a question of mindset. I knew I was going well and I wanted to give it a try. Super happy!"

RESULTS STAGE 14

- Nico Denz (GER) Bora-Hansgrohe 4:37:30
- Derek Gee (CAN) Israel-Premier Tech "
- Alberto Bettiol (ITA) EF Education-EasyPost "
- Laurenz Rex (BEL) Inter-marché-Circus-+1 Wanty
- David Ballerini (ITA) Soudal-Quick-Step "
- Toms Skujins (LAT) Trek-Segafredo +4
- Marius Mayrhofer (GER) Team DSM +10
- Stefano Oldani (ITA) Alpecin-Deceuninck +20
- Andrea Pasqualon (ITA) Bahrain Victorious +50
- Mirco Maestri (ITA) EOLO-Kometa Cycling Team "



Bora-Hansgrohe's German rider Nico Denz celebrates as he crosses the finish line to win the fourteenth stage of the Giro d'Italia 2023 yesterday. (AFP)

Sri Lanka cricket chiefs re-elected after term limits dropped

COLOMBO: Sri Lanka's sports minister suspended controversial regulations on term limits on administrators and allowed the cricket board to re-elect its office bearers yesterday, avoiding a possible international ban. Board officials said they and the minister reached a deal after reports Sri Lanka risked suspension by the International Cricket Council (ICC) over alleged political interference. "The minister agreed not to invoke regulations he gazetted in December," Sri Lanka Cricket Secretary Mohan de Silva told AFP, adding a court action against the politician had been withdrawn. Sri Lanka Cricket is the crisis-hit coun-

try's richest sporting body but has been embroiled in controversy since the South Asian nation won the World Cup in 1996. It has about \$40mn in reserves and wants to build that to \$100mn in two years. It has seen graft allegations against both players and administrators, and in 2018 the then sports minister Harin Fernando said the ICC ranked it among the most corrupt cricketing nations. With the withdrawal of the sports ministers' regulations, board president Shammi Silva was elected uncontested for a third two-year term. The ICC sent its deputy chairman Imran Khwaja to Colombo last week,

who met with both Sri Lanka Cricket and sports minister Roshan Ranasinghe, but the governing body has not disclosed the outcome of what it called his "fact-finding mission". Rugby's world governing body banned Sri Lanka on Wednesday following similar allegations of political interference by the minister.

Former Australian captain Booth dies
Former Australian Test captain Brian Booth has died aged 89. Cricket Australia said yesterday, praising him as an "immensely respected and admired" player. The middle-order batter played 29 Tests for

Australia between 1961 and 1966, including twice as captain during the 1965-66 Ashes series against England when regular skipper Bob Simpson was absent. He scored 1,773 runs, including five centuries, at an average of 42.21. A dual-sport athlete, Booth also played hockey and represented Australia at the 1956 Melbourne Olympic Games. "Brian was immensely respected and admired throughout the cricketing community and beyond," said CA chief Nick Hockley. "Less than 50 players have captained the Australian men's Test team and Brian's name is included on a list that features many of the game's greats"

CRICKET

England's Anderson not expecting to play all five Ashes Tests

Reuters
London

Veteran fast bowler James Anderson said he does not expect to play all five matches at next month's home Ashes series against Australia.

Anderson is England's leading bowler in Tests, with 685 wickets, and is crucial to their chances after fellow pacer Jofra Archer was ruled out of the Ashes with an elbow injury.

The 40-year-old suffered a groin injury playing for Lancashire last week but has said he expects to be fit for the five-match series, which spans just over six weeks and begins at Edgbaston from June 16.

"I think playing all five is a little bit optimistic," Anderson told British media.

"I think three, not just for myself - if you said to any of the bowlers three out of five, I think that's probably more realistic, more sensible. If it's four then great.

"The thing is, you've got to take it game by game. If we're bowling 250 overs in the field in five days then you're probably going to rest. There could be rain, we could bowl them out cheaply. You just don't know, you've got to play it by ear."

England were handed a 4-0 drubbing in Australia in the last Ashes series, but coach Brendon McCullum and captain Ben Stokes have led them to 10 wins in 12 Tests on the back of an aggressive style of play dubbed "Bazball".

Anderson hailed Stokes's leadership, adding: "I think he's been spot on so far. I can't fault anything really.

"I think everyone knew that he was a leader, the way he trains, whether it's the gym or whether it's catching or batting or bowling the way he goes about his business - he is the ultimate professional, a born leader.

"(But) for me, it's the finer details, not just on the field where his tactical nous has

been spot on, but also his emotional intelligence off the field and how he talks to everyone in the group."

BOLAND TURNED DOWN COUNTY OPPORTUNITY

Australian fast bowler Scott Boland said he turned down the opportunity to play county cricket in England so that he would be fresh heading into the World Test Championship (WTC) final and the Ashes.

Only the second indigenous Australian male to play a Test, Boland made his debut in December 2021 at the last Ashes, where he announced himself onto the scene with an outrageous spell in the second innings with figures of 6-7 in four overs. But at 34, Boland is no youngster and he said at this stage of his career he wanted to prioritise playing only for his country and Victoria.

"I did have the opportunity to play county cricket this year, but I prioritised being a bit fresher going into six tests in two months," Boland told cricket.com.au.

"I know my body, that if I'm at a stage where I'm getting tired, I want to keep my career going for as long as I can. I don't want to burn out."

Boland finished among the top-wicket takers against England in that series with 18 scalps in three tests - only behind Pat Cummins (21) and Mitchell Starc (19) - as Australia retained the Ashes.

Rotating the quicks was key to Australia's commanding 4-0 series victory and Boland said they would have to employ a similar strategy in England. "It will be tough for fast bowlers to play all six games," Boland said.

"I'm definitely preparing to play. It could be at the start, it could be half way through, I'm not sure. But I'm planning to play and excited to play whenever they choose me."

Australia face India at The Oval in the WTC final from June 7-11 before the first Ashes test From June 16 at Edgbaston.



England fast bowler James Anderson.

INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

LSG seal play-off spot with one-run win, CSK through

AFP
Kolkata

Lucknow Super Giants (LSG) survived an unbeaten blitz of 67 by Kolkata Knight Riders (KKR) by one run and qualify for the Indian Premier League (IPL) play-offs yesterday.

Nicholas Pooran's 58 guided Lucknow to 176-8, a total that was threatened by Rinku, a left-hand batsman, who smashed four sixes in his 33-ball knock but Kolkata ended on 175-7.

The result ensured a top-two finish for Chennai Super Kings (CSK), who hammered hosts Delhi Capitals by 77 runs in their march to the play-offs in the first match of the day.

Four-time champions Chennai, led by M S Dhoni, will take on holders Gujarat Titans, who top the 10-team table, in the first qualifier next week.

The winner will head straight to the final in Ahmedabad on May 28 and the loser playing the winner of the "eliminator" between teams three and four in the second qualifier.

Two-time champions Kolkata



Kolkata Knight Riders' Rinku Singh (centre) looks on as Lucknow Super Giants' Ravi Bishnoi (right) celebrates after winning the IPL match in Kolkata yesterday. (AFP)

bowed out of the race for the top four, leaving five-time champions Mumbai Indians, Royal Challengers Bangalore - both the teams play their respective matches today - and Rajasthan Royals fighting for the remaining spot.

Kolkata began strongly to put Lucknow in trouble at 73-5 before the left-handed Pooran hit back in his 30-ball blitz to guide his team to 176-8 at Eden Gardens.

In reply, England's Jason Roy, who hit 45, and Venkatesh Iyer

gave Kolkata a brisk start in their stand of 61 in 5.5 overs before the Lucknow spinners hit back.

Kolkata lost track after Roy's wicket but Rinku, who became an IPL sensation with his five sixes off five balls last month, made Kolkata dream again even

when they needed 40 off the last two overs.

"I had to take it as deep as possible. I was looking to capitalise. This was a small pitch. I pride myself to play in these situations (after he came out at 73 for 5). Ayush (Badoni) and I had had a partnership against Chennai as well. Our bowlers have done it in the last two games. We have a young bowling attack," player of the match Nicholas Pooran said.

In the opening match, New Zealand's Devon Conway (87) and Gaikwad (79) set up Chennai's win with an opening stand of 141 to steer the team to 223-3.

Skipper David Warner hit a valiant 86 but Chennai kept down Delhi, who are coached by Ricky Ponting, to 146-9 and finish the group stage with eight wins.

The season remains special for Dhoni, who is believed to be playing his last season and has attracted huge crowds wearing the teams' yellow as a tribute to the legendary cricketer.

Dhoni, 41, though has kept the fans guessing and still not clarified on his swansong.

The wicketkeeper-batsman and former India captain walked in to bat amid thunderous applause at Delhi's Feroz Shah Ko-



Chennai Super Kings' Devon Conway plays a shot during the IPL match against Delhi Capitals in New Delhi yesterday. (AFP)

tla ground and stood unbeaten with Ravindra Jadeja, who hit a seven-ball 20.

67*, Roy 45, Bishnoi 2-23, Yash Thakur 2-32) **by one run.**

BRIEF SCORES

Lucknow Super Giants 176 for 8 (Pooran 58, Shardul Thakur 2-27, Narine 2-28) **beat Kolkata Knight Riders 175 for 7** (Rinku

Chennai Super Kings 223 for 3 (Conway 87, Gaikwad 79) **beat Delhi Capitals 146 for 9** (Warner 86, Chahar 3-22, Pathirana 2-22, Theekshana 2-23) **by 77 runs.**



PGA CHAMPIONSHIP

Leaders launch third round at rain-soaked Oak Hill

AFP
Rochester, United States

Co-leaders Scottie Scheffler, Viktor Hovland and Corey Connors began yesterday's third round of the PGA Championship in soggy conditions as heavy rain showers drenched Oak Hill.

A day-long deluge made the thick rough even tougher to escape and reduced length for those fortunate enough to find the fairway.

Hot air blowers and squeegees were used to keep greens and fairways playable.

Second-ranked Scheffler, last year's Masters champion, 11th-ranked Hovland of Norway and Canada's Connors were all on five-under par 135 for 36 holes as they began a slog across the water-logged layout.

"It's doable. There are birdie holes out there," six-time major winner Phil Mickelson said after a five-over 75. "It's not impossible. It's just playing difficult. But if you play well, I think you can shoot under par."

Trailing hopefuls spent hours

getting soaked while trudging through a wet mess.

"It's just really difficult to keep everything dry," three-time major champion Jordan Spieth said. "It starts with a grip and if you get water on the ball or the driver face the ball can really go anywhere. You just have to be so accurate off the tee here and the rain makes it more difficult to be accurate."

World number one Jon Rahm, last month's Masters winner, fired a 72 despite six bogeys and a birdie in his first 10 holes, standing with Spieth on six-over 216.

Four-time major winner Rory McIlroy was three-foot birdie putt at the par-3 third and six-foot birdie putt at the par-3 fifth.

The world number three from Northern Ireland seeks his first major title since 2014.

Scheffler, last year's Masters winner, would overtake Rahm atop the world rankings with a victory. The American could become the first man to win the PGA and the Players Championship in the same year since Hal Sutton in 1983.

Hovland led after a round for a

third consecutive major and was in the top five after 36 holes for his third major in a row. His best major finish was fourth in last year's British Open.

Connors, ranked 29th, is trying to become his homeland's second men's major champion after Mike Weir's 2003 Masters triumph. Connors won last month's PGA Tour Texas Open and had his best major finish, a share of sixth, at last year's Masters.

They could take some comfort in knowing that all six prior major champions crowned at Oak Hill, including Jack Nicklaus at the 1980 PGA Championship, were in the top three after 36 holes.

Bryson DeChambeau and Brooks Koepka, two US stars who jumped from the PGA Tour to the Saudi-financed LIV Golf League, were loudly booed when they went off together at the first tee.

They are the only players to shoot 66, the low score of the week, and among only nine players under par for 36 holes, the fewest at any PGA since 2008.

Spieth, who hoped to com-

plete a career Grand Slam with a victory, fired a 71, his low round this week. The American has struggled with a left wrist injury.

"I just don't have the confidence in it not making it worse, so I just bail a little bit," Spieth said. "I probably cost myself a few shots on that."

Lee Hodges had a dramatic moment at 17 when on a 15-foot par putt his ball hung on the edge of the cup for more than 20 seconds before dropping into the hole, the American being discouraged from tapping in by playing partner Spieth.

After the round, Hodges was given a one-stroke penalty for waiting longer than the 10-second limit to play a ball in that situation.

Defending champion Justin Thomas fired a 75 to stand with Mickelson and Hodges on 220.

Jon Rahm waits to hit from the eighth fairway during the third round of the PGA Championship at the Oak Hill Country Club in Rochester, New York.

PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports



TENNIS

Rune rallies past Ruud to reach final

‘I’VE PLAYED SOME OF MY BEST TENNIS IN THE LAST TWO MATCHES’

AFP
Rome

Holger Rune fought from a set and a break down yesterday to book a place in the Italian Open final with a 6-7 (2/7), 6-4, 6-2 defeat of fourth seed Casper Ruud.

The 20-year-old Dane established Scandinavian superiority as he overhauled the Norwegian who played the Roland Garros final a year ago against Rafael Nadal and has two semi-finals in Rome. Rune will bid for the title today against the winner from Daniil Medvedev and Stefanos Tsitsipas, who play their semi-final later. Ruud lost for the first time in five meetings with his rival, with all of their matches being played on clay. Rune, who knocked out top seed Novak Djokovic in the quarter-finals, said that he relaxed when he thought all was lost on court.

"When I was down, I told myself I had nothing to lose, he would probably win," he said.

"I told myself to play freely, play aggressive as it would likely be my last set. That was the key to the comeback - I'm super-happy."

Rune said his game has lifted at the best moments this week in the capital. "I've played some of my best tennis in the last two matches. It's so difficult to play the top guys, I had to find my best tennis. I only found it at the end, that's how I was able to turn it around."

Ruud needed 69 minutes to



Denmark's Holger Rune celebrates after defeating Norway's Casper Ruud during the Italian Open semi-final yesterday. (AFP)

win a grinding first set with the Norwegian dominating the tie-breaker to take the early lead after failing to convert on three break points in the sixth game.

Rune, occasionally something of a loose cannon for his outbursts of temper, began to unravel a bit in the second set with Ruud holding his nerve as the deadlock continued. The young-

ster lost serve to trail 2-3 and suddenly called for the physio, who rubbed his right shoulder for the three-minute medical timeout. But that pause may have turned the match around, with Rune suddenly coming to life as he levelled at a set apiece and ran away with the third to advance in a light drizzle. Rune closed out victory in just under

two and three-quarter hours as he broke Ruud for a fourth time.

The Dane will be playing his eighth ATP final (4-3) and his third this season. He won in Paris Bercy last November and was runner-up to Andrey Rublev in Monte Carlo in April.

Earlier, Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina fought from 4-1 down in the second set to over-

haul Jelena Ostapenko to reach the final of the Italian Open.

The 6-2, 6-4 comeback from the Kazakh sent Rybakina into her fourth major final of the season after the Australian Open, Indian Wells and Miami.

She will bid for the trophy against Anhelina Kalinina of the Ukraine, who reached the second WTA final of her career.

BOXING

Haney puts world title on line against Lomachenko

AFP
Los Angeles

Unbeaten Devin Haney puts his undisputed lightweight world title on the line against former three-division Vasiliy Lomachenko of Ukraine yesterday in Las Vegas.

It's a bout the 24-year-old American champion believes is overdue, and now he says he has the tools to make even this tough test look easy.

"I feel like he should have fought me four years ago," Haney said this week. "But now the time has come."

"It's going to be worse for him than it would have been had we fought back then," he added. "On paper, this is my toughest test. But I look to make it an easy night. I look to make it as easy as possible and come out victorious."

Four years ago Lomachenko was a lightweight world champion and seen by many as the best pound-for-pound fighter in boxing.

Now the 29-0 Haney, with 15 knockouts, holds the World Boxing Association, World Boxing Council, International Boxing Federation and World Boxing Organization belts.

He became the first undisputed lightweight world champion since Pernell Whitaker in 1990 with a lop-

sided decision over George Kambosios in Melbourne in June 2022.

He battered Kambosios with his thunderous right hand in the rematch last October on the way to another unanimous decision victory.

Lomachenko, whose camp wanted him to fight Kambosios, instead spent time away from the ring after enrolling in a territorial defence unit for Ukraine after the invasion of the country by Russia.

"You can't think about your future when there's a war coming to your house," Lomachenko said. "You just think about life, and about your family, and about the people around you. You can't think about a professional sport."

Lomachenko returned to the ring in October with a unanimous decision win over Jaime Ortiz in New York.

The 35-year-old, who owns a record of 17-2 with 11 knockouts, knows that as an "old fighter" he's the underdog.

But he thinks experience could make a difference.

"He is a high-level boxer. He understands boxing. He knows what he needs to do," Lomachenko said of Haney.

"He can use his reach. He can use his feet. He can create distance. But I have a lot of experience in this sport. It will be very interesting for me."



Devin Haney (left) and Vasyl Lomachenko of Ukraine pose during a ceremonial weigh-in prior to their undisputed lightweight title bout at MGM Grand Garden Arena in Las Vegas. (AFP)

FOOTBALL

Napoli coach denies rumours of offers from other clubs

Reuters
Rome

Napoli coach Luciano Spalletti denied he has had offers from other clubs as rumours intensified in Italian media this week that he is set to leave the Serie A champions in the close season.

The 64-year-old led Napoli to their first Serie A title in over 30 years and reached the Champions League quarter-finals, but the speculation around the future of Italian coach came amid comments from President Aurelio De Laurentiis who said he didn't want to 'clip the wings' of his tactician.

"I don't know what he meant by that, you'd have to ask him. It is not linked to what we said to each other at dinner. As far as I am concerned, I don't need a pair of wings, but a pair of boots. I don't need wings to fly anywhere," Spalletti said in a press conference yesterday.

"There was no need to negotiate anything. I did not reject any salary increase... It is not true that I received offers from other clubs, that is false. It is false to say I am waiting for other clubs or that I turned down any proposals."

Spalletti added that the future was bright for Napoli and that the next goal would be European domination.

"Even the president spoke of a great future, I think he said he has Champions League ambitions and he brought them from zero to here," he added. "You all agree that we have to fight to win the Champions League."

Napoli will receive the Scudetto trophy on June 4 and have three games left to play. They take on third-placed Inter Milan on Sunday and Spalletti said his side were motivated to get one over on their opponents.

"They are Champions League finalists, deservedly so, I think we have beaten all teams in this league (season), except Inter at least once, so we have a strong motivation," he said.



SPOTLIGHT

Wakrah beat Gharafa to clinch Qatar Cup handball title



Al Wakrah players celebrate with the trophy after winning the Qatar Cup handball tournament at the Al Duhail Sports Hall yesterday.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Wakrah emerged as Qatar Cup handball champions after a comprehensive 26-21 win

over Al Gharafa in the final at the Al Duhail Sports Hall yesterday.

Wakrah had a slender 12-11 lead at the end of first half, but were explosive in the second half as they ran away with the title. Wakrah had lost in the finals of 2019-2020 and 2021-2022 edi-

tions. It was the third loss in the Qatar Cup finals for Al Gharafa after defeats in 2016-2017 and 2018-2019 seasons.

Qatar Olympic Committee Second Vice-President Dr Thani bin Abdulrahman al-Kuwari crowned the champions and

handed medals to both the teams.

QATAR DRAW IN GROUP A FOR OLYMPIC QUALIFIERS

Meanwhile, Qatar were drawn along with Saudi Arabia, South Korea, the UAE, India and China in Group A for the Asian Men's



Runners-up Al Gharafa pose with Qatar Olympic Committee Second Vice-President Dr Thani bin Abdulrahman al-Kuwari and other officials after the final.

Handball Qualification for 2024 Olympic Games.

Qatar will host the event from October 18-28. The draw ceremony took place at the Qatar Handball Association head-quarters yesterday. In Group B, Bahrain were placed with Iran, Kuwait, Uzbekistan, Japan and Kazakhstan. The winner of the

qualifiers will seal a spot for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, while the runner-up will go into a play-off.

The draw ceremony was attended by President of the Qatar Handball Federation Ahmed al-Shaabi, Vice-President of the International Handball Federation and Treasurer of the Asian

Handball Federation Bader Mohamed al-Theyab. This will be the third time in a row that Qatar will be hosting handball Olympic qualifiers. Mohamed Jaber al-Mulla, Secretary-General of the Qatar Handball Association, thanked the Asian federation for its confidence in granting Qatar rights to host the qualifiers.

BUNDESLIGA

Leipzig shock Bayern to hand Dortmund title edge

Dortmund can go two points clear with one game remaining with a win today against Augsburg

AFP
Berlin

Borussia Dortmund are two wins away from their first title in a decade, after RB Leipzig came from behind to win 3-1 away at Bayern Munich yesterday. Bayern led 1-0 thanks to an early Serge Gnabry goal and looked in cruise control, but the visitors scored three second-half goals to turn the match, and the Bundesliga title race, on its head.

Dortmund can go two points clear with one matchday remaining with a win today against Augsburg. The win, Leipzig's first in Munich and only their second victory over the German champions, secured the visitors Champions League football next season.

Bayern came into the match secure in the knowledge that two wins in their last two games would snare an 11th straight league title. Gnabry settled Bayern's nerves after 25 minutes, blasting a rising shot in off the left post, his fifth in his past four games. Bayern looked to take the speed out of the game and exert control, but Leipzig struck against the run of play on the counter after 65 minutes.

Konrad Laimer, widely tipped for a move to Bayern in the summer, took advantage of a superb team move to rocket the ball home. A shellshocked Bayern sought to fight back but soon found themselves behind, after Benjamin Pavard brought down Christopher Nkunku in the box. The France forward smashed the ball home from the spot, giving home 'keeper Yann Sommer no chance. Leipzig won another penalty with four minutes remaining after a handball, with Dominik Szoboszlai



RB Leipzig's Dominik Szoboszlai (second left) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Bayern Munich in the Bundesliga at the Allianz Arena in Munich yesterday. (Reuters)

slamming home.

Earlier yesterday, an injury time goal from Bochum's Keven Schlotterbeck sent Hertha Berlin back to the second division, with a 1-1 draw in the German capital. Dead last coming into the weekend, Hertha appeared poised to delay relegation for at least another

week when Lucas Tousart headed in a second-half goal at Berlin's Olympic stadium.

But Schlotterbeck's header in the fourth minute of injury time secured Bochum a draw and sent Hertha back to the second division after a decade in the Bundesliga. "We don't have to be

ashamed of our performance today, we didn't get relegated because of today," Hertha manager Pal Dardai said after the match.

Berlin-born midfielder Kevin-Prince Boateng, who started his career at Hertha, then moved to Tottenham, AC Milan and Barcelona before returning, said

with tears in his eyes: "You can't blame the team, relegation wasn't about today. I just love the club. It's just bitter."

Bochum's point meant they climbed one place clear of the relegation zone with one week remaining. Elsewhere, Schalke striker Sebastian Polter scored late at home against Eintracht Frankfurt to give his side a 2-2 draw, claiming a crucial point against the drop. Schalke, promoted at the start of the season, took the lead in the first minute as captain Simon Terodde headed in a free kick.

Daichi Kamada equalised 20 minutes later for the visitors and Tuta gave Frankfurt the lead 15 minutes into the second half, before Polter scored just his second of the season with five minutes remaining. Union Berlin wasted a chance to close in on a first-ever Champions League appearance, losing 4-2 at Hoffenheim. Union fell behind 2-0 following errors from Portuguese centre-back Diogo Leite.

Leite headed a ball goalwards into the path of Hoffenheim's Ihlas Bebou, who scored the opener, and then gave away a penalty which was converted by Andrej Kramaric.

Dutch defender Danilho Doekhi pulled a goal back for the visitors in first-half injury time, heading in a cross from captain Christopher Trimmel.

With Union pushing for an equaliser, Kramaric scored with one minute remaining to secure a 3-1 lead. Both sides scored a goal in injury time as Hoffenheim climbed four clear of the relegation spots. Werder Bremen ensured another year in the top division with a 1-1 draw at home against Cologne. A first-half goal by Steffen Tigges gave Cologne the lead but Romano Schmid scored late in the second half to snare a point for the home side.

Mason denies Kane was saying farewell to Spurs

London: Interim coach Ryan Mason insisted Harry Kane was not saying farewell to Tottenham after the England captain waved to fans following yesterday's 3-1 defeat against Brentford. Kane's brilliant free-kick put Tottenham ahead after eight minutes in north London as the striker reached 30 goals in all competitions this term. But Brentford hit back to win as Bryan Mbeumo's double and Yoane Wissa's late goal left frustrated Tottenham fans chanting for chairman Daniel Levy to be axed. Following Tottenham's final home game of a dismal campaign, the players did a lap of honour in front of a largely empty stadium.

Kane waved to the fans who had stayed in what was interpreted as a goodbye amid growing uncertainty over his future. After he failed to engineer a move to Manchester City in 2021, Kane, who has one year left on his contract, has been linked with Bayern Munich, Paris Saint-Germain and Manchester United.

But interim boss Mason said: "He waves at the crowd every season. I remember sitting here two years ago and you guys were convinced he was leaving, saying the same thing. It's the last home game of the season so he wants to show his appreciation to the support he's received and we've all received this season."

Successive defeats have damaged Tottenham's hopes of securing European football next season. Failing to make it into Europe would be a fitting conclusion to a troubled campaign that featured Antonio Conte's departure after he labelled the players selfish and criticised the culture of a club that last won silverware in 2008. Mason, hired after Conte's replacement Cristian Stellini was sacked, admitted it hurt to see so many fans depart before the lap of honour.

LA LIGA



Villarreal's Gerard Moreno celebrates after scoring against Girona. (AFP)

AFP
Girona, Spain

Gerard Moreno grabbed a last-minute winner to earn Villarreal a vital 2-1 win at Girona in La Liga and boost their hopes of qualifying for the Champions League. The Yellow Submarine, fifth, moved two points behind Real Sociedad, fourth, who were facing newly-crowned champions Barcelona late last night.

Jeremy Pino opened the scoring for the visitors after being teed up by Nicolas Jackson at Montilivi but David Lopez pegged Villarreal back. Jackson also set up Moreno's late strike with a sprint down the

left and an inviting cross for the forward to gleefully slam home. The 31-year-old Spain international, brought on as a substitute, has struggled for form and fitness after injury. "We want (Real Sociedad) to lose, I hope they lose, it's what we want, so we'll watch the game," said Jackson.

I'M STAYING AT REAL UNTIL 2024: ANCELOTTI DISMISSES BRAZIL INTEREST

Carlo Ancelotti ended any doubt about his immediate future yesterday by saying he will honour the last year of his contract with Real Madrid amid interest from Brazil. Brazilian FA (CBF) president Ednaldo Rodrigues said in March that Ancelotti would be an obvious choice to fill the va-

cant national managerial position if he was available at the end of the European season. After Real Madrid's humiliating 4-0 defeat by Manchester City in their Champions League semi-final on Wednesday, speculation grew that his job was under threat with Real also failing to win the La Liga title as bitter rivals Barcelona clinched it with four games to spare. "Everyone knows really well what my situation is: I have contract until the end of the 2024 season and I want to stay," Ancelotti told a news conference, clearly annoyed when asked about the Brazil interest yet again. When a reporter asked if the club had assured him that he was staying, Ancelotti replied with an emphatic: "Yes!"

Real, however, have not made an official

statement about Ancelotti's future. President Florentino Perez gave a vague answer when asked about Ancelotti following Real's 2-1 victory in the Copa del Rey final. Italian Ancelotti has experienced Perez's short temper when he was sacked in 2015, one year after guiding Real to their long-awaited 10th European Cup title.

"It could have been a better season, but it was a good one," Ancelotti said when asked how he would assess the 2022-23 campaign. "Of course, we are not satisfied with La Liga, but we fought to the end in the other competitions... and won three of them."

Ancelotti was referring to the Spanish Cup, FIFA club World Cup and the European Super Cup victories.

Moreno snatches Villarreal important win at Girona