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### Sri Lanka square series with 132-run win over Afghanistan



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### Verstappen wins in Spain to continue Red Bull sweep



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# GULF TIMES SPORT



FOOTBALL

## Messi's final game for PSG ends in defeat, Auxerre relegated

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HORSE RACING

# Sheikh Joaan crowns winners of Qatar Prix du Jockey Club

By Sports Reporter  
Chantilly, France

**H**E Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee, crowned the winners of the 183rd renewal of the Qatar Prix du Jockey Club at Chantilly in France yesterday.

The Jean Claude Rouget trained Ace Impact (Cracksman x Absolutly Me) remained unbeaten and continued his colossal line of improvement by taking the QREC-sponsored Gr1 2,100m contest for three-year-old thoroughbreds for his owner, Ecurie Serge Stempniak.

Unbeaten in three starts prior to lining up for the €1,500,000 contest, Ace Impact floated into the weekend's racing on the back of a success in the Listed Prix de Suresnes at Chantilly on May 4.

Ridden by Cristian Demuro, the three-year-old son of Cracksman offered his trainer Jean-Claude Rouget with his sixth success in the Qatar Prix du Jockey Club. The bay colt



HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee, poses with the connections of Qatar Prix du Jockey Club winner Ace Impact at Chantilly, France, yesterday.

represents an immense success story for his small-time breeder Waltraut Spanner. Held up towards the midfield of a race dictated by the eventual runner up Big Rock (Rock Of Gibraltar), Ace Impact travelled well throughout and challenged wide in the home straight. Proving resolute, the colt stayed on strongly to beat the Yeguada Centurion Slu owned and Christopher Head trained Big Rock by three and a half lengths. The runner-up was ridden by Aurelien Lemaitre. The Jaber Abdullah owned and An-



dreas Schutz trained Marhaba Al Sanafi (Muhaarar) took the third place as he was further two and a half lengths under Mickael Barzalona.

"We have always loved Ace Impact", stated the winning trainer, Jean-Claude Rouget, after the race.

"He was originally trained in Pau, but then he came to Deauville with the intention of debuting in the Prix de Crèvecoeur. But, unfortunately, he was the only one not to have pushed a summer coat! Otherwise, I've never had a problem with him and he has come with time! He debuted at Cagnes-sur-Mer. This day he beat Axiome and really set a good impression. We always thought that he was very good and today he proved it."

Bred by Waltraut Spanner, Ace Impact is a brother to the Listed placed Alessandro (Australia), as well as the Listed placed Apollo Flight (Rock Of Gibraltar).

TENNIS/FRENCH OPEN

# Alcaraz, Djokovic enter quarter-finals

UKRAIN'S SVITOLINA, RESURGENT PAVLYUCHENKOVA REACH LAST EIGHT STAGE

AFP  
Paris

**N**ovak Djokovic swept into the French Open quarter-finals for the 14th straight year yesterday as world number one Carlos Alcaraz breezed past Lorenzo Musetti to stay on a collision course with the 22-time Grand Slam champion.

Third seed Djokovic ended the surprise run of Peruvian outsider Juan Pablo Varillas, winning 6-3, 6-2, 6-2, and has yet to drop a set through four matches.

The Serb, chasing a third Roland Garros crown, is into a record 17th French Open quarter-final after making the last eight at a major for the 55th time.

"I'm proud of it, but my attention is already in the next match," said Djokovic, who faces Russian 11th seed Karen Khachanov for a place in the semi-finals.

"I know what my goal is here. I'm trying to stay mentally the course and of course not look too far.

"Obviously the performance of today gives me a great deal of confidence about how I felt, about how I played."

Varillas, 27, was the first player from Peru to reach the second week of a Grand Slam since Jaime Yzaga made the US Open quarter-finals 29 years ago.

Djokovic raced 4-0 ahead in the opening set only for Varillas to break in the next game and then have a chance to get back on serve in the seventh game.

But once Djokovic held for a 5-2 lead it was plain sailing for him as he closed out victory in just under two hours.



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz Garfia serves to Italy's Lorenzo Musetti during their French Open match in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

Khachanov made his third successive Grand Slam quarter-final after he recovered from a bad start to overcome Lorenzo Sonego 1-6, 6-4, 7-6 (9/7), 6-1.

Djokovic holds an 8-1 record against Khachanov, winning their only previous meeting at the French Open in 2020.



Serbia's Novak Djokovic serves to Peru's Juan Pablo Varillas during their French Open match in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

umphing 6-3, 6-2, 6-2 to avenge last year's defeat on clay in the Hamburg final.

"I think I played such a great level, really high quality of shots. I played a really complete match from the first ball until the last and I'm pretty happy to get through this tough round," said Alcaraz. The 20-year-old will face either 2021 runner-up Stefanos Tsitsipas or Austrian qualifier Sebastian Ofner in the next round. Alcaraz improved to 34-3 for the season and is one win away from potentially squaring off against Djokovic in the semi-finals.

Elina Svitolina, playing her first Grand Slam since becoming a mother, reached the quarter-finals for the fourth time.

The Ukrainian defeated Daria Kasatkina 6-4, 7-6 (7/5) for a seventh win in seven meetings against the Russian who was a semi-finalist last year. As with all her matches, Svitolina opted

ASIAN U-20 ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIPS

## Qatar's Hemeida wins pole vault gold



Aspire Academy's Seif Hemeida won pole vault gold.

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

**A**spire Academy's Seif Hemeida continued his fine form in the pole vault in 2023 with another gold medal for Qatar at the 20th Asian Under-20 Athletics Championships in Yecheon, South Korea, yesterday.

The 18-year-old, who is coached by Qatar Athletics Federation's Pawel Szczzyrba, dominated the event as he created the championship record and broke his own national record in the process.

Hemeida claimed the title thanks to his first-time clearance at 5.25m but he decided to continue and eventually cleared 5.50m.

Earlier Hemeida had cleared 4.80m, 5.00m, 5.10, 5.20m and 5.25m on his first attempts, which proved to be enough for him to win the gold medal as China's Liu Rui failed his three efforts at 5.25m.

The event ended up being a straight battle between Hemeida and China's Liu Rui after two Japanese athletes both registered three failures each at 5.15m. His height of 5.50m means that he added 15cm to his previous Qatar national record, which he cleared to win silver at the Asian Indoor Athletics Championships in February.

The victory is further testimony to the strength of the partnership between the Qatar Athletics Federation and Aspire and the support of Qatar



Qatar's Ismail Doudai won 400m gold.

Sports Club. Hemeida's leap in South Korea put him joint second on this year's world under-20 rankings (1st 5.61) and 85th on the all-time world under-20 list as of today.

The victory for Hemeida in South Korea comes just two weeks after he won gold for Qatar at the first-ever Arab Under-23 Athletics Championships in Tunisia.

He also won gold at the West Asian Athletics Championships in Doha in April.

Also in action for Qatar on the first day of the competition was Aspire sprinter Amir Mohamed, who qualified from the heats but was unable to progress from the semi-finals into the final.

There was a second gold on the opening day for Qatar as Ismail Doudai won the men's 400m event. Two other Aspire student-athletes are set to compete at the championships with Mahamat Abdrahman in 400m hurdles and Nayef al-Rashidi in 110m hurdles, which will also feature part-time Aspire athlete Oumar Doudai.



QFA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING HELD



The Executive Committee of the Qatar Football Association (QFA) held its inaugural meeting yesterday under the chairmanship of Jassim bin Rashid al-Buainain, President of the QFA. The committee members Mohamed Khalifa al-Suwaidi, Hani Talib Ballan, Hassan Juma al-Muhannadi, Khalid Abdullah al-Sulaiti and Mansoor al-Ansari were also present in the meeting. Mohamed Khalifa al-Suwaidi has been named Vice-President of QFA while Mansoor al-Ansari will remain in his position as QFA Secretary-General.

FOCUS

Hazlewood out of WTC final, Nesar included

Reuters  
London

Australia fast bowler Josh Hazlewood has been ruled out of the World Test Championship (WTC) final against India with Scott Boland set to replace him in the playing XI in the one-off match beginning at The Oval on Wednesday.

Hazlewood played only three games in the recent Indian Premier League after a side injury flared up while he also grappled with a left Achilles issue.

This has all meant that he has only played four of Australia's last 19 Test matches and has not played in back-to-back first-class games since early 2021.

The 32-year-old was hopeful of playing

the WTC final but was replaced by Michael Nesar in their 15-man squad though Boland is likely to be Australia's third fast bowler alongside skipper Pat Cummins and left-arm quick Mitchell Starc.

"Josh was very, very close to being given the green light but we are cognisant that our upcoming schedule means this is not a one-off test match for us," chief of selectors George Bailey said yesterday.

"This will give Josh an ideal preparation leading into Edgbaston," Bailey said referring to the Ashes series against England beginning on June 16.

"With six Test matches in a little over seven weeks we will need all of our fast bowling assets."

Nesar and Sean Abbott have abandoned their county duties and have been training with the Australian squad in Beckenham.

"Michael's county form has been strong and knowing that he was going to be close by allowed for him to keep playing and for us to be able to call on him," Bailey told reporters yesterday.

"He is a great strength to have as part of the fast-bowling group."

Coach Andrew McDonald said the short turnaround between the WTC final and the Ashes series necessitated effective management of their fast bowling resources.

"We've got the WTC final to play, which we are excited about, but on the back of that we have to quickly turn our attention to England and the Ashes," McDonald told reporters.

"So there'll always be considerations around management..."

"I'd say there'd be some moving parts amongst the quicks."

CRICKET

Sri Lanka square series with big win over Afghanistan

After scoring 324, the home bowlers skittle out visitors for 191 inside 43 overs

AFP  
Hambantota

Quick bowler Dushmantha Chameera stormed back into the Sri Lankan team to power their 132-run win over Afghanistan in Hambantota yesterday and square the three-match one-day international series.

Having amassed a target of 324, the Sri Lankan bowlers skittled out the tourists for 191 inside 43 overs for their biggest win in ODIs over Afghanistan.

Chameera, returning to the side after a seven-month layoff after ankle surgery, bowled a couple of hostile spells to finish with two for 18.

Sri Lanka will be buoyed by the return of their main strike bowler, as they head to Zimbabwe straight after the series to play World Cup qualifiers.

"We are very happy that Chameera is back: injury kept him out for a while but I am glad he is firing on all cylinders," skipper Dasun Shanaka said.

"Dimuth Karunaratne is back as well, and he adds more stability to the batting - and obviously he's very experienced. These are good signs looking forward for the World Cup qualifiers."

There are no such problems for Afghanistan, who have already qualified for the World Cup later this year in India.

Chameera was well backed up by part-time off-spinner Dhananjaya de Silva, who finished with three wickets, including first-match hero Ibrahim Zardani.

Leg-spinner Wanindu Hasaranga polished up the tail claiming three for 42.

Zardani, who had top scored in the first ODI with 98, was again amongst the runs with 54.

But the scoreboard pressure got to him as he edged an attempted cut shot that was well taken by Kusal Mendis behind the stumps.

Captain Hashmatullah Shahidi top



Sri Lankan batsman Kusal Mendis plays a shot during the second one-day international against Afghanistan in Hambantota yesterday. (AFP)

scored with 57 runs, before being trapped leg before by de Silva.

After that, there was little resistance by the Afghan batters as they lost six wickets for 23 runs.

"I don't think that was our best performance, we were bit sloppy on the field," Shahidi said after the match. "We have got one more game, and we will try and bounce back."

Sri Lanka came into the game making four changes, having lost the first ODI by six wickets on Friday.

Openers Dimuth Karunaratne and Pathum Nissanka added 82 runs for the first wicket, with Karunaratne on a comeback trial doing well to post 52 off

62 balls. Kusal Mendis then upped the tempo with a superb counter-attack, smashing 78 off 75 balls with seven fours and one six.

The third-wicket stand between Mendis and Sadeera Samarawickrama, who was playing his first ODI in more than three years, gave the innings much-needed impetus. The pair added 88 runs in 86 balls.

Sri Lanka's lower middle order was the driving force behind their total of 323, with the hosts scoring 109 runs in the last ten overs.

Fareed Ahmad and Mohamed Nabi were the pick of the bowlers for Afghanistan finishing with two wickets apiece.

The third and final ODI will take place on June 7 also in Hambantota.

BRIEF SCORES

**Sri Lanka 323 for six in 50 overs** (Pathum Nissanka 43, Dimuth Karunaratne 52, Sadeera Samarawickrama 44, Kusal Mendis 78, Mohamed Nabi 2-52, Fareed Ahmad 2-61)

**Afghanistan 191 all out in 42.1 overs** (Ibrahim Zardani 54, Rahmat Shah 36, Hashmatullah Shahidi 57, Dushmantha Chameera 2-18, Wanindu Hasaranga 3-42, Dhananjaya de Silva 3-39)

**Result:** Sri Lanka won by 132 runs

**Series:** Afghanistan 1, Sri Lanka 1.

**Toss:** Sri Lanka

ENGLAND SPINNER LEACH RULED OUT OF ASHES

London: England's Ashes preparations were dealt a blow yesterday as frontline spinner Jack Leach was ruled out of the series due to a lower back stress fracture.

The 31-year-old developed the injury as England wrapped up victory in a lone Test against Ireland on Saturday.

"A scan on Sunday in London has revealed a stress fracture, which will keep him out of the forthcoming Ashes Test series," the England and Wales Cricket Board said in a statement.

No replacement for the Somerset left-arm has been announced, but Leach's absence leaves a big gap to fill for the selectors for the showdown against Australia.

He was the only spinner named in the 16-man squad on Saturday for the first two Tests and England's depth in that area will now be tested.

England head coach Brendon McCullum and captain Ben Stokes could opt for an all-seam attack, with Joe Root providing a spin option.

But that could be a risky approach with doubts over how many overs Stokes will be fit to bowl due to a knee injury.

Leach impressed during the winter tours of Pakistan and New Zealand to improve his Test tally to 124 wickets in 35 matches.

But teenager Rehan Ahmed also shone on his Test debut in Pakistan, taking seven wickets in one match at an average of less than 20 runs.

Surrey all-rounder Will Jacks is also in contention after he started the first two Tests in Pakistan.

The first of the five-Test Ashes series gets underway on June 16 at Edgbaston.



England's Jack Leach (left) with teammate Joe Root walk to the field at the start of play during day one of the second Test against New Zealand in Wellington in this February 24, 2023 file photo. Frontline spinner Leach is ruled out of the forthcoming Ashes series due to a lower back stress fracture. (AFP)

CYCLING

Laporte sprints to opening stage win



French rider Christophe Laporte celebrates after winning the first stage of the 75th edition of the Criterium du Dauphine cycling race, after covering a distance of 158km between Chambon-sur-Lac to Chambon-sur-Lac, central France, yesterday. (AFP)

AFP  
Chambon-sur-Lac, France

Frenchman Christophe Laporte pipped Belgian Rune Herregodts on the line in central France to win the first stage of the Criterium du Dauphine yesterday.

Intermarche-Circus-Wanty's Herregodts had been part of an early breakaway but finished in third place with Italian Matteo Trentin in second.

With less than a month to go until the Tour de France, last year's champion Jonas Vingegaard crossed the line just behind Jumbo-Visma team-mate Laporte.

One of France's potential contenders for the Tour, Julian Alaphilippe, also finished with the main group in a rain-sodden day to the south of Clermont.

Former Tour champion Egan Bernal came through unscathed too, as he continues his comeback from serious injuries suffered in a training crash in January 2022. This year's Tour de France begins in San Sebastian, Spain on July 1.

"I just want to finish this race and I would like to know where I'm am, I've been racing in different races but not like the Dauphine," Ineos Grenadiers' Bernal said before the day's stage.

"The plan afterwards depends on how this race goes, I'm not sure how I am. When you have so many accidents and bad luck you need to be strong mentally."

Laporte takes the overall leader's yellow jersey thanks to a 10-second win bonus before Monday's second stage, a 167.5km hilly ride eastwards from Brassac-les-Mines to La Chaise-Dieu.

BOTTOMLINE

Hyper-extended knee 'nothing to worry about', says Stokes

Reuters  
London

England skipper Ben Stokes dismissed concerns about his knee after he was seen hobbling when he took a catch in their Test victory over Ireland on Saturday, saying it would not be a problem ahead of the Ashes later this month.

Stokes looked in discomfort when he took a catch to dismiss Ireland's Curtis Campher during England's 10-wicket win in the one-off Test at Lord's.

The 32-year-old has had knee trouble for some time now, restricting his seam bowling in test matches.

"I landed quite awkwardly. My weight went on the inside of my knee, I hyper-extended it. It was one of those things, but I am 32 (on Sunday) so that probably explains it," Stokes said.



"I bowled this morning, the first time I have bowled since being back from (the Indian Premier League) and I was really happy with the way it was. Nothing to worry about."

The all-rounder, who has picked up 194 Test wickets, has bowled only 17 overs in his last four Tests, while he bowled just one over for Chennai Super Kings in the IPL.

He did not bat or bowl in the win over Ireland. Stokes added that it was "never my intention to bowl in this game" but would be ready to share the ball when the Ashes get underway, with the first Test against Australia at Edgbaston from June 16.

He also praised Test debutant Josh Tongue after the seamer picked up a five-wicket haul in the second innings, dismissing top order batsmen at regular intervals.

Tongue was named in the Ashes squad for the first two Tests.

"He obviously played that third seamer role and we used him with different plans at different times," Stokes said.

"He bowled in longer spells and showed how versatile he can be, which is what we are looking for in a third seamer. He can bowl 90mph, full and short... It was a special feeling for a kid to get a five-for on debut, particularly at Lord's."



FORMULA ONE

# Verstappen wins in Spain to continue Red Bull sweep

The world champion wins from pole in Spain where Lewis Hamilton secures second spot on the podium

Reuters  
Barcelona

Max Verstappen won the Spanish Grand Prix from pole position yesterday to stretch his Formula One championship lead to 53 points and continue Red Bull's sweep of the season with the team's seventh success in as many races.

Seven-times world champion Lewis Hamilton was second for Mercedes, but a distant 24.090 seconds behind, with teammate George Russell completing the podium on a cloudy but dry afternoon at Barcelona's Circuit de Catalunya.

Red Bull's Sergio Perez, Verstappen's closest rival in a season that looks sure to crown the dominant Dutch 25-year-old for a third time, finished fourth after fighting back from 11th at the start.

The win was Verstappen's fifth of the season, third in a row, third in Spain and the double world champion's 40th in Formula One.

The man who took the first Grand Prix win of his career at the Spanish circuit in 2016 and also triumphed last year, secured the bonus point for fastest lap to cap a day of domination.

"It's a big pleasure to drive with a car like this. I think it showed again today," said Verstappen, who fended off Ferrari's home hero Carlos Sainz at the start in the only challenge of an otherwise straight-forward afternoon.

"I had the harder compound so I knew the start would be a bit tricky. Going around the outside at Turn One is always quite difficult but luckily nothing happened."

Verstappen was also shown a black and white flag for exceeding track limits late in the race but the risk of a five second penalty was hardly going to trouble someone so far up the road from the rest.

"Well done Max, that was mega. Very well controlled, even though you went over the white lines a few times," said team boss Christian Horner.

McLaren's Lando Norris, who started third on the grid, suffered a broken front wing on the first lap after contact with Hamilton and had to pit, plunging down



Red Bull's Max Verstappen speaks to second-placed Mercedes' Lewis Hamilton after winning the Spanish Grand Prix in Barcelona yesterday. (Reuters)

the order and finishing 17th. The form of the Mercedes drivers, with a re-designed car after a disappointing start to the season, provided a main talking point.

Mercedes moved up to second in the championship on 152 points to runaway Red Bull's 287 and with Aston Martin dropping to third on 134.

"Mega job guys, mega job," said Hamilton over the radio.

"Thank you so much to everyone back at the factory, continuing to push. This is

a real showing for all your hard work. Let's keep pushing."

Russell went off into the gravel on his way to the grid, where he lined up 12th, but his car was undamaged and his pace strong.

"It definitely feels better," he said of the car.

"You are just putting in those lap times and comparing it to the guys around you - the Ferraris and Astones - and you are going quicker and quicker."

Sainz was fifth with the Aston Martins of Lance Stroll and Fernando Alonso sixth and seventh.

Alpine's Esteban Ocon was eighth, Alfa Romeo's Guanyu Zhou ninth and Pierre Gasly, who qualified fourth before a six-place grid penalty, took the final point for Renault-owned Alpine.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc, who started from the pitlane after a nightmare in qualifying left him on the back row, finished 11th.

## HAMILTON HAILS 'MEGA JOB' BY MERCEDES, SAYS HE IS FOCUSED ON NEXT YEAR

**Barcelona:** Lewis Hamilton celebrated a 'mega' job by Mercedes at the Spanish Grand Prix yesterday and dropped another big hint he will stay with them next year to fight for a record eighth Formula One title.

The Briton finished runner-up to Red Bull's Max Verstappen at Barcelona's Circuit de Catalunya with team mate George Russell third in the first real test of their re-designed Formula One car.

"Mega job guys, Mega job," Hamilton shouted over the team radio at the chequered flag.

"The car felt great," he told *Sky Sports* television. "We've definitely got steps to continue taking to try and close the gap to the Red Bulls but this is way more than I expected this weekend and I thoroughly enjoyed the race.

"As long as I've been racing, if you're quick here you should be good elsewhere."

The points sent Mercedes second in the constructors' championship, ahead of Aston Martin, and the happy faces contrasted to the gloom after Friday practice when Hamilton spoke of struggling to get in the top 10.

The team sent reserve driver Mick Schumacher back to the factory for intensive simulator work on Friday night while Hamilton said he had stayed up until around 11pm seeking solutions.

"We definitely didn't expect to have the result we had today," said Hamilton, who has yet to sign a new contract for next season.

Speaking to reporters, Hamilton said Mercedes would keep chasing down the Red Bulls - he finished 24 seconds behind Verstappen - and hoped to be challenging by the end of the year.

Red Bull have won all seven races so far this year, Verstappen five of them.

"I'm more focused on making sure we have the car next year to challenge them from day one," added Hamilton. "The further we continue to push the car this year, the more that impacts next year also in some ways."

Asked if he would be at Mercedes in 2024, he replied: "I haven't signed anything yet but I think we're meeting with (team boss) Toto (Wolff) tomorrow so hopefully we can get something done."

Wolff said it would probably take half an hour over coffee.

While happy with the team's change of direction after an early season wake-up call, the Austrian cautioned it was important to keep expectations real.

"You see where the benchmark is. It's at the end more than 20 seconds.

"Maybe it was 15 in reality but that's just not where we aim to be," he said.

"We just need to chip away...we are really good at grinding. Once there is a setup direction and a development direction, we just go for it."

MOTORSPORT

# Belgium's Neuville wins Rally of Italy in fine style

AFP  
Olbia, Italy

Belgium's **Thierry Neuville**, driving a Hyundai, jumped from fifth to second in the drivers' standings after winning the Rally of Italy in Sardinia yesterday.

Neuville headed Esapekka Lappi of Finland in a 1-2 finish for Hyundai at round six of 13 of the World Rally Championship.

It was the Belgian's 18th career success with co-driver Martijn Wydaeghe alongside. World champion Kalle Rovanpera, driving a Toyota, completed the podium.

"Obviously it was a challenging weekend," said Neuville, who now trails series leader Rovanpera by 25 points.

"We came here with the belief that we could fight for victory but the first day was challenging and we lost a bit of time. Yesterday we found ourselves in the lead and we had to manage it until the end.

"It's the first victory for the team this year,



it's a 1-2, and the first win for our team principal (Cyril Abiteboul) as well. Craig Breen is in our memories also - we wanted the win in Croatia for him, but we got it now."

The lead changed hands nine times during the rally until Neuville seized the initiative

when Toyota rival Sebastien Ogier went off the road in Saturday's rain-hit penultimate test.

"When I hit the brake pedal, my foot slipped and we couldn't make the corner," said France's Ogier, an eight-time world champion.

Next stop on the circuit is the Safari Rally of Kenya between June 22-25.

- Final results**
1. Thierry Neuville/Martijn Wydaeghe (BEL, Hyundai) 3hr 40min 01.4sec.
  2. Esapekka Lappi/Janne Ferm (FIN, Hyundai) at 33sec.
  3. Kalle Rovanpera/Jonne Halttunen (FIN, Toyota) 1:55.3.
  4. Elfyn Evans/Scott Martin (GBR, Toyota) 5:20.5.
  5. Andrea Mikkelsen/Torstein Eriksen (NOR, Skoda) 9:33.3
- Drivers' standings**
1. Kalle Rovanpera/Jonne Halttunen (FIN) 118 points.
  2. Thierry Neuville/Martijn Wydaeghe (BEL) 93.
  3. Ott Tanak/Martin Jarveoja (EST) 85.
  4. Elfyn Evans/Scott Martin (GBR) 83.
  5. Sebastien Ogier/Vincent Landais (FRA) 70

## Al-Atya, Bernacchini at Rally Italia Sardegna



Qatar's Nasser bin Khalifa al-Atya and his Italian co-driver Giovanni Bernacchini are competing in the FIA Masters Cup, an event for driver over the age of 50. The pair, which finished fifth, yesterday wrapped up with an overall time of 5:11:43.2 in the competition. Austrian team of Keferbock Johannes and Minor Ilka emerged champions in the rally with a time of 4:20:03.1. Al-Atya and Giovanni also featured in the Rally of Portugal - first round of FIA's Masters Cup Europe - last month.



Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland watches his shot from the 18th tee during the third round of the Memorial Tournament at Muirfield Village Golf Club in Dublin, Ohio. (AFP)

## Rory McIlroy leans on experience, ties for lead at Memorial

**Dublin, Ohio:** Northern Ireland's Rory McIlroy, South Korea's Si Woo Kim and David Lipsky all took advantage of a pair of poor performances from Friday's leaders to vault into a three-way tie for first on Saturday after 54 holes of action at the Memorial Tournament in Dublin, Ohio.

McIlroy carded a 2-under 70, Kim posted a 1-under 71 and Lipsky had an even-par 72 to climb the leaderboard at Muirfield Village Golf Club. All three currently sit at 6-under-par 210 for the tournament.

Justin Suh, Friday's second-round leader, dropped 13 spots into a tie for 14th after recording a 5-over 77 on Saturday. Hideki Matsuyama of Japan, who was in second after 36 holes, fell into a tie for ninth with his third-round 75.

McIlroy, who finished with four birdies against two bogeys on Saturday, is search-

ing for his 24th career victory on the PGA Tour. With Kim seeking his fifth and Lipsky still trying to get his first, McIlroy believes he could have the upper hand heading into Sunday but knows things can change quickly.

"I mean, look, it's a, like it's a big tournament and I've got quite a bit of experience in that and you would like to think that gives you a little bit of an advantage," McIlroy said. "So everyone's going to go out there (Sunday) and, regardless of where you are in the tournament, this golf course makes you a little uncomfortable anyway."

"With the way the leaderboard is and how bunched it is, it's just going to come down to who can sort of hold their head the most coming down the stretch."

Even with the odds stacked against him,

Lipsky is confident that he can make a run. "I feel like I've won at every stage of the game professionally. I haven't broken through on the PGA Tour and hopefully that's coming soon," Lipsky said. "But I know I can win, I know I can close out tournaments, and I'm always excited to be in the hunt."

Denny McCarthy (68 on Saturday), Norwegian Viktor Hovland (69) and Wyndham Clark (70) are among five golfers who are tied for fourth. With a 7-under 65, Keegan Bradley carded the low round of the day and climbed 52 spots up the leaderboard into a tie for ninth.

**Shining in debut, Rose Zhang takes lead at Mizuho Americas Open**

Rose Zhang fired a 6-under-par 66 on Saturday to move into the lead after three

rounds of action at the Mizuho Americas Open in Jersey City, New Jersey.

Zhang turned in a bogey-free round while picking up six birdies to climb three spots on the leaderboard. She now sits at 11-under 205, two strokes ahead of Thailand's Aththaya Thitikul, India's Aditi Ashok and Cheyenne Knight, who are all tied for second. "Saturday" was pretty much what I expected. The golf course was playing a little more difficult, especially with the winds gusting up a little bit more and it's in a different direction," Zhang said. "So there was nothing that I didn't anticipate when I went out here."

At 20 years old, Zhang is playing in her first event on the LPGA Tour. She starred at Stanford, where she was a two-time NCAA champion and was named Pac-12 Golfer of the Year in 2022.



## FOOTBALL

# Messi's final game for PSG ends in defeat, Auxerre relegated

'His contribution to PSG and Ligue 1 cannot be underestimated and we wish Leo and his family all the best for the future'

AFP  
Paris

Lionel Messi's final game for Paris Saint-Germain ended in defeat on Saturday, while Monaco missed out on European qualification and Auxerre were relegated on the last night of the Ligue 1 season.

Messi's expected departure from the French giants after two seasons was officially confirmed by PSG in a statement shortly before Saturday's match against Clermont.

"His contribution to Paris Saint-Germain and Ligue 1 cannot be underestimated and we wish Leo and his family all the best for the future," said PSG president Nasser al-Khelaifi.

Yet Messi, who ends his PSG career with 32 goals in 75 appearances, was jeered by some fans during the match, which the champions lost 3-2.

There was little riding on the game itself after PSG wrapped up a record 11th French title last weekend, and Christophe Galtier's side contrived to throw away a two-goal lead. Sergio Ramos, whose own departure from PSG was confirmed on Friday, marked his final appearance by heading in a Vitinha cross for the opener in the 16th minute.

Mbappe, looking to end a fifth consecutive campaign as Ligue 1's top scorer, then scored a penalty to make it 2-0 with his 29th league goal this season, which he marked by holding up Sergio Rico's number 16 jersey.

Spaniard Rico, PSG's back-up



PSG president Nasser al-Khelaifi with Lionel Messi after winning the title.

goalkeeper, is in a serious condition in hospital in Seville after being injured in a horse-riding accident last weekend.

Johan Gastien pounced on a Marco Verratti mistake to pull a goal back for Clermont, who then saw Grejohn Kyei miss a penalty. The visitors equalised in first-half stoppage time through Mehdi Zeffane, and Kyei secured a famous win in the second half as they end the season in eighth place.

"The most important thing

was the tribute to Sergio," Mbappe told broadcaster Canal Plus after PSG suffered a seventh league defeat in 2023.

"There are more important things than football, and on the pitch we were already champions. We could have lost 22-0 and that would not have changed anything for us.

"We had to pay tribute to Sergio. I think we have all been affected by what is an extremely serious situation. We have been worried about that all week and



Paris Saint-Germain players celebrate after winning Ligue 1 trophy at the Parc des Princes Stadium in Paris. (AFP)

so we tried to pay tribute in the best possible way."

Mbappe's goals tally left him two ahead of Lyon's Alexandre Lacazette in the final standings.

Asked about his own future in Paris, France star Mbappe said: "I am just here to play. I am still under contract. The club is doing what it can and I will be happy with whatever the club does."

PSG end the season a point clear of runners-up Lens, who completed a fine campaign with a 3-1 win away at Auxerre in

which Alexis Claude-Maurice scored twice and Lois Openda got his 21st goal in Ligue 1.

That result allowed Nantes to climb out of the relegation zone and above Auxerre with a 1-0 win over Angers, as Auxerre return to the second tier after just one season back in the elite.

Angers, Troyes and Ajaccio had already been condemned to the drop with four teams going down and only two coming up as France's top flight is reduced from 20 clubs to 18 for next season.

Marseille, who were already guaranteed third and a place in the Champions League qualifying rounds, lost 1-0 at Ajaccio in their first game after coach Igor Tudor announced his departure.

In the battle for the remaining European places, Lille began the day in fourth, a point above

Rennes and Monaco.

However, Lille were held to a 1-1 draw at Troyes, allowing Rennes to climb above them thanks to a 2-1 victory at Brest in which Benjamin Bourigeaud

scored both their goals. Rennes therefore go into next season's Europa League group stage, while Lille will enter the Europa Conference League in the play-off round. Monaco, beaten 2-1 at home by Toulouse, finish sixth and miss out on European qualification altogether.

Elsewhere on Saturday, Nice beat Lyon 3-1, while Lorient were 2-1 winners against Strasbourg and Folarin Balogun scored his 21st goal this season as Reims lost 3-1 to Montpellier.

## SPOTLIGHT

## Benzema leaves Real after 14 years

Reuters  
Madrid

Ballon d'Or winner Karim Benzema will leave Real Madrid as a free agent in the close season after 14 trophy-laden years, the La Liga club said yesterday, with the striker set to move to Saudi Arabian side Al Ittihad.

Saudi Arabia's state-run Al Ekhbariya television station reported that Al Ittihad had reached an agreement with Benzema on a two-year contract, with club officials in Madrid to hammer out a "record deal" with the striker. The 35-year-old Frenchman had looked set to stay at the Spanish club for one more year after a 2022-23 season in which he struggled with injuries and missed out on France's World Cup campaign in Qatar due to another injury.

However, an offer estimated by media to be worth more than 100mn euros (\$107.05mn) from Saudi Arabia reportedly made him reconsider his future.

The Frenchman decided to void the one-year extension clause he had in his contract,



with Real saying he had "earned the right to decide his future".

"Real Madrid and our captain Karim Benzema have agreed to bring his brilliant and unforgettable time as a player at our club to a close," the club said in a statement. "Karim Benzema's career at Real Madrid has been a shining example of conduct and profession-

alism, and he has represented the values of our club." Benzema could follow his former Real teammate Cristiano Ronaldo to the Gulf country after the Portugal forward signed a 2-1/2 year contract estimated to be worth more than 200mn euros with Al Nassr in December. Having joined Real in 2009 from Olympique Lyonnais, Benzema became the spearhead of the club's attack and their main goal-scoring threat after Ronaldo left for Juventus in 2018. Benzema scored more than 350 goals for Real to sit second on the club's all-time scoring list behind Ronaldo.

He had his best season in the 2021-22 campaign when he scored 44 times in all competitions to lead the side to a record-extending 14th European title as well as the La Liga crown. In the Champions League, Real made remarkable comebacks from losing positions in the last 16, quarter-finals and semi-finals against Paris St Germain, Chelsea and Manchester City respectively - with Benzema scoring in each of the second legs. His pivotal role earned him the Ballon d'Or crown, making him the first French player to win the trophy since Zinedine Zidane in 1998 and the fifth Frenchman overall.

## VOLLEYBALL BEACH PRO TOUR

## Younousse-Tijan finish second



Qatar's Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan in action during the final of the Volleyball Beach Pro Elite16 event in Ostrava yesterday.

Agencies  
Ostrava

Tokyo 2020 Olympic bronze medallists Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan lost to reigning Olympic champions Anders Mol and Christian Sorum from Norway 1-2 (15-21, 21-19, 12-15) in the Volleyball World Beach Pro Tour Ostrava Elite16 final yesterday.

It was the first podium of the season for the Qatari pair and fifth overall on the Beach Pro Tour since it was launched last year. With the victory, the Norwegian pair defended their Ostrava title. It was their third overall podium-topper in Ostrava, as they won the 4-star event to increase their pro tour medal count to 10, including a record-breaking six gold medals.

USA's Miles Partain and Andrew Benesh, seeded 13th in the main draw bracket, made their way to the podium after starting their Ostrava quest from Wednesday's qualifiers.

Their bronze was the pair's second medal on the Tour, after the gold they took at the first Dubai Challenge in October. They won 2-0 against home favourites Ondrej Perusic and David Schweiner.

In the final, Mol and Sorum dominated the first set to edge forward on the scoreboard, but sev-

enth-seeded Younousse and Tijan fought back in the second to push the final to a third-set decider. Regaining control on the court, the Norwegians made sure they stayed in front on the way to Mol's kill block that ended the set in their favour.

Mol's blocking efforts accounted for as many as six of his 28 points in the match. Sorum finished with 19 points as both he and his partner managed to ace twice each during the game. Ahmed's 22-point tally included an ace and a block, while Cherif raised three stuffs towards a 15-point total.

"This means everything! It's so special to play here in Ostrava, in front of all these amazing people," said Mol at the end of the match.

In the first of yesterday's two semi-finals, Mol and Sorum and Perusic and Schweiner returned to their tradition to engage in three-set battles with the Beachvolley Vikings emerging victorious in the end. They came back from a set down to claim a 2-1 (19-21, 21-17, 15-8) win. In the second semi-final, Partain and Benesh took the first set of that match, but then Younousse and Tijan fought back to win it by 2-1 (18-21, 21-17, 15-9).

Tijan outsourced everyone on the court with 23 points, including an ace, while Younousse raised three kill blocks and also aced once to tally 17 points to his name. Benesh finished with 22 points, while Partain added another 15.

## LEIPZIG RETAIN GERMAN CUP



German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier (left) applauds as Leipzig's players celebrate with the trophy after they won the German Cup final against Eintracht Frankfurt in Berlin. (AFP)