

FOCUS

Australia backing Warner to have a big Ashes

Reuters
Melbourne

Australia are optimistic that **David Warner** will have a big Ashes and have backed him to deliver at the top of the order.

Selectors had equivocated on whether the lefthander was locked in for the Ashes series against England after a difficult tour of India but head coach Andrew McDonald offered a firm endorsement yesterday.

"We're optimistic with what Dave's got left, we've picked him in the squad and we feel he'll play a really big part in the Ashes and the World Test Championship," McDonald told Australian radio station SEN.

Warner was included in Australia's squad for the WTC final against India and the first two Ashes Tests but selectors kept their options open at the top of the batting by also calling up Marcus Harris and Matt Renshaw.

"He's an important part of that squad, and if he wasn't, we would've had a clear checkpoint after the WTC going into the Ashes," added McDonald.

"That's not the case, we've picked our squad for the first two Ashes tests as well, so he's clearly in our plans and ready to go."

Apart from a defiant 200 against South Africa in December, Warner has struggled for runs in recent Tests, making a total of 26 in three innings in the recent tour of India before re-turning home injured.

He had a dire series in England during the last Ashes tour, averaging 9.50, the worst ever by an opener to play 10 innings in a series, with paceman Stuart Broad taking his wicket seven times.

Broad and Warner have faced off against each in 26 Tests dating back to 2013, with the Englishman dismissing the Australian 14 times - more than any other bowler on the planet.

Warner had a better time of it in 2015, scoring 418 runs at an average of 46.44.



Warner finished the Indian Premier League for Delhi Capitals with 516 runs at an average of 36.86, down on his career average of 41.54.

"He's in a good head space," said McDonald. "I spoke to him as recently as yesterday, and he's ready to go. He's really excited to get back into the camp."

The Ashes series starts on June 16 at Edgbaston. Australia hold the urn after winning the 2021-22 series 4-0 at home.

Meanwhile Broad is gearing up to "go to battle" with long-time adversary Warner.

"I'm obviously looking forward to going to battle with Davey again. We've had incredible battles," said Broad.

"I'm really looking forward to stepping on the field against him. I must admit, at the end of Hobart last time, we shared a good chat and didn't know if we would play against each other again. Hopefully we can."

"He had the better of me for quite a long period, got a hundred at Brisbane and at the WACA (in

2013) and, ultimately, the biggest praise I can give Davey is the fact I had to completely study him and change my style of bowling because of the success he had against me."

"He's been a great competitor, someone I've really enjoyed playing against. He's fiery, ferociously competitive, and those sorts of characters bring out the best in me as well."

Broad readily admits the thrill of tussling with the best players the world has to offer is a habit he cannot kick, even after 161 caps and nearly 14 years at the highest level.

"What do they call it, the twilight? But I've still got a great hunger," he said.

"Ultimately I play sport and cricket for the competitive side. I love that competitive drive that bowling at a batter gives you. You beat the outside edge and there's no win in that, but then you nip one back and it goes through the gate."

"Those sort of feelings are so addictive to me," he added.

CRICKET

Mumbai eliminate Lucknow to keep IPL final hopes alive

Pacer Akash Madhwal takes 5 wickets for a stunning win after gritty knocks from Cameron Green, Suryakumar Yadav

Reuters
New Delhi

Akash Madhwal took five wickets for as many runs to lead Mumbai Indians to a crushing 81-run win in the second IPL playoff game and knock Lucknow Super Giants out of the tournament yesterday.

Cameron Green (41) and Suryakumar Yadav (33) put on 66 to help guide five-time champions Mumbai to 182-8 after they elected to bat first in the knock-out contest in Chennai.

Madhwal then returned figures of 5-5 in 3.3 overs to dismiss Lucknow for 101 as Mumbai booked a meeting with holders Gujarat Titans in the next play-off encounter tomorrow.

The winners of that clash will meet Chennai Super Kings in the final in Ahmedabad on Sunday.

Lucknow's innings imploded as they collapsed from 69-2 to be bowled out in 16.3 overs, losing three key wickets to run outs.

Green, who hit his maiden T20 century in Mumbai's previous win, looked in control during his 23-ball knock until his departure.

Naveen-ul-Haq, who took four wickets for Lucknow, sent back Suryakumar and Green, bowled by a slower off-cutter from the Afghanistan pace bowler, in the space of three deliveries to push Mumbai onto the back foot.

Tilak Varma hit back with a quickfire 26 and a 43-run stand with Tim David, who was out caught for 13 after unsuccessfully



Mumbai Indians' Akash Madhwal (centre) celebrates with teammates after the dismissal of Lucknow Super Giants' Nicholas Pooran (not pictured) during the IPL eliminator match at the M A Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai yesterday. (AFP)

reviewing a full toss for being over waist-height.

Naveen finished with 4-38 and Yash Thakur took three wickets but despite their efforts Mumbai's impact sub Nehal Wadhwa boosted the total with his 12-ball 23. Lucknow lost their openers early including impact player Kyle Mayers for 18 before Australia's Marcus Stoinis attempted

to pull the chase together in his 27-ball 40. But Madhwal struck with successive balls, including getting the dangerous Nicholas Pooran caught behind for a golden duck. Stoinis, who crossed 400 runs this season to be his team's standout performer, was run out after a mid-pitch collision with non-striker Deepak Hooda with both batsmen

watching the ball. The innings fell further apart with two more run outs sending back Krishnapa Gowtham and Hooda.

BRIEF SCORES
Mumbai Indians 182 for 8 (Green 41, Naveen 4-38, Thakur 3-34) **beat Lucknow Super Giants 101** (Stoinis 40, Madhwal 5-5) **by 81 runs**

CHENNAI CAPTAIN DHONI LOOKS TO END WITH A BANG IN IPL FINAL

Chennai: **M S Dhoni** is looking to bow out in style by winning the Indian Premier League with Chennai Super Kings for the fifth time - unless the 41-year-old cricket superstar stuns everyone and keeps going.

On Tuesday, skipper Dhoni's tactical nous - at times controversial - again sealed the deal as CSK overcame the fancied Gujarat Titans by 15 runs to book a slot in Sunday's final at the world's biggest stadium in Ahmedabad. With his finishing skills on the wane, a dodgy knee and his place in the batting order increasingly hard to justify, Dhoni has suggested on several occasions his retirement is imminent. He again kept fans guessing, saying on Tuesday he would take until the auctions for the 2024 IPL in December to make his final decision. "I will always be there for CSK whether in playing form or sitting somewhere," he said. "I don't really know. But frankly, it takes a heavy toll."

Cool customer
Victory on Sunday against either Mumbai or Gujarat - depending on the remaining playoff - would be a fitting final achievement for a player who is second only to Sachin Tendulkar when it comes to fan adulation in cricket-crazy India. Hard-hitting and always unruffled, India's most successful skipper has many nicknames including "Captain Cool" and "Thala", which means "leader" in Tamil.

First and foremost, he is a run powerhouse and finisher par excellence, but it is Dhoni's style and humble beginnings that set him apart, and which were enough for a Bollywood biopic.

Dhoni spent his early years in a cramped one-bedroom government flat in Ranchi provided by

his pump operator father's employer.

The young Dhoni was passionate about sport and honed his skills playing tennis-ball cricket and borrowing bats and other kit from friends.

On his father's insistence, he took a job at Indian Railways but the hectic routine of juggling between collecting tickets and playing cricket finally saw him break free. In 2004, he made his India debut and in 2007, took over from Rahul Dravid as India's one-day captain, the same year leading the national side to the inaugural Twenty20 World Cup in South Africa.

In 2008, he became Test captain and won two home series against Australia, and in 2011 famously sealed winning the 50-over World Cup in India with a sumptuous, imperious six.

Along the way - with constant hairstyle changes, from shaggy to spiky to shaved - numerous endorsements saw Dhoni become one of world sport's best-paid athletes, earning an estimated \$31mn in 2015. But he stunned the cricket world by quitting the five-day format in 2014 after finishing with 27 wins from 60 Tests as skipper. He stepped down from the limited-overs captaincy in 2017 on the pretext of preparing Virat Kohli as leader, but continued to play a big part in the team's decision-making process. His last appearance for India was in their semi-final loss to New Zealand in the 2019 ODI World Cup.

He then briefly served with an army reserve unit, where he is an honorary lieutenant colonel, before announcing his international retirement.

But he hasn't quit the IPL, at least not yet. He captained CSK from the IPL's first edition in 2008 and took the franchise to nine finals and four victories, most recently in 2021.



Team DSM's Italian rider Alberto Dainese (second left) sprints to the finish line to win the 17th stage ahead of Bahrain - Victorious's Italian rider Jonathan Milan (right) and Team Jayco AlUla's Australian rider Michael Matthews (second right) during the Giro d'Italia 2023 cycling race, after covering a distance of 197km between Pergine Valsugana and Caorle, near Venice, yesterday. (AFP)

DAINESE TIMES HIS FINAL FLOURISH PERFECTLY TO WIN GIRO STAGE 17 AFTER MASS SPRINT

Caorle, Italy: Alberto Dainese timed his sprint to perfection in a breathless finish to win yesterday's stage 17 at the Giro d'Italia, a 195-kilometre ride from Pergine Valsugana to Caorle, while Geraint Thomas retained the leader's maglia rosa jersey. The Team DSM rider held off Jonathan Milan (Bahrain Victorious) in a mass sprint to prevail by a few centimetres, with Michael Matthews (Jayco-AlUla) taking third place.

"In the last metres, I was really digging so deep. I was really on the limit and I saw Johnny coming. I couldn't throw my bike because I was really on the limit but it's nice to get a few centimetres in front and get the win," Dainese said. "In the last five days, I was quite sick with stomach issues. Today was the first day I was feeling okay, like 80%, and to win after such a struggle in the last five days is insane."

Briton Mark Cavendish, who announced on Monday that he will end his 17-year career as a professional cyclist at the conclusion of the season, also appeared to be in contention for the stage win, but faded in the final kilometre.

A four-man breakaway comprising of Thomas Champion (Cofidis), Charlie Quarterman (Corratte-

Selle Italia), Diego Sevilla (Eolo-Kometa) and Senne Leysen (Alpecin-Deceuninck) built an advantage of over two minutes.

Leysen attacked with 22km to go and put in a valiant performance as he battled a challenging headwind, but he never stood a chance as Movistar and Groupama-FDJ took control of the surging peloton, which swallowed up the Belgian rider with 5km left. Ineos Grenadiers rider Thomas continues to lead the overall standings, 18 seconds ahead of Joao Almeida (UAE Team Emirates) with Primoz Roglic (Jumbo-Visma) in third place.

"It was a crazy bunch finish. Luckily it didn't rain that much today," said Thomas, who turns 37 today. "We are all safe and ready for the next three stages. Wearing the Maglia Rosa on my birthday will be definitely nice, I hope I can keep it until Rome." Today's stage 18 takes place on a mountainous 161-km route from Oderzo to Val di Zoldo, with two category one ascents.

'I AM NOT A ROBOT': EVENEPOEL SAYS AFTER GIRO CRITICISM HURT
Belgian cycling star Remco Evenepoel took a swing at his critics yesterday as he announced he

was back in training nine days after abandoning the Giro d'Italia with Covid even though he was in the lead. "Ups & downs are part of our job and I can accept that," the 23-year-old, who held a narrow lead when he dropped out, posted on Facebook. "What is hard to accept is all the fake and negative comments I got after having to leave the race," he said.

"I just want to ask everyone to remember I am not a robot, but also a normal human being, husband, son, teammate etc. with normal feelings," he wrote adding that he would use it as motivation. "After today's check-ups and medical screenings, I got the green light to start training again."

Evenepoel, the Giro favourite, left the race on May 14 after testing positive. The rider, who won the world championship and the Spanish Vuelta last season, said leaving the race was tough.

"Definitely one of the hardest setbacks in my still very short career," he wrote. "A very brutal end of what could have been a beautiful story. 6 months of full preparation for only this race. Sacrifices, long days in the rain, long periods away from home. Everything was going according to plan but that is how sport goes."



FOCUS

Le Mans - 100 years of man, machine and midnight oil

AFP
Paris

The Le Mans 24 Hours celebrates its centenary tomorrow - the mythic race's history marked by triumph and tragedy, and a hefty sprinkling of Hollywood stardust.

Since 33 cars set off in the rain for the very first edition on May 26, 1923, Le Mans has gone on to earn an exalted place in motor-sport's calendar alongside Formula One's Monaco Grand Prix and the Indy 500.

Only one driver - the late Graham Hill - has succeeded in taking the chequered flag in all three of motor racing's 'triple crown'.

While Toyota have proved unstoppable during the recent Hybrid era, the early Le Mans years were dominated by Bentley.

The British marque's five wins between 1924 and 1930 came from a team of mechanics and millionaire Woolf Barnato - the legendary 'Bentley boys'.

A Bugatti took seventh in 1930

with Odette Siko and Marguerite Mareuse sharing the driving - the best placing for an all-female crew to this day.

World War Two forced Le Mans into hibernation but on its return, in 1949, a newish Italian constructor by the name of Ferrari, took the first of its nine wins. Withdrawing from the main category in 1973 the now iconic 'prancing horse' stable is making its return for the 100th anniversary party when the cars line up again for this year's event on June 10.

The 1950s delivered up a fierce rivalry between Jaguar, Mercedes, Ferrari and Aston Martin. It was also during this decade that disaster struck Le Mans.

In 1955 the Mercedes, with France's Pierre Levegh at the wheel, crashed in front of the stands on the main straight.

Levegh's car was ripped to shreds, its engine exploding, killing him and 80 spectators.

Ferrari stacked up six wins in the first half of the Swinging Sixties. US car tycoon Henry Ford II, irked by Enzo Ferrari's attitude

in a failed bid to buy the Italian constructor, set out to build a machine capable of putting the brakes on Ferrari's Le Mans run.

His sense of injustice proved a powerful motivator, and Ford duly constructed a car to win the 1966 edition.

One driver who remembers that race vividly is four-time winner Henri Pescarolo.

Only one driver - the late Graham Hill - has succeeded in taking the chequered flag in all three of motor racing's 'triple crown'

Called up at the last minute by Matra he recalled a stint during the night with "headlamps that didn't shine much light, bends that weren't lit up, at the wheel of a car not easy to drive and surrounded by much faster Ferraris and Fords in full battle.

"I was completely terrified! There were cars from every angle going at scary speeds," he said.

"Even when I was involved in serious enough accidents later on, I can't say I was ever as

scared as I was then." That famous duel of man's ego and machine was immortalised in the 2019 film *Ford v Ferrari* starring Matt Damon and Christian Bale.

The 24 Hour classic has ignited the imagination of numerous Hollywood A-listers over the years. Paul Newman famously finished second in 1979 aged 54, Patrick Dempsey raced it four times, Steve McQueen used the 1970 edition to shoot scenes of his film *Le Mans*, and in 2016 Brad Pitt gave the celebrated command "Gentlemen, start your engines".

The year before Newman's starring role at the Sarthe circuit, Belgian driver Jacky Ickx had helped Ford to a fourth straight win, ending a famous Le Mans tradition in the process.

Until then, the start involved drivers running to their cars, a practice Ickx considered dangerous.

His protest, in walking to his car and consequently setting off last, triggered the race organisers, the Automobile Club de l'Ouest, to do away with it.

Ickx went on to win the '69 race, by a miniscule 100 metre margin - the first of his six wins.

The following year Porsche's name went on the Le Mans roll of honour for the first of their record 19 wins.

Another German constructor, Audi, was to help Denmark's Tom Kristensen to the drivers' record of nine wins.

Next month's centenary, the 91st edition, promises to be a special affair, with a sold-out 300,000 crowd burning the midnight oil to watch the new Le Mans hypercar and a top tier grid comprising Toyota, Peugeot, Ferrari, Porsche, Cadillac, Gluckhaus, and Vanwall.

French racing driver Henri Pescarolo rests in the Jean Rondeau team pit during the 46th edition of the 24 Hours of Le Mans on the circuit de la Sarthe in Le Mans, France, on June 9, 1979. The 24 Hours of Le Mans will celebrate its centenary tomorrow. (AFP)



FORMULA 1

Alonso senses an opportunity on the streets of Monaco

'We hope that it gives the drivers a more stable and predictable platform'

Reuters
Monaco

Monaco kicks off Formula One's flood-delayed European season on Sunday with **Fernando Alonso** sensing a chance to end dominant Red Bull's run of success at the most glamorous and historic of street circuits.

A home race for Ferrari's Charles Leclerc, Monaco would have been part two of a triple-header with Italy and Spain but the Emilia Romagna Grand Prix scheduled for Imola last weekend was called off due to devastating floods.

Red Bull's Max Verstappen and Sergio Perez have won all five races so far this season by some distance, and the last two in Monaco.

They will be favourites again but, despite a history of processional races in the principality, the metal-fenced streets of Monte Carlo can bite back - particularly in the wet.

Italian Jarno Trulli took the sole win of his career there in 2004 and Frenchman Olivier Panis in a wet 1996 race, with only three cars still running at the finish.

Aston Martin's Alonso, winner in Monaco with Renault and McLaren in 2006 and 2007, will be ready for any opportunity that comes his way after securing four third places so far in 2023.



"We seem to have a car that is maybe not the fastest on the straights. We need to improve that, but we are very good on the corners," he told Sky Sports television when asked where he might win.

"I would say that the slowest speeds of the championship, let's say Monaco, Budapest, Singapore; these kind of circuits, I think we put our main hopes at the moment."

Leclerc has secured pole for

the last two years but has yet to stand on the Monaco podium as a Formula One driver.

Mercedes are bringing an up-graded car and Monaco is one of seven-times world champion Lewis Hamilton's favourite cir-

cuits with three previous wins there.

"We are introducing the first step in a new development direction," said team boss Toto Wolff. "It won't be a silver bullet; from my experience, they do not exist in our sport.

"We hope that it gives the drivers a more stable and predictable platform. Then we can build on that in the weeks and months ahead."

Double world champion Verstappen, the 2021 Monaco winner, needs no extra encouragement to assert himself and will want to turn the tables on Perez after losing to him last May.

The Mexican crashed in qualifying but still ended up third on the grid and ahead of Verstappen at a circuit where overtaking is extremely difficult.

Verstappen appeared to nurse a grudge for months and refused to give a place back to Perez in Brazil in November, alluding to "something that happened in the past".

Dutch media reported it as payback for Monaco, with Perez having to deny deliberately crashing to prevent Verstappen lapping faster.

The Mexican, now 14 points behind Verstappen, will be looking for a repeat win to get back in the battle.

"This is the race every driver wants to win growing up and I was lucky enough to achieve that last season. That has only made me more hungry to stand on the top step once again," he said.

TENNIS

Holders Switzerland face tough BJK Cup Finals draw

Reuters
London

Defending champions Switzerland have been drawn alongside former winners Czech Republic and the United States for the 2023 Billie Jean King Cup Finals, the International Tennis Federation (ITF) announced yesterday.

The United States and the Czech Republic are the two most successful nations in the tournament's history, having won it a combined 29 times.

"This is the most difficult group of all with the two strongest nations in women's tennis at the moment," Swiss team captain Heinz Gunthardt said.

"The Czech Republic and the U.S. not only have excellent singles players, but also the best doubles players in the world. But the Billie Jean King Cup is not a normal tournament and we are confident of advancing."

Seville will host the showpiece women's team event, which features 12 nations and will take place from Nov 7-12. Teams will compete in four round-robin groups of three, with the four group winners progressing to the semi-finals.

Seven-times winners Australia will battle it out with Kazakhstan and Slovenia, while hosts Spain, Canada and Poland make up the third group for the event.

Fourth seeds France, who have won the tournament three times, have been drawn with four-times winners Italy and Germany.

Group A: Switzerland, Czech Republic, United States
Group B: Australia, Kazakhstan, Slovenia
Group C: Spain, Canada, Poland
Group D: France, Italy, Germany.

Tsitsipas splits with Philippoussis days before French Open

Mark Philippoussis is no longer helping to coach world number five **Stefanos Tsitsipas**, the Australian former tennis star said, calling it the end of "a great ride". Philippoussis joined Tsitsipas's father Apostolos in the coaches box in the second half of last season and helped guide the Greek player to the Australian Open final.



Tsitsipas, who was beaten in the final in January by Novak Djokovic, previously hailed the impact of "wise man" Philippoussis. But the 46-year-old Philippoussis, a former Wimbledon and US Open finalist of Greek heritage, wrote on Instagram that the partnership is over, days before the French Open. He did not say why.

"Thanks for the opportunity of being a part of your team," Philippoussis said on Tuesday.

"It was a great ride and experience, and I'm proud of what we achieved together in the short amount of time we had. "I wish you health, happiness and success for your future, on and off the court!"

Tsitsipas's father remains his main coach.

GOLF

Scheffler and Burns headline Colonial field

AFP
Los Angeles

Scottie Scheffler's share of second at the PGA Championship on Sunday was enough to return him to the top of the world rankings and now he'll aim to keep the intensity up at Colonial Country Club in Fort Worth, Texas. Scheffler, a Texas native who remembers attending the US PGA Tour event at Colonial as a young fan, admitted there's a fatigue factor in the week after a major championship. Even so, he said yesterday his goal is to bring the same level of focus demanded by a major to every tournament he plays.

"I think the majors definitely kind of sharpen your focus just because the golf course is so challenging and you have

to be on for all 18 holes," said Scheffler, the 2022 Masters champion. "Any time you lose focus out there, you tend to get punished for it pretty good. So that's kind of where the wear down factor comes from, just from being at such a high level of focus. "That's the type of energy I'm trying to bring to more of the regular tour events, just that intensity for all four days, not just when you're in contention or not just when I'm playing really well. Just bringing that intensity to every shot, whether it's the first tee shot tomorrow morning or a shot in the playoff, like it was last year."

Scheffler started the final round at Colonial with a two-shot lead last year, but on a wind-whipped day his good friend Sam Burns erased a seven-stroke deficit and rolled in a 38-foot birdie putt from off the green to beat the world

number one in a playoff. Scheffler said he takes no extra motivation from that near miss, preferring to treat this week as a clean slate. "I'm typically pretty hungry to win whatever event it is," said Scheffler, who has won the Phoenix Open and Players Championship this season. "I show up expecting to come here and play well and do my best."

Burns, one of a trio of Texas stars on tap this week along with Scheffler and Jordan Spieth, arrives for his title defence off a missed cut last week at Oak Hill. Burns put a positive spin on that disappointment, saying the enforced rest days had him more than ready for a tournament he also attended as a child.

"I'm obviously very excited to be back here," said Burns, who won the biggest title of his career at the WGC Match Play in March. "A lot of really

good memories from last year, and even memories as a kid. This was always an event that I grew up coming to as a kid, so it's really special."

While Scheffler and Burns have every reason to think they can put together a solid week, Spieth is still nursing the left wrist injury that forced him out of the Byron Nelson tournament earlier this month. The three-time major champion was encouraged by his performance at the PGA Championship, where he improved each round on the way to a share of 29th. But he said he'd be paying close attention to how the injury responds to continued play. "At this point, I don't feel like I'm rushing things," Spieth said. "I think I'm on par with following the docs I've talked to, and it's kind of a week-to-week thing because it's something that can get worse."



Scottie Scheffler hits a tee shot on the sixth hole prior to the Charles Schwab Challenge at Colonial Country Club in Fort Worth, Texas. (AFP)

GOLF

QGA, Commercial Bank extend Qatar Masters sponsorship agreement



Qatar Golf Association (QGA) President Hassan Nasser al-Naimi and Commercial Bank EGM, Chief Marketing Officer and Head of CB Premium Banking, Hussain al-Abdulla pose with other officials after signing the sponsorship agreement for the Qatar Masters.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Commercial Bank has entered a partnership agreement with Qatar Golf Association to continue to be the title sponsor for the Qatar Masters until 2025.

The highly-anticipated event is organised by The Qatar Golf Association (QGA), the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), Doha Golf Club and the long-term title sponsor, Commercial Bank.

First held in 1998, the Commercial Bank Qatar Masters helped establish Qatar as a world-class sporting venue and is considered to be the country's annual 'must-attend' sporting and social event. Sanctioned and supported by the DP World Tour, the tournament attracts annually around 20,000 spectators and is broadcasted to a global TV audience of over 450mn households and widely known for bringing together the world's best golf talent.

Hassan Nasser al-Naimi, President of Qatar Golf Association, commented: "We at the Qatar Golf Association are truly grateful for the contribution of Commercial Bank over the past twenty five years, which have helped us turn the Com-

mercial Bank Qatar Masters into a major world class golf tournament and it's utterly gratifying to announce the continued commitment and support of Commercial Bank for another three years to come".

Commercial Bank EGM, Chief Marketing Officer and Head of CB Premium Banking, Hussain al-Abdulla said: "Today, we're not just renewing a partnership; we're reaffirming our belief in the power of sport to connect, inspire, and drive us forward. This partnership between Commercial Bank and the Qatar Golf Association transcends the boundaries of a golf tournament. It's a testament to our commitment to the community, our support for world-class sporting talent, and our role in showcasing Qatar as a hub of international events".

The 2023 Commercial Bank Qatar Masters will take place from October 26 to 29. The tournament is expected to attract top professionals as it's the last qualifying tournament on the DP World Tour for the players who are ranked 110th and higher, primarily, to retain their Tour card and to be able to qualify for the final two tournaments of 2023, the Nedbank Golf Challenge (64 entries) and the DP World Tour Championship (50 entries).

PREMIER LEAGUE

Rashford could return against Chelsea, says Man United coach

Forward is United's top goalscorer this season with 29 goals in all competitions

Reuters
Manchester

Forward Marcus Rashford could return from a two-game absence when Manchester United host Chelsea, manager Erik ten Hag said yesterday as the Premier League club look to secure their place in the Champions League next season.

The 25-year-old England international, who is United's top goalscorer this season with 29 goals in all competitions, missed their last two wins against Wolverhampton Wanderers and Bournemouth, first with a leg injury and then an illness. "It looks like (he will be available)," Ten Hag said ahead of today's home game against 12th-placed Chelsea. "Yesterday he returned to training. He looks quite fit but we have to see today what is the outcome of the training, how did he recover, and then we will make our choices."

The Dutchman, who ended United's six-year trophy drought when they won the League Cup in February, said his team are on the right path but acknowledged that they are a work in progress. After missing Champions League football last season, United are on track to secure a top-four spot in this campaign - they need a point from their final two matches against Chelsea and 10th-placed Fulham.

United are fourth in the standings with 69 points, three more than fifth-placed Liverpool, who have played a game more. "We are in a project and we want to go back and win trophies," Ten Hag said.

"We win one trophy, but we want to win more trophies. We want to compete with the best, but we are still on a journey. But we think we are in the right direction. But we can always be better because good is not good enough. We want to compete with the best and then you have to be in the Champions League. So (it is) simple."

United have the chance to win one more trophy this season when they face

rivals Manchester City in the FA Cup final on June 3.

LAMPARD CONFIDENT OF CHELSEA REVIVAL AFTER DISMAL SEASON

Frank Lampard is confident that Chelsea will come back stronger next season after a dismal campaign, the interim manager said ahead of their last two Premier League games. Chelsea are 12th in the standings with 43 points.

Chelsea, who won the Champions League in 2021, will end this season without silverware despite their new US owners' huge spending on new players. "There is a lot to go over to get to the bottom of it. The club has to explore every factor and make sure it does not happen again," Lampard told reporters. "It could be a long process - from my experience, when you switch something off, it isn't easy to switch on again."

Lampard is optimistic, however, that Chelsea have the right structures in place. "When you look at the good models around that have consistency in those areas and decision-making and how the club moves forward, they're generally more successful clubs," Lampard said. "Where we are at the minute, that will be the work process to try and see where we are aligned, where do we want to get to and what does it look like."

Lampard, who will step down from his role as temporary manager at the end of the campaign, urged his players to show fighting spirit against United. "They (players) have to show there is something resting on this game in terms of their personal and collective approach," Lampard said. "We have to go with a very good mentality against a good team who are fighting for something we have had for many years - and now we don't have it."

Lampard said that forward Joao Felix would be back after missing the defeat at Manchester City but French defender Benoît Badiashile's will be out for "months rather than weeks".



Marcus Rashford missed Manchester United's last two wins against Wolverhampton Wanderers and Bournemouth.

LA LIGA

Veteran Alba to leave Barca after 11 years

AFP
Barcelona

Jordi Alba will leave Barcelona at the end of the season after 11 years at the club, the Catalan side said yesterday. "Barcelona and Alba have reached an agreement to release the player from the contract that he had until the end of the 2023-24 season," said Barcelona in a statement.

Alba joined Barcelona from Valencia in 2012 and won six La Liga titles and one Champions League among 19 trophies with the Catalan giants. The 34-year-old veteran Spanish left-back lost his place in the team to teenager Alejandro Balde this season. Alba had one more year left on his contract, which expires in 2024, and Spanish reports say he will waive a significant percentage of the money due to help the club amid financial struggles.

The Spaniard follows in the footsteps of captain Sergio Busquets, who is also leaving the club this summer. The pair will play their final home match at Camp Nou against Real Mallorca on Sunday. Alba has played over 450 times for Barcelona, scoring 27 goals and providing 91 assists as a vital outlet on the left flank.

The defender's recent goal against Osasuna earned Barcelona a 1-0 win and took them to the brink of the title. He also won the 2012 European Championship with Spain, scoring in the 4-0 win over Italy in the final.

One of his finest seasons came in 2015 under Luis Enrique, when he helped Barcelona win the treble. The left-back has been linked with a move to Saudi Arabia like Busquets and Lionel Messi, the former Barcelona

playmaker who is leaving Paris Saint-Germain in the summer. Alba joined Barcelona's academy as a teenager before leaving for Cornellà and then Valencia, returning to Camp Nou for 14mn euros.

VALLADOLID BEAT CHAMPIONS BARCA TO BOOST SURVIVAL HOPES

Real Valladolid earned an important 3-1 victory over champions Barcelona to boost their La Liga survival hopes on Tuesday night. The hosts were good value for their victory and climbed to 17th, moving provisionally three points clear of the relegation zone.

Barcelona defender Andreas Christensen sent Valladolid on their way by heading into his own net in the second minute.

Canadian striker Cyle Larin added the second from the penalty spot after Eric Garcia tripped Gonzalo Plata in the area, with the Ecuadorian winger scoring the third on the break. La Liga's top goalscorer Robert Lewandowski pulled one back for the Catalans in the final stages. Young playmaker Pablo Torre started for the first time in La Liga for Barcelona and put in a bright performance but his team were sluggish as a whole and fell to a second consecutive defeat.

Real Sociedad put one foot into next season's Champions League with a 1-0 win over 10-man Almeria. Takefusa Kubo's first-half strike gave Imanol Alguacil's side, fourth, an eight-point lead on fifth-place Villarreal. Defeat leaves Almeria provisionally 15th, four points above the relegation zone. Celta Vigo, 14th, were held to a 1-1 home draw by Girona and are five points above the relegation zone.



Qatar enter Arab snooker championship semis



Qatar qualified for the semi-finals of the snooker competition at the Arab Billiards and Snooker Championship, which is being held at the Saudi capital Riyadh. Twelve countries are participating in the event, which will conclude on May 29. Qatar players dominated the Group A, winning against Saudi Arabia A and B, and Kuwait to enter the semis. Today they will face Jordan in the semi-finals.

FOCUS

Madrid players, fans show support for Vinicius

AFP
Madrid

Vinicius Junior's Real Madrid teammates showed him support after he was racially abused, by wearing his number 20 shirt before their La Liga match against Rayo Vallecano yesterday. The 22-year-old Brazilian winger was present at the Santiago Bernabeu although not part of the squad for the game because of a knee problem, and his colleagues applauded him as he watched from the side of the pitch.

Vinicius faced off with a supporter at Valencia's Mestalla stadium on Sunday after being abused during the match, and was later sent off for hitting Hugo Duro. However the Spanish football federation's Competition Committee revoked his red card late Tuesday because some images from the VAR video were not shown to the referee who sent him off.

Valencia had the south stand of Mestalla shut for five matches as punishment for the

racist abuse, which they said they will appeal against. A banner in one stand read "We are all Vinicius, enough already!" while players held up another message reading "Racists, out of football", as part of a joint campaign from the federation and La Liga.

After 20 minutes supporters around the stadium chanted "Vini, Vini" and applauded, with Vinicius standing up and applauding them back, returning their support with a thumbs up. The Brazilian winger watched the game from Madrid's presidential box, alongside chief Florentino Perez. Vinicius may return to action for Madrid on Saturday when Los Blancos visit Europa League finalists Sevilla.

GERMAN FOOTBALL CLUBS BLOCK LEAGUE'S INVESTMENT PLAN

German football clubs yesterday blocked proposals by the league to sell off part of their TV rights to investors, which stirred anger among fan groups. The plan put forward by the German Football League (DFL) would have seen clubs in the top two divisions sacrifice part of their broadcast rev-

enues in exchange for an immediate cash injection of two billion euros (\$2.2bn).

But representatives from the 36 Bundesliga and second division teams failed to give the two-thirds majority needed to give the project the go-ahead. In all, 20 clubs supported the investment plan at a meeting in Frankfurt, while 11 voted against and five abstained.

The investment plan, seen by DFL bosses as essential for German football to remain internationally competitive, has faced vocal opposition from fans. Supporters groups fear that the proposed commercial partnership will dilute Germany's fan-ownership model, with banners protesting the DFL's investment plan unfurled at fixtures across the country.

Individual clubs similarly made their rejection of the league's investment idea clear ahead of the vote, including first-division Cologne and second-tier St Pauli. As part of the deal, the league hoped to put 750 million euros towards marketing and the creation of a new streaming platform, while 300 million would have gone straight to clubs.