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CRICKET | Page 2

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GOLF | Page 3

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Page 4

ATHLETICS

Gardiner hopes to build confidence at Doha Diamond League



By Sports Reporter
Doha

Olympic 400m champion and former world champion Steven Gardiner of Bahamas will return to Qatar for the Doha Diamond League meeting on May 10.

Gardiner clocked a national record of 43.48 with victory at the World Athletics Championships in Doha 2019. It was an impressive upgrade to the silver he'd won in London two years earlier and a performance that made him the sixth-fastest man in the history of the event.

In the lead up to the 2023 World Championships in Budapest, the 28-year-old – who owns the fastest indoor 300m time in history (31.56) – had been in fine form. He was unbeaten over 400m and recorded the second-fastest performance of his career one month out from the global showpiece (43.74). He cruised through the opening round but was injured in the semi-final and failed to finish. He returned to competitive action with a 31.99 300m in Flori-

da in March 2024 and will race in front of a home crowd at the World Athletics Relays in the Bahamas (4-5 May) ahead of the Seashore Group Doha Meeting.

"This is an exciting year for me with the prospect of my third Olympic Games," said Gardiner, who was a 4x400m Olympic relay bronze medallist in Rio 2016 and is also the Bahamian record holder for the 200m and 4x400m mixed relay.

"I was heartbroken to suffer an injury in Budapest last summer which ended my season, but I want to run fast when it matters and when you train this hard, working towards those big moments, injuries happen. I'm working on my fitness and being healthy and my training is coming along. I'm looking forward to competing in the 400m in Doha. The warm conditions will suit me, so it's a perfect opportunity to build my confidence with a strong early season performance."

Doha meet will see many stars in action with reigning Olympic, world and Asian Games javelin champion Neeraj Chopra set to return. World champion Mary Moraa of Kenya and World Indoor Championships

silver medallist Jemma Reekie of Britain will compete over 800m at the Doha Diamond League Meeting at the Qatar Sports Club on May 10.

Meanwhile, Olympic and world pole vault champion Katie Moon (USA) will take on fellow world champion Nina Kennedy (Australia) and newly-crowned world indoor champion Molly Caudery (Britain) at the Doha Meeting.

Moon – ranked fifth all-time with a best height of 4.95m – famously shared global gold with Commonwealth champion and Australian record holder Kennedy (4.91m) at the 2023 World Athletics Championships in Budapest after an enthralling contest failed to separate them. They were subsequently shortlisted for the 2023 International Fair Play Award as a result of their actions.

The Doha leg is the third meeting of the 2024 Diamond League. The series comprises 15 meetings in total across four different continents and started with Xiamen (China) on April 20. It concludes with a single final across two days in Brussels (13-14 September).

AFC U-23 ASIAN CUP

Min-woo strike steers South Korea past Japan

Japan will take on hosts Qatar in the quarters on Thursday



Kim Min-woo (left) scores against Japan during the Group B of the AFC U-23 Asian Cup at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Kim Min-woo's header 15 minutes from time earned South Korea a 1-0 win over Japan to seal top spot in Group B of the AFC U-23 Asian Cup at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday and set up a quarter-final meeting with Indonesia.

Japan, meanwhile, will take on hosts Qatar in their last eight encounter on Thursday after finishing in second place in the standings, with Go Oiwa's side suffering their first defeat of the competition.

Min-woo scored 17 minutes after being introduced from the bench by head coach Hwang Sun-hong during a game that had looked destined for long periods to end in a draw as both teams had already secured their spots in the knockout rounds.

Japan kept pushing with Joel Chima Fujita's effort deflected off target and Hosoya heading directly at Baek, while Sato's header hit the post in a frantic finish but the Koreans held on. Meanwhile, a gritty performance from China saw them end their campaign on a winning note by defeating the United Arab Emirates 2-1. The victory was only the East Asians' sec-

ond ever win in tournament victory and saw them finish third in Group B ahead of their opponents, with both already eliminated prior to kick-off.

China side that broke the deadlock in the 24th minute. Harib Abdalla's half-hearted headed clearance from Tao Qianglong's cross saw the ball fall to Xie Wenneng near the penalty spot, and the 23-year-old promptly volleyed it into the left bottom corner.

It was China's first goal in six matches, with the last time they found the back of the net coming in a 3-0 win against Oman in 2018. Three minutes into the second half UAE equalised. Ahmed Fawzi masterfully brought Abdulla Almenhali's piercing diagonal pass under control before calmly sliding the ball past the onrushing goalkeeper Li Hao.

But in the end, UAE simply could not muster enough to avoid a third successive loss even with nine minutes of added time, leaving China to celebrate a hard-earned triumph at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium.

IRAQ EDGE SAUDI FOR TOP SPOT

Iraq completed their turnaround with a 2-1 win over Saudi Arabia to emerge the Group C winners. A second consecutive win enabled Iraq to overcome an opening defeat to Thailand to

finish top on six points with Saudi Arabia also advancing as the runners-up, after Thailand lost 1-0 to Tajikistan in the other game.

Chasing the win necessary to reach the next stage, Iraq were on the offensive and were awarded a penalty late in the first half after Mustafa Saadoon was brought down by Saleem Alabsi with Ali Jasim taking responsibility and converting in the first minute of added time. Saudi Arabia were given a way back into the match in the 10th minute of added time after referee Hiroyuki Kimura – after a VAR review – awarded them a penalty following Saadoon's elbow on Haitham Asiri, with al-Ghamdi sending the ball home to send the teams level into the break.

Having survived a nervy start to the half, Iraq retook the lead in the 63rd minute after Alabsi failed to clear the ball cleanly, allowing Saadoon to nip in with the ball bouncing off his chest and into the net from Saad Almasser's clearance. Meanwhile, Tajikistan wrapped up their campaign with a 1-0 victory over Thailand with a last-gasp goal from Manuchehr Safarov at Al Janoub Stadium. They finished third in Group C with Thailand finishing in the bottom. Safarov scored the decisive goal in first minute of stoppage time as he rose high to head home a Amadoni Komolov cross.

SPOTLIGHT

Qatar's al-Jamaat wins U-14 chess gold at GCC Youth Games



Qatar Chess Federation President Mohamed al-Mudhaka with chess contingent at the GCC Youth Games in Abu Dhabi.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's talented youngster Khaled al-Jamaat clinched gold medal in the rapid chess U-14 category chess event at the GCC Youth Games, which is underway in the UAE. Qatar won another chess medal when Rawda al-Qasabi claimed bronze in the U-18 event. The Qatar chess team raised its tally to seven medals, after Hamad al-Kuwari won the gold in the individual speed chess U-14, while Ibrahim al-Janahi won the individual silver.

Layan al-Qasabi sealed the individual silver in U-18, in addition to winning two silver medals in the U-14 team competitions. The tally of the Qatari delegation in the Gulf Youth Games rose to 21 medals.

The President of Qatar Chess Federation Mohamed al-Mudhaka lauded the youngsters' performances, hoping them to shine in future events.



Qatar's Khaled al-Jamaat poses with the gold medal.

On Sunday, Qatar sailing team claimed the bronze medal of optimist class at the inaugural Youth GCC Games in the UAE. Team Qatar squad included Saud al-Emadi, Ali al-Buainain, Abdulaziz al-Mahmoud, Saad al-Ibrahim and Abdullah al-Buainain.

The Games are witnessing 3,500 athletes from the six GCC nations competing in 25 individual and team sports.



Qatar sailing team claimed bronze medal of optimist class.

SPOTLIGHT

Ganguly, Ponting back Pant to play T20 WC

AFP
New Delhi

Cricket greats Sourav Ganguly and Ricky Ponting yesterday backed India star **Rishabh Pant** to play the T20 World Cup in June after his return to the Indian Premier League following a serious car crash.

Pant, a wicketkeeper-batsman, took the field in the T20 tournament this season as captain of Delhi Capitals after 14 months away from top-level cricket due to the crash.

The 26-year-old left-handed batter has scored 254 runs including two half-centuries in eight matches and looked sharp behind the wickets.

"I want every young player to play but unfortunately we can only pick 15," Ganguly, who is Delhi's Director of Cricket, told reporters on Pant's India selection.

"The (more) equipped, the better one's play...I feel Pant is definitely in that bracket. And I am sure he will go to the West Indies."

Ganguly said Pant's ability to hit "big sixes" makes him stand out and advised the Indian players to "just play without fear".

Delhi head coach Ponting said he was sure Indian selectors would choose Pant for the T20's showpiece tournament beginning June 1 in the West Indies and the United States.

"I think his batting is getting better and better by the game," Ponting said, calling Pant the "heart and soul" of the franchise.

"I think he has started to get a bit more trust and belief in his body as well. His keeping skills behind the stumps have been really good," he added.

"He is too good a player and can have too much of an impact on the game for India not to select him in the squad."

Virat 'should open' batting

Pant crashed his car north of New Delhi in December 2022, suffering multiple injuries when the vehicle rammmed into a crash barrier, flipped over and caught fire.

He underwent an intensive rehabilitation programme after the

crash left him with a damaged ligament in his right knee, a hurt wrist and ankle, and abrasions to his back.

Pant has played 129 internationals for India across three formats, scoring 4,123 runs, including six centuries.

Ganguly, one of India's most successful captains, also said Virat Kohli "should open" as a T20 batter in the World Cup, after some critics suggested the veteran is too slow by modern-day standards.

Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Kohli leads the IPL batting chart with 379 runs including hitting the first century of this season off 67 balls.

Comparisons have been drawn with Sunrisers Hyderabad opener Travis Head, who got his ton in 39 balls and has guided his team to record IPL totals of 277 and 287.

"Virat Kohli has got the capability of getting a 40-ball hundred also," Ganguly, also ex-chief of the Board of Control for Cricket in India, said.

"With the talent they have, (India) just need to go and hit. The mindset should be to hit."

REYNOLD
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CRICKET

Jaiswal, Sandeep power Rajasthan Royals to big win

IPL POINTS LEADERS BEAT MUMBAI INDIANS BY 9 WICKETS



Rajasthan Royals' Yashasvi Jaiswal plays a shot during the Indian Premier League match against Mumbai Indians in Jaipur yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Jaipur, India

Yashasvi Jaiswal struck form with an unbeaten 104 as Rajasthan Royals consolidated their position at the top of the IPL table with a nine-wicket thrashing of Mumbai Indians yesterday.

Medium-pace bowler Sandeep Sharma took 5-18 to help restrict Mumbai to 179-9 after Yuzvendra Chahal claimed an IPL first of 200 wickets at Rajasthan's home ground in Jaipur.

Jaiswal, a left-handed opener whose previous best this season was 39, steered the team home in 18.4 overs in an innings interrupted by rain.

"I really enjoyed from the start and I made sure I was watching the ball properly and playing proper cricketing shots," said Jaiswal.

"I'm trying to do what I am doing well, some days it comes good and some days it doesn't, I'm not thinking much."

Rajasthan, who won the inaugural IPL in 2008 under late Australian hero Shane Warne, registered their seventh win in eight matches. Jaiswal struck his second IPL hundred - both versus Mumbai - as he smashed nine fours and seven sixes in his 60-ball knock and put on 109 runs with skipper Sanju Samson, who made 38.

Sharma set up victory his first ever five-wicket haul in T20 cricket as he took the spotlight away from Chahal's remarkable feat and was named man of the match.

Chahal sent back Mohamed Nabi caught and bowled for 23 with his leg-spin as he

celebrated the achievement with hugs from teammates.

But Chahal was taken for 48 runs in four overs and Sharma stood out after he took three wickets in the 20th over including Tilak Varma, who top-scored with 65, and Tim David, who made three.

Chahal was substituted with Jos Buttler coming in as impact player and he began with two boundaries in the opening over by skipper Hardik Pandya, who played his landmark 100th IPL match.

Pandya has endured a tough time this season after he replaced veteran Rohit Sharma as skipper only to be booed by the fans across venues.

"After the game, it's not the right time to go to the players, everyone is professional, they know their roles," said Pandya.

"What we can do is learn from this game and the mistakes which we have made, rectify it and make sure that we don't repeat it."

The left-handed Jaiswal joined in the charge as he hit South African speedster Gerald Coetzee for a six and two fours to get the chase underway.

Rajasthan raced to 61-0 in six overs when rain stopped play and action resumed after 45 minutes.

Piyush Chawla bowled Buttler for 35 after the break but Jaiswal stood firm and in the company of Samson made the chase a cakewalk.

BRIEF SCORES

Rajasthan Royals 183 for 1 (Jaiswal 104*) **beat Mumbai Indians 179 for 9** (Tilak 65, Sandeep 5-18) **by 9 wickets**



Rajasthan Royals' Sandeep Sharma celebrates during the IPL match against Mumbai Indians in Jaipur yesterday. (AFP)

FOCUS

Aspetar strengthens Asian football medicine with latest AFC Fellows

Aspetar, Orthopaedic and Sports Medicine Hospital, recently welcomed the newest cohort of the AFC President's Travelling Fellows for Football Medicine. This prestigious programme, running for over a decade, fosters collaboration between Aspetar and the Asian Football Confederation (AFC) to elevate sports medicine expertise across Asia.

The week-long programme hosted four participants: Dr Mujahid Mohamed S Awadh Khoja (Physician, Saudi Arabia FA), Dr Afrah Hamood Ali Al-Jabri (Physician, Oman FA), Ms Nathaline Gilinguirian (Physiotherapist, Lebanon FA), and Ng Yui Kan (Physiotherapist, Hong Kong FA).

The healthcare professionals will delve deep into the world of sports medicine, attending lectures from Aspetar's leading experts on crucial topics like sports nutrition and cutting-edge rehabilitation techniques.

The program offers a comprehensive curriculum, equipping the fellows with the tools to excel in their fields.

Participants gain valuable insights into Football Medicine specific to the Asian landscape, exploring methods to prevent player injuries and illnesses through structured programs. They also learn innovative approaches to enhance player performance and overall health, while gaining exposure to the application of scientific research methods in sports medicine. This immersive experience further allows them to expand their knowledge base in their chosen areas of expertise.

The AFC President's Travelling Fellows program reflects the



longstanding partnership between Aspetar and the AFC, solidified through a formal memorandum of agreement. This initiative offers a unique opportunity for AFC member associations to expose their healthcare professionals to the unparalleled expertise housed within Aspetar.

Dr Abdulaziz al-Kuwari, Aspetar CEO, reiterated the programme's significance: "At Aspetar, we are driven by a core principle: sharing our knowledge and experience. We are honoured to welcome these talented fellows. As the premier Orthopaedic and Sports Medicine Hospital in the region, and a leader recognised by FIFA, Aspetar remains steadfast in its commitment to advancing sports medicine throughout Asia."

By fostering this exchange of knowledge and best practices, Aspetar continues to play a pivotal role in strengthening the foundation of sports medicine across Asia, ensuring the continued health and well-being of elite football players in the region.

No credible evidence of wrongdoing in Chinese swimming case: WADA

Zurich: The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) confirmed reports on Saturday that 23 Chinese swimmers tested positive for a banned drug before the 2020 Tokyo Olympics but it accepted the country's findings that this was due to substance contamination. Multiple media reports said the swimmers tested positive for trimetazidine (TMZ), which is found in heart medication, months before the Covid-delayed Games began in the Japanese capital in July 2021.

CHINADA, China's anti-doping agency, called the reports "misleading" and said the positive results had been inadvertent. CHINADA said the swimmers had tested positive for "extremely low concentration" of TMZ after inadvertently being exposed to the substance through contamination and should not be held responsible for the positive results, according to a statement reported by China's state news agency Xinhua on Sunday. The Chinese anti-doping agency said it had investigated the matter "from various respects" and kept WADA and World Aquatics informed. "WADA agreed with our conclusion after thorough

review," CHINADA said. The Chinese Swimming Association did not respond to an email from Reuters seeking comment. WADA said it was notified in June 2021 of CHINADA's decision to accept that the swimmers returned adverse analytical findings, or AAFs, after inadvertently being exposed to the drug through contamination.

The global anti-doping body, which has the authority to appeal the rulings of national doping agencies, said it reviewed the decision and consulted scientific experts and external legal counsel to test the contamination theory presented by CHINADA. "WADA ultimately concluded that it was not in a position to disprove the possibility that contamination was the source of TMZ and it was compatible with the analytical data in the file," the anti-doping body said in a statement.

"WADA also concluded that...the athletes would be held to have no fault or negligence. As such, and based on the advice of external counsel, WADA considered an appeal was not warranted." China's 30-member swimming team won six medals at the Tokyo Games, including three golds.

Korda claims Chevron crown for second major, record fifth straight win

Washington: World number one Nelly Korda matched a LPGA record with her fifth consecutive victory on Sunday, winning the Chevron Championship for her second major crown and 13th career tour triumph. The two-stroke triumph over Sweden's Maja Stark stretched Korda's season win streak to five titles in five starts to equal the LPGA record set by American Nancy Lopez in 1978 and matched by Sweden's Annika Sorenstam from 2004-05. Korda withstood a tension-packed back nine but never lost her lead in holding off rivals over the closing holes at Carlton Woods in suburban Houston to claim the \$1.2 million top prize in the first women's major tournament of the season. "I can finally breathe now. That back nine felt like the longest back nine of my entire life," Korda said. "It was a little bit of a grind on the back nine but happy to get the win." The 25-year-old American fired a three-under par 69 in the final

round to finish on 13-under 275 after 72 holes. Stark was second on 277 after a closing 69 followed by American Lauren Coughlin and Canada's Brooke Henderson sharing third on 278 and South Korean Ryu Haeran fifth on 279 after closing on 74. Korda, the daughter of former Czech tennis star Petr Korda, won her only prior major crown at the 2021 Women's PGA Championship while also capturing a gold medal at the Tokyo Olympics. This year, Korda also won January's Drive On Championship, last month's Seri Pak and Ford championships and the LPGA Match Play earlier this month. "There's a key in the simplicity that I have. I honestly take it a shot at a time," Korda said. "It has been working so far. I feel like sometimes golf can get overcomplicated." There were plenty of late complications. At 10, Korda missed the green with her approach but chipped in for birdie to reach 14-under and lead

There's a key in the simplicity that I have. I honestly take it a shot at a time. It has been working so far. I feel like sometimes golf can get overcomplicated.

— Nelly Korda

by four. Korda went way right off the 11th tee on the way to her first bogey, trimming her lead to three over Ryu and Coughlin, who both closed the front nine with back-to-back birdies. "I was definitely starting to feel it on the back nine, the nerves setting in," Korda said. "It's a major. It's everything I've always wanted as a little girl, to lift that major trophy. "I can finally breathe now and enjoy the moment because I was definitely really nervous. I feel sick

Nelly Korda of the United States celebrates with the trophy after winning The Chevron Championship in The Woodlands, Texas. (AFP)

to my stomach." Coughlin closed within two strokes with a birdie at the par-4 14th and Korda missed a five-foot birdie putt at the par-5

13th as tension built. Coughlin, however, made bogeys at 16 and 17 and Henderson took a bogey at 14, leaving Korda with a four-stroke lead.

Korda, however, stumbled with a bogey at 15 and when Coughlin closed with a birdie and Stark birdied the par-3 17th, Korda's lead was again down to two. After clutch pars at 16 and 17, Korda watched from the fairway at the par-5 18th as Stark came up a foot short on an eagle chip then tapped in for birdie, cutting Korda's lead to a single stroke. Korda sent her second shot just over

the green, missed an eagle putt but sank a short comeback birdie putt for the victory. After a Saturday storm halted play and dumped 1.5 inches of overnight rain on the course, Korda made seven pars to close out her third round on 69 and share second with Henderson, one stroke behind Ryu, last year's LPGA Rookie of the Year. The three went out in the last group for Sunday's final round and Korda quickly grabbed the lead. Ryu opened with back-to-back bogeys to tumble from the top. Henderson answered a bogey at the second with a birdie at the third to stand on 10-under but Korda birdied the par-3 third from 15 feet and escaped a bunker to birdie the par-5 fourth for a two-stroke lead at 12-under. Henderson answered a double bogey at the fourth with birdies at five and six while Korda sank a 14-foot birdie putt at the eighth, reaching 13-under and stretching her lead to three strokes at the turn. (AFP)



FOOTBALL

PSG close in on title with win over Lyon

'I'm very happy with the result, with the match, and with the week'

AFP
Paris

Paris Saint-Germain are on the brink of winning another French Ligue 1 title after crushing Lyon 4-1 on Sunday, the same scoreline by which they beat Barcelona in the Champions League in midweek.

All the goals came in the first half at the Parc des Princes, with a Nemanja Matic own goal and a Lucas Beraldo effort having PSG two ahead inside six minutes.

Goncalo Ramos then scored twice either side of an Ernest Nuamah strike as the Parisians cruised to victory despite the rested Kylian Mbappe spending the whole evening on the bench.

PSG, who have not lost a Ligue 1 game since September, are now 11 points clear of Monaco in second with just five matches remaining.

It means that they will secure a 10th French title in 12 seasons if they win at Lorient in a rearranged game on Wednesday and Monaco fail to beat Lille at the same time.

"I'm very happy with the result, with the match, and with the week," PSG coach Luis Enrique told broadcaster Amazon Prime.

He rested Mbappe and Ousmane Dembele among five changes to the starting line-up in last Tuesday's 4-1 win away to Barcelona in the second leg of their Champions League quarter-final tie. "After the match in Barcelona, you never know how it's going to be, but I think the team was extremely precise and I am very confident and very happy."

Lyon have enjoyed a remarkable revival in the last few months under new coach Pierre Sage and are still hoping to qualify for Europe after sitting bottom of the table at the end of November.

However, they were blown away as Matic diverted Marco Asensio's



Paris St Germain's Goncalo Ramos celebrates after scoring their third goal against Olympique Lyonnais in the Ligue 1 match in Paris. (Reuters)

outback into his own net and Brazilian defender Beraldo converted at a corner to make it 2-0 after six minutes. Ramos headed in Achraf Hakimi's cross to make it 3-0 just after the half-hour mark, although Ghanaian starlet Nuamah came in from the right flank to pull one back for Lyon soon after.

Ramos restored PSG's three-goal cushion by finishing off a fine move just before the break for his 13th of the season in all competitions.

That rounded off the scoring, and whatever happens in midweek PSG will hope to be confirmed as title winners before travelling to face Borussia Dortmund in the first leg of their Champions League semi-final on May 1.

Lyon are a point away from seventh position, which will be enough to qualify for Europe if they fail to beat PSG when the

teams meet again in the French Cup final at the end of May.

Monaco moved up into second place by winning 2-0 earlier away at Brest in a battle of two teams chasing Champions League qualification. Swiss midfielder Denis Zakaria and Japan's Takumi Minamino got their goals, either side of half-time. Monaco held on for the victory despite having both Eliesse Ben Seghir and Wilfried Singo sent off in stoppage time.

A third straight win for the principality side leaves them primed to go on and secure automatic qualification for next season's Champions League, a competition they have not graced since 2018/19.

They are two points above Brest and three ahead of fourth-placed Lille, who bounced back from their midweek Europa Conference League exit on penalties to Aston Villa by beating Strasbourg 1-0.

Canada's Jonathan David scored the only goal of the game to take his tally in Ligue 1 this season to 17.

The team finishing fourth will enter next season's Champions League in the preliminary rounds.

Marseille needed a stoppage-time goal by Cameroonian striker Paris Moubagna to grab a point in a 2-2 draw at Toulouse. Moubagna had also scored on Thursday as Marseille overcame Benfica in a penalty shoot-out to reach the Europa League semi-finals.

However, they have now failed to win in four league games and sit ninth in the table, meaning it may well be that they have to win the Europa League in order to qualify for Europe again next season.

Jordan's Mousa al-Tamari netted a late winner as Montpellier won 2-1 at Reims, while Metz moved out of the relegation zone by winning 1-0 at Le Havre.

TENNIS

Djokovic skips Madrid Open, Nadal to face Blanch

AFP
Madrid

World number one and record 24-time Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic will not play at the Madrid Open this week.

Media reports said the 36-year-old Serbian star had pulled out of the tournament and he was not included in the draw yesterday.

The 36-year-old is yet to win a title this season and has only played in four tournaments this year, having decided to lighten his schedule.

Veteran tennis great Rafael Nadal will continue his comeback from injury in Madrid and has been pitted against 16-year-old American Darwin Blanch in the first round.

Djokovic has now pulled out of the Madrid Open three times in four years. The Serbian could still appear in Rome at the Italian Open before defending his

French Open title from May 26.

Djokovic is a three-time champion at the two-week clay court event in the Spanish capital. It is his second Masters 1000 withdrawal this year after skipping the Miami Open in March. Djokovic attended Real Madrid's 3-2 win over Barcelona at the Santiago Bernabeu on Sunday and is expected to appear at the Laureus Awards in Madrid, where he is in contention to win the Sportsman of the Year trophy.

Veteran tennis great Nadal, 37, played at the Barcelona Open but was defeated in the second round by Alex de Minaur in straight sets. If he defeats teenager Blanch then he will face Australian world number 11 De Minaur in the second round for the second week in a row.

Reigning champion and second seed Carlos Alcaraz said he was hoping to be fully fit to play in Madrid after a forearm problem and will face either Alexander Shevchenko or Arthur Rinderknech in the second round.

'I have nothing to hide' says motorsport boss Ben Sulayem

Motorsport boss Mohamed Ben Sulayem says he has "nothing to hide" and "I play by the rules" after being cleared of accusations that he interfered with the organisation of the inaugural Las Vegas Grand Prix.

The president of governing body the FIA had been accused of asking officials "to find some concerns to prevent the FIA from certifying the (Las Vegas) circuit" before it hosted a grand prix for the first time in 2023, according to an internal FIA report.

The United Arab Emirates national, a former rally driver, was also cleared by the FIA ethics committee of influencing the results of the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix last year.

"I wish it was only an accusation, but I was already convicted in the court of public opinion," Ben Sulayem told media at the Chinese Grand Prix.

"I have nothing to hide. I'm proud of the work I've accomplished," added Ben Sulayem of his tenure since being elected FIA president in December 2021. The reasons why the president of the FIA would have wanted to prevent the Las Vegas race from taking place have never been explained.

However, there have been claims of tensions over influence in the sport between the FIA and American group Liberty Media, who own the commercial rights to Formula One and organised the Las Vegas Grand Prix. But Ben Sulayem said his relationship with Formula One Management (FOM) was "very good". "FOM is our partner," said Ben Sulayem. "I don't have any problems. I just want to continue doing business with them."

As for the past allegations against him, Ben Sulayem was adamant that he played it by the book. "I can stand tall and look you in the eyes and say I am a sportsman and I play by the rules," he said.

MOTORSPORT

Qatar Drag Race Championship concludes after thrilling last round

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Qatar Drag Race Championship (QDRC) concluded in thrilling fashion with 110 competitors featuring in 14 categories in the fourth and final round.

The championship, which lasted for months, was sponsored by Qatar Racing Club (QRC) Chairman HE Sheikh Khalid bin Hamad al-Thani.

In the Super Stock category during the last round, Nawaf al-Ansari emerged victorious after defeating Ahmed Malik in the final race, securing his fourth podium finish of the season, ultimately winning the championship title.

In the Super Street category, Hamad al-Muftah claimed the title after defeating the qualifying trials leader Mustafa Atat in the final race.

The season championship title went to racer Khalid al-Sultan. Ahmed al-Emadi managed to combine the last round title with the season championship in the 8 Cylinder Pro category after defeating Abdullah Ali in the final, while Abdul Rahman Kafoud also combined the two titles but in the Modified 8 Cylinder category after beating Khalid al-Ajmi in the final.

In the Stock category for cars with 8-cylinder engines, Salman Rajab won the fourth round title after defeating Akram Rashidi in the final race, with the latter becoming the champion of the current season in this category.

Moving on to cars equipped with 6-cylinder stock engines, racer Hamad al-Mansour claimed the fourth title of this season, achieving a perfect score and earning him the title of the current season's champion.

Al-Mansour's victory in this



Winners of the fourth round and the season champions pose with QRC Director Sheikh Jabor bin Khalid al-Thani.

round came after he outperformed Mohamed Sayed in the final race.

Additionally, Mahmoud Ali Abbas won the 4 Cylinder Modified title by defeating Tariq Zaid in the final showdown.

These results led to Waseem Agha being crowned the champion of the current season, having

won the previous three rounds. The 4 Cylinder Stock category saw Armando Austria claiming a consecutive victory this season by defeating Christian Saramento in the final race, seizing the season championship.

In the Modified Light Trucks categories, racer Badr al-Shar-

shani achieved his third consecutive victory in the championship, securing him the title of the current season, while, in the Stock category, Mohamed al-Ansari took first place, followed by Abdullah al-Hamadi in second, and Faisal Mohamed in third, leading to al-Hamadi claiming the sea-

son championship. In the Street ET category, Abdul Rahman Malik emerged victorious in the final race against Usman Anjoom, while Youssef Abu Diya secured third place, ultimately becoming the season champion after tying in points with Malik, edging him out based on the number of podium finishes.

Shahid Munir alone managed to secure two titles from the current season, the first of which came in the Stock Bike category where he won the fourth round, marking his third victory in this category this season.

In the Bike ET category, Ouzair Ismail managed to achieve his second title of the season after winning the second round, thus becoming the champion of the current season.

QRC Director Sheikh Jabor bin Khalid al-Thani crowned the championship winners and podium winners of the last round.

SPOTLIGHT

Indian prodigy Gukesh, 17, makes chess history

Agencies
Montreal

A 17-year-old from India will become the youngest player to challenge for the World Chess Championship crown after winning a major tournament in Canada. Gukesh Dommaraju will face reigning champion Ding Liren from China for another piece of history, after becoming the youngest player to win the prestigious Candidates Tournament.

"I'm just so relieved, so happy following this crazy game," Gukesh said following his landmark triumph in Toronto on Sunday. "I was in the right mindset throughout the event. From start to end, I was in good spirits, fully motivated and I really wanted to win the event."

A grandmaster since he was 12, he is now set to be the "youngest World Chess Championship challenger in history," the International Chess Federation said. Asked

how he felt about his history-making feats, the teenager said: "I don't really care about youngest and all these records, but it's a nice thing to say. Right now I'm mostly just happy about winning the tournament."

Gukesh became India's youngest grandmaster when he was just 12 years, seven months and 17 days old, but missed being the world's youngest by 17 days. Eight players competed from April 4 in Toronto, but without the Norwegian multiple world champion Magnus Carlsen. The date and location of the world championship showdown have yet to be announced.

If Gukesh wins it he'll become the youngest undisputed world chess champion in history. It should be mentioned that GM Ruslan Ponomarev won the knockout FIDE World Championship in 2002 at the age of 18, but at a time when the world title was split; GM Vladimir Kramnik, and the player he beat in a match in 2000, Garry Kasparov, didn't participate.

Gukesh outscored Fabiano Caruana, Hikaru Nakamura and Ian Nepomniach-

thci by a half point – the three players who finished in shared second place were also the top three seeds at the double round-robin, not to mention the fact that Caruana and Nepo had already won previous editions of the event.

On Sunday, in a tense, almost six-hour game, Caruana was unable to finish off a winning position against Nepomniachtchi to extend the tournament one more day with tiebreaks. With a draw in that game, Gukesh's draw against Nakamura was enough for the Indian to win the Candidates with nine points from 14 rounds, which was held over a three-week period.

Former Women's World Champion Tan Zhongyi won the Women's Candidates by a 1.5-point margin after leading the tournament the entire way through. She attained a winning advantage against Anna Muzychuk, but a draw was still enough to secure tournament victory. She will play Ju Wenjun in the next FIDE Women's World Championship in 2025, which will be a rematch of their 2018 encounter where Tan lost.



Gukesh Dommaraju, who was one of three Indian players in the eight-man Candidates tournament, will face China's Ding Liren for the World title later this year.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Arsenal's Arteta warns of Chelsea danger

Gunners returned to the top of the league at the weekend, beating Wolves 2-0



Arsenal are level on 74 points with second-placed Liverpool but have a superior goal difference. Manchester City are one point behind with a game in hand. (AFP)

AFP
London

Mikel Arteta says Chelsea deserve to be higher in the Premier League table as he prepares his title-chasing Arsenal team for a testing London derby today. The Gunners returned to the top of the league at the weekend, beating Wolves 2-0 to leapfrog defending champions Manchester City.

They are level on 74 points with second-placed Liverpool but have a superior goal difference. City are one point behind with a game in hand. Mauricio Pochettino's Chelsea were beaten by City in their FA Cup semi-final on Saturday but are unbeaten in eight league games, with four wins coming in that spell.

Arteta said Saturday's win against Wolves was crucial after last week's league defeat to Aston Villa and a Champions League exit at the hands of Bayern Munich. "We are in a great position in the Premier League," the Spaniard told reporters yesterday.

"We've been like this for nine months, nine-and-a-half months, and we want really to give it a real go and be really determined to do what is in our hands to try to lift that trophy and tomorrow we are going to have a very tough opponent in front of us."

Pochettino, speaking at his own press conference, said a late call would be made over the fitness of top-scorer Cole Palmer, who had missed training due to illness. But the Argentine said his team could win with or without their talisman. "The most important thing is the team and the collective," he said. "He is an important part of the team and is doing fantastic for us, but we are Chelsea and we have plenty of play-

ers that can perform and do the job."

Arteta said ninth-placed Chelsea would be dangerous opponents regardless of whether Palmer was fit, praising the squad and "incredible manager" Pochettino. "Whoever they put out there, when you look at the squad they have, the quality they have, it's great," he said. "I think they are doing very, very well. I think they're doing much better than people are talking."

Arteta added: "They deserve to be in a much higher position in the league when you look at what they've done and what they've produced in games. "They have reached a final (League Cup), they have reached a semi-final (FA Cup), they could have been through. I think what Mauricio is doing is really impressive and I'm sure he's going to get them there."

Arteta said his players were full of energy despite a gruelling season as the club hunt their first Premier League title for 20 years. "When I saw them this morning I had to stop them because winning is a big boost of energy and after their performance against Wolves, winning and having to play a London derby tomorrow, everybody is ready for it."

"Something else is the amount and the volume of those games. It's not the moment for us to look at that, we have to think in a positive way and feel and think that we are fresh to perform in the best possible way."

Arteta was also asked about his team's good record against other members of the so-called "Big Six" this season, against whom they have not lost a single game. "Whether it's psychology, whether it's performance, whether it's getting better as a team, obviously the more you win against big teams the more belief you have that you can do it consistently," he said.

Bologna beat Roma to close in on Champions League spot

Milan: Bologna took a huge step towards the Champions League yesterday with an impressive 3-1 win at rivals Roma, as Inter Milan attempt to win the Serie A title in a hotly-anticipated Milan derby.

Oussama El Azzouzi's stunning overhead kick and further strikes from Joshua Zirkzee and Alexis Saelemaekers consolidated fourth place for Bologna, who are nearly assured of a spot in Europe's top club competition. Bologna played in one round of the old European Cup in 1964 but have never competed in the modern Champions League.

However that looks set to change as they sit eight points ahead of sixth-placed Atalanta, with a top-five finish enough to qualify for next season's revamped competition. Bologna were deserved winners in the Italian capital, outplaying Roma who looked tired after eliminating AC Milan from the Europa League midweek.

Missing Romelu Lukaku and with Tammy Abraham starting up front for the first time in nearly a year, Roma struggled to get going and are now looking over their shoulders at Atalanta who they lead by a single point.

Daniele De Rossi's side now travel to Udinese on Thursday to finish their interrupted match and then go back across the country to face arch-rivals Napoli in Naples. The first leg of their Europa League semi-final with Bayer Leverkusen then follows in Rome on May 2.

Pouring rain and freezing temperatures in Milan haven't damped the enthusiasm of Inter fans who have gathered at the San Siro for one of the biggest ever derbies in the northern Italian city. Inter must win on Thursday night to claim their 20th league crown with five matches remaining in the season.

LA LIGA

Barca chief wants Clasico replay if Yamal goal call wrong

AFP
Barcelona

Barcelona president Joan Laporta said yesterday the club will demand a Clasico replay if they can prove officials made a mistake by not allowing Lamine Yamal's "ghost goal".

The champions fell to a 3-2 defeat against Real Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu on Sunday night in a match which featured multiple controversial incidents, leaving their arch-rivals 11 points clear at the top of La Liga. The most debated was 16-year-old winger Yamal's first-half flick from a corner which may have crossed the line before Madrid goalkeeper Andriy Lunin pushed it away.

Without goal-line technology in Spain, officials used VAR to try and confirm if the ball had crossed the line but could not be certain it had and so play continued with the score level at 1-1. Laporta demanded the Spanish football federation and the refereeing committee send Barcelona all footage of the incident and audio recordings of the officials' conversations. "If, once the documentation has been analysed, the club understands that there was an error in the assessment of the play, as we think there was, we will take all the necessary steps to reverse the situation, without ruling out any legal action that may be necessary," said Laporta in a video published by Barcelona.

"If it is confirmed that it was a legal goal, as we believe it was, we will go further and ask for a replay of the match, as has happened in another European match due to a VAR error."

Laporta was referring to a match between Anderlecht and Genk in January in the Bel-



Barcelona's Lamine Yamal (left) is tackled by Real Madrid's Eduardo Camavinga during the La Liga match at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium in Madrid on Sunday. (AFP)

gian top flight which was initially scheduled to be replayed because of a misapplication of the laws of the game, but in the end it was ruled that Anderlecht's 2-1 win would stand. Barcelona coach Xavi Hernandez said on Sunday it was a "disgrace" that Spanish football did not have goal-line technology. Laporta also criticised a general

"misuse" of VAR, saying there appeared to be "contradictory criteria" for its intervention depending on the teams involved.

Barcelona had two penalty appeals turned down during the Clasico defeat for what they said were fouls on Yamal and Fermin Lopez. Jude Bellingham snatched Real Madrid a dramatic 3-2 win. Real Madrid

coach Carlo Ancelotti hailed the England midfielder's decisive intervention to take Los Blancos to the brink of the Spanish title. Madrid twice came from behind with Vinicius Junior and Lucas Vazquez netting to level Andreas Christensen and Fermin Lopez strikes, before Bellingham rammed home the winner in stoppage time.

"He arrived at just the right time, he worked so hard in the game, it's been a while since he scored and today he scored a goal that could be fundamental in winning the league," said Ancelotti.

Barcelona, second, bounced back with a strong performance after their Champions League exit at the hands of Paris Saint-Germain but their last stand was demolished by Bellingham. Madrid showed the same grit to stay in the match as they did midweek against Manchester City on the way to the final four in Europe, before Bellingham's knock-out blow left the Santiago Bernabeu crowd delighted.

Madrid's top scorer with 21 goals across all competitions, the former Borussia Dortmund man netted twice in Madrid's Clasico win over Barcelona in October and is shining in his first season in Spain at only 20 years old.

"We took a huge step towards La Liga," Vazquez, key in all three Madrid goals, said. "We've had a very good season, we're on a very good path, now we just have to polish it off and we'll go for everything."

Earlier Atletico Madrid suffered a 2-0 defeat at Alaves to dent their chances of a top four finish and end a woeful week, following their Champions League exit. Diego Simeone's side, fourth, lead fifth place Athletic by three points after Carlos Benavidez and Luis Rioja's strikes consigned them to defeat.

Italy icon Cannavaro named Udinese manager

Milan: Italy legend Fabio Cannavaro was named new Udinese coach yesterday after Gabriele Ciuffi was sacked in an attempt to avoid relegation from Serie A. In a statement Udinese said that Cannavaro "has signed a contract until June 30, 2024", the 2006 World Cup winner also bringing in his brother Paolo on his coaching staff.

Ciuffi was dismissed after Udinese fell to a 1-0 defeat at fellow strugglers Verona on Saturday, a loss which left them locked on 28 points with Frosinone who are just inside the relegation zone. Former Ballon d'Or winner Cannavaro, 50, will be in charge on Thursday when Udinese play the final 18 minutes of their home clash with Roma.

Play in that match just over a week ago was suspended with the teams level at 1-1 after Roma defender Evan Ndicka collapsed on the pitch with what was initially feared to be a heart problem.

However tests later revealed that the Ivory Coast international had suffered "a thoracic trauma with minimal left pneumothorax (trapped air between the lung and chest wall)".

Cannavaro has had a mixed coaching career, working in the Gulf and China - where he won the Super League in 2019.