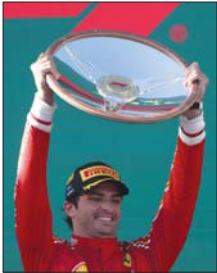


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return as
Pakistan alters
selection panel



FORMULA 1 | Page 4

Sainz claims
Australian GP,
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SPORT

TENNIS

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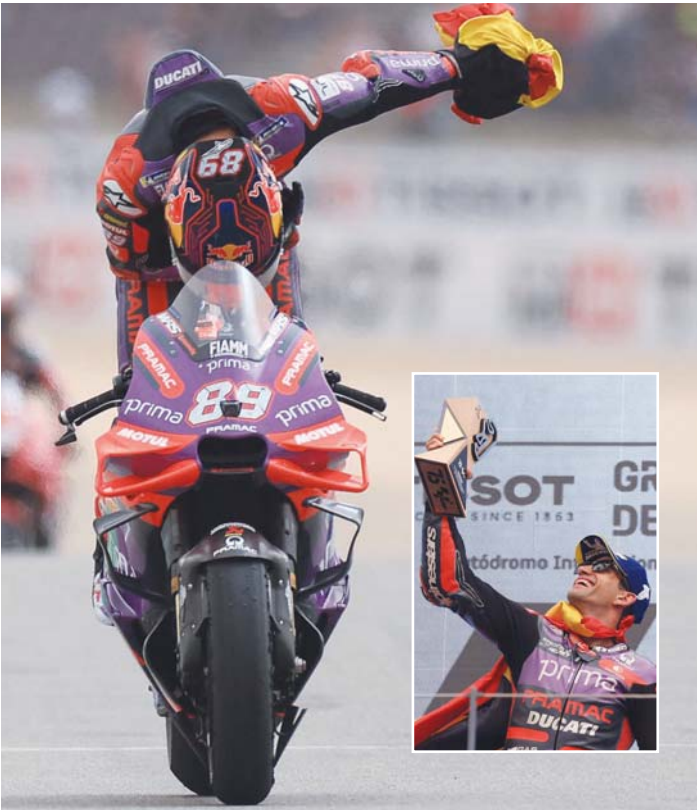
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MOTOGP

SPOTLIGHT

Spain's Martin wins as Bagnaia crashes out

'I am happy because I've worked a lot... on every detail to feel 100 percent'



Ducati Spanish rider Jorge Martin (also inset) celebrates after winning the Portuguese Grand Prix at the Algarve International Circuit in Portimao yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Portimao, Portugal

Jorge Martin hit the front in the first lap and never relinquished his lead to win the Portuguese MotoGP yesterday, in the second race of the season.

Enea Bastianini was second and teenage rookie Pedro Acosta third.

Martin took top spot in the standings from champion Francesco Bagnaia who crashed out after a collision with Marc Marquez in the wild final stages.

Bastianini, on a factory Ducati, started on pole but Martin, third at lights out, quickly took the lead on his Pramac Ducati going into turn

one and dominated the race, making no errors.

Martin, runner-up to Bagnaia in the championship last season, suffered a horror crash at Portimao in 2021 from which he needed several surgeries to recover.

"Today I had no problems and I felt great... winning again is fantastic and I feel very competitive," Martin told DAZN.

"I was very focussed on the start, I knew it would be the key.

"I am happy because I've worked a lot... on every detail to feel 100 percent."

The exciting 19-year-old Acosta, on a Gasgas-Tech3, seventh in qualifying, overtook Brad Binder's KTM and then six-time MotoGP world champion Marquez on a



Young Qatari rider Hamad al-Sahouti yesterday competed in his maiden Moto3 World Championship race during Portuguese Grand Prix in Portimao. Riding a Honda with the Rivacold Snipers Team for the first time, the 19-year-old finished 22nd with a time of 35 minutes and 19.231s, 1'10.193s behind the race winner Daniel Holgado. (Rivacold Snipers Team)

Fresini Ducati, to move into fifth.

Italian defending double world champion Bagnaia kept Acosta at bay for a while, but the young Spaniard passed and gained a maiden podium after Maverick Vinales crashed out.

"The team has done an incredible job," a delighted Acosta, 19, told DAZN.

"It's the first podium and look at all these people, today is the day of Gas Gas red. "Thanks to all the team, we knew it would not be easy but now we have the first podium in the bag."

Acosta became the third-youngest rider to score a podium in the premier class.

Bagnaia, who took the season-opener and had won on the Algarve in 2021 and 2023, was chasing a 20th victory, but Martin stayed comfortably ahead of the chasing pack.

The final laps were chaotic, with Bagnaia and Marquez colliding at turn five and Vinales crashing because of an apparent technical issue on his Aprilia.

The team later said it was "presumably" a gear box issue.

Bagnaia and Marquez's crash with three laps remaining while battling for fifth led to the Spaniard coming in 16th while the Italian retired.

"We touched and we both finish with zero points," said Bagnaia.

"We will not be sanctioned, because the punishment is that both of us don't get any points today.

"They are situations that are hard to understand, everyone tries to do the best for himself"

Bagnaia said he had spoken with Marquez and that both riders "had different points of view"

"In races there are collisions... we're both annoyed because it's not the outcome we wanted," said Marquez.

After Ducati had six of the top seven finishes in Qatar, Acosta, Binder and Jack Miller brought their KTM motorcycles to positions three, four and five. With the Argentine MotoGP cancelled, the next race is in Austin, Texas, across April 12-14. Martin leads the standings on 60 points from Binder with 42 and Bastianini on 39.

TOP 10 RESULTS

1. Jorge Martin (ESP/Ducati-Pramac) 41:18.138, 2. Enea Bastianini (ITA/Ducati) at 0.882, 3. Pedro Acosta (ESP/GasGas-Tech3) 5.362, 4. Brad Binder (RSA/KTM) 11.129, 5. Jack Miller (AUS/KTM) 16.437, 6. Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 19.403, 7. Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) 20.130, 8. Aleix Espargaro (ESP/Aprilia) 21.549, 9. Miguel Oliveira (POR/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 23.929, 10. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 28.195,

Haidan tops Big Tour in 10th round of Hathab

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Mohamed Saeed Haidan claimed the Big Tour title in the tenth round of the Longines Hathab - Qatar Equestrian Tour - at the outdoor arena of Qatar Equestrian Federation topping the One round against the clock 145-150cm showjumping class late on Saturday night.

Mohamed Haidan was flawless astride bay gelding Obama finishing the routine in best time of 66.53secs.

The Longines Hathab - Qatar Equestrian Tour is an annual domestic series with 14 rounds and this is its 7th season.

The Big Tour's runners-up podium spot was claimed by Mohamed Khalifa al-Baker who clocked a spotless 70.25secs with bay stud Lissabon 56 while

Khaled Abdulaziz al-Eid on bay stud Q Layen was third clocking 73.61secs.

The Big Tour winners were awarded their prizes by Faisal al-Kahla, Deputy Director of the Longines Hathab Championship.

Earlier, the Open Class One round against the clock (120-125cm) event was won by Hussain Saeed Haidan, who rode dark brown stud D Saucedo for a clean routine in fastest 54.74secs.

Abdulaziz Fahad al-Eid astride bay gelding Kayenne Of De Rocky Mounten was second (55.78secs) while Sultan Salem Badi al-Naemi on bay gelding Higgs was third in 56.86secs.

The Open Class podium winners were awarded their prizes by former support rider Mubarak al-Rumaihi.

The 11th round of Hathab will be held from March 28-30 at the same venue.



Faisal al-Kahla, Deputy Director of the Longines Hathab Championship, awards the Big Tour winners of Longines Hathab Round 10, Season 7, at the Qatar Equestrian Federation's outdoor arena on Saturday.



Open Class winner of Hathab round 10 Hussain Saeed Haidan receives his prize from former support rider Mubarak al-Rumaihi.

FOCUS

Al Wakrah win inaugural edition of EQSL

Curtains came down on the inaugural edition of Electronic Qatar Stars League (QSL) 2024, with Al Wakrah being crowned as champions following their 5-3 victory over Al Ahli in the final played on Saturday evening, March 23, 2024, in the presence of Hani Taleb Ballan, CEO of QSL, Hassan Rabiah al-Kuwari, Executive Director of Sales, Marketing and Communication at QSL, and Ahmed Khelil Abbassi, Executive Director of Competitions and Football Development at QSL.

A number of guests and invitees also attended, including Faisal Khalid, Secretary-General of Qatar ESports Federation (QESF), Khalifa al-Haroon, Executive Director of QESF, Ahmed al-Bannai, CSR and Sponsorship Manager at Ooredoo, and Mohamed al-Marzouqi, Head of Programmes

at Al Kass. Besides, representatives of a number of media outlets and social media celebrities were present.

After the end of the competitions, Hani, al-Kuwari and Faisal crowned Al Wakrah, Al Ahli and Al Sadd, who finished first, second and third respectively.

The final day witnessed the knockout stages - quarter-finals, semi-finals, third-place play-off and final.

Al Wakrah will represent Qatar in the qualifiers for 2024 Electronic Sports World Cup for clubs. Electronic competitions through the famous game (FC 24), developed by EA Sports, were held over three days from March 21 at the Virtuocity Hall in Doha Festival City mall, with the participation of 2023-2024 season Expo Stars League's 12 teams.

E-QSL is a new initiative that

aims to open new horizons for the QSL and club companies to enter the field of e-sports and keep pace with the tremendous development of this game, in addition to support the Qatari e-sports team, expand the base of participation in society, and refine and develop talent in this sport, which is of interest to a large section of fans, especially youngsters. (qsl.qa)

RESULTS

QUARTER-FINALS

Al Sadd bt Al Rayyan 5-4, Muathier lost to Al Ahli 1-4, Al Wakrah bt Al Gharafa 6-1, Al Markhiya lost to Al Shamal 3-4

SEMI-FINALS

Al Sadd lost to Al Ahli 3-5, Al Wakrah bt Al Shamal 5-0.

THIRD-PLACE PLAY-OFF

Al Sadd bt Al Shamal 1-0

FINAL

Al Ahli lost to Al Wakrah 3-5



ANNOUNCEMENT

Disgraced pacer Amir ends retirement



AFP
Lahore, Pakistan

Disgraced fast bowler **Mohamed Amir** announced yesterday he was coming out of retirement and available for this year's Twenty20 World Cup, after Pakistan announced changes to its selection process.

Amir's precocious career was halted in 2010 after he along with then-Pakistan Test captain Salman Butt and fellow pacer Mohamed Asif were banned for five years over a spot fixing scandal.

All three were also jailed by a UK court.

Amir returned to play for Pakistan in 2016 but announced a

shock retirement in December 2020 after he was not selected due to poor form.

"I still dream to play for Pakistan! Life brings us to the points where at times we have to reconsider our decisions," Amir wrote yesterday on social media platform X.

After "positive" talks with Pakistan Cricket Board officials, he said the PCB made him feel "that I was needed and can still play for Pakistan".

"I declare I am available to be considered for upcoming T20WC," the 31-year-old added.

The Twenty20 World Cup will be held in the United States and the West Indies in June.

Amir has represented Pakistan in 36 Tests, 61 ODIs and 50 T20Is.

His announcement came a day after all-rounder Imad Wasim reversed his own decision to retire four months ago and made himself available to play in this year's World Cup.

Earlier yesterday, newly elected PCB chairman Mohsin Naqvi announced a seven-member selection panel, making the captain and head coach part of the process.

"We have reorganised the selection committee with seven members but the different thing is that there will be no chairman," Naqvi told a press conference, adding that each member would have "equal powers".

Former captain Mohamed Yousuf, Wahab Riaz, Abdul Razzaq and Asad Shafiq – all played for Pakistan – will be joined by the current

captain, the head coach and a data analyst.

The committee will soon announce probabilities for a two-week training camp to be held at army base Kakul from today, Naqvi said yesterday.

Pakistan are without a head coach following their disastrous World Cup (50 overs) in India last year where they failed to qualify for the semi-finals.

Afterwards Babar Azam stepped down from captaincy of all formats and was replaced by Shan Masood as Test captain and Shaheen Shah Afridi as T20I captain.

The then-head coach Mickey Arthur was replaced by team director Mohamed Hafeez under whom Pakistan suffered a 3-0 Test whitewash in Australia and a

4-1 series defeat in a T20I series in New Zealand. Naqvi yesterday left open whether Shaheen will be retained as captain, saying the selection committee will make a final decision on its T20I captain after the training camp.

The chairman also announced the restoration of a central contract for fast bowler Haris Rauf, who was suspended last month after he refused to play Tests in Australia.

"Rauf has stated that there was some misunderstanding so we have restored his central contract," said Naqvi.

Pakistan will play five T20Is against New Zealand at home followed by two in Ireland and four in England before featuring in the World Cup.

FIRST TEST

De Silva, Mendis hit centuries once again on Day 3

Bangladesh are 47-5 at stumps with 464 more needed for a win

AFP
Sylhet, Bangladesh

Dhananjaya de Silva and Kamindu Mendis both slammed their second century of the match as Sri Lanka set up a 511-run target for Bangladesh before pushing the hosts to the corner in the first Test yesterday.

The visitors were all out for 418 in their second innings at Sylhet, with Mendis making 164 runs to go with his 102 in the first innings and De Silva, who also scored 102 runs in the first innings, adding 108.

Sri Lankan pacers began the victory push immediately, reducing Bangladesh to 47-5 at stumps, with 464 more needed for an unlikely win.

Vishwa Fernando claimed 3-13, while Kasun Rajitha and Lahiru Kumara each claimed a wicket as Mahmudul Hasan (0), Najmul Hossain Shanto (6), Zakir Hasan (19), Shahadat Hossain (0) and Liton Das (0) all departed.

"Of course, it's a bad thing, because we're all doing bad together," Mehidy Hasan Miraz said of Bangladesh's batting.

"Everyone has to play well in Test cricket, otherwise it will be difficult."

The sorry display from Bangladesh batsmen came after de Silva and Mendis had dominated the bowlers for the better part of the day, becoming only the third pair in Test history to score a century in both innings.

The Chappell brothers, Greg and Ian, of Australia achieved the feat against New Zealand in March 1974, before Misbah-ul-Haq and Azhar Ali emulated it against Australia in Abu Dhabi in 2014.

The pair, who shared 202 runs in Sri Lanka's first innings total of 280 runs, put on 173 runs together this time.

"I'm very happy.... the main reason is the talent and determination these players possess," Sri Lanka batting coach Thilina Kandamby said.

Mehidy broke their partnership, before finishing with 4-74 for Bangladesh.

Resuming on 119-5, the visitors lost night-watchman Fernando (four) early to Khaled Ahmed, before de Silva and Mendis took control. De Silva brought his second century into the game with a single off Mehidy, before he was dropped by Nahid Rana off Shoriful Islam on 101.

Sri Lanka have never lost a Test series to Bangladesh.



Sri Lanka's Dhananjaya de Silva (right) and Kamindu Mendis run between the wickets during the third day of the first Test against Bangladesh at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium in Sylhet yesterday. (AFP)

SCOREBOARD		
Sri Lanka first innings	280	(Dhananjaya), 8-366 (Jayasuriya), 9-366 (Kumara), 10-418 (Mendis)
Bangladesh first innings	188	Bowling: Shoriful 21-2-75-1, Khaled 18-2-46-1, Rana 20-1-128-2 (w2, nb1), Taijul 20-4-2-75-2, Mehidy 29-8-74-4, Mominul 1-1-0-0, Najmul 1-0-5-0
Sri Lanka second innings (overnight 119-5)		
N. Madushka c Liton b Rana	10	
D. Karunaratne c Rana b Shoriful	52	
Kusal Mendis c Liton b Rana	3	
A. Mathews c Liton b Taijul	22	
D. Chandimal lbw b Mehidy	0	
D. de Silva c Zakir b Mehidy	108	
V. Fernando c Mehidy b Khaled	4	
Kamindu Mendis c Mehidy b Taijul	164	
P. Jayasuriya b Mehidy	25	
L. Kumara lbw Mehidy	0	
K. Rajitha not out	4	
Extras (b12, lb3, nb10)	26	
Total (all out; 110.4 overs)	418	
Fall of wickets: 1-19 (Madushka), 2-32 (Kusal), 3-60 (Mathews), 4-64 (Chandimal), 5-113 (Karunaratne), 6-126 (Fernando), 7-299		

FOCUS

Captain Samson leads Rajasthan to opening win over Lucknow



Rajasthan Royals' captain Sanju Samson plays a shot during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 match against Lucknow Super Giants at the Savai Mansingh Stadium in Jaipur. (AFP)

AFP
Jaipur, India

Sanju Samson led from the front as Rajasthan Royals defeated Lucknow Super Giants by 20 runs in their opening match of the Indian Premier League yesterday.

Captain Samson hammered an unbeaten 82 off 52 balls to steer in-augural IPL champions Rajasthan to 193-4 after they elected to bat first in Jaipur.

Rajasthan's New Zealander quick Trent Boult then struck two early blows to rattle the Lucknow batting, which finished on 173-6 despite an unbeaten 64 by West Indies' Nicholas Pooran.

Ravichandran Ashwin of Royals said yesterday: "It was a wicket of two halves. When we batted first, it stuck in the pitch. Sometimes it is tough. After the eight-over mark, we felt the wicket was a good one. In our view, we were 10 short. It was a good pitch; it tends to get better here."

He added: "I went for 12 off the first ball I bowled! I bowl in different stages of the game. The body is ageing. Requires different mindset. I came from a Test series. I went for 15 in the first over – that was inside the powerplay. The moment that phase of the game is done, I try to shell it away!"

Lucknow, who made the play-offs in the last two seasons since their debut alongside Gujarat Titans in 2022, lost regular wickets but skipper KL Rahul attempted to keep the chase on track in his 44-ball 58 despite his slow start.

The left-handed Pooran then took charge and along with Rahul put on 85 runs for the fifth wicket but the asking rate kept climbing rather rapidly.

Rahul fell to Sandeep Sharma after his fifty and Marcus Stoinis's departure left Pooran with a lot in the final few overs.

Samson remained the hero as he took on the opposition attack and built key partnerships including a 93-run third-wicket stand with Riyan Parag, who made 43.

Samson hit six sixes on a pitch with variable bounce where Lucknow bowlers took a beating except Krunal Pandya, who returned figures of 0-19.

The Rajasthan innings witnessed a nearly 10-minute halt in the first over when a cable of the spidercam broke as technicians scurried to sort out the wires on the field.

BRIEF SCORES
Rajasthan Royals 193 for 4 (Samson 82*, Parag 43) beat **Lucknow Super Giants 173 for 6** (Pooran 64*, Rahul 58, Boult 2-35) **by 20 runs**

BOTTOMLINE

Gujarat edge past Mumbai in IPL thriller to spoil Pandya's homecoming



Gujarat Titans' players celebrate after the dismissal of Mumbai Indians' Gerald Coetzee during the Indian Premier League (IPL) Twenty20 match in Ahmedabad yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Ahmedabad, India

Gujarat Titans edged out Mumbai Indians by six runs in an IPL thriller yesterday as Hardik Pandya suffered a defeat as Mumbai captain after he controversially replaced Rohit Sharma.

Rohit (43) and Dewald Brevis (46) shone in Mumbai's chase of their 169 target with a third-wicket stand of 77 but Gujarat's bowlers hit back to keep the opposition down 162-9 in Ahmedabad.

Millions of Mumbai fans had slammed the franchise for the captaincy switch as Pandya made his IPL debut for Mumbai under Rohit and later led Gujarat to a title in

their debut season in 2022 at the same venue.

But it was celebration at the world's biggest cricket stadium or new home team captain Shubman Gill who spoiled Pandya's homecoming. Commentators said close to 90,000 fans turned up at the 132,000 capacity arena.

Five-time champions Mumbai needed 48 from 36 balls with seven wickets in hand before going down to an opening loss.

"We backed ourselves to chase those 42 runs but it was one of those days where we lost the momentum," said Pandya.

"It feels good to be back because this is one stadium you can enjoy, feel the atmosphere quite lively and obviously the crowd was full and they got a good game as well."

Mohit Sharma took down Brevis, who came in as impact substitute, and then Tim David in successive overs before fellow quick Spencer Johnson struck twice in the 19th over to dent the chase further.

Rohit's wicket in the 13th over off Sai Kishore also proved to be key for Gujarat. Pandya attempted to go for the 19 runs needed in the last over with a six and a four off Umesh Yadav before being caught out on the third.

"I think the way the boys held their nerve, and the way we bowled in the death overs, especially with the dew coming in, I thought it was special," said Gill.

Pandya, who has returned to competitive cricket after an ankle injury, bowled with the new ball and sent down three overs for 30

runs. Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah came in first change to bowled Wriddhiman Saha with a trademark toe-crushing yorker and finished with figures of 3-14 in four overs to keep down Gujarat to 168-6. His other two wickets included Sai Sudarshan, who top-scored with 45, and David Miller, who made 12. Bumrah was ably supported by IPL debutant and South African quick Gerald Coetzee, who took two wickets after joining the franchise for \$602,000 in the auction last year.

BRIEF SCORES
Gujarat Titans 168 for 6 (Sudharsan 45, Bumrah 3-14, Coetzee 2-27) beat **Mumbai Indians 162 for 9** (Brevis 46, Rohit 43, Mohit 2-32) **by six runs**

TENNIS

Sun returns as Swiatek chases ‘Sunshine Double’

‘I just believe that I have abilities to play on any surface, especially here where it’s a little bit slower’

Reuters
Miami

After two days of rain the sun returned to the Miami Open on Saturday in a good omen for Iga Swiatek, who launched her bid to become just the second woman to win the “Sunshine Double” more than once with a breezy 6-1 6-1 win over Italy’s Camila Giorgi.

In stark contrast to Swiatek’s joy, Belarusian world number two Aryna Sabalenka exited in a fit of rage, smashing her racquet and walking off court without offering a handshake after a 6-4 1-6 6-1 loss to Ukraine’s Anhelina Kalinina.

Ukrainian players have been refusing to shake hands with Russian and Belarusian opponents since Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Back on court for the second time in as many days following the apparent suicide of former boyfriend Konstantin Koltsov, Sabalenka appeared to have little left in the tank physically, mentally and emotionally after a long difficult week.

After her return wide gave Kalinina the match the Australian Open champion vented her frustration by smashing her racquet to pieces and exiting the court.

With the win Kalinina moves into the round of 16, where she will face Kazakhstan’s Yulia Putintseva.

Winner of the “Sunshine Double” (wins at Indian Wells and Miami Open) in 2022, Swiatek can join Steffi Graf as the only other woman to pull off the feat more than once if she can lift the trophy in Miami after taking the first leg in the California desert last weekend.

The world number one opened her Miami account in ruthless style, romping to victory in just 69 minutes.

“Today, for sure, was a pretty positive day,” said Swiatek.

“I just believe that I have abilities to play on any surface, especially here where it’s a little bit



Anhelina Kalinina of Ukraine serves against Aryna Sabalenka (not pictured) on day six of the Miami Open. (USA TODAY Sports)

slower usually. I already know that I could do it (win) two years ago, so this experience has taught me that there’s no need to worry or panic, you just have to really use every minute on court to be focused and get the right feeling.”

Swiatek has not lost an opening match since 2021 in Cincinnati and the 22-year-old Pole was in no danger of having that run end on the Hard Rock stadium court, racing out to a 4-0 lead in the opening set and never stepping off the gas.

Next for Swiatek is 26th-seeded Czech teenager Linda Noskova, who could prove a tricky test having stunned the Pole in the third round of this year’s Australian Open.

‘BEST MATCH’

In the battle of players returning to the tour from maternity leave it was former world number one Naomi Osaka coming away with a 6-2 7-6(5) win over 15th-seeded Ukrainian Elina Svitolina. It is another big step in the 26-year-old Japanese player’s comeback having

now picked off two top 20 ranked players in the six matches since her return.

“I definitely do think it was one of my best matches, if not the best match,” said the four-time Grand Slam winner. “But I also want myself to play better and better every match.”

“I feel like for me going into the match, I knew that she’s a great player, and I had no choice but to play really well if I wanted a chance to win.”

American fifth seed Jessica Pegula moved untroubled into the third round when an ailing Zhu Lin retired trailing 6-4 4-1.

After only eight matches were completed on Friday due to rain, the start of play was again delayed by three hours on Saturday with Pegula and Zhu among the first in action as organisers scrambled to get back on schedule.

Zhu, looking for her first win over a top five ranked opponent, began smartly, matching Pegula with an early break.

But the 30-year-old Chinese

was unable to sustain the effort as Pegula broke again to take the opener before charging out to a 3-0 lead in the second.

Zhu would hold serve at 3-1 but after Pegula served to increase her lead in the match headed to the bench during the changeover showing signs of distress and asked for the trainer.

A medical time out was called with a doctor coming on court checking Zhu’s blood pressure and heart rate as the Chinese player closed her eyes and pointed to her chest.

Following a brief discussion with the chair umpire the match was called with Pegula coming across to check on her opponent.

Next up for Pegula is Canadian Leylah Fernandez, who converted all six of her break chances in a 6-4 6-2 win over Colombian Emiliana Arango.

Romania’s Sorana Cirstea brought former champion Sloane Stephens Miami Open to a screeching halt mauling the American Grand Slam winner 6-2 6-1.

EMOTIONAL SABALENKA EXITS MIAMI OPEN IN FIT OF RAGE



Miami: Aryna Sabalenka, back on court for the second time in as many days following the apparent suicide of former boyfriend Konstantin Koltsov, had a difficult and emotional week come to an end on Saturday with a 6-4 1-6 6-1 loss to Anhelina Kalinina.

After a gutsy second round win on Friday over good friend Paula Badosa the world number two appeared to have little left in the tank physically, mentally or emotionally for a late night Stadium court battle with Ukrainian Kalinina.

When her return wide gave Kalinina the match the 25-year-old Belarusian bowed her head, took a few steps then flew into a rage, venting her frustration by smashing her racquet to pieces at centre court.

With racquet destroyed, she then turned and walked off court without shaking the Ukrainian’s hand. “It’s always tough to play on big stages against these top players,” said Kalinina.

“Today was really tough with nerves but I managed in the tough moments to deal with it. So I’m a little bit proud of myself today.”

The result and outburst are hardly a surprise coming at the end of

a pressure-packed week for the Australian Open champion. Sabalenka issued a brief statement on Wednesday saying her “heart was broken” by the “unthinkable tragedy” but has otherwise remained out of the spotlight.

The statement was also the first mention since the tragedy that the couple had split.

The Miami-Dade police department confirmed on Tuesday that they had responded to a call the day before at a Miami resort about reports of a man jumping off a balcony.

The police said no foul play was suspected.

Koltsov, 42, played for the Belarus national team at the 2002 and 2010 Olympics and spent parts of three seasons with the National Hockey League’s Pittsburgh Penguins between 2003 and 2006.

The news of Koltsov’s death sent a shockwave through the Miami Open as Sabalenka’s fellow players rallied around her, including her opponent Badosa.

Sabalenka was very much in control of her emotions and slowly found her form in a 6-4 6-3 win over Badosa but slowly unravelled against Kalinina and could never regain her composure.

ALCARAZ AND SINNER TAKE FIRST STEPS TOWARDS MIAMI SHOWDOWN



Carlos Alcaraz of Spain waves to the crowd after his match against Roberto Carballes Baena on day six of the Miami Open. (USA TODAY Sports)

Miami: Top seed Carlos Alcaraz and number two Jannik Sinner took the first confident steps towards the mouth-watering Miami Open final tennis fans want to see by romping into the third round on Saturday with blowout wins. Tennis’s newest and hottest rivalry was dialled up a notch last week in the Indian Wells semifinals when Alcaraz put the first blemish on Sinner’s perfect season by halting the Italian’s 16 match winning streak.

Sinner shrugged off the loss saying Miami would be a fresh start, which began with a breezy 6-3 6-4 workmanlike win over fellow Italian Andrea Vavassori.

Alcaraz, who went on to win Indian Wells and arrives in Miami bidding to complete the “Sunshine Double”, was no less efficient in a clinical 6-2 6-1 win over Roberto Carballes Baena in an all Spanish encounter.

The win certainly impressed three-times Grand Slam winner Andy Murray who went on X immediately after the match and posted. “Watching Alcaraz play tennis makes me smile”.

“That’s pretty cool for a legend like Andy to say something like this that he enjoys a lot watching

my matches,” said Alcaraz. “It’s crazy for me. He has seen a lot of tennis during his career, a lot of matches, a lot of players.”

With the two young guns hogging the spotlight, defending champion Daniil Medvedev has been flying under the radar but that may not last much longer after the third seed moved on with a tidy 6-4 6-2 win over Hungarian Marton Fucsovics.

After two days of rain the sun returned to the Miami Open but it was still a gloomy Saturday for US hopes as three of the top four-ranked American men led by 12th seed Taylor Fritz crashed out in the second round.

Joining Fritz at the Hard Rock stadium exit were 13th seed Tommy Paul and 21st-seeded Frances Tiafoe, leaving number 16 Ben Shelton as the highest-ranked American standing.

After only eight matches were completed on Friday because of rain, the start of play was again delayed by three hours on Saturday before Brazilian qualifier Thiago Seyboth Wild kicked off the action on Stadium court with a 6-3 6-4 upset of Fritz.

A perfect 10-0 in opening matches since the

start of 2023, Fritz appeared bamboozled by the 24-year-old who enjoyed the support of a small but vocal flag-waving Brazilian crowd.

While Fritz piled up 26 unforced errors and managed a single break opportunity, Seyboth Wild converted three of his five break chances. “I played a really solid match today, I barely missed,” said Wild, who is no stranger to producing upsets, beating Daniil Medvedev at last year’s French Open.

“It was exactly the plan with my coach before the match.”

Tiafoe may be a crowd favourite wherever he plays in the US but the support was not enough help him against Christopher O’Connell as the Australian scratched out a 7-5 7-6(5) win.

One of the many matches suspended on Friday by rain, Denis Shapovalov returned on Saturday to deliver an upset, finishing off 10th seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas 6-2 6-4.

Britain’s former world number one Murray earned back-to-back victories for the first time this season, closing out his rain hit match with a 7-6 (7) 6-3 decision over Argentine Thomas Martin Etcheverry.

CYCLING

Pedersen defeats Van der Poel in Belgium

AFP
Wevelgem, Belgium

Denmark’s Mads Pedersen dug deep to execute a tactical masterclass when beating world champion Mathieu van der Poel to the line in the Gent-Wevelgem cobbled classic in Belgium yesterday.

After around 100km together, the pair began their sprint in the final 500m with Van der Poel making a desperate last lunge before running out of steam as Pedersen then crossed the line with his Dutch rival already hanging his head.

Van der Poel also famously ran out of team at the Yorkshire worlds in 2019, before a then little-known Pedersen claimed the world title in a deluge.

Current world champion Van der Poel was targeting a second cobbled classic in a row after E3

Friday. Winner last season of the world championship in Glasgow, Milan-San Remo and Paris-Roubaix, Van der Poel has established himself as the man to beat in the big one-day challenges.

But Lidl-Trek’s Pedersen has also been closing in on a major win after several brushes with success in the early season races.

“We need to ride fast, keep up with the big boys and beat them in the sprint,” he said of how he could compete with the biggest riders.

Yesterday, he and Van der Poel were inseparable until the final 200m over the 253km route.

In third place was Jordi Mees of Bora-Hansgrohe with Jasper Philipsen fourth and Jonathan Milan also of Lidl-Trek in fifth.

Yesterday’s race was the second of four runs in the Flanders region each spring on the hilly, cobbled and often rainy series dubbed ‘Holy Week’ by cycling-mad Belgian fans.

QMMF DRIVERS DO WELL IN UAE COMPETITION



The drivers of the Qatar Motorsports Academy (QMA) continue their proficiency in international karting championships as part of the program established by Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF). This time, the academy drivers excelled in the UAE Rotax MAX Challenge at the Al Ain Raceway in Abu Dhabi. Faesal al-Yafei secured second place in the DD2 Masters category, while Bader al-Sulaiti claimed third place in the Senior category, despite starting from the last position in the race. Taha Hassiba, another QMA member, also achieved a commendable result, finishing in sixth place in the same category. Tameem Hassiba performed well in the Junior category and finished within the top ten ranking, specifically in eighth place. Additionally, driver Nimir Al Qahtani secured the Rookie’s Cup in the Mini category. The QMA drivers will continue their international participation in the upcoming period, aiming to gain wider experience and striving to achieve even more remarkable results and thereby proudly raising the Qatari flag high on the podium.

FORMULA 1

Sainz clinches Australian Grand Prix in Ferrari 1-2

THREE-TIME WORLD CHAMPION VERSTAPPEN FAILS TO FINISH

AFP

Melbourne

Ferrari's Carlos Sainz surged to victory at the Australian Grand Prix yesterday to snap Red Bull's winning start to the season after three-time world champion Max Verstappen sensationally failed to finish.

The Spaniard, who had appendicitis surgery two weeks ago, took the chequered flag 2.3 seconds ahead of teammate Charles Leclerc, with McLaren's Lando Norris a bold third.

It was his third grand prix win and first since Singapore last year.

"I'm happy to be in a one-two with Charles here. It shows that hard work pays off," said Sainz, who missed the last race in Saudi Arabia and was bed-ridden for a week afterwards.

"Life sometimes is crazy ... the podium in Bahrain, then the appendix, the comeback, the win. It's a rollercoaster but I loved it and I'm extremely happy."

While he celebrated, it was a disastrous day for pole-sitter Verstappen, who limped out with smoke billowing from his car after being passed by front-row partner Sainz on lap two. The Dutchman blamed a brake issue for his first retirement in two years.

"What we can see so far from the data is that as soon as the lights went off the right-rear brake just stuck on," he said.

"It just caused the damage and it kept on increasing so it was also basically driving with the hand-brake on."

It was also a horror race for Lewis Hamilton in his inconsistent Mercedes, with the British seven-time world champion suffering engine failure on lap 17.

To add to Mercedes' woes, teammate George Russell crashed heavily on the last lap with the car ending on its side.

Russell climbed out unscathed,



Ferrari's Spanish driver Carlos Sainz Jr celebrates with the trophy on the podium after winning the Australian Formula One Grand Prix at Albert Park Circuit in Melbourne yesterday. (AFP)

with Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso faulted for "potentially dangerous" driving over the incident and slapped with a 20-second penalty. Verstappen emphatically won the opening two grands prix of the season in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, with both a Red Bull 1-2, and was hot favourite to make it three from three.

He had been aiming to match his own record set last year of 10 consecutive wins – one more than Sebastian Vettel in 2013 – and was unbeaten in his last 18 starts from pole position.

But while Verstappen was favoured to win, the Ferraris had proved highly competitive in practice and qualifying on the fast and flowing Albert Park track.

Despite not being fully fit, Sainz,

whose seat at Ferrari is to be taken by Hamilton next year, topped Q1 and Q2 to fire a warning shot.

Oscar Piastri in the other McLaren was fourth ahead of Red Bull's Sergio Perez. Alonso dropped to eighth after his penalty with teammate Lance Stroll elevated to sixth and RB's Yuki Tsunoda to seventh. Haas pair Nico Hulkenberg and Kevin Magnussen rounded out the top 10.

"It feels good mostly for the team of course, first and second didn't happen since Bahrain 2022," said Leclerc. "Carlos has had an incredible weekend to come back from his surgery, he's done an amazing race."

Verstappen made a clean start and pulled clear of Sainz when the lights went out, with Norris hold-

ing onto third as they jostled for position. But his lead didn't last with Sainz opening his DRS on lap two to slice past before smoke started pouring out of the Red Bull and the Dutchman retired.

Sainz led from Norris and Leclerc before the first pit stops.

Sainz put on fresh rubber on lap 17 and had a 2.6sec lead from Leclerc at the halfway mark, closely followed by Piastri and Norris. With no Verstappen to contend with, the Spaniard gradually built the gap as Norris passed Piastri to move into third. Leclerc pitted again and he came back out in fifth on hards, but quickly surged back to second. Sainz also pitted for a second time and retained his narrow lead to cruise home in front of 130,000 fans.

FOOTBALL

Teenager Endrick makes history as Brazil beat England

AFP

London

Brazil's new boss Dorival Junior started his bid to revive the five-time world champions with a 1-0 win against England as teenage sensation Endrick bagged his first international goal in Saturday's friendly at Wembley.

Coming off their worst period for over 60 years, Brazil hope Dorival Junior can trigger a revival in time to challenge for the 2026 World Cup.

This was a first significant step in the right direction for the Selecao, who marked their manager's debut with victory against an England side expected to make a strong challenge to win Euro 2024. On a cathartic evening for Brazil after their wretched 2023, it was fitting the highly-rated Endrick bagged Brazil's late winner.

The Palmeiras forward, due to join Real Madrid in July, has been tipped to succeed Neymar as Brazil's latest superstar and his match-winning cameo appearance off the bench was a suitable coming of age moment in his third appearance.

Endrick stole the spotlight in the 80th minute when the teenager tapped in, defying England's appeals for offside after Vinicius Junior's shot was saved by Jordan Pickford.

Aged 17 years and 246 days, Endrick is the youngest senior international goal-scorer at Wembley. He is also the youngest player to score for Brazil since Ronaldo in 1994.

"Time will tell how far he can go. We have to be calm and patient with him," said Dorival Junior. Endrick's emergence is a breath of fresh air for Brazil after an unusually stale period for the Selecao.

Snubbed by Real Madrid boss Carlo Ancelotti and frustrated by the failings of two caretaker managers, Dorival Junior has been tasked with ensuring Brazil qualify for the World Cup.

The 61-year-old left Sao Paulo to take charge of Brazil in January, moving into world football's most scrutinised job at a time when his country had just finished a calendar year with more defeats (five) than wins (three) for the first time since 1963. Beaten in three consecutive World Cup qualifiers

for the first time ever, Brazil face a nervous fight to qualify for the 2026 tournament.

But in the dynamic display of Vinicius Junior, the emergence of Endrick and the combative performances of his teammates, Brazil have cause for optimism at last. England boss Gareth Southgate was impressed with the new Brazil, saying: "The difference was one moment of ruthlessness.

"In the attacking third they have players of the very highest quality. The midfield three are all technical players as well.

"They have got some fabulous forwards and you have to defend well. Endrick has finished off their goal. It's a good moment for him."

Brazil will aim to build on the momentum from their first win over England since 2009 in another friendly against Spain on Tuesday. England's spluttering performance featured few highlights, although Southgate will have been encouraged by a lively debut from Newcastle forward Anthony Gordon.

England were wearing their controversial new home shirt for the first time after criticism of manufacturer Nike's decision to change the colour of the St George's Cross on the kit.

The debate about the shirt will soon be forgotten, but Southgate won't have fond memories of its debut as England lost at home for the first time in 21 games.

Southgate opted for Ollie Watkins instead of Ivan Toney as England's central striker, with Harry Kane not risked due to an ankle injury. But Watkins did little to suggest he could shoulder the burden if Kane were to be injured at the Euros.

Adding to Southgate's problems, England's stand-in captain Kyle Walker was forced off with a hamstring injury.

"He is feeling something. We just have to assess it over the next couple of days," Southgate said. Belgium's friendly visit to Wembley on Tuesday represents the last chance for England's fringe players to impress before Southgate names his Euro squad. "I'm not down on the performance at all. Clearly I don't like losing but I thought there were lots of very good performances from players who have hardly played for England," said Southgate, who revealed Kane will not be fit for the Belgium game.

Spain 'contenders' at Euro 2024 but need 'time', says De La Fuente

Spain coach **Luis de la Fuente** insists his squad has the "raw materials" to make a title push at Euro 2024 where the former champions will be "contenders". The 62-year-old talked to AFP ahead of Friday's 1-0 defeat to Colombia in a friendly international at the London Stadium.

As well as discussing the progress of his team, De la Fuente also lamented the arrests this week in a corruption investigation, the latest in a string of scandals that have ensnared the Spanish Football Federation (RFEF).

"It is not good for Spanish football that attention is diverted to this other focus," said De la Fuente. The coach led Spain to Under-19 and Under-21 European titles and Olympic silver medal in Tokyo



before taking over the senior team in 2022 and winning the Nations League in June 2023.

Spain are one of the six top seeds for the 24-team Euros in Germany this summer.

"We are among the contenders who are going to fight for the trophy," said De la Fuente. "We have to try to live up to

expectations and the expectation is we will compete to win. "Winning at this level is very difficult because there are other teams that are well prepared, with very good players."

"We have a very difficult group, with Croatia, Italy and let's not forget Albania, who topped their group, with a very brilliant coach, with very good players even if they are unknown to the general public," De la Fuente said.

At the last Euros, Spain beat Croatia in the last 16 but lost to Italy, who took the title, in the semi-finals. "Both Croatia and Italy could be fighting for the top, and then you have France, Portugal, England, Germany," added the coach.

De La Fuente has overhauled the

Spain squad. In Friday's starting lineup only Aymeric Laporte also began Spain's last game in a major tournament – the round-of-16 loss to Morocco in the World Cup in December 2022.

"We have the raw materials to make a great team. What do we need? Time," De la Fuente said. Against Colombia, De la Fuente gave second-half minutes to 16-year-old Lamine Yamal, 17-year-old Pau Cubarsi and Nico Williams, a 21-year-old, who also came on as a 75th-minute substitute against Morocco in the World Cup only to be replaced in the last minute of extra time by penalty specialist Pablo Sarabia, who then missed his spot kick. On Friday, Yamal replaced the 31-year-old Sarabia after 72 minutes.



Brazil's striker Endrick (left) celebrates with teammate Vinicius Jr after scoring the opening goal of the friendly against England at Wembley stadium in London yesterday. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

Al-Amri, al-Jabir emerge champs

By Sports Reporter

Doha

In a splendid Ramadan evening, where the sounds of engines rose and the heat of competition ignited, the competitions of the third round of the Qatar Drift Championship concluded at Qatar Racing Club (QRC).

The exciting round witnessed an array of elite challengers with several competitors appearing for the first time this season.

The first day was dedicated to qualifying trials, which were held over two sessions. The eventual results saw racer Ahmed al-Amri scoring the highest points to top the qualifying trials for the first time this season. Ali al-Jabsheh, the leader of the trials in the previous two rounds and a driver for the "Brothers" team, settled for sec-

ond place in this round. Following him was Salem al-Sarraf in third place, ahead of Saud al-Attia.

The round witnessed the participation of 21 racers competing for the sixteen qualifying berths for the elimination rounds, which began on the following day.

These rounds witnessed strong confrontations, allowing eight racers to advance to the second round, which included four head-to-head match-ups. The first match-up was between al-Amri and Yazan al-Jabsheh, ending in favour of the former, who then progressed to the semi-finals to face Mohamed al-Jabir, who had surpassed Abdulhadi al-Hjailan in the same round.

The remaining two matches in the other half of the schedule were highly thrilling and resulted in al-Jabsheh and Salem al-Sarraf advancing to the first semi-final round after defeating Mubarak

al-Dousari and Mesiar Abu Shiba, respectively.

After intense competitions in the semi-final round, some of which were replayed due to ties, al-Amri and al-Sarraf made it to the final, where al-Amri was absent due to mechanical issues, allowing al-Sarraf to be crowned champion as al-Amri settled for second place.

In the match to determine the third and fourth places, racer al-Jabir managed to surpass al-Jabsheh after the latter faced some issues, thus securing third place. He won the local championship title, while the second and third places in this category went to al-Jabsheh and his brother Yazan respectively on the podium.

QRC Director Sheikh Jabor bin Khalid al-Thani crowned the top three winners on the podium. The fourth round of the championship will take place on March 28 and 29.

