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Leverkusen late heroics keep unbeaten streak alive

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Martin claims crash-filled sprint at Spanish GP, extended lead

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DIAMOND LEAGUE

Barshim settles for second place as Kerr triumphs

'This is an important season for me and I am really looking forward the next competition'

Agencies
Suzhou, China

Qatar's Mutaz Essa Barshim seemed to be flying in the men's high jump final of Suzhou Diamond League meeting in China yesterday until he erred at 2.31m and moved straight to 2.33 before choosing to call it a day and save himself for the Doha leg in preparation for the forthcoming Paris 2024 Olympics.

The 32-year-old Olympic and world champion Barshim's decision to settle for second place was a wise call given the bigger goals he's set for himself.

In comparatively cooler conditions to that of the Xiamen meeting last week, Barshim began at 2.20m in the eleven-man competition and went on to also clear 2.24, 2.27 and 2.29 - all in his first attempts.

World indoor champion Hamish Kerr of New Zealand, who emerged winner, began at 2.16 needed a jump extra to clear 2.24 and 2.27, and later 2.31 which set the battle between him and Barshim.

Unable to get past 2.31 in two attempts, Barshim moved to 2.33 before calling it a day after one attempt. Kerr too had two attempts at 2.33 but without success.

Speaking soon after, Barshim said: "I loving coming back to compete here, and it was a nice week. This is an important season for me and I am really looking forward the next competition. I really love Suzhou and enjoyed it with my wife here. The fans are very supportive and encouraged me a lot.

"Compared to the last meeting in Xiamen, the weather is way better. Due to the rain (in Xiamen) I was really concerned and I did not want to push myself too hard because I did not want to be injured and ruin my season. The Olympics is the goal with my next competition in Doha in two weeks," he added.

Kerr, who rebounded after his third place in Xiamen, said, "It was great to get



Qatar's Mutaz Essa Barshim in action during the high jump event at the Diamond League athletics meeting in Suzhou, China, yesterday.

the win. I've been working on a few technical things so far that to work out tonight, I'm stoked. It wasn't perfect through 2.24m, 2.27m tonight but I stayed patient and that is the most pleasing thing. Just to be out there with these who I really look up to like Barshim and to beat them, I still have to pinch myself. This gives me a lot of confidence going into the season ahead."

Turner Vernon of USA was third with a best jump of 2.27.

DUPLANTIS SAILS TO VICTORY, SIMBINE BEATS COLEMAN

Sweden's Armand 'Mondo' Duplantis dominated the men's pole vault, going close to bettering his own world record set last week. The reigning Olympic champion, who cleared 6.24m in Xiamen for his eighth world record mark, wrapped up the win in Suzhou with a meet record of 6.00m.

The bar was immediately raised to



South Africa's Akani Simbine (left), finishes ahead of USA's Christian Coleman (centre) and USA's Fred Kerley in the men's 100m in Suzhou. (AFP)

6.25m, but it proved too much for the US-born Duplantis, who failed three times at the height, albeit going close on his final effort. "There's always a little bit of a crash after a huge performance like that, like I had last week, but I still felt good today, of course," Duplantis said. "I knew I was going to have to push a little bit harder, it wasn't going to come as natural as last week because that's just kind of the nature of how it feels. I felt a little bit flat today, but still really good. I just feel that conditions have to be perfect for me to jump a world record and I wasn't quite feeling it off the runway tonight," he said.

World 100m champion Sha'Carri Richardson suffered another upset in the women's 200m, with the American coming in third at 23.11 seconds behind Briton Daryll Neita's winning 22.62 and the USA's Anavia Battle's 22.99.

South Africa's Akani Simbine won the

men's 100 metres in 10.01sec ahead of American Christian Coleman. "I expected a better performance but I am fine with today's result which I achieved my SB today," said newly-crowned world indoor 60m champion Coleman, who won the blue ribbon event in Xiamen.

Simbine added: "With Coleman, you just need to know that he's going to come out, (you have to) just stick to the arranged plan, focus on your own race."

Fred Kerley, the 2022 world champion and Olympic silver medalist, rounded out the podium in 10.11sec. Nigeria's world record holder Tobi Amusan was disqualified from the women's 100m hurdles after a false start, with Olympic champion Jasmine Camacho-Quinn of Puerto Rico awarded first place in 12.63sec in a photo finish. Ethiopia's Mekedes Alemeshete claimed victory in the women's 5,000m and took the world lead.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Liverpool title hopes suffer blow, Sheffield United relegated

AFF
London

Liverpool's fading Premier League title hopes were dealt a near-fatal blow yesterday as West Ham rescued a draw against Jurgen Klopp's men while Sheffield United dropped through the relegation trap door. Manchester United's push for Europe was dented by Burnley, who salvaged a late draw at Old Trafford, and Everton secured their top-flight status with a 1-0 win at home to Brentford.

Klopp's glittering reign at Anfield appears to be ending on a flat note after they dropped points for the fourth time in five league games at the London Stadium. Just weeks ago Liverpool, who won the League Cup in February, were on course for a quadruple of trophies but that is now a distant memory after FA Cup and Europa League exits and a string of damaging league results.

Liverpool would have moved level on points with leaders Arsenal with a victory, at least temporarily, but they failed to make the most of their chances despite a stirring second-half fightback. The Gunners are on 77 points, two clear of Liverpool with a game in hand, while defending champions Manchester City have 76 points with two games in hand on the Reds.

Jarrod Bowen put David Moyes's West Ham ahead shortly before half time but Liverpool looked a different side in the second period, equalising through Andy Robertson before an own goal from West Ham goalkeeper Alphonse Areola. But West Ham levelled in the 77th minute when Bowen wriggled free down the right and lifted a cross towards Michail Antonio, who headed home to make it 2-2.



Liverpool's Mohamed Salah was involved in touchline spat with manager Jurgen Klopp during the Premier League match against West Ham yesterday. (Reuters)

A downbeat Klopp, in the final weeks of his time at Anfield, refused to talk about his side's title chances. "I'm not in the mood to talk about that to be honest or look at that at all," he said. "We had to win here, we knew that, and we didn't, and now we have a little bit more time between now and the next game. We try to get the

boys ready again and we will go again."

Klopp attempted to play down a touchline spat with Mohamed Salah, who was left out of the starting line-up, but the Egypt forward fanned the flames. "There's going to be a fire today if I speak," he told reporters.

Pep Guardiola's City, who play relega-

Salah warns of Klopp 'fire' after Liverpool drop points

London: Mohamed Salah ruined Jurgen Klopp's attempt to play down a touchline spat at West Ham yesterday, claiming there would be a "fire" if he spoke about the clash following Liverpool's 2-2 draw. The Reds were desperate to bounce back after a painful midweek loss in the Merseyside derby at Everton and Klopp dropped Salah to the bench in an attempt to jolt his weary team into form.

Liverpool recovered from conceding an opener to take a 2-1 lead midway through the second half at the London Stadium. But Michail Antonio effectively ended their faint Premier League title hopes when he headed an equaliser in the 77th minute. Salah had been waiting to come

on before Antonio's goal and was involved in an animated conversation with Klopp, appearing to be angry with his manager. It ended with fellow substitute Darwin Nunez being forced to push teammate Salah away before they entered the fray.

"We spoke about it in the dressing room and that is done for me," said Klopp, in the final weeks of his Anfield reign. Asked if Salah was OK with it, Klopp claimed: "That was my impression."

However, when Salah walked past reporters and was asked to stop, he admitted: "There's going to be a fire today if I speak." The 31-year-old has struggled to hit top form in recent weeks, scoring just once in his past six matches.

tion-threatened Nottingham Forest today, are hot favourites to secure an unprecedented fourth straight English top-flight title. Arsenal are firmly in the hunt but face a tough away day at Tottenham, also today.

Newcastle's 5-1 win against basement club Sheffield United strengthened their push for European football next season but sent Chris Wilder's team down to the Championship after just one season in the top flight. Anel Ahmedhodzic gave the visitors an early lead at St James' Park but Alexander Isak scored twice as the home side roared back. "We have not been good enough," Wilder said. "The league has been too powerful for us right the way through the season."

Newcastle remain in seventh place but are just one point behind Manchester United, who conceded a late penalty in a 1-1 draw against Burnley. Brazilian winger Antony scored his first Premier League goal of the season but Zeki Amdouni lev-

elled from the spot in the 87th minute.

United have now won just one of their past six league matches as they limp towards the end of the season. Burnley are two points behind Forest, who are just outside the relegation zone, and one point behind Luton. Ten Hag said his team "gave it away". "We are one of the most dynamic and entertaining teams in the league at this moment," said the Dutchman. "We are creating loads of chances by playing good football. It was unnecessary to lose control."

Idrissa Gueye scored in the 60th minute at Goodison Park to make it four wins out of five for Sean Dyche's Everton, who have survived despite losing eight points this season for breaches of Premier League financial rules.

Hwang Hee-chan and Toti Gomes scored as Wolves deepened Luton's woes with a 2-1 win and Fulham drew 1-1 with Crystal Palace.

Mohamed al-Balooshi shines at Qatar Off-Road Championship



Mohamed al-Balooshi won the round four of the Qatar Off-Road Championship 2024 at the Sealine yesterday. The Emirati rider topped the Class 1 of the bikes category to finish ahead of Rafic Eid and his sibling Sultan al-Balooshi. The Quad category was won by Mansoor al-Suwaidi, with Abdullah al-Falasi coming second, while Rafic Eid took the Veteran Class 1 honours. In the cars category, Ahmed al-Kuwari and Nasser al-Kuwari won the Class 1, while Class 2 was clinched by Nawaf al-Sowaidi and Aisvydas Palikuena.

CRICKET

Azam, Afridi help Pakistan down NZ to draw series

The series gave both teams a kickstart to their preparations for World Cup

AFP
Lahore

Skipper Babar Azam hit a solid half century while spearhead Shaheen Shah Afridi grabbed four wickets as Pakistan overcame New Zealand by nine runs in the fifth and final Twenty20 international in Lahore yesterday.

Azam's 44-ball 69 and Fakhar Zaman's 33-ball 43 took Pakistan to 178-5 in their 20 overs before Shaheen claimed 4-30 to restrict New Zealand to 169 in 19.2 overs, squaring the series at 2-2.

But Pakistan's win only came in the final over with 12 needed as Josh Clarkson 38 not out threatened to pull off a heist, but two run outs in Mohamed Amir's over sealed the home win much to the delight of a full house at Gaddafi Stadium.

The first match of the series was abandoned while Pakistan clinched the second and New Zealand the third by identical seven-wicket margins - all in Rawalpindi.

New Zealand took the fourth match, also in Lahore, by four runs.

The series gave both the teams a kickstart to their preparations for the Twenty20 World Cup to be held in the United States and the West Indies in June.

While Pakistan would be disappointed not to have won a series against a depleted New Zealand side missing a host of players due to Indian Premier League, unavailability and injuries, the visitors got a boost from their bench strength.

Shaheen gave Pakistan an ideal



Pakistan's Shaheen Shah Afridi (second from left) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of New Zealand's Jimmy Neesham during the fifth and last T20I in Lahore yesterday. (AFP)

start by dismissing Tom Blundell for four in his first over - his 15th wicket in his opening over of a Twenty20 international - and 50th in all T20 matches.

Tim Seifert put New Zealand back on track with an aggressive 33-ball 52 - his ninth T20I half century containing seven boundaries and two sixes.

He added 76 for the second wicket with skipper Micheal Bracewell (23) but from 81-1 New Zealand lost four wickets in the space of 25 balls for the addition of just 22 runs.

Leg-spinner Usama Mir (2-21) had Seifert and Mark Chapman

(12) while fellow spinner Shadab Khan accounted for Bracewell as New Zealand's chase was derailed.

Shaheen returned for a second spell to dismiss James Neesham (16), Zak Foulkes (nought) and Ish Sodhi (three) in successive overs.

Earlier, Azam saw his opening partner Saim Ayub fall in the second over for just one but that did not deter him as he added 73 for the second wicket with Usman Khan who made a brisk 24-ball 31.

Azam hit six boundaries and two sixes in his 34th T20I half-century before he was bowled by pacer Ben Sears in the 15th over.

Zaman hit four boundaries and

a six before he was smartly caught by Chapman on the boundary off Foulkes as Pakistan managed 55 in the last five overs.

Shadab Khan hit a six and a four in his five-ball 15 not out.

New Zealand made three changes as they brought back Seifert, Cole McConchie and Foulkes while pace spearhead Shaheen returned for the home team.

BRIEF SCORES

Pakistan 178 for 5 (Babar 69, Fakhar 43, Neesham 1-13) **beat New Zealand 169** (Seifert 52, Shaheen 4-30, Usama 2-21) **by 9 runs.**

FOCUS

Estanguet emotional as Olympic torch sets sail for France

AFP
Piraeus, Greece

The Olympic flame set sail yesterday on its voyage to France on board the Belem, the Torch Relay reaching its climax at the revolutionary Paris Games opening ceremony along the river Seine on July 26.

"The feelings are so exceptional. It's such an emotion for me," Tony Estanguet, Paris Olympics chief organiser, told reporters before the departure of the ship from Piraeus.

He hailed the "great coincidence" how the Belem was launched just weeks after the first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens in 1896.

"These games mean a lot. It's been a centenary since the last time we organised the Olympic games in our country," he added. The 19th-century three-masted boat set sail on a calm sea but under cloudy skies.

It was accompanied off the port of Piraeus by the trireme Olympias of the Greek Navy and 25 sailing boats while dozens of people watched behind railings for security reasons.

"We came here so that the children understand that the Olympic ideal was born in Greece. I'm really moved," Giorgos Kontopoulos, who watched the ship starting its voyage with his two children, told AFP.

On Sunday, the ship will pass from the Corinth Canal - a feat of 19th century engineering constructed with the contribution of French banks and engineers. The Belem is set to reach Marseille - where a Greek colony was founded in around 600 BCE - on May 8. Over 1,000 vessels will accompany its approach to the harbour, local officials have said.

French swimmer Florent Manaudou will be the first torch bearer in Marseille. His sister Laure will be the second torch bearer in ancient Olympia, where the flame was lit on April 16.

Ten thousand torchbearers



President of the Paris 2024 Olympics and Paralympics Organising Committee Tony Estanguet poses with the Olympic flame before carrying it on board French 19th-century three-masted barque Belem to begin the flame's journey to France yesterday in Athens. (AFP)

will then carry the flame across 64 French territories.

It will travel through more than 450 towns and cities, and dozens of tourist attractions during its 12,000km (7,500-mile) journey through mainland France and overseas French territories in the Caribbean, Indian Ocean and Pacific.

It will then reach Paris and be the centre piece of the hugely imaginative and new approach to the Games opening ceremony. Instead of the traditional approach of parading through the athletics stadium at the start of the Games, teams are set to sail down the Seine on a flotilla of boats in front of up to 500,000 spectators, including people watching from nearby buildings. The torch harks back to the ancient Olympics when a sacred flame burned throughout the Games. The tradition was revived in 1936 for the Berlin Games.

Greece on Friday had handed over the Olympic flame of the 2024 Games, at a ceremony, to Estanguet.

Hellenic Olympic Committee chairman Spyros Capralos handed the torch to Estanguet at the Panathenaic Stadium, where the Olympics were held in 1896.

INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Delhi down Mumbai, Rajasthan near play-offs

AFP
New Delhi

Australia's Jake Fraser-McGurk smashed 84 off 27 deliveries to fire Delhi Capitals to 257-4 and a 10-run win over Mumbai Indians in another Indian Premier League (IPL) high-scoring yesterday.

In the second match of the day, skipper Sanju Samson hit an unbeaten 71 as Rajasthan Royals all but confirmed their play-off spot with a seven-wicket hammering of Lucknow Super Giants.

Delhi, at their home Arun Jaitley Stadium, posted their best-ever total in the T20 tournament, a day after Punjab Kings chased down a record target of 262.

Delhi's previous best was 231-4 in 2011 against Punjab Kings. This edition Sunrisers Hyderabad have twice smashed IPL records with totals of 277 and 287. Bowlers kept five-time champions Mumbai down to 247-9 despite a valiant 32-ball 63 by Tilak Varma as Delhi



Delhi Capitals' Jake Fraser-McGurk celebrates after scoring a half-century during the IPL match against Mumbai Indians in New Delhi yesterday. (AFP)

boosted their play-off hopes with five wins in 10 matches. Fraser-McGurk, a 22-year-old Australian batsman who has taken his IPL debut season by storm with three half-centuries in five matches, started with two fours and a six off England pace bowler Luke Wood

in a 19-run first over.

"That's my role, go out there and score as many as I can and get the team off to a nice start," Fraser-McGurk, who has a strike-rate of 237.50, said after his blitz.

The Australian kept up the charge to reach his fifty in 15 balls



Rajasthan Royals' captain Sanju Samson gestures after his team win the match against Lucknow Super Giants in Lucknow. (AFP)

with a hit over the fence and put on 114 runs with opening partner Abishek Porel, who hit 36.

Leg-spinner Piyush Chawla finally denied Fraser-McGurk, who went unsold in the auction before Delhi signed him as injury replacement, his century.

There was no stopping Delhi as Shai Hope hit a 17-ball 41, skipper Rishabh Pant made 29 off 19 deliveries and Tristan Stubbs smashed an unbeaten 48 to pummel the opposition attack.

Mumbai, who have endured a tough season after Hardik Pandya replaced veteran opener Rohit Sharma as captain and has been booed across a number of venues, lost regular wickets.

Pandya hit 46 off 16 balls but it was a 70-run partnership between Varma and Tim David, who hit 37 off 17 balls that raised Mumbai's hopes, but Delhi kept calm.

David fell lbw to Mukesh Kumar after a four and a six and Varma was run out at the start of the final over as Mumbai remained ninth.

Kumar and fellow medium-pace bowler and impact substitute Rasikh Salam took three wickets each.

In the evening match in Lucknow, the hosts posted 196-5 courtesy a 76 by skipper KL Rahul and his 115 run stand with Deepak

Hooda, who made 50. Lucknow lost two early wickets after New Zealand's left-arm quick Trent Boult bowled Quinton de Kock for eight and Sandeep Sharma bowled Marcus Stoinis for a duck.

Rahul and Hooda steadied the innings and then hit back but the effort was not enough as Dhruv Jurel, who hit 52, and Samson steered table-toppers Rajasthan home with one over to spare for their eighth win in nine matches.

Top four teams will qualify for the play-offs.

BRIEF SCORES

Delhi Capitals 257 for 4 (Fraser-McGurk 84, Stubbs 48*, Hope 41, Nabi 1-20) **beat Mumbai Indians 247 for 9** (Tilak 63, Hardik 46, Rasikh 3-34, Mukesh 3-59, Khaleel 2-45) **by ten runs.**

Rajasthan Royals 199 for 3 (Samson 71*, Jurel 52*) **beat Lucknow Super Giants 196 for 5** (Rahul 76, Hooda 50, Sandeep 2-31) **by seven wickets.**

MOTORSPORT

Martin claims crash-filled sprint at Spanish MotoGP

'Marc overtook me because I made a mistake on corner seven. Then I tried to push him and he made a mistake'

AFP
Jerez de la Frontera, Spain

Jorge Martin extended his lead in the MotoGP standings as he won the Spanish Grand Prix sprint in Jerez yesterday after Marc Marquez crashed out while leading late in the race.

Teenaged rookie Pedro Acosta was runner up to take second in the championship race as nine riders failed to finish. Former world champion Fabio Quartararo started in 23rd of 25 but so spread out was the crash-shattered field that he managed to cross the line third.

But the Frenchman was later penalised eight seconds and relegated to fifth for low tyre pressure which cost Yamaha their first podium place of the season. Dani Pedrosa, the 38-year-old Spanish veteran racing as a wild card for KTM moved up to third place, ahead of Italian Franco Morbidelli of Ducati-Pramac in fourth.

Riders repeatedly described the track, dappled with damp after morning rain, as tricky.

"A difficult race, the track conditions were super hard," said Martin in his on-track interview.

Marquez, with his first pole since joining Ducati Gresini, and Martin started on the front row, but South African Brad Binder shot off from the second row to grab the lead on his KTM.

Spaniard Martin, on a Ducati-Pramac, overtook on lap two and



Ducati rider Jorge Martin celebrates after winning the sprint race of the MotoGP Spanish Grand Prix at the Jerez racetrack in Jerez de la Frontera, Spain, yesterday. (AFP)

pulled away from the chaotic battle behind him as riders kept tumbling. Two-time defending champion Francesco Bagnaia went down on lap three. Binder squeezed past on the inside, forcing the Italian into another bike. Bagnaia's Ducati went flying, out of the race and out of the points.

Martin built a comfortable lead but Marquez was the fastest bike

on the course and closed in. Under pressure, Martin made a mistake on lap seven and Marquez pounced. With three laps left Marquez hit a damp patch and slid off. He remounted to finish seventh.

"I had a good start but then I saw Marquez was coming even though I was pushing a lot, a lot, a lot," said Martin. "Marc overtook me because I made a mistake on

corner seven. Then I tried to push him and he made a mistake."

Acosta, who started on the fourth row on his GasGas, came through to take second.

Martin went to 92 points in the standings, 29 clear of Acosta who took over second, four points head of Italian Enea Bastianini of Ducati who did not finish.

Spaniard Maverick Vinales,

a double winner in Austin last time, is fourth after he too fell on his Aprilia. Acosta, who appeared surprised when told he was second overall, said it "did not matter".

"We know we have the pace, but it was quite tough starting from 10th after the crash in qualifying," said the 19-year-old.

"With the mixed conditions it was not easy. The wet patches were quite wet and it was easy to lose the rear tyre. It happened that I touched a wet patch and went wide."

Quartararo commented: "The track was really tricky. Of course, a lot of crashes in front."

Martin said he hoped the track would be easier for Sunday's main race. "Tomorrow in dry conditions it will be a different story," he said.

Revised result of the sprint

1. Jorge Martin (ESP/Ducati-Pramac) 19min 52.682sec.
2. Pedro Acosta (ESP/GasGas-Tech3) at 2.970sec.
3. Dani Pedrosa (ESP/KTM) 7:10.2
4. Franco Morbidelli (ITA/Ducati-Pramac) 8.481
5. Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) 15.052
6. Raul Fernandez (ESP/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 15.882
7. Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 18.131
8. Augusto Fernandez (ESP/GasGas-Tech3) 18.278
9. Miguel Oliveira (POR/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 18.418
10. Joan Mir (ESP/Honda) 18.553
11. Takaaki Nakagami (JPN/Honda-LCR) 21.136
12. Johann Zarco (FRA/Honda-LCR) 21.948
13. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 23.478
14. Jack

Miller (AUS/KTM) 37.901, 15. Alex Rins (ESP/Yamaha) 1min 2.288sec.

16. Lorenzo Salvadori (ITA/Aprilia) 1:22.979

DNF: Stefan Bradl (GER/Honda-HRC), Luca Marini (ITA/Honda), Maverick Vinales (ESP/Aprilia), Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Ducati-VR46), Enea Bastianini (ITA/Ducati), Brad Binder (RSA/KTM), Alex Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini), Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati), Aleix Espargaro (ESP/Aprilia)

World championship standings:

1. Jorge Martin (ESP/Ducati-Pramac) 92 pts.
2. Pedro Acosta (ESP/GasGas-Tech3) 63
3. Enea Bastianini (ITA/Ducati) 59
4. Maverick Vinales (ESP/Aprilia) 56
5. Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati) 50
6. Brad Binder (RSA/KTM) 49
7. Aleix Espargaro (ESP/Aprilia) 39
8. Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 39
9. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 25
10. Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) 24
11. Jack Miller (AUS/KTM) 22
12. Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 20
13. Alex Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 14
14. Miguel Oliveira (POR/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 14
15. Raul Fernandez (ESP/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 11
16. Augusto Fernandez (ESP/GasGas-Tech3) 9
17. Joan Mir (ESP/Honda) 7
18. Dani Pedrosa (ESP/KTM) 6
19. Franco Morbidelli (ITA/Ducati-Pramac) 5
20. Johann Zarco (FRA/Honda-LCR) 5
21. Alex Rins (ESP/Yamaha) 3
22. Takaaki Nakagami (JPN/Honda-LCR) 2

TENNIS

Nadal downs De Minaur in Madrid, Sinner advances

Reuters
Madrid

Rafael Nadal continued his return to form as he defeated Alex de Minaur 7-6(6) 6-3 in the second round of the Madrid Open yesterday.

The five-time Madrid champion lost to De Minaur in Barcelona last week, but in front of another hugely partisan crowd the 37-year-old outclassed the Australian 10th seed this time around.

"The atmosphere here is just a joke so just can't thank enough everybody here," Nadal said after the crowd rose in appreciation of his display.

Nadal broke at the first opportunity to take a 2-0 lead in the opening set, but De Minaur broke back immediately after the Spaniard got involved in a heated exchange with the umpire. Nadal was clearly upset at being told he had not challenged a call in time.

He appeared rattled by the exchange, and De Minaur then broke to love to lead 4-3 but Nadal recovered and broke again to level, and in the tiebreak he raced into a 6-2 lead before De Minaur roared back to level at 6-6. Nadal regained his composure to win the opening set, and continued in the same vein as he broke serve in the first game of the second set, and ran out an easy winner to the acclaim of the Madrid crowd.

"Super happy to be able to be competitive against a great player



Spain's Rafael Nadal celebrates victory against Australia's Alex De Minaur at the end of the second round of the Madrid Open in Madrid yesterday. (AFP)

like Alex, and play over two hours, it means a lot to me," Nadal said.

In what will probably be his last season, Nadal's comeback in January after almost a year out with a hip injury ended early due to a thigh issue, and his recent return in Barcelona was halted by De Minaur in the second round.

"I really believe that tennis hasn't been an issue for the last two years, more the physical issues," Nadal said.

"If I'm able to play weeks in a row and if I'm able to play tennis then I'm going to see how far I can go and how competitive I can be, but that's not the case yet, just

step by step and lets see how I recover"

Nadal will face Pedro Cachin next, after the Argentine defeated American Frances Tiafoe 7-6(1) 3-6 6-4. Top seed Jannik Sinner had little trouble against fellow-Italian Lorenzo Sonego, with the world number two winning 6-0 6-3, while sixth seed Stefanos Tsitsipas was knocked out 6-4 6-4 by Brazilian qualifier Thiago Monteiro. Through to the third round in Madrid for the second time in three appearances, the Sinner will face Jordan Thompson or Pavel Kotov for a place in the last 16.

Sinner dropped just four points

behind his first serve against Sonego and faced zero break points.

"I feel like if you serve well here it's a huge weapon," said the 22-year-old Italian.

"I didn't play here last year, so in the two years since I've been here, I have improved many things.

"I can still improve because here it's very different to play; tomorrow is a practice day, so hopefully I can get a better feel of the court."

Russian third seed Daniil Medvedev came from a set down to beat Italian Matteo Arnaldi 2-6 6-4 6-4 and will meet America's Sebastian Korda in the third round.

Swiatek beats Cirstea to enter 4th round

Last year's women's finalist Swiatek eased past Romania's Sorana Cirstea 6-1, 6-1 to book a fourth-round meeting with home favourite Sara Sorribes Tormo or ex-world number one Victoria Azarenka at the WTA Madrid Open. Play started with the roof closed due to wet conditions but that had no effect on Swiatek, who leapt to a 4-0 lead inside 22 minutes.

The top seed got broken while serving for the opening set at 5-0 but that only delayed the inevitable as she struck right back to close out the set on the 40-minute mark.

The second set followed a similar pattern and Swiatek wrapped up the victory with a service winner, losing just two games in the one-hour 17-minute clash.

"For sure the weather is different than last year but still I know how to play in these kind of conditions. I feel really comfortable," said Swiatek, who is seeking a third WTA 1000 crown of the season this week. (AFP)



Poland's Iga Swiatek returns the ball to Romania's Sorana Cirstea during the Madrid Open match in Madrid yesterday. (AFP)

Cherif wins again to close in on Big Tour title at Hathab



French rider Cyrine Cherif yesterday produced another clinical performance to win the 13th and penultimate round of the Big Tour class the 13th Longines Hathab Tour, which extended her championship lead. At the Qatar Equestrian Federation (QEF)'s outdoor arena, Cherif astride l'am Moerhoeve's Princess Z, cleared the challenging course in 6713 secs to take her points tally to 255, 11 ahead of Mohamed Khalifa al-Baker. Khalid Mohamed al-Emadi is third in the overall standings with 223 points. Yesterday, al-Baker, who rode Lissabon 56, was the fastest rider clocking 64.56 secs but took penalties on four occasions to settle for a second place. Faleh Suweid al-Ajami in company with Ghana, committed four faults while clocking 65.93 secs to secure third place. Meanwhile, Marc Bettinger and the QEF-owned Dukhan 3 topped the Open Class with a perfect run in 55.57 secs. Hamad Towaim al-Marri rode Baron Z H to second place in 56.58 secs while Hussain Saeed Haidan teamed up with D Saucedo to earn third place with a time of 56.70 secs.



Sheikh Joaan participates in ANOC Executive Council meeting



HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, Senior Vice-President of the Association of National Olympic Committees (ANOC) and President of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), yesterday participated via videoconference in the 89th ANOC Executive Council meeting held in Athens, Greece. The meeting, chaired by Dr Robin Mitchell, President of ANOC and was attended by members of the ANOC Executive Council. During the meeting, discussions focused on key topics such as the latest preparations for the ANOC World Beach Games and the upcoming Paris 2024 Olympic Games. The session also included a review of the ANOC's strategic plan and updates from the continental associations and various ANOC Commissions on their recent initiatives.

Qatar athletes win three bronze at Youth GCC Games



Qatar athletes bagged three more medals at the Youth GCC Games underway in the UAE. Abdullah al-Ali claimed bronze medal in the karate 76 plus category while Jassim al-Husseini secured bronze medal in the duathlon event. Abdul Hadi al-Maraghi also earned a bronze in the individual time trial cycling race.



BUNDESLIGA

Leverkusen stay unbeaten after Andrich's late goal

Kane scores twice in Bayern Munich's 2-1 win over Frankfurt

AFP

Leverkusen, Germany

Robert Andrich scored with the last kick of the match to extend Bayer Leverkusen's unbeaten run to a 46th game this season with a 2-2 home draw against Stuttgart yesterday.

With Bundesliga champions Leverkusen facing their first loss of the season in any competition trailing 2-1 late in stoppage time, Andrich hammered in a loose ball to equalise in the sixth minute of stoppage time. The strike keeps Leverkusen's remarkable streak of late goals alive, with Xabi Alonso's side doing the same at Borussia Dortmund in the seventh minute of injury time for a 1-1 draw last week.

Two goals in the space of nine minutes to start the second half from Chris Fuehrich and Deniz Undav put Stuttgart on course, with Amine Adli pulling one back after 61 minutes. Famed for late comeback heroics this season, Leverkusen built pressure but could not break through, putting their hopes of becoming the first team to go a full Bundesliga season without defeat in doubt.

The home side won a free kick and Florian Wirtz curled the ball into the box, Andrich snapping up a rebound to score. Alonso's side have now won or equalised in stoppage time 10 times this season in all competitions.

Earlier, Harry Kane scored twice in Bayern Munich's 2-1 win over Eintracht Frankfurt to set a new personal record for goals in a season. Kane scored in each half, finishing off a tearing Konrad Laimer run and converting a penalty, to raise his league tally to 35 goals in 31 games. Kane is now six goals shy of Robert Lewandowski's all-time single-season Bundesliga goals record and has hit a personal best of 42 goals in all competitions this campaign.

The England captain's goals came either side of a Hugo Ekitike stunner, a day after the Frenchman became a permanent Frankfurt player. Bayern veteran Thomas Mueller said his side was "in a good flow", saying since getting past Arsenal in the Champions League quarter-finals "we've been getting better, we've got a grip on things".

Despite the victory, which solidified Bayern's chances of a second-placed finish, both



Bayer Leverkusen's Robert Andrich (right) scores the equaliser during the Bundesliga match against VfL Stuttgart in Leverkusen, western Germany, yesterday. (AFP)

Laimer and defender Matthijs de Ligt were subbed off with injury just days before Tuesday's home Champions League semi-final against Real Madrid. Dortmund, Germany's other Champions League semi-finalist, had a setback ahead of hosting Paris Saint-Germain on Wednesday, being thoroughly outclassed in a 4-1 defeat at Leipzig.

England winger Jadon Sancho curled an excellent shot from the edge of the box into the top right corner to give Dortmund the lead. Jolted to life, Leipzig equalised almost immediately, Lois Openda turning in a superb Xavi Simons cross for his 24th goal of the season. Leipzig then scored two quick-fire goals either side of half-time. Benjamin Sesko pounced on a rebound just before the break and Openda found Mohamed Simakan early in the second.

Christoph Baumgartner added a fourth with 10 minutes remaining to send Leipzig five points clear of Dortmund in fourth, the final guaranteed Champions League spot - although Germany are on track for five placings next season. Dortmund goalie Gregor Kobel said "we gifted the opponent too many goals".

Werder Bremen guaranteed first division football next season, winning 3-0 away at Augsburg to go 10 points clear of the drop with three games to play. Goals from Romano Schmid and Olivier Deman and a Marvin Ducksch penalty took Bremen to a second-straight win for the first time since February.

Wolfsburg also took a major step towards securing top-flight football, scoring two goals in the final minutes to come from behind and beat 10-man Freiburg 2-1.

HAMID WINS 800M SILVER AT U-20 ASIAN ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIP



Qatar's Hatem Hamid won 800m silver at the U-20 Asian Athletics Championship in Dubai yesterday. Hamid clocked 1:48.39 seconds. This is Hamid's second medal in the championship, after he earlier won gold in the 1,500m. Qatar has won four gold and one silver so far. On Friday, Omar Dawoud had clinched gold in the 110m hurdles, while Saif Hemida won the pole vault event.

SERIE A

Depleted Milan hold Juve to close in on Champions League

AFP

Turin, Italy

AC Milan took another step towards Champions League qualification after yesterday's goalless draw at Serie A rivals Juventus. Stefano Pioli is close to guaranteeing Milan, in second, a spot in Europe's top club competition in what will almost certainly be his final season at the club.

Pioli is reportedly set to be replaced by Julen Lopetegui after a campaign which has ended in disaster, with a Europa League exit at the hands of Roma and a humiliating city derby defeat which gave the league title to Inter Milan.

However, with a top-five finish guaranteeing Champions League football Milan are 16 points ahead of sixth-placed Atalanta, who have six games left to play starting with today's home clash with struggling Empoli. A place in the Champions League basically assured before kick-off, Milan had little to play for and a host of absences following a stormy end to their painful loss in Monday's derby with Inter.

Pioli had a threadbare defence with Theo Hernandez, Davide Calabria - both sent off late on in the derby - and Fikayo Tomori all suspended, while Simon Kjær and Pierre Kalulu were also unavailable. To make matters worse Milan then lost France goalkeeper Mike Maignan to a hamstring problem suffered

during the pre-match warm-up.

Juve meanwhile are in dismal form, winning two league matches since the end of January, and even with Milan severely depleted Massimiliano Allegri's team struggled to create clear chances. The best opportunities of the game nonetheless came for the hosts.

Five minutes after the break Sportiello kept out Filip Kostic's snap shot and then pounced to stop Danilo scoring on the rebound. And as Juve pushed in the final minutes Adrien Rabiot looked on in horror as he was denied a certain goal by Malick Thiaw's goal-line block after another important Sportiello stop. However the draw means Bologna can move level on 65 points with third-placed Juve with a home win over Udinese which would put more pressure on under-fire Allegri.

Earlier Matteo Pessina's 96th minute penalty earned mid-table Monza a 1-1 draw at Lecce, who were denied a potentially huge win for their survival bid in an incident-packed finale. A packed Stadio Via del Mare erupted when Nikola Krstovic smashed home what delirious fans thought was the winner in the second minute of stoppage time.

But the celebrations were still bubbling in the stands when Lorenzo Venuti was penalised for handball and Pessina casually slotted home the leveller. Lecce should still be safe from the drop as they sit eight points above the relegation zone in 13th position.

Guler stretches Madrid's vast Liga lead at Real Sociedad

San Sebastian, Spain: Turkish teenager Arda Guler's strike helped Real Madrid close in on the Spanish title with a 1-0 win at Real Sociedad on Friday, moving 14 points clear at the top of La Liga. After last weekend's Clasico win over second place Barcelona it appears a formality for Madrid to take the title back from their arch-rivals, and Guler helped them move one step closer.

The playmaker, 19, has endured an injury-hit season but on his first league start snatched a heavily rotated Madrid side a tight victory at the Reale Arena.

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti rested virtually his entire first choice team with Tuesday's Champions League semi-final visit to face Bayern Munich in mind. Top scorer Jude Bellingham was on the bench after recovering from a stomach problem to earn a late addition to the squad list, alongside Vinicius Junior, Toni Kroos and various other stars. As a result Madrid conjured little in attack beyond Guler's goal, with the hosts, sixth, on top in driving San Sebastian rain.

Barcelona face Valencia tomorrow in La Liga but the Catalans have all but thrown in the towel in the title race.

LIVERPOOL REACH AGREEMENT FOR SLOT TO BECOME NEW MANAGER: REPORTS

Liverpool reached an agreement with Feyenoord on Friday for Arne Slot to succeed Jurgen Klopp as manager, British media reported. The Press Association said that a compensation package for the 45-year-old, who had two years left on his contract, has now been agreed.

The BBC claimed that the deal is worth up to £9.4mn. Slot had said Thursday that he was "confident" of landing the Anfield job. "I would like to go to Liverpool. Now I'm waiting to see whether the clubs reach an agreement. I'm very confident in that," he told reporters.

Slot moved to Feyenoord in 2021 after impressing in his first managerial role at AZ Alkmaar. He led the Dutch giants to the inaugural Europa Conference League final at the end of his first season, in which they narrowly lost 1-0 to Jose Mourinho's Roma. Slot then delivered just a second league title in 24 years to De Kuip last season before penning a new three-year deal. Klopp will step down at the end of this season after a nine-year reign which brought the Champions League title in 2019 and Premier League trophy a year later.

LEICESTER PROMOTED TO PREMIER LEAGUE AS LEEDS CRASH

Leicester City were promoted to the Premier League on Friday after rivals Leeds United crashed to a shock 4-0 defeat at Queens Park Rangers. The result leaves Leicester top of the Championship with 94 points with two games to play while Leeds stay second on 90 but with just one match left. Third-place Ipswich Town can pip Leeds to the second automatic promotion place as they currently have 89 points with three matches still to play.

Enzo Maresca's Foxes achieved promotion at the first time of asking having been relegated from the Premier League last season following a third-from-bottom finish. Their final two games begin with a trip to Preston on Monday, before they round off the season with a home finale against Blackburn on May 4.

Leeds will find themselves outside the top two if Ipswich beat Hull or Coventry in their game in hand on Tuesday. Should Ipswich win both, they will be promoted while Leeds will have to enter the play-offs. Goals from Ilias Chair, Lucas Andersen, Lyndon Dykes and Sam Field gave QPR victory and guaranteed their survival in England's second-tier.



AC Milan's Rafael Leao (right) tackles Juventus' Federico Gatti during the Serie A match in Turin, Italy, yesterday. (AFP)