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GULF TIMES SPORT




CRICKET

Dhoni's Chennai beat Gujarat to reach IPL final for 10th time

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Arabi to face Ahli, Wakrah meet Rayyan in Amir Cup handball semis



Al Arabi edged past Al Duhail 32-30 to enter the semi-finals of the Amir Cup handball tournament yesterday. In the last four tomorrow, Arabi will take on Al Ahli, who earlier beat Al Sadd 31-30 in extra time after the match had ended in a draw at regulation time. In the other semi-final, Al Wakrah will take on Al Rayyan. Wakrah outplayed Al Khor 31-17, while Rayyan defeated Al Gharrafa 29-28 in the penalty shootout, after the teams were tied 25-25 at full time.

ATHLETICS

Barshim joins Crouser and Sawyers at London Diamond League

‘I’VE ACHIEVED A LOT, BUT I’M STILL CHASING AND AIMING FOR MORE’

Olympic champions Mutaz Essa Barshim, Ryan Crouser and local star Jazmin Sawyers will all be in action when the Diamond League returns to London with a star-studded array of field events on July 23.

Three-time Diamond League champion Barshim is out to regain the Diamond Trophy this season. After a disappointing start at the season opener in Doha on May 5, he will be hoping to channel the form which saw him crowned world champion in London six years ago.

“To open my Diamond League season in Doha was special as there is no support quite like the support you get at home, but returning to London, where I won my first World Championships title, is always close to my heart,” said the 31-year-old.

“I know I’ve achieved a lot, but I’m still chasing and aiming for more. I have set my own goals and targets for 2023 and the World Championships and the Asian Games are at the top of that list. Competing in London is the perfect preparation for Budapest where I’m aiming to win my fourth global title.”

In addition to his London 2012 and London 2017 medal-winning exploits, Barshim has delivered a series of impressive competition performances in the UK. Highlights include his silver at the World Indoor Championships in Birmingham (2018) and clearing 2.40m – one of his all-time top ten jumps – for victory in the 2017 Diamond League meeting at Birmingham’s Alexander Stadium.

Another former Diamond League and current Olympic champion in action in London will be US shot put world record holder Ryan Crouser. The American won his first ever Diamond Trophy in 2021, before losing his throne to compatriot Joe Kovacs last season.

Crouser said, “I am really looking forward to competing in the London Stadium once again. It has been a few years



Qatar’s Mutaz Barshim finished a disappointing third at the season opener in Doha.

since I have thrown there, so it will be great to have this competition just a few weeks before the World Athletics Championships.

“The Diamond League events always bring a strong competition, so I look forward to being part of a great show with my fellow shot putters. I look forward to seeing all the UK fans in July.”

Sawyers won the first continental title of her career in Istanbul earlier this year, setting a new British record in the process. She will return to a hero’s welcome at

the London Stadium, where she hopes to pick up crucial points on the road to the Diamond League Final in September.

Sawyers said, “After the highs of the indoor season, I am really looking forward to competing outdoors, and to be back in the London Stadium for this event will be amazing. I cannot wait to compete in front of the huge home crowd again.

“I have been fortunate enough to compete in front of the UK crowd several times during my career, so I know the boost it gives all the athletes, particularly

the British athletes. So, I look forward to seeing everyone there this summer to cheer me on at the long jump pit down the backstraight.”

The Diamond League London is the tenth leg of athletics’ premier one-day meeting series. The Diamond League comprises 14 of the most prestigious events in global track and field. Athletes compete for points at the 13 series meetings in a bid to qualify for the two-day Diamond League Final in Eugene on 16th-17th September.

FOOTBALL

Asian federation foresees Saudi Arabia bid for 2030 or 2034 World Cup

AFP
Beirut

Asian Football Confederation (AFC) president, **Sheikh Salman bin Ebrahim al-Khalifah**, said the body wanted to host another World Cup, in 2030 or 2034, and that “Saudi Arabia is coming in force”.

Asia has staged the World Cup twice: in South Korea and Japan in 2002 and in 2022 in Qatar. “I think Saudi Arabia is a country capable of organising a similar tournament,” Sheikh Salman, who is from Bahrain, told journalists in Beirut on Monday during a visit to Syria and Lebanon.

“But we have to choose the right time: 2030 or 2034? If our chance of hosting the tournament is better in 2034, we are looking into that, and if our conditions in 2030 are better, why not?”

In 2026, when the World Cup increases to 48 teams, it will split three ways for the first time with United States, Canada and Mexico as hosts. There are two proposed multi-nation bids for 2030, one from Spain, Portugal and Morocco, and one by Argentina, Chile, Uruguay and Paraguay, which would return the centenary World Cup to the site of the first final, in Montevideo.

Last September, a spokesman for the Egyptian Ministry of Youth and Sports, Mohamed Fawzi, said his country was studying a joint bid with Saudi Arabia and Greece. The Saudi Minister of Sports, Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Faisal, said in February that his country had not submitted a candidacy file, but added that “anything is possible.”

Sheikh Salman said he wanted to make sure the AFC was united behind any bid and had support from elsewhere. “We are co-ordinating with the continental federations and FIFA on the basis that we will host the 2030 or 2034 World Cup in agreement



with everyone, so that when the file is presented, we must ensure that it succeeds by at least 90 percent,” he said. “We have 47 votes, while you need more than 110 votes to host the World Cup. We must have support from other continents. We are coordinating the appropriate time to host this championship.”

Emulating neighbours Qatar and United Emirates, Saudi Arabia has been investing heavily in sport as part of the “Vision 2030” strategy to diversify an oil-dependent economy. The kingdom will host the AFC’s Women’s Cup in 2026, its Asian Cup for the first time in 2027, the multisport Asian Games in 2034, and is scheduled to stage the 2029 Asian Winter Games on artificial snow in the planned giant futuristic city of Neom.

It already hosts a Formula One race in Jeddah, the annual Spanish Super Cup, golf tournaments and boxing title bouts. Cristiano Ronaldo joined Saudi club Al Nassr in January and the country’s sovereign wealth fund finances the breakaway LIV golf tour and owns Newcastle United in the English Premier League.

CRICKET

Chennai Super Kings reach IPL final for 10th time

Captain MS Dhoni leads team with shrewd tactics to help side reach title clash



Chennai Super Kings' Mahendra Singh Dhoni catches a helmet during the IPL first qualifier against defending champions Gujarat Titans in Chennai yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Chennai

Ravindra Jadeja starred with bat and ball as Chennai Super Kings beat holders Gujarat Titans by 15 runs yesterday to enter the IPL final that could be skipper MS Dhoni's farewell.

Four-time winners Chennai posted 172-7, a total their bowlers defended as they bowled out Gujarat for 157 in a play-off believed to be the last home match at the MA Chidambaram Stadium for the 41-year-old Dhoni.

The left-handed Jadeja returned figures of 2-18 with his spin bowling following his 22 runs, which boosted the Chennai total after Ruturaj Gaikwad's 60 on an awkward pitch for batting.

Fireworks lit up the sky as Chennai made their 10th Indian Premier League final.

Gujarat, led by Hardik Pandya, will have another shot at making the final, which is on Sunday in Ahmedabad, when they take on the winner of the second play-off between Lucknow Super Giants and five-time champions Mumbai Indians.

The spotlight remained on Dhoni, who is India's most decorated player, leading his country to two World Cup triumphs including the inaugural T20 crown in 2007 and has played mentor to younger heroes including Virat Kohli.

Believed to be playing his last IPL as player, Dhoni has attracted huge crowds across venues with fans turning up in



Chennai Super Kings' Ravindra Jadeja runs between the wickets during the IPL first qualifier against Gujarat Titans in Chennai yesterday. (AFP)

Chennai's yellow as a tribute to the crick-eting great. His home venue was nearly packed to capacity as fans cheered every move of their hero, who raised the noise when he came into bat. But the crowd soon fell silent as the superstar, who has been troubled with a knee injury in this season but has not explicitly said he is retiring, fell to Mohit Sharma for one off two balls.

Earlier Gaikwad registered his fourth half-century of the season as he capitalised on a reprieve on two when he was dismissed in the second over only for the delivery to called no-ball.

He hit back with a six and four and soon converted Chennai's modest start to a strong opening stand of 87 with New Zealand's Devon Conway, who made 40.

Chennai wobbled after Gaikwad's de-

CSK's title wins
2010 CSK beat Mumbai Indians
2011 CSK beat RCB
2018 CSK beat Sunrisers Hyderabad
2021 CSK beat Kolkata Knight Riders
Finals lost by CSK
2019 CSK lost to Mumbai Indians
2015 CSK lost to Mumbai Indians
2013 CSK lost to Mumbai Indians
2012 CSK lost to Kolkata Knight Riders
2008 CSK lost to Rajasthan Royals
** MS Dhoni has captained CSK in all previous finals.

parture but Jadeja's 16-ball cameo, which included two sixes, and one hit over the fence by England's Moeen Ali in the final over fired Chennai to what turned out to be a winning total. Shubman Gill attempted to drive Gujarat's chase with his 42 but the rest of the batting faltered.

Fast bowler Deepak Chahar, who took down Gill, and the Sri Lankan duo of Maheesh Theekshana and Matheesha Pathirana also took two wickets each.

Rashid Khan attempted to pull out a rabbit in his 16-ball 30 but fell in the 19th over and Pathirana sealed the deal on the final ball.

BRIEF SCORES
Chennai Super Kings 172 for 7 (Gaikwad 60, Conway 40, Shami 2-28) **beat Gujarat Titans 157 all out** (Gill 42, Jadeja 2-18) **by 15 runs**

BOXING

Heavyweight champ Tyson Fury 'looking at bout in Australia'

AFP
Melbourne

Britain's world heavy-weight champion **Tyson Fury** says he is seriously exploring the possibility of a fight in Australia.

The unbeaten Fury is currently in the country to support close friend and former WBO heavy-weight champion Joseph Parker in his bout against Faiga Opelu today.

"I'm looking to do a fight here so I will be going up and down the country looking at different stadiums over the next few days," Fury told *Fox Sports* television.

"I'm 100 percent serious."

The 34-year-old Fury, who boasts a record of 33 wins from 34 fights with one draw, is visiting Australia for the first time.

Fury hasn't fought since retaining his World Boxing Council title with a decisive stoppage over British rival Derek Chisora in December, with nothing else yet lined up.

There have been on-off talks with Oleksandr Usyk, who holds the WBA, IBF and WBO titles.

"I'm looking to fight some big fights this year and next year," Fury said in Melbourne, adding that negotiations with the Ukrainian Usyk are ongoing.

"We have an undisputed fight on the horizon for all the belts against Oleksandr Usyk," he told *Fox Sports*.

"That has been in talks now



for well over a year. There's also other big fights, so we're working on some possibilities at the moment."

One of them could be against China's Zhang Zhilei or fellow Briton Joe Joyce if Usyk fails to materialise.

Zhang upset Joyce with a sixth-round stoppage in London in April, taking his WBO interim title and with it the mandatory position to face the sanctioning body's full champion Usyk.

Joyce has activated his rematch clause and Fury is eyeing a possible clash against the winner.

"We were supposed to talk about fighting Zhang but Joe Joyce has activated his rematch clause so them two will now have a rematch and maybe the winner will get a chance to fight me later on," he said.

FOCUS

IBA suspends four federations for joining 'rogue' body

Reuters
London

The International Boxing Association (IBA) has suspended federations from New Zealand, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden for joining a 'rogue' rival organisation, it said on Monday.

A group including the United States and Britain announced the establishment of Swiss-registered World Boxing last month in a breakaway aimed at securing the troubled sport's Olympic future.

Its interim executive board features representatives from Germany, Britain, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Philippines, Sweden and the United States.

USA Boxing, representing the most successful country in the sport's Olympic history, has terminated its membership of the IBA. The IBA said New Zealand, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden were suspended "due to their participation in a rogue boxing organisation" but could be readmitted if the involvement ceased.

They must also publish a statement on their official websites "explicitly condemning any attempts to establish an alterna-

tive international boxing federation".

The IBA said the Czech federation was also suspended after organising a tournament where USA Boxing fighters were allowed to take part.

Liberia and Equatorial Guinea were suspended for failing to provide annual reports.

Federations from Iceland and Ireland provided annual reports following the commencement of proceedings against them.

The IBA said boxers and officials from suspended national federations could still take part, with national flags and anthems but without federation symbols, in IBA-sanctioned competitions if registered directly through the IBA.

There was no immediate comment from World Boxing on how many countries have joined its organisation.

Boxing's place in the Olympics after next year's Paris Games remains uncertain, with the sport not on the initial programme for Los Angeles 2028, pending reforms demanded by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

The IBA was suspended by the IOC in 2019 and stripped of involvement in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and the qualifiers for Paris 2024.

West Indies' Thomas suspended for alleged match-fixing

Dubai: West Indies batter Devon Thomas has been provisionally suspended for alleged match-fixing, the International Cricket Council (ICC) said yesterday, charging him with seven counts under its Anti-Corruption code.

The charges against Thomas, who has represented West Indies in all three formats, relate to his conduct while playing in the franchise-based Lanka Premier League, the Abu Dhabi T10 and the Caribbean Premier League (CPL).

"The charges involve contriving or being party to an agreement to fix or attempt to fix, contrive or influence improperly the result, progress, conduct or other aspects of matches in the Lanka Premier League 2021," ICC said.

"He has also been charged under several other codes, including failing to disclose full details of an approach in the

Lanka Premier League 2021, Abu Dhabi T10 2021 and CPL 2021."

Thomas, 33, has 14 days to respond to the charges. Thomas last played in December when he made his test debut against Australia at Adelaide. He has played 21 one-day internationals (ODI), 12 Twenty20s and one Test match, and was named in the squad for next month's ODI series against the United Arab Emirates.

"CWI (Cricket West Indies) is not directly involved in the process but remains firm in denouncing corruption in cricket, and fully supports the ICC ACU (Anti-Corruption Unit) in its efforts to uphold the integrity of the sport," the body said. "In collaboration with ICC and the West Indies Players' Association (WIPA), CWI remains committed to sensitising and educating our players and officials on anti-corruption in sports."

CYCLING

Almeida wins Giro stage 16, Thomas is back in pink

AFP
Bondone, Italy

neous rider Geraint Thomas took back the leader's jersey in the Giro d'Italia even though he lost out yesterday's stage 16 win, crossing the line just after UAE Team Emirates' Joao Almeida at the top of Monte Bondone.

The two riders were part of a group of six which included another overall race favourite Primoz Roglic, that hunted down the breakaway on the 203km mountainous stage before snapping off with five kilometres to go.

When Almeida took off, only Thomas, who turns 37 tomorrow, was able to stay with him, to the north of Lake Garda.

Welshman Thomas led as they went through the one-kilometre mark but the 24-year-old Portuguese Almeida kicked harder in the sprint to take the stage win.

It marks Almeida's first victory in a major Tour but denied Thomas, the 2018 Tour de France winner, his first stage win in the Giro. "I'm so happy, it's a dream come true. After four years I was always



UAE Team Emirates' Portuguese rider Joao Almeida (left) sprints to win ahead of INEOS Grenadiers' British rider Geraint Thomas during the 16th stage of the Giro d'Italia 2023 cycling race, covering a distance of 203 km between Sabbio Chiese and Monte Bondone, near Cavedine, yesterday. (AFP)

so close and yet so far at the same time," said Almeida who has previously been runner-up on four stages in the Giro. "Fi-

nally I've got it. I don't have the words to describe it. My team was amazing and they did a great job as always. "I knew I

was feeling good and I took the risk to go for it. If you don't try, you don't know. I tried and I achieved it - so I'm very happy for the team. "It's very special for me. I will always try to go for more and fight to the end to give everything I have."

Groupama-FDJ's Bruno Armirail, a surprise leader for two stages, battled hard to retain the pink jersey but cracked with 10 kilometres remaining and conceded more than four minutes.

Thomas, who has already worn the pink jersey for five stages before Armirail's intervention on Saturday, now holds an 18-second lead over Almeida in the overall standings with Jumbo-Visma's Roglic, who came in third on the stage, another nine seconds back.

"It would have been nice to win the stage but I had to keep riding, I didn't want to be caught playing cat and mouse with Joao, with Roglic behind," said Thomas. "We worked well together and then I led it out. Unfortunately he had the jump on me and won the sprint," added the Welshman who also suffered the setback of losing another teammate with the retirement of Pavel Sivakov.

FORMULA ONE

Hamilton moving to Ferrari? Perhaps, but don't bank on it

Toto Wolff said in March he wouldn't mind if the British F1 star 'looked elsewhere'

Reuters
London

Lewis Hamilton is out of contract with Mercedes at the end of the Formula One season and, inevitably, speculation that the seven-times world champion could move to Ferrari is again picking up speed.

The *Daily Mail* reported on Monday that Ferrari were set to offer the 38-year-old Briton a £40mn (\$50.48mn) deal to race in red as teammate to Charles Leclerc, with company president John Elkann making the approach.

Italy's *Gazzetta dello Sport* said the speculation "would apparently have a foundation of truth" but could not confirm the figures.

There was no comment from Mercedes or Ferrari but social media was buzzing.

Hamilton has been linked to the Italian team before - he has at least one of their luxury sports cars in his private car collection - and in 2019 twice met Elkann socially.

Speculation that he might replace now-retired four-times world champion Sebastian Vettel alongside Leclerc came to nothing then, although the German was replaced by Spaniard Carlos Sainz at the end of 2020.

The situation is different now, and there are also a number of reasons why certain parties might want to give the rumour mill an extra shove with this weekend's showcase Monaco Grand Prix looming.

Hamilton has not won a race since 2021, with George Russell a rising talent within the team, but such speculation emphasises his continuing superstar status and boosts his bargaining position - even if Mercedes need no reminding.

On Ferrari's side, Leclerc is a firm favourite but the Monegasque is out of contract at the end of 2024 and, with his



Lewis Hamilton (third right) is seen with his Mercedes boss Toto Wolff (third left) in this team photo released before the start of the 2023 Formula One season.

patience at times wearing thin, has also been linked to Mercedes.

Asked in April whether he had any conversations with the former champions, Leclerc replied: "Not yet, not for the moment."

A move for Hamilton would be a timely reminder from Ferrari that they are not sitting still, although Sainz would not be impressed.

Hamilton needs a winning car to challenge for a record eighth title and the coming races will be crucial in helping him assess whether Mercedes can pro-

vide it, or whether to have a last shot at somewhere else.

Red Bull have won everything so far in 2023 with double champion Max Verstappen and Sergio Perez, but they are not an option. The champions do, however, stand to gain from anything that distracts their rivals.

Just how seriously Hamilton might consider a move to Maranello remains to be seen, and the championship's second oldest driver has in recent months pointed firmly to racing on with Mercedes.

The manufacturer has supported him

throughout his career and allows considerable personal and commercial freedom that might not be available at Ferrari.

"I continue to feel very much at home in this family," Hamilton said at the Australian Grand Prix in April.

"I see myself with Mercedes until my last days, to be honest. I have amazing allies within the team, great relationships here."

While Mercedes boss Toto Wolff said in March he would have 'no grouch' if Hamilton felt a need to look elsewhere, he also doubted the driver would leave.

FOCUS

Risk of F1 race ban recedes as Gasly sheds penalty points

Reuters
Zurich

Alpine's **Pierre Gasly** moved away from the risk of a Formula One race ban on Monday after dropping two of the 10 penalty points accrued for a series of minor offences over the past year.

Twelve points in a 12-month period triggers an automatic suspension.

The first two of Gasly's points were collected when he was driving for AlphaTauri at the Spanish Grand Prix on May 22 last year and collided with Aston Martin's Lance Stroll.

The cancellation of last Sunday's Emilia Romagna Grand Prix at Imola removed the risk of Gasly incurring any more points before the ones from Spain expired.

The Frenchman, who reached his tally of 10 in Mexico last October, still has more penalty points than any other driver on the starting grid.

Formula One stewards have



adopted a new approach to penalty points this season, restricting them to examples of unsafe driving rather than breaches of the sporting rules such as exceeding track limits.

Four of Gasly's 10 to Monday were for collisions, two for speeding after red flags were waved, two for being too far behind the safety car and the others for repeatedly exceeding track limits and gaining an advantage by going off.

The showcase Monaco Grand Prix is next up this weekend.

MOTORSPORT

Wilson ruled out after Indianapolis crash

Reuters
Zurich

Britain's **Stefan Wilson**, younger brother of the late F1 and IndyCar driver Justin, will miss Sunday's Indianapolis 500 after injuring his back in a heavy crash on Monday.

Wilson went into the barrier after his car was hit from behind in afternoon practice at the Indianapolis Motor Speedway by compatriot Katherine Legge.

The 33-year-old's Dreyer & Reinbold team said he had suffered a fracture of the 12th thoracic vertebrae.

"Based on this type of injury, Wilson will not be allowed to



compete in this Sunday's 107th Indianapolis 500 Mile Race," the team added.

Wilson would have been starting his fifth Indianapolis 500. His brother made eight appearances but died after being hit on the helmet by debris in an IndyCar race at Pocono Raceway in 2015.

'HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS' OF FREE TICKETS PLEDGED FOR GAMES OPENING CEREMONY



French soldiers patrol near the Eiffel Tower as part of the "Sentinelle" security plan in Paris, France, yesterday. (Reuters)

Paris: Hundreds of thousands of people will be able to watch the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics for free, organisers stressed yesterday amid ongoing criticism about the price of tickets for next year's event.

The final figure for the number of people who will be granted tickets for the vast and ambitious outdoor opening ceremony along the river Seine is still under discussion.

"Hundreds of thousands," Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin told a press conference when asked about the number of people yesterday. "It will depend on the weather and the publicity you do for it."

Around 100,000 tickets will be sold for exclusive river-side positions, with organisers initially saying another

500,000 would be given an opportunity to watch from higher positions on roads above the Seine.

Athletes are set to sail down the river in a flotilla of 115 boats, the first time the opening ceremony for the Olympics has taken place outside of the athletics stadium.

"With its open and public nature, this ceremony will enable hundreds of thousands of people to see it for free," Paris mayor Anne Hidalgo told the same press conference with Darmanin and Games chief Tony Estanguet.

With demand far outstripping supply, Paris 2024 organisers have faced a stream of criticism online and even from some athletes over the price of tickets, which first went on sale in February and March.

A second release, which began on May 11, has led to outrage over prices as high as €2,700 (\$2900) for the paying positions for the opening ceremony.

"I'm not even sure that my family will be able to come to see me, it's so expensive," Belgium's Nafissatou Thiam, a two-time Olympic heptathlon champion, told Belgian media *DH* recently.

The ceremony also poses a huge security challenge for French organisers, with around 10,000 athletes taking part and 200 heads of state set to attend in addition to the huge crowds on the river banks.

Around 37,000 members of the security forces would be on duty for the opening ceremony, Darmanin said, with summer holidays cancelled for police over the period of the Games

which will run from July 26 to August 11. Around 2,000-3,000 private security agents are also being recruited for the opening ceremony.

Darmanin stressed drones were considered the biggest security threat, but he added air defence technology was available and would be trialled later this year during the Rugby World Cup in France.

"It's a new threat. It's not certain that anything will happen but it is certainly the most difficult to prepare for," he said.

"We know that the planet's biggest event will attract a lot of people who want to party, and then without a doubt some others who want to spoil the party," said Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo.

Recuperating Tiger Woods withdraws from US Open

Los Angeles: Tiger Woods ruled himself out yesterday of playing in the US Open as he recovers from right ankle surgery, organisers said.

The 47-year-old 15-time major champion - which includes three US Open crowns - underwent further surgery in April on his ankle, which was severely injured in a car accident in 2021. The US Open, the third of the four majors, runs June 15-18 at the Los Angeles Country Club's North Course.

Woods most recently competed at the Masters in April but he withdrew early in the third round and it was then decided that he would undergo another operation.

"Tiger Woods, who won this championship in 2000, 2002 and 2008, has withdrawn as an exempt player while still recovering from his recent surgery," read the statement from organisers.

Woods battled to make the cut at Augusta National but was visibly limping at times on the storied course where he has won five times.

Woods has competed in just five tournaments since his February 2021 car crash near Los Angeles, completing 72 holes only twice.

He played four rounds in his surprise return to golf at last year's Masters and at the Genesis Invitational PGA Tour event at Riviera Country Club in February. He reiterated at Riviera that his competitive schedule would be extremely limited, saying he hoped to play in all four majors and perhaps "a couple" of other events.

At Augusta he acknowledged that he wonders each time he plays the Masters if it will be his last time there.

"I don't know how many more I have in me," he said, adding that he felt "very lucky" to still have his right leg.

"It has been tough and will always be tough. The ability and endurance of what my leg will do going forward will never be the same. That's why I can't prepare and play as many tournaments as I like.

"But that's my future and I'm OK with that."

TENNIS

ITIA trying to delay doping hearing further: Halep

Reuters
Bucharest

Former world number one **Simona Halep** has accused the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) of seeking to further delay her independent tribunal doping hearing and said she is being denied her right to be heard.

The 31-year-old former Wimbledon and French Open champion has been provisionally suspended since October 2022 after testing positive for banned blood-booster roxadustat at the US Open last year.

Halep has strongly denied knowingly taking the banned substance and has said she has evidence to show that small amounts of the anaemia drug entered her system from a licensed supplement that was contaminated.

Halep has said she sent evidence about the contamination to the International Tennis Federation in December and hoped her case would be heard by an independent tribunal in Febru-



ary but that it was postponed and a new date in March was also put back.

Last week Halep was charged with a further and separate breach of the Tennis Anti-Doping Programme and asked again to be judged by an independent tribunal.

In a statement posted on Twitter, Halep said that while the ITIA was publicly stating it was committed to engaging her in an "empathetic, efficient and timely manner" they were at the same time requesting the tribunal delay her hearing for a third time.

"I am once again extremely shocked and disappointed by the ITIA's attitude," she added.

"The ITIA publicly states one thing while privately doing another, I have repeatedly asked for my hearing and the ITIA has repeatedly sought to delay it.

"When is it going to stop? I ask the question once again," said Halep.

"I am entitled to a quick hearing.

"Acting this way is contrary to my rights."

The independent ITIA, which was established by tennis' international governing bodies to oversee integrity matters such as doping and corruption, said in a statement to Reuters that it proposed both charges were heard together to avoid multiple hearings.

"To do this, we wish to provide all parties (including the independent tribunal) sufficient time to consider the significant materials associated with the latest charge," it added.

"Ultimately it is a decision for the independent tribunal. Ms Halep also has the opportunity to make her representations to them."

Last year Halep joined Serena and Venus Williams as the only Hologic WTA Tour players to earn more than \$40mn in career prize-money.

Last year in August, Halep won the National Bank Open and collected a winner's check worth \$439,700, enough to push her over the financial milestone.

Including the ATP, only seven players have earned more than Halep in their careers.

LA LIGA

Spain arrests seven after racist incidents targeting Vinicius

Forward was subjected to racist taunts during Sunday's 1-0 defeat at Valencia



Real Madrid's Brazilian forward Vinicius Junior (centre) confronts Valencia's officials as he leaves after being sent off the pitch by the referee during the La Liga match at the Mestalla stadium in Valencia on Sunday. (AFP)

AFP
Madrid

Spanish police arrested seven people yesterday over two incidents of racial abuse targeting Real Madrid's Brazilian star Vinicius Junior, including one this weekend that sparked an international outcry. Spain's football league, La Liga, has been engulfed in a racism scandal after the 22-year-old forward was subjected to racist taunts during Sunday's 1-0 defeat at Valencia and later sent off.

The player has been taunted by opposition fans since joining Real in 2018 but the latest incident has kicked up a storm over whether Spain is doing enough to stamp out racism in football.

Police yesterday arrested three youths in Valencia for "insults and gestures with racist overtones" towards the player that amounted to "an alleged hate crime" during Sunday's match.

After their statements were taken, they were later "released on condition they appear when summoned" by the public prosecutor's office or the courts, a police spokesman said. Sunday's game was held up for several minutes and with the referee saying that shouts of "monkey" had been directed at Vinicius.

In a statement, Valencia confirmed the arrests, reiterating its "strongest condemnation of racism and violence" and saying the club was acting against those involved "by banning them for life" from their stadium. In Madrid, police arrested another four men suspected of dangling an effigy wearing a Real Madrid shirt with Vinicius' number on it from a bridge earlier this year.

The dark-skinned inflatable dummy was hung by the neck from a bridge near Real Madrid's training ground several hours before a derby clash with Atletico Madrid on January 26. Above it was a 16-metre banner reading 'Madrid hates Real', police said. Investigators said three of the suspects were "active members of a group of radical fans" who had previously been identified as "high risk" by agents working to prevent football violence.

"Spain is fighting this behaviour, we condemn it and we are working to eradicate it," government spokeswoman Isabel Rodriguez said yesterday just hours after Brazil protested to the Spanish ambassador. The Brazilian government also said it

would complain to Madrid and La Liga in a statement saying it "deeply regrets that no effective measures have yet been taken to prevent the recurrence of these racist acts".

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said Sunday's incident showed FIFA's racism protocol in football was "obsolete". Referee Ricardo de Burgos Bengoetxea activated the racism protocol after Vinicius squared off with fans, singling out one supporter whom he accused of abuse. But Ancelotti said the protocol should have been "applied when the team bus reached the stadium, because the insults started there".

In mobile footage of the crowds awaiting the arrival of Real Madrid's bus broadcast by LaSexta television, multiple voices can be heard singing abusive chants and making offensive sounds. It was, said Ancelotti, "a moment to take

drastic measures" to tackle the issue.

Meanwhile, La Liga said it would request more sanctioning power to act against fans for violent, racist or xenophobic behaviour, saying it felt "powerless" when its incident reports failed to have an impact. "Giving La Liga greater sanctioning capacity would be an effective tool to boost the fight against racism in sport," it said in a statement, indicating it wanted the power to impose stadium closures, to ban fans for instigating offences or to impose fines.

Later on in Sunday's match, Vinicius was sent off for hitting Valencia's Hugo Duro after the referee watched VAR footage of a brawl between the two teams. But Spain's refereeing committee sidelined official Ignacio Iglesias Villanueva - who was in charge of VAR for the match - for his part in awarding Vinicius a red card.

During the match, the VAR footage he showed the referee did not include the part where Duro grabbed the Brazilian around the neck before the incident - also a red card offence.

Vinicius was dismissed and will likely miss the next two or three matches, meaning he may not play again for Madrid this season. Media reports said Iglesias Villanueva had been sacked but the football federation did not confirm that.

There is growing anger in Brazil over the incident, with the lights on the Christ the Redeemer statue in Rio de Janeiro turned off for an hour in solidarity with the player. "Black and imposing," Vinicius tweeted of the darkened statue, saying he was moved and thanking followers for their support. "But I want, above all, to inspire and bring more light to our fight," he added.

SPOTLIGHT

Guardiola demands Man City intensity despite Premier League triumph

AFP
London

Pep Guardiola has demanded his treble-chasing Manchester City players maintain their sky-high standards even though they have already wrapped up the Premier League title. Arsenal's defeat at Nottingham Forest on Saturday confirmed City's fifth title in six years - with three games to spare.

They celebrated their latest title triumph by beating Chelsea on Sunday and travel to Brighton today before concluding their league campaign at Brentford on Sunday. City have the FA Cup final to come against Manchester United at Wembley on June 3 before the Champions League final against Inter Milan in Istanbul a week later.

Guardiola said a drop-off in intensity levels was inevitable after City hunted down Arsenal in the title race, but he urged his players to keep focused ahead of their two finals. "They have to be ready to run a lot," said the City boss. "The best way to prepare for the final is be ready. The players set the standards, they have to maintain it. It's normal the energy would drop. Arsenal play for just the Premier League. We have FA Cup, Champions League, the energy we use is massive. It's normal you drop, you have to avoid it or don't drop much otherwise the two teams (Brighton and Brentford) can hurt us. Play our game, adapt the way we play, arrive to United and Inter in the best condition possible."

City's deep squad means Guardiola has plenty of options to test players. Against Chelsea he made nine changes, includ-

ing a first Premier League start for England midfielder Kalvin Phillips, who has had a difficult first season since arriving from Leeds. Guardiola insisted all his players still have a part to play. "Everyone can have an influence, sometimes five minutes is as important as the rest," he said. "Everyone has been important, everyone has been involved in the fact we are where we are."

Captain Ilkay Gundogan too asked City to stay focused. "We haven't lost any games for so many weeks and that's the standard that we have to set for ourselves," he said. "We do nothing different - we do the same things that we've done in the last few weeks and hopefully it can be a really special end to the season."

"I love the club and being part of this amazing team. Obviously, we want to finish the season with two more trophies. We have two more big finals, and the last two games of the Premier League season are going to be preparation for that. We don't want to drop anything. I would love to lift two more trophies."

Midfielder Kevin De Bruyne, who like Gundogan is now a five-time Premier League winner, is confident City can do something "special" at the end of their latest triumphant campaign. "We like to win, and we're never bored of it. We've won a lot in the past but we want to win again and again," De Bruyne said. "We keep on working. We enjoy the games against Brighton and Brentford and prepare for United and Inter and hopefully we can do something special. Everybody wants it. We know we need to win two games, but they are hard games, and we need to prepare ourselves the best as possible and hopefully we can win them."



Pep Guardiola has led Manchester City to five league titles in six years.

SERIE A

Juventus suffer humbling loss to Empoli after points deduction



Juventus' players look dejected after their loss to Empoli on Monday. (Reuters)

AFP
Rome

Juventus lost 4-1 at Empoli on Monday hours after their points reduction for illicit transfer activity was revised in a blow to their Champions League hopes.

The Turin giants are a point below sixth-placed Roma in the Europa League Conference qualification spot. Earlier, the Italian Football Federation's (FIGC) appeals court announced Juve's 10-point deduction.

The decision came following a revision of their initial 15-point penalty inflicted on the club over illicit transfer activity. "Finding yourself with 10 points

down a quarter of an hour from the match is at least a mitigating factor," Juve coach Massimiliano Allegri told reporters. "It's been a very tiring year," he added.

It caps a difficult few days for the two-time European champions as they were knocked out of the Europa League semi-finals after defeat at Sevilla on Thursday. With two league games of the season remaining, Juve, on 59 points, can still catch AC Milan, on 64, in the fourth and final Champions League berth, with the teams meeting in Turin on Sunday.

In Empoli, the hosts' 36-year-old striker Francesco Caputo scored either side of Sebastiano Luperto's 21st-minute strike for the side in 14th place. Italy's Fe-

derico Chiesa claimed an 85th-minute consolation for the visitors who play mid-table Udinese as well as Milan before the end of the campaign.

With three minutes of added time played the home side rubbed salt into Juve's wounds as 22-year-old Roberto Piccoli scored his second goal of the season. The decision by the FIGC and the result at Empoli also mean that Lazio, who replaced Juve in second place, have qualified for the Champions League group stage for the first time since 2020 and only the second time since 2007. Earlier on Monday, at the Stadio Olimpico, Nemanja Matic scored an 83rd-minute equaliser as Roma drew 2-2 with Salernitana.

FOCUS

Saka signs new long-term Arsenal deal

AFP
London

Bukayo Saka has signed a new long-term contract at Arsenal, saying the Premier League club is the "right place to make the next step" in his blossoming career. The England forward played a pivotal role in the club's unsuccessful title push this season, scoring 14 goals in all competitions and providing 11 assists.

Saka joined Arsenal as an eight year old and has featured in all of the team's Premier League matches over the past two seasons. The 21-year-old said he was at the ideal club to improve even further after emerging as one of Arsenal's key players. "I think I have everything I need to become the best player I can be, and that's why I'm happy to stay here and be here for the future, because I really believe that we can achieve big things," he said yesterday.

"For me, it's about achieving my personal ambitions - how much I push myself and demand from myself each game, week in,



week out. Then I have all the right people around me in terms of family, and when I come to the training ground, my teammates, the coaching staff."

London-born Saka, who made his Arsenal debut in 2018, said the club were moving in

the right direction despite missing out on the Premier League title this year. The Gunners topped the table for much of the season but stumbled in the home stretch as Manchester City collected their third consecutive title.

They are guaranteed to finish second and will play Champions League football next season for the first time since the 2016/17 season. "Time is on our side," said Saka. "You can look at our team and a lot of the players are young. We're hungry, and a lot of us haven't won trophies at Arsenal so we want to achieve big things."

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta welcomed the new deal, which will reportedly keep Saka with the Gunners until 2027. "Retaining our best young talents is key to our continued progress and Bukayo represents such an important part of our squad now and for the future," said the Spaniard.

"As well as being a fantastic talent, Bukayo is a special person, he's loved by us all and he is a credit to himself and his family for the hard work and commitment they have all made to get to this level today."

Thai FA bans players, officials over SEA Games final brawls

Bangkok: Thai football yesterday handed out lengthy bans to two players, two officials and a coach over the brawls that marred the men's final at the Southeast Asian Games.

Indonesia beat Thailand 5-2 in extra time in Phnom Penh last week but the match degenerated into violence as players and staff from both sides clashed on the touchline. Thailand had three players sent off.

The Thai FA apologised and promised a swift investigation, and yesterday announced a one-year ban from the national team for a goalkeeping coach and two team officials. "The fact-finding team agreed unanimously that as adults, the

goalkeeping coach and team officials should be mature enough to control the situation and set a good example for the players, who are aged under 22," the Thai FA said in a statement. "They should not lead or take part in the incident."

Men's football at the biennial SEA Games is played between under-23 sides. Goalkeeper Soponwit Rakyard - who was red-carded after he ran half the length of the pitch to deliver a diving punch - was banned from the national team for six months.

Substitute Teerapak Pruengna was also given a six-month ban. "While they took part in the incident, they were under match

pressure and have apologised, and they are young - these are reasons to decrease their penalty," the Thai FA said.

Indonesia went into the final hoping to restore pride following a deadly stadium disaster and the loss of hosting the Under-20 World Cup.

But the match will be remembered for the chaotic scenes that erupted in the 97th minute when Thailand - who had been 2-0 down - scored to make it 2-2 and force extra time. Thai officials celebrated by running over to the Indonesia bench, prompting the first melee, and there was more trouble when Indonesia retook the lead early in extra time.