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Pope and Duckett run riot against Ireland



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Verstappen fastest in Spain as Alonso revs up the fans



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TENNIS

# Djokovic blasts French Open fans after reaching last 16

‘Majority of the people come to enjoy tennis. But there are people who love to boo every single thing you do’

AFP  
Paris

Novak Djokovic blasted French Open fans as “disrespectful” after he defeated Alejandro Davidovich Fokina in a tense third round clash yesterday.

Djokovic, chasing a third Roland Garros title and men’s record 23rd Grand Slam crown, came through 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/5), 6-2 against the 34th-ranked Spaniard to reach the last 16 for a 14th successive year.

During an often fractious afternoon, Djokovic earned the ire of fans when he took a medical timeout for treatment on his left thigh at the end of the second set having been on Court Philippe Chatrier for the best part of three hours. The 36-year-old Djokovic, a polarising figure in tennis, gave spectators a sarcastic round of applause and a thumbs-up.

In the third set, he launched a ball skywards in frustration which again brought jeers. Djokovic mocked his tormentors by mimicking their boos and nodding his head in weary acceptance. “I think the majority of the people come to enjoy tennis or support one or the other player. But there are people who love to boo every single thing you do,” said Djokovic.

“That’s something that I find disrespectful and I frankly don’t understand that. But it’s their right. They paid for the ticket. They can do whatever they want. Actually 99 percent of the time I will stay quiet but sometimes I will oppose that because I feel when somebody is disrespectful he or she deserves to have an answer to that.”



Serbia's Novak Djokovic reacts during his third round match against Spain's Alejandro Davidovich Fokina at the French Open in Paris yesterday. Djokovic won 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/5), 6-2. (Reuters)

the champion in 2016 and 2021, swept through the third set. Next up for the former world number one is a clash with either Polish 13th seed Hubert Hurkacz or Peru’s Juan Pablo Varillas.

Stefanos Tsitsipas continued his bid for a maiden Grand Slam title with a 6-2, 6-2, 6-3 win over former semi-finalist Diego Schwartzman. The Greek fifth seed, who a blew a two-set lead to Djokovic in the 2021 final, will next play Austrian qualifier Sebastian Ofner after making the second week for a fifth straight year. Tsitsipas also lost the Australian Open showpiece to Djokovic earlier this year.

Meanwhile, women’s third-seed Jessica Pegula and men’s seventh-ranked Andrey Rublev were dumped out of the tournament. Italian Lorenzo Son-

ego battled back from two sets down to knock out Rublev and reach the last 16 for the second time. The world number 48 was two points from defeat during a fourth-set tie-break but prevailed 5-7, 0-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/5), 6-3 after three hours and 42 minutes on Court Suzanne Lenglen.

Sonego will face Russian 11th seed Karen Khachanov for a possible quarter-final meeting with Djokovic. “Incredible comeback today,” he said. “I played more aggressive than in the first and second sets because when he’s aggressive it’s tough to compete against him.”

Eleventh seed Khachanov ended Australian Thanasi Kokkinakis’ run with an entertaining 6-4, 6-1, 3-6, 7-6 (7/5) win. American Pegula’s hopes of a deep run in Paris were ended in com-

prehensive fashion by Belgian Elise Mertens. The 28th seed cruised to a 6-1, 6-3 victory to reach the fourth round for the third time.

World number three Pegula, who only has two WTA Tour titles to her name, has still never passed the quarter-final stage of a Grand Slam tournament. “I’m very happy to win in two sets. She’s a very good player,” said Mertens. The former Australian Open semi-finalist will next face 2021 runner-up Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova.

Aryna Sabalenka refused to do an official post-match press conference after powering into the last 16 for the first time with a straight-sets win over Kamilla Rakhimova. The Belarusian claimed she “did not feel safe” when asked to condemn her country’s sup-



Belgium's Elise Mertens knocked out third seed Jessica Pegula of the US.

port of Russia’s war in Ukraine during a press conference earlier this week.

The second seed is yet to drop a set in the tournament after a comfortable 6-2, 6-2 win against world number 82 Rakhimova. Sabalenka is one of the favourites for the championship after a fine start to the year and will usurp Iga Swiatek as world number one if she lifts the title. “I should be able to feel safe when I do interviews with the journalists after my matches,” she told selected media.

Sabalenka will face either former US Open champion Sloane Stephens or Kazakhstan’s Yulia Putintseva in the fourth round. Russian Daria Kasatkina, a semi-finalist last year, raced into the second week by thrashing American Peyton Stearns 6-0, 6-1 in under an hour. The ninth seed will next face Elina Svitolina for a place in the quarter-finals.

Ukrainian Svitolina reached the fourth round on her first Grand Slam appearance since the 2022 Australian Open with a 2-6, 6-2, 7-5 win over

Anna Blinkova. She is now on an eight-match winning run after also clinching the title in Strasbourg last week, beating Russian Blinkova in the final.

**THIRD ROUND RESULTS**  
**(x denotes seeded player)**  
**Men:** Sebastian Ofner (AUT) bt Fabio Fognini (ITA) 5-7, 6-3, 7-5, 1-6, 6-4; Novak Djokovic (SRB x3) bt Alejandro Davidovich Fokina (ESP x29) 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/5), 6-2; Karen Khachanov (x11) bt Thanasi Kokkinakis (AUS) 6-4, 6-1, 3-6, 7-6 (7/5); Lorenzo Sonego (ITA) bt Andrey Rublev (x7) 5-7, 0-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7/5), 6-3

**Women:** Elina Avanesyan bt Clara Tauson (DEN) 3-6, 6-1, 7-5; Anastasia Pavlyuchenkova bt Anastasia Potapova (x24) 4-6, 6-3, 6-0; Elise Mertens (BEL x28) bt Jessica Pegula (USA x3) 6-1, 6-3; Elina Svitolina (UKR) bt Anna Blinkova 2-6, 6-2, 7-5; Daria Kasatkina (x9) bt Peyton Stearns (USA) 6-0, 6-1; Sloane Stephens (USA) bt Yulia Putintseva (KAZ) 6-3, 3-6, 6-2; Aryna Sabalenka (x2) bt Kamilla Rakhimova 6-2, 6-2

FOOTBALL

# UEFA condemn harassment of referee Taylor, Roma’s Mourinho charged

Reuters  
Bengaluru

UEFA yesterday condemned the harassment of Europa League final referee Anthony Taylor and his family by AS Roma fans, while the Serie A club’s manager Jose Mourinho was charged with using abusive language against a match official. Taylor came under scrutiny following Roma’s shootout loss to Sevilla in UEFA’s second-tier final on Wednesday.

The match was tetchy with Taylor dishing out 14 yellow cards, the most

ever in a Europa League game, and playing almost 30 minutes of stoppage time in total. The day after the match, videos circulated on social media showing English referee Taylor and his family being harassed by Roma fans at Budapest Airport.

In the video, Roma fans could be seen abusing the 44-year-old Taylor and his family, who required protection from airport security as they sought refuge in a safe area.

“UEFA vehemently condemns violent behaviour directed towards its referee Anthony Taylor and his family. Such actions are unacceptable and undermine the spirit of fair play and

respect that UEFA upholds,” UEFA said in a statement.

“UEFA maintains a close collaboration with local police and airport security starting from the referees’ arrival in host cities. However, we are constantly striving to enhance the security measures for officials in coordination with local authorities. We will carefully assess the incidents and incorporate valuable insights into our future event planning processes.”

As part of disciplinary proceedings following the final, the European governing body charged Mourinho, who was filmed yelling expletives at the officials outside the Puskas Arena. The

Portuguese manager was critical of the refereeing in comments after the game, saying, “it was an intense, masculine, vibrant game with a referee who seemed Spanish. It was yellow, yellow, yellow all the time.”

Both teams’ supporters have also been charged with setting off fireworks and throwing objects, while Roma’s fans were alleged to have committed acts of damage along with other crowd disturbances.

Sevilla have additionally been charged over a pitch invasion by their supporters, who raced out onto the field after Gonzalo Montiel fired home the winning spot kick.



Roma's Jose Mourinho used abusive language against referee Anthony Taylor (right) after the Europa League final in Budapest on Wednesday. (Reuters)



CRICKET

# Pope, Duckett lead the run charge as England stay solid

Test debutant Josh Tongue picks up three late wickets for the home side



England's Ollie Pope celebrates reaching his double century against Ireland at Lord's Cricket Ground in London yesterday. (Reuters)

AFP  
London

Ollie Pope and Ben Duckett compiled record-breaking centuries before debutant Josh Tongue took his first wickets in Test cricket as England continued to dominate their Ashes warm-up against Ireland yesterday's second day at Lord's.

Pope's 205, the fastest double hundred in a Test in England, and Duckett's 182, the quickest 150 in a Test at Lord's - were the cornerstones of a huge first innings total of 524-4 declared.

That left England 352 runs ahead on first innings.

Ireland then slumped to 18-2 before reaching 97-3 at stumps, with fast bowler Tongue, who struck twice in an over - taking all the wickets in a return of 3-27 in eight overs.

Harry Tector (33 not out) and Lorcan Tucker (21 not out) held firm on a good pitch but Ireland were still 255 runs away from avoiding an innings defeat.

Worcestershire quick Tongue had gone wicketless on Thursday.

But in another selection coup for coach Brendon McCullum and skipper Ben Stokes, he struck with his first ball Friday

when Peter Moore was plumb lbw for 11.

Five balls later, Ireland captain Andrew Balbirnie - who had avoided the embarrassment of a 'pair' at the Home of Cricket - was caught behind carelessly chasing a wide ball from Tongue.

Ireland now risked being beaten inside two days in a match scheduled for four rather than the usual Test maximum of five.

James McCollum, who had top-scored for Ireland with 36 on Thursday, then retired hurt on 12 after twisting his right ankle trying to pull a Tongue short ball.

Tongue then had Paul Stirling out gloving down the legside to wicketkeeper Jonny Bairstow.

Earlier, Duckett and Pope ran riot against an outclassed attack lacking the experience of the Ireland bowling unit that reduced England to 85 all out in a corresponding Lord's clash four years ago. Both batsmen scored a hundred runs in a session yesterday, left-hander Duckett achieving the feat in the morning's play and Pope in the afternoon.

And Duckett, by making a run-a ball 150, surpassed Australia great Don Bradman's record of 166 balls for the fastest Test 150 at Lord's, in what was also the England opener's first Test on home soil.

Ireland, in just their seventh Test and

still searching for a first win at this level, had few answers to the run-spree, with seamers Mark Adair and debutant Fionn Hand both conceding over 100 runs each.

Joe Root helped himself to 55 as he became just the 11th batsman, and second Englishman after Alastair Cook, to score 11,000 Test runs before giving his wicket away.

Pope, went on to a maiden Test double century after tea in style by driving off-spinner Andy McBrine six to reach the landmark in just 207 balls faced.

But the next delivery saw a charging Pope stumped comfortably, with Stokes then declaring.

England had resumed just 20 runs behind, after veteran seamer Stuart Broad had taken 5-51 in Ireland's first innings 172 on Thursday.

Duckett was 60 not out, with England vice-captain Pope unbeaten on 29.

A morning and wicketless run spree took England to 325-1 at lunch.

But a replacement ball did the trick for Ireland, with Duckett playing onto medium-pace Graham Hume having faced just 178 balls, including 24 fours and a six.

The first Ashes Test at Edgbaston starts on June 16 but before then Australia face India in next week's World Test Championship final at the Oval.

<b>SCOREBOARD</b>	
<b>Ireland 1st Innings</b>	<b>172</b>
<b>England 1st Innings (overnight: 152-4)</b>	
Z. Crawley c and b Hand	56
B. Duckett b Hume	182
O. Pope st Tucker b McBrine	205
J. Root b McBrine	56
H. Brook not out	9
<b>Extras (b7, lb5, nb1, w3)</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Total (4 wkts decl, 82.4 overs)</b>	<b>524</b>
<b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-109 (Crawley), 2-361 (Duckett), 3-507 (Root), 4-524 (Pope)	
<b>Bowling:</b> Adair 20-2-127-0 (2w); Hume 17-0-85-1; Hand 19-2-113-1 (1w); Campher 13-0-88-0 (1nb); McBrine 13.4-0-99-2;	
<b>Ireland 2nd Innings</b>	
P. Moor lbw b Tongue	11
J. McCollum ret hurt 12	
A. Balbirnie c Bairstow b Tongue 2	
H. Tector not out	33
P. Stirling c Bairstow b Tongue	15
L. Tucker not out	21
<b>Extras (nb3)</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Total (3 wkts, 26 overs)</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>To bat:</b> C Campher, A McBrine, M Adair, F Hand, G Hume	
<b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-16 (Moor), 2-18 (Balbirnie), 3-63 (Stirling)	
<b>Bowling:</b> Broad 5-1-18-0 (2nb); Potts 6-1-28-0; Tongue 8-1-27-3; Leach 7-1-24-0 (1nb) <b>Note:</b> Match scheduled for maximum four days	

BADMINTON

## South Korea's An advances to semis at Thailand Open

AFP  
Bangkok

Badminton women's singles world number two An Se-young yesterday booked a semi-finals berth against a formidable Carolina Marin in the Thailand Open.

The 21-year-old South Korean young gun - who won the All England Open in March - polished off China's Han Yue in straight sets 21-16, 21-18 at the Huamark indoor stadium in Bangkok.

"I'm so happy," An told reporters, adding that the match had been difficult because of a strong court drift and slippery floor.

Spaniard Marin - the Rio Olympic gold medallist - outshone Canada's Michelle Li 21-19, 21-12 to storm into the semis.

Ranked sixth in the world, Marin in recent years faced an epic road to recovery from a devastating knee injury that ruled her out of the Tokyo Olympics and denied her the chance to defend her title.

Local hope Pornpawee Chochuwong struggled to find consistency against Chinese powerhouse He Bingjiao, going down 10-21, 19-21.

Fifth-ranked He will meet Mia Blichfeldt from Denmark on Saturday after she bulldozed Singapore's Yeo Jia Min 21-11, 21-9 in 34 minutes.

In the men's singles draw, Hong Kong's Lee Cheuk Yiu came from nine points down in the second to seal a nail-biting 21-19, 23-21 victory against Malaysia's Ng Tze Yong.

Frenchman Toma Junior Popov will face Lee today after he beat India's Kiran George 21-16, 21-17 in a tightly fought contest yesterday.

India's Lakshya Sen - who claimed a Commonwealth gold medal last year - swiftly disposed of Leong Jun Hao from Malaysia 21-19, 21-11.

Sen will meet world number five Kunlavut Vitidsarn, who delighted Thai fans with a thrilling come-from-behind 18-21, 21-14, 21-11 win over China's 13th-ranked Lu Guang Zu.

ATHLETICS

## Knighton cruises to Florence Diamond League 200m win

AFP  
Florence, Italy

Erriyon Knighton breezed to victory in the men's 200 metres at the Florence Diamond League yesterday.

Teen sensation Knighton crushed the opposition in Italy, crossing the line in a season's best 19.89 seconds, 0.39sec ahead of nearest challenger Jereme Richards.

"It's a good time for a season opener, I feel like I did good, could have been better but I'm

happy with the result," Knighton told broadcaster RAI.

Knighton, 19, is a rising star of American sprinting and holds the 200m world records for under-18 and under-20 athletes.

Later world champion Fred Kerley races in the 100m against fellow Americans Marvin Bracey and Trayvon Brommell, who finished on the podium behind Kerley at Eugene last year.

Olympic champion Marcell Jacobs won't be racing against Kerley on home turf as he pulled out of the popular event with a back injury as he did in Rabat last week.



Erriyon Knighton (second right) of the US wins the men's 200m final at the Diamond League leg at Pietro Mennea Golden Gala - Stadio Luigi Ridolfi, Florence, Italy, yesterday. (AFP)

### Pogacar plays down wrist fracture before Tour de France

Paris: Two-time Tour de France champion Tadej Pogacar said yesterday that recovery from a wrist fracture was just a minor setback with a month to go until the start of the Tour de France.

Slovenian Pogacar, 24, suffered the injury in a crash during April 24's Liege-Bastogne-Liege with the Tour beginning in Bilbao, Spain, on July 1.

"Luckily it's not a huge setback, it's nothing to do with the legs or head. I could train almost normally, do good hours," Pogacar told reporters.

"Hopefully I will be 100%, maybe the wrist will not be at 100% but I think the legs can be because you don't need a wrist to train legs. "We will see how the Tour goes and I will enjoy it in any case," he added.

Pogacar, who won the Tour in 2020 and a year later, will race in the Slovenian national championships later this month after having sat out June 14-18's Tour of Slovenia.



BOTTOMLINE

# Zadran stars in Afghanistan's six-wicket win over Sri Lanka

AFP  
Hambantota, Sri Lanka

Afghanistan opener Ibrahim Zadran starred with run-a-ball 98 in his team's six-wicket win against hosts Sri Lanka in the first of three one-day internationals yesterday.

Zadran and Rahmat Shah (55) top scored to steer the visitors to 269-4 in the 47th over after they won the toss and chose to field first in Hambantota.

Earlier Charith Asalanka top-scored with 91 to help Sri Lanka reach a below-par 268 all out after a shaky start pushed them to 84-3 inside 20 overs.

The 21-year-old Zadran was dismissed by Kasun Rajitha, who was Sri Lanka's most effective bowler on the day, and finished with 2-49 in his 10 over spell.

Zadran raced to his half-century in just 35 balls and hit 11 fours and two sixes in his innings.

Both his sixes came against rookie pacer Matheesha Pathirana, who recently made a name for himself with noteworthy performances for the latest IPL winners Chennai Super Kings.



Afghanistan's Mohamed Nabi (left) and Najibullah Zadran celebrate after their team won the first one-day international against Sri Lanka by 6 wickets in Hambantota yesterday. (AFP)

Wayward Pathirana finished with 1-66 in 8.5 overs of his debut ODI.

Zadran and Shah anchored the Afghanistan innings after other opener Rahmanullah Gurbaz fell for 14 in the sixth over.

Mohammad Nabi (27) and Najibullah Zadran (7) remained unbeaten at the end to steer Afghanistan to victory.

Sri Lanka's Lahiru Kumara took 1-21 in

4.3 overs as other Sri Lanka bowlers failed to make a dent. Zadran said it was "very tough to get out" close to his fourth century and praised his bowlers for "a very good job" to restrict Sri Lanka below 300.

"I wanted to finish the game and get a hundred but that's how it goes in cricket," he said after the game. "A target of 269 was a good score, but not that challeng-

ing. The ball was coming on to that bat and we just wanted to finish things off," he added. Earlier, a 99-run stand between Asalanka and Dhananjaya de Silva for the fifth wicket rescued the hosts. De Silva made 51 before being bowled by Nabi.

Left-arm seamer Fazalhaq Farooqi (2-58) claimed the wickets of Dimuth Karunaratne and Kusal Mendis in his opening spell, and then Fareed Ahmad and Mujeeb ur Rahman made further inroads.

After the dismissal of De Silva, captain Dasun Shanaka added 32 runs for the sixth wicket with Asalanka, but bowler Noor Ahmad accounted for the skipper with a well-disguised googly.

Dushan Hemantha backed up Asalanka well in a 48-run stand for the seventh wicket. He made 22. Asalanka scored his 91 off 95 balls with 12 fours.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**Sri Lanka 268 all out in 50 overs** (Charith Asalanka 91, Dhananjaya de Silva 51; Fazalhaq Farooqi 2-58, Fareed Ahmad 2-43) **Afghanistan 269-4 in 46.5 overs** (Ibrahim Zadran 98, Rahmat Shah 55; Kasun Rajitha 2-49) **Result:** Afghanistan won by six wickets **Series:** Afghanistan lead 1-0



MOTORSPORT

# Verstappen gets the fastest time as Alonso impresses

The points leader is quick in both practice sessions in Spain where Fernando Alonso strikes a chord with home fans



Red Bull's Max Verstappen during practice of the Spanish Grand Prix at Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya, Barcelona, Spain, yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters  
Barcelona, Spain

Red Bull's Formula One championship leader Max Verstappen set the pace in practice for the Spanish Grand Prix yesterday, with home hero Fernando Alonso delighting the crowd with the second fastest lap.

The Dutch driver was top in both sessions, 0.768 seconds quicker than Mexican team mate and closest rival Sergio Perez in the first and then 0.170 faster than Aston Martin's Alonso in the late afternoon.

"Overall I think we had a very good day, the car was in a good window," said Verstappen. "Short run and long run everything looked quite good."

Verstappen's fastest lap around Barcelona's Circuit de Catalunya was a one minute 13.907 second effort on soft tyres in practice two, with Alonso clocking 1:14.077.

The circuit has been shortened slightly, with the final chicane no longer used, and returned to a layout last used in 2006.

"It's been a lot more fun to drive," said Verstappen. "F1 cars in general feel

better at high speed so for me the last two corners are much better to drive."

Alonso's 32nd and last win was at the same circuit a decade ago with Ferrari and his form at the age of 41 - with five podiums in six races including second in Monaco last weekend - has fired up the fans.

"It's so close over one lap that I think a couple of tenths will put you in a completely different position in the classification, so we won't read too much into the times," said the Spaniard.

"The fans have been amazing and it's great to see their support. Hopefully we can put on a good show for them tomorrow."

Verstappen, who took his first F1 win at the circuit in 2016 and also won last year, leads closest rival Perez by 39 points after winning four of six races. Red Bull have won all six.

Alpine's Esteban Ocon, fresh from third place in Monaco last Sunday, was best of the rest in practice one while Haas's Nico Hulkenberg was third in the second session with Perez fourth and Ocon fifth.

Ferrari introduced a new look upgraded car and Charles Leclerc and Carlos Sainz ended the day sixth and seventh.



Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton takes part in the second free practice session of the Spanish Grand Prix at the Circuit de Catalunya in Montmelo, on the outskirts of Barcelona, yesterday. (AFP)

Mercedes' George Russell, who had been trying out prototype Pirelli tyres for much of the first session, ended up eighth after being 10th in practice one, with seven times world champion team mate Lewis Hamilton 11th.

The top teams were all running with sensors and fluorescent 'flow-vis' paint in the first session as they sought aerodynamic data. Several drivers also complained about the bumpy approach to the final corner, although Red

Bull appeared to have got on top of the problem. "It's not too bad. This track has been resurfaced a few years ago and it's still quite decent," said Verstappen.

## Hamilton says more work needed after difficult day

Lewis Hamilton endured a 'difficult day' and said more work was needed on his upgraded Mercedes after struggling to 11th place in yesterday's practice at the Spanish Grand Prix.

The seven-time champion said he felt that his revised car was 'not terrible' on long runs, but he added that he needed to extract more speed on single laps.

"It's ok," he said. "We're fighting as hard as we can - it's been a difficult day, in P1 and P2, working to get on top of the tyres and the 'deg' - and it so different from last week, of course," he said.

"The long run pace was not terrible, but we need to work on extracting more on a single lap."

Asked how it felt, he replied: "The car feels like... the car."

He added the revised final sector of the track, at the Circuit de Catalunya, was a big improvement with the removal of the chicane. "The final corners are awesome now," he said.

"Very fast. I much prefer it to the small chicane that was there, but I haven't followed anyone there yet, but it's going to be tough through there for the degradation."

"From today's pace, it's been a struggle for me to get into the top ten, but we plan some changes overnight. It's so close between us all from fifth down to P10 and impressive to see all the improvements by everyone."

"Ocon and Alpine look so good and Aston Martin are up to one-tenth from Red Bull which is so impressive."

He added that possible wet weather "can always bring a helping hand" but promised to "work hard tonight to get on top of it."

Team-mate George Russell was eighth and said: "It's been fun to drive the new version of the circuit... We've learned a huge amount and can dig into the data now."

"We are not Friday specialists, but we will do what we can, learn from it and move forward tomorrow."

Defending double world champion Max Verstappen topped the times in both sessions for Red Bull, outpacing Aston Martin's two-time champion Fernando Alonso at the end of the day ahead of Haas's Nico Hulkenberg.

GOLF

# Riley leads Memorial by one after birdie barrage

Reuters  
Dublin, Ohio

Davis Riley birdied three of his final four holes on Thursday to grab a one-stroke lead with a 5-under-par 67 in the first round of the Memorial Tournament in Dublin, Ohio.

Starting on the back nine during very challenging conditions in the afternoon wave at Muirfield Village Golf Club, Riley was 2 under through 14 holes. He then reeled off birdies on Nos 6 and 7 before draining a 13-foot birdie putt on No 9 to move a shot ahead of England's Matt Wallace, who carded a 4-under 68 during the morning wave.

"It's a tough golf course," Riley said. "Especially in the afternoon because the greens get really firm and bouncy. And the wind was up. I just had a couple up and ins on some par-4s to save par that kind of kept the round going."

Jordan Spieth is among a group of seven players another shot off the pace at 3 under that also includes Mark Hubbard. Spieth was tied for the lead at 4 under when his tee shot on No. 18 found a fairway bunker. After advancing the ball only 25 yards and then finding another bunker green side, Spieth got up and down to salvage bogey.

"It felt like a great round," he said. "It was nice to beat a tough golf course."

Hubbard, who got into the field as an alternate and also started on the back nine, reached 6 under during the morning wave. He then drilled a sprinkler head with his approach shot on No 16 that ricocheted his ball past the green, beginning a string of three consecutive bogeys to end his round.

"I've been playing really well, I've been working really hard," he said. "I've never really played that well here. So the combination of feeling pretty confident with my game and absolutely zero expectations always usually leads to good stuff."

A total of 32 players finished under par Thursday. That included 2020 champion Jon Rahm, who birdied three of his final eight holes to get to 2 under and in a tie for 10th place.



Davis Riley of the US plays a shot from a bunker on the first hole during the first round of the Memorial Tournament at Muirfield Village Golf Club in Dublin, Ohio. (AFP)

That was four shots better than World No 1 Scottie Scheffler, whose opening 74 included four bogeys against a pair of birdies.

Jack Nicklaus' signature course underwent a significant re-design.

Spieth said the fairways "are like half the width that they normally are," which Rahm said he enjoys the options presented to players off the tee.

"At the end of the day it's mainly a second-shot golf course," Rahm said. "You have to have those irons dialled in, whether you have an 8-iron or a pitching wedge. So to an extent I think it might compare to a US Open, but we've gotten to a point nowadays where hitting a 5-wood off a tee in a US Open doesn't usually happen. So it's usually mostly 5-wood, 7-iron. So there's some holes where you relate, but for the most part I wouldn't say it's exactly the same."

Third-ranked Rory McIlroy struggled like many on the 18th hole. Like his playing partner Spieth, McIlroy was one shot off the lead when he lost his drive to the right. After going long with his third shot, the Northern Irishman sent his fourth back past the flag and wound up with a triple-bogey 7 to drop to even par.

However, he's still in the hunt, five shots back of Riley, who entered the week ranked 79th and coming off five consecutive missed cuts in stroke play events. He did win the Zurich Classic of New Orleans with Nick Hardy in April.

Riley also held a share of the lead after the first round of the Memorial last year before eventually tying for 13th. He hopes to draw upon that experience for the next three days and earn a winning handshake from Nicklaus on Sunday afternoon.

## SABALENKA SKIPS FRENCH OPEN PRESSER, SAYS PREVIOUS QUESTIONING MADE HER FEEL UNSAFE

Paris: Belarusian tennis star Aryna Sabalenka skipped her post-match press conference at the French Open yesterday citing mental health reasons, two days after she was asked to comment on the war in Ukraine following her second-round win.

The tournament organisers instead released an interview with the world number two conducted by a hand-picked group of reporters in which she said she had not felt safe at her previous press conference.

At Wednesday's event Sabalenka was asked about Russia's invasion of Ukraine and her country's role as a staging ground for Russian troops and weapons.

Sabalenka said that her choice not to take part in Friday's press conference was supported by the French Open organisers.

"After my match (on Wednesday) I spoke with the media like I normally do. I know they still expect some questions that are more about the politics and not so much about my tennis," she said.

"For many months now I have answered these questions at tournaments and been very clear in my feelings and my thoughts. These questions do not bother me after my matches."

"I know that I have to provide answers to the media on things not related to my tennis or my matches, but on Wednesday I did not feel safe in the press conference," she said.

A French tennis federation spokesperson told Reuters Sabalenka would not be fined.

"It was to protect her," the spokesperson said yesterday, adding that whether she attends other press conferences would be her decision. Sabalenka will play either American Sloane Stephens or Yulia Putintseva of Kazakhstan in the next round.

In 2021, former world number one Naomi Osaka of Japan was fined \$15,000 for skipping a post-match press conference at the French Open and threatened with tough sanctions by the board of the four Grand Slam tournaments. She subsequently withdrew from the tournament citing mental health concerns and later said she had been battling depression and anxiety for years.

## China returns to WTA calendar in autumn after four years

China returns to the Women's Tennis Association autumn calendar after a four-year absence with seven tournaments in the mainland and Hong Kong confirmed yesterday. With the exception of last year's Beijing Winter Olympics, which took place in a "bubble", most global sport halted in China after the Covid-19



Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka plays a backhand return to Russia's Kamilla Rakhimova during their singles match on day six of the French Open yesterday. (Reuters)

pandemic emerged there in late 2019. The WTA had also suspended events in China for 16 months until last April in the wake of a sexual assault claim by Chinese tennis player Peng Shuai.

Yesterday, the WTA announced the 2023 autumn calendar after a four-year absence that will take place following the US Open through to the WTA Finals' which takes place in the Chinese city of Shenzhen from October 30. The Guangzhou event will be the first tournament in China starting the week of September 18.

It will be followed by Ningbo from September 25 with the China Open in Beijing from October 2, which is one of two WTA 1000 events scheduled along with Guadalajara from September 18. Zhengzhou will be included in WTA 500 events from October 9 along with San Diego and Tokyo, which both take place in September, details showed.

Guangzhou (September 18), Ningbo (September 25), Hong Kong (October 9) and Nanchang (October 16) are among WTA 250 tournaments, along with Osaka, Seoul and Monastir. In addition the WTA Elite Trophy second-tier tournament takes place in Zhuhai in China from October 23.

The WTA said that along with the tournaments confirmed on Friday "continual expansion of WTA 125 events across several continents with an updated schedule released in the coming weeks".



## FOOTBALL

# De Bruyne, Grealish ready for City's FA Cup final against United

Guardiola confirms Ortega will start in goal instead of first choice keeper Ederson

AFP

London

**P**ep Guardiola says Kevin De Bruyne and Jack Grealish are fit to feature for treble-chasing Manchester City in their FA Cup final showdown against Manchester United today. De Bruyne, Grealish, Ruben Dias and Manuel Akanji all missed City's last Premier League game of the season at Brentford last week.

But City boss Guardiola revealed yesterday that the quartet have returned to training and are expected to be involved in the first all-Manchester FA Cup final at Wembley. "They've trained well in the last two training sessions. They are all of them, more or less, fine," he said.

Guardiola has also confirmed Stefan Ortega will start in goal against United instead of regular first choice keeper Ederson. Ortega, who started two of City's last three league games, has not conceded a goal in the FA Cup this season.

It is a bold move from Guardiola, whose side are two wins away from becoming only the second English club – after United in 1999 – to win the Premier League, FA Cup and Champions League in the same season. "Stefan is going to play. I have always been like that in the FA Cup. The keeper who has played in the FA Cup is going to play in the FA Cup final," Guardiola said.

Although City surged to the title with a blistering run of 12 successive league victories and finished 14 points ahead of United, Guardiola has no intention of underestimating Erik ten Hag's team. United beat City 2-1 in January, avenging their 6-3 loss earlier in the campaign, and also ended their six-year trophy drought by lifting the League Cup in February.

Guardiola has been impressed Ten Hag's work in his first season at Old Trafford. "I look at a manager on how his team improve. When you see a team better and better, in a league that is not easy, you identify a really good manager," he said. "He represents our profession in the best way possible. I can't say we are friends, we are not in touch much, but I think United have an exceptional manager for many, many years."

If City beat United, they can complete



Manchester City's coach Pep Guardiola talks to his players during a training session yesterday.

the treble in the Champions League final against Inter Milan in Istanbul on June 10. But Guardiola urged his players not to look ahead to their bid for a first Champions League crown. "Thinking about titles, the second or third, we have to analyse the strength of our opponent, look at the weaknesses they have," he said.

"Everything surrounding is normal, you cannot control it. It's special for itself but the question what United have done for the past five months means they are a completely different team. They were better when we lost but we played good. I have the feeling that they have improved, the playing patterns are more clear. We've done really, really well against them during my time but it's United, the quality of player has always been there."

Meanwhile, United coach Erik ten Hag fears forward Antony is "unlikely" to re-

cover from injury in time for FA Cup final. Antony was stretchered off during the first half of last week's Premier League win against Chelsea.

United boss Ten Hag had hoped the Brazilian could return to face treble-chasing City in the first all-Manchester FA Cup final. But Antony has made slow progress this week and looks set to be sidelined at Wembley. "Unlikely (he will be fit)," Ten Hag said. "Antony didn't make the progress, so he still has a chance but unlikely he is available."

Anthony Martial's injury-hit season will also end on the sidelines. The 27-year-old strained a hamstring towards the end of Sunday's win against Fulham and he will miss the final after scans showed a muscle tear. Despite the fitness issues plaguing his team, Ten Hag remains confident United have the squad strength

to beat arch rivals City. "These questions so many times about the absence of players in the last couple of months," he said. "Every time I say the same answer: it's about the players who are available and many times we were successful. We have a good squad and from that good squad we make a good team."

United fans are desperate for their side to extinguish those dreams as Pep Guardiola's men look to replicate Alex Ferguson's 1999 treble heroes. "We want to win, we want to win a cup," Ten Hag said. "It's not about stopping them. It is about that we win, that we win the cup. We have a great opportunity. That's great that we deserved that opportunity to be in the cup final and then meet Man City. That's a great opportunity. We fought so hard for it. I think we progressed that well that we are in that FA Cup final."

## SPOTLIGHT

## Miami tight-lipped on signing Messi as Argentine coach takes charge

AFP

Miami

**I**nter Miami's sporting director Chris Henderson declined to comment on speculation over a bid for **Lionel Messi** as the club unveiled their new Argentine interim coach Javier Morales yesterday.

Miami, who sacked their English coach Phil Neville on Thursday, have long been linked with a bid for Messi, who is expected to leave Paris Saint-Germain when his contract runs out at the end of this season. The club, which is co-owned by David Beckham, has pointedly never denied the various reports of a bid and when asked directly if an offer had been made for Messi, Henderson was careful with his words.

"I'm not going to get into specifics about players that are not on our roster," he said. "I'm here today to talk about Javi Morales to talk about our team. You know there is a transfer window opening but we wanted we want to focus on tomorrow night (against DC United), the Open Cup quarter-finals and the next game... so it's a busy period for us and that's our focus at the moment," he said.

Former Manchester United player Neville was sacked after Miami's fourth straight loss left them stranded at the bottom of the Eastern Conference and ranked 27th of 29 teams in MLS with fans having turned against him. Morales was appointed as interim head coach but former Argentina and Barcelona coach Tata Martino, who worked in MLS as head coach of Atlanta before coaching Mexico at last year's World Cup, has been linked with a move to the South Florida club.

"I don't I don't want to talk about specific coaches," said Henderson when asked about Martino. "There will be a process, interview process but I'm not going to get into specifics. That's internal within our club between myself and our ownership group and we will we will continue that process together as a group," he added.

Although no timescale has been given to Morales, both the coach and Henderson referred to the next three games on several occasions. Morales, who began



his playing career in Argentina before moving to Real Salt Lake in MLS, said he was relishing the chance to take charge of the side for the upcoming games, starting with the visit of Wayne Rooney's DC United today.

He also said he would love to get the job on a permanent basis. "Of course, this is the opportunity of my life, I've been waiting for this," he said. "Probably it is not in the way that I expected but this is life, it is what it is, it has come at this time, I am happy for the opportunity and I will do my best. I've seen this club growing so much... I love this club and will try to help (the team) to improve and get better as soon as possible."

There is now a distinctly Argentine feel to the Miami club, which has a strongly South American fan base – as well as Morales, goalkeeping coach Sebastian Saja played four times for the national side and eight years with Argentine club San Lorenzo. Federico Higuain, the brother of former Argentina and Real Madrid forward Gonzalo, is the head coach of Inter's reserve team, assisted by compatriot Cristian Raul Ledesma.

"What we want to start achieving is that people come to the stadium and they feel identified and represented by this club and by this team," said Morales. "That people go home, regardless of the result, proud to be an Inter Miami fan. I am not saying that has not what has happened in the past but that is what I want from my team."

## Al-Atya stays fourth at Rally Italia Sardegna



Qatar's Nasser bin Khalifa al-Atya and Italian co-driver Giovanni Bernacchini negotiate the route during the second day of the Rally Italia Sardegna yesterday. Al-Atya and Bernacchini finished fourth fastest yesterday. The two Ford Fiesta drivers are fourth overall going to the third day of the hugely popular Masters Cup battle today.

## Gladbach part ways with manager Daniel Farke

**Berlin:** Borussia Moenchengladbach have decided to part ways with coach Daniel Farke after one year in the job, the Bundesliga side announced. Formerly coach of Norwich City, Farke joined Gladbach in the summer of 2022 and led the side to 10th place this season with 43 points, the club's worst season in 12 years.

The club issued a statement saying after an end-of-season analysis with the former coach, the two decided to finish their working arrangement. Farke, who had a contract at Gladbach until 2025, twice took Norwich City to the Premier League by winning the second division, before immediately being relegated.

German media reports former Bayer Leverkusen manager Gerardo Seoane is the favourite to take over from Farke, but several others including outgoing Frankfurt manager Oliver Glasner and former Southampton boss Ralph Hasenhuettl are also in the mix. Gladbach won five German titles in the 1970s but have struggled since, the

1995 German Cup being the only piece of silverware since.

### ALLARDYCE LEAVES LEEDS AFTER FAILING IN RESCUE MISSION

Sam Allardyce left Leeds by mutual consent yesterday after failing to save the club from relegation to the Championship in his four-game spell as interim boss. Allardyce, 68, arrived at Elland Road to replace the sacked Javi Gracia as Leeds battled to extend their stay in the Premier League to a fourth successive season.

But Leeds lost three and drew one of their games under the former England boss, with their relegation sealed on the last day of the season. Allardyce had hinted he would be willing to remain in charge next season to oversee Leeds' bid for a quick return to the top flight. But, after talks between Allardyce and the club hierarchy on Thursday, Leeds have opted to move on from the former Newcastle, Everton and West Ham manager.

### PSG TO FACE RONALDO ON JAPAN SUMMER TOUR

Paris Saint-Germain will face Cristiano Ronaldo's Al Nassr and Champions League finalists Inter Milan in summer friendlies in Japan, the French title-holders said. PSG travelled to Japan to play three local clubs last summer and were greeted by sell-out crowds, even for their training sessions.

This year they will take on Saudi side Al Nassr in Osaka on July 25 and J-League club Cerezo Osaka three days later. There will be no head-to-head however between Ronaldo and old rival Lionel Messi, with the Argentine set to leave PSG.

Messi was not among the players PSG used to illustrate the tour announcement on their website. They round off their Japan visit against Inter, who play Manchester City in the Champions League final, at Tokyo's National Stadium on August 1. City, Bayern Munich and Celtic have also announced tours to Japan this summer. PSG clinched a record 11th French title last week.

## GERMAN CUP

## Departing Glasner hopes Frankfurt 'sparkle' one last time

AFP

Berlin

**O**utgoing Eintracht Frankfurt manager **Oliver Glasner** said yesterday he will not think about his future "until the final whistle" ahead of today's German Cup final clash with RB Leipzig.

Glasner, who took Frankfurt to a Europa League triumph last season, was sacked in May, but the club let him stay on until after final. "I don't think it will matter to me until the final whistle" Glasner said in Berlin, explaining "I've had enough to do, Leipzig have kept me busy."

"I will enjoy the evening," said the Austrian manager. "The game is important tomorrow, not Oliver Glasner." Frankfurt's Europa League win took them to the Champions League for the first time



in their history this season.

Despite finishing seventh in the league this season, a win today would see them qualify for the Europa League once more. Frankfurt are chasing their sixth German Cup title, which would draw them level with Werder Bremen as having the equal second most titles after Bayern Munich's 20. Sitting next to the golden trophy at

press conference, Glasner took a glance at it and told reporters "everyone wants to take it home – it sparkles the same for everyone"

Born on the outskirts of Frankfurt, Eintracht captain Sebastian Rode said he had positive memories of the final, which he won in 2016 with Bayern and in 2017 with Dortmund. "It brings back good memo-

ries, I've been here twice and I've won both times."

Glasner's side face holders Leipzig, who last year beat Freiburg on penalties to lift their first ever major silverware. Leipzig manager Marco Rose, who was installed mid season and did not coach the Red Bulls to the title in 2022, said: "We're here to win the thing – we want to go that final step."

Rose said his side would not be over-awed despite facing a crowd which is likely to be heavily pro-Frankfurt in the German capital. Frankfurt fans are known for travelling, having bought an estimated 25,000 tickets for a game at Barcelona's Camp Nou. "We know Frankfurt fans are an inventive bunch and find their way to get tickets, but we've experienced things like that before," said Rose. "We'll also have a couple of Leipzig fans in the stadium."

## No alternative to Bayern sackings, says ex-president Hoeness

**Berlin:** Former Bayern Munich president Uli Hoeness said in an interview published yesterday the club had no alternative but firing chief executive Oliver Kahn and sporting director Hasan Salihamidzic.

Hoeness explained the club needed to take action, with news of the sacking becoming known just moments after Bayern won their 11th straight Bundesliga title. "The overall development was simply too unsatisfactory," Hoeness told newspaper *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, referring to the club's poor second half of the season.

Nine points ahead of Borussia Dortmund at Christmas, Bayern entered the final round of the season two points behind. Their 2-1 win over Cologne in the last

match of the campaign, along with Dortmund's 2-2 draw against Mainz, meant they won the title on goal difference.

Bayern sacked Kahn and Salihamidzic on Thursday, but did not tell the players or make the news public until moments after the full-time whistle. Captain Thomas Mueller found out in a post-match interview, after putting on a t-shirt commemorating the win. Hoeness, who played for Bayern before running the club in various capacities for decades, revealed "nobody" at the club was consulted about the decision to fire coach Julian Nagelsmann in March. "Even Herbert Hainer (Bayern president) was informed far too late... and something like that simply doesn't work."