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Milan nets Giro 4th stage, Pogacar retains lead

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GULF TIMES

SPORT

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Kane must 'deliver' against Madrid, says Bayern coach Tuchel

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Qatar SC ease past Al Waab, Umm Salal survive Al Bidda scare in Amir Cup



Qatar SC secured a place in the quarter-finals of the Amir Cup after a 2-0 win over Al Waab in the last 16 match yesterday. At the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium, Bruno Tabata converted a penalty in the 30th minute to put Qatar SC ahead, before a stoppage-time goal by Ali Awad sealed the win over tournament debutants Al Waab. In the last eight, Qatar SC will face the winner of tomorrow's match between Al Rayyan and Al Khor.

PICTURE: Noushad Thekkayil



In the other last 16 match yesterday, Umm Salal scored twice in extra time to get past a resilient Al Bidda 3-1 at Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium. Umm Salal will play either Al Gharafa or Al Ahli in the quarters. Al Bidda surprised Umm Salal by opening the scoring in the first minute through Youssef Ahmed. Umm Salal did not take long to equalise, as Osama Tannan found the net in the 12th minute. Bidda missed an opportunity to go ahead after Bright Eno Bakare's penalty in the 21st minute was saved by Umm Salal goalkeeper Badji. After the match finished 1-1 at the regulation time, Umm Salal scored two goals through Lucas Eduardo Joao and Kenji Joel in the 93rd and 96th minutes to seal the victory.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Hummels on target as gutsy Dortmund knock PSG out

PSG hit woodwork four times as they lose both legs of semi-final

AFP
Paris

Mats Hummels headed in the only goal as Borussia Dortmund stunned Kylian Mbappe and Paris Saint-Germain in their Champions League semi-final second leg yesterday, winning 1-0 on the night and advancing 2-0 on aggregate to next month's final at Wembley.

Hummels struck five minutes into the second half at the Parc des Princes and PSG were unable to muster a response, the home side all out of luck as they hit the woodwork four times in total. Dortmund, who sit fifth in the German Bundesliga, were never expected to go so far and will be underdogs in the June 1 showpiece regardless of whether they face their old rivals Bayern Munich or Real Madrid, who meet today.

It will be their first final since 2013 when, remarkably, the match was also played at Wembley and Jurgen Klopp's Dortmund team lost to Bayern. Hummels played in that final and here, 11 years later, he was the hero as Dortmund built on the advantage given to them by Niclas Füllkrug's goal in the first leg.

The story of this semi-final, however, is just as much about PSG's failure in another crunch knockout tie in the competition. They have still never won the trophy despite all the money invested by their Qatari owners since the 2011 takeover, and there will be no dream send-off for Mbappe.

He will leave when his contract expires after this season and had been hoping to play his last game for the club in the June 1 final. Instead PSG will be left to reflect on how they failed to get their hands on the biggest trophy of all during Mbappe's seven years at his hometown team.

PSG's last two semi-final appearances both came during the pandemic, meaning this was the first time they had hosted a match at this stage of a European competition with fans in 29 years, since losing to AC Milan in 1995. They were favourites to reach their first Champions League final since 2020, despite their defeat in Dortmund six days earlier.

Luis Enrique's team had won 2-0 at home against the same opponents in the group stage and were safe in the knowledge that a repeat of that performance would be enough. The



Dortmund's Mats Hummels (second right) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Paris Saint-Germain during the Champions League semi-final second leg match. (AFP)

PSG coach made one major selection decision, dropping Bradley Barcola and bringing in Portuguese striker Goncalo Ramos. That meant moving Mbappe out of a central position and onto the left wing.

Dortmund would have been bracing themselves for an onslaught from kick-off, but that did not transpire. Mbappe took only seven minutes to produce his first attempt, yet his volley was easily saved by Dortmund goalkeeper Gregor Kobel.

The hosts had most of the possession but struggled to get Mbappe into the game, with the France captain often looking isolated on the wing. In fact it was Dortmund who had the best chance of the first half, when Karim Adeyemi led a counterattack before seeing his shot saved by Gianluigi Donnarumma.

It felt as though the hosts needed to change something or risk going out with a whimper. They should have been ahead two minutes after the restart, when Ramos touched on a ball driven into the box by Mbappe, but War-

ren Zaire-Emery somehow contrived to hit the post from close range.

That was to prove crucial as Dortmund struck moments later. PSG cheaply conceded a corner, and Julian Brandt's resulting delivery from the Dortmund right was headed in by Hummels. Ramos swept a shot over from a Vitinha pass on the hour mark before Nuno Mendes became the second PSG player to strike the right-hand post, this time with a powerful shot from outside the box.

It was starting to look as if it would really not be PSG's night, and Luis Enrique realised he had to act as he sent on Barcola and Marco Asensio for Ramos and Fabian Ruiz, moving Mbappe through the middle. Dortmund responded by withdrawing Jadon Sancho and sending on an extra defender in the hulking Niklas Suele. They withstood everything PSG threw at them but were also helped by the frame of the goal, with Kobel turning Mbappe's shot onto the bar on 86 minutes and Vitinha then rattling the bar too.

SPOTLIGHT

Barshim gears up to host inaugural 'What Gravity Challenge'



Qatar's high jump icon Mutaz Barshim trains at the Katara Amphitheatre, ahead of his brainchild event - 'What Gravity Challenge'.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Olympic champion Mutaz Barshim will launch his 'What Gravity Challenge' tomorrow, where the Qatar legend will go head-to-head with some of the world's top high jumpers.

The inaugural edition of the event, which will be hosted by the Qatar Athletics Federation at the Katara Amphitheatre, will gather world's top 12 high jumpers as they compete for a custom trophy and the chance to inspire the next generation. Each athlete has

a personal best ranging from 2.32m to 2.43m, with Barshim a clear favourite.

Italian Gianmarco Tamperi, who shared the gold at the Tokyo Olympic Games with Barshim, will also feature in the event. The other athletes who will be in action are JaVughn Harrison, Sanghyeok Woo, Hamish Kerr, Tobias Potye, Luis Castro Rivera, Andrii Protsenko, Bandon Starc, Naoto Tobe, Zhen Wang and Bohdan Bondarenko.

The 1992 Olympic champion Javier Sotomayor of Cuba is the ambassador of the event, along with Sweden's Patrik Sjöberg, who holds the third highest jump in the history behind Barshim.



Sanghyeok Woo (left) and Luis Castro Rivera at a training session yesterday.

SPOTLIGHT

Wilson wins maiden World Snooker title

AFP
Sheffield, United Kingdom

Kyrn Wilson held his nerve on Monday night as he overcame an impressive fightback from qualifier Zak Jones to win snooker's World Championship title for the first time.

A clearly emotional Wilson eventually triumphed 18-14 in the final at Sheffield's Crucible Theatre in northern England but only after Jones, who lost the first seven frames of the best of 35 contest, had won three frames in a row from 17-11 down to give himself hope of a remarkable rally.

But in the end the 12th-ranked Englishman regained his composure sufficiently to see off his Welsh opponent.

"Can you imagine how embarrassing it would have been if I'd lost and Bailey is dressed like that?" Wilson, pointing to his son, dressed in classic waistcoat and bow tie snooker attire, told the BBC.



England's Kyren Wilson and his sons Bailey (left) and Finley pose with the trophy after victory over Wales' Jak Jones on day two of their World Championship Snooker final at The Crucible in Sheffield, northern England, on Monday night. Wilson won the final 18-14. (AFP)

The 32-year-old added: "I'd like to say sorry to Jak for that outburst (shouting 'come on' on match ball)

but it does just mean so much to all of us. "My mum and dad have remortgaged and sacrificed their

whole lives to get me here. My brother and wife too. The list goes on and on, it's a massive team ef-

fort." Wilson paid tribute to the resilient Jones by saying: "He was so tough and I don't know if there's many people left in Wales the amount that were cheering for him!

"Me and Jak have come through the junior ranks together. This is Jak's first final, let alone a World final, and he's conducted himself in an amazing fashion and I'm sure he'll be back."

A gracious Jones said: "I congratulate Kyren and family. They deserve it so much. If anyone deserves it, he does."

Jones was only the ninth qualifier in 47 years at the Crucible to reach the final and he came within sight of emulating Terry Griffiths, his fellow Welshman, in 1979 and Shaun Murphy in 2005 in winning the title.

"It's been an unbelievable tournament for me.

"About a month ago I was twitching in my first qualifying match. It's been a long month but I'm happy with it."

During his stirring recovery in Monday's concluding evening ses-

sion, Jones even threatened a maximum 147 break after potting the first 12 reds and blacks.

Jones had started Monday's morning session five frames down at 11-6 behind but twice reduced Wilson's lead to three frames.

Wilson, however, restored his advantage to lead 15-10 heading into the evening's play.

Jones, who had defeated seeds Zhang Anda and Judd Trump en route to the final, hit back with his first century of the final to cut Wilson's lead to 16-11.

The 28th frame saw Jones clear to the colours to force a re-spotted black only for Wilson to move within a frame of victory thanks to a stunning pot off three cushions.

Jones ensured there would be a mid-session interval with a break of 67 as he started to claw his way back after looking like he might become only the third player, after John Parrott in 1989 and Jimmy White in 1993, to lose the world final with a session to spare.

But in the end he had left himself with just too much to do as Wilson regained his composure.

CRICKET

Bangladesh seal T20 series with hard-fought win

The hosts jump to unassailable 3-0 lead over Zimbabwe

AFP
Chittagong, Bangladesh

Bangladesh survived a late onslaught from Faraz Akram to beat Zimbabwe by nine runs in the third Twenty20 international and seal the five-match series 3-0 in Chittagong yesterday.

Playing his first match in the series, Faraz hit an unbeaten 34 off 19 balls, a record for any Zimbabwean batting at number 10, but the visitors still finished short at 156-9.

Faraz and Wellington Masakadza put on 54 for the ninth wicket to lift the side from 91-8.

The visitors needed 21 runs from the final over but Mohamed Saifuddin bowled Masakadza in the first ball to put Bangladesh back on top.

Saifuddin, who made 3-42, held his nerve to concede only three runs from the last three balls.

Towhid Hridoy earlier scored his maiden Twenty20 international with 57 off 38 balls, helping the hosts recover from a sluggish start after they were put in to bat first.

Jaker Ali provided Towhid ample support with 44 off 34 balls as the pair shared 87 for the fourth wicket.

"Today the wicket was a bit slow. That's why we took time, I told my partner to do the same, after we are set we will execute," said player of the match Towhid Hridoy.

Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto said: "(Winning the series) Yes, the boys showed a lot of character. Especially to-



Bangladesh's Towhid Hridoy plays a shot during the third Twenty20 international against Zimbabwe at the Zahur Ahmed Chowdhury Stadium in Chittagong yesterday. (AFP)

day the way Hridoy and Jaker batted in the middle. I am really happy for them." When asked

about death bowling concern, he said: "Obviously, I think we need to execute our plan and we didn't

bowl well in the last five overs. So we have to improve that area. Looking forward to next match and hopefully we will comeback strongly."

Blessing Muzarabani claimed 3-14 for Zimbabwe, his career best figure, but his teammates struggled to contain the innings.

Muzarabani bowled Liton Das for 12 as the opener shuffled across to play a paddle sweep, only to miss the line of the ball.

Zimbabwe captain Sikandar Raza bowled his counterpart Shanto for six to leave Bangladesh 29-2.

Sikandar said in the post-match presentation that "the top five including myself have to raise our hands for the failure".

"Bangladesh have shown us that one guy can get set and the others can bat around him. This target was chasable," the skipper added.

Jaker joined Towhid after Faraz scalped opener Tanzid Hasan for 21 to help Bangladesh shift gear.

Muzarabani bowled Towhid and Jaker in the space of three balls in the penultimate over. Bangladesh won the opening two matches to lead the five-match series 2-0. The final two matches of the series will be played in Dhaka on Friday and Sunday.

BRIEF SCORES
Bangladesh 165-5 in 20 overs (Towhid Hridoy 57, Jaker Ali 44; B. Muzarabani 3-14) **vs Zimbabwe 156-9** (F. Akram 34, T. Marumani 31; Mohamed Saifuddin 3-42, Rishad Hossain 2-38)
Toss: Zimbabwe
Result: Bangladesh win by nine runs **Series:** Bangladesh win five-match series 3-0

INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Delhi down Rajasthan, stay in the play-off race



Delhi Capitals batsman Jake Fraser-McGurk reacts during the Indian Premier League match against Rajasthan Royals at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
New Delhi

Skipper Sanju Samson's 86 went in vain as Delhi Capitals beat Rajasthan Royals by 20 runs yesterday to stay in the hunt for an IPL play-off berth.

Delhi posted 221-8 courtesy of Jake Fraser-McGurk's 20-ball 50 and an attacking 65 by Abishek Porel at their home Feroz Shah Kotla ground.

Rajasthan looked good in their chase after Samson's fifth half-century of this season but his dismissal, a catch in the deep which was ruled clean by the third umpire, turned the match in Delhi's favour.

Rajasthan, who are yet to confirm their play-off spot, lost three more wickets in the next two overs and Delhi restricted the opposition to 201-8 for their sixth win in 12 matches.

"We had it in our hands, it was 10-11 runs per over which was achievable but these things happen in the IPL," Samson said after the loss.

Inaugural champions Rajasthan, placed second behind top-pers Kolkata Knight Riders, have eight wins in 11 matches and still favourites to make the top two in the play-offs.

Top four teams will make the play-offs but number one and two will have the advantage of getting an extra match to enter the final on May 26 in Chennai.

Spinner Kuldeep Yadav re-

turned impressive figures of 2-25. Fast bowlers Khaleel Ahmed and Mukesh Kumar also took two wickets.

But the batters set up victory after Fraser-McGurk, who raised his 50 in 19 balls, and Porel attacked in an opening stand of 60.

Rajasthan lost wickets after the openers departed but Tristan Stubbs hammered 41 off 20 balls in a late charge to take the total to 221-8.

Stubbs was helped by Gulbadin Naib, who hit 19, and Rasikh Salam, who hit two sixes in his nine runs, as Delhi got 53 runs from the last three overs.

The in-form Samson, a wicket-keeper-batsman who has amassed 459 runs, attempted to set up the chase only to depart in the 16th over when Shai Hope caught the batsman off Kumar.

Hope's foot was parallel to the boundary rope but the third umpire ruled it out and a disappointed Samson walked back after a chat with the on-field officials.

Veteran spinner Ravichandran Ashwin led the Rajasthan bowling with figures of 3-24.

Yuzvendra Chahal took his 350th T20 wicket - first Indian to achieve the feat - when he got skipper Rishabh Pant, a left-hand batsman, caught out at fine leg for 15.

BRIEF SCORES
Delhi Capitals 221 for 8 (Porel 65, Fraser-McGurk 50, Ashwin 3-24) **beat Rajasthan Royals 201 for 8** (Samson 86, Kuldeep 2-27, Mukesh 2-30) **by 20 runs**

FOCUS

Rejuvenated Pakistani pacer Amir is back for 'unfinished work' at World Cup

AFP
Karachi

Rejuvenated fast bowler **Mohamed Amir** said he has "unfinished work" at next month's T20 World Cup, 15 years after dazzling as a teenager when Pakistan last lifted the trophy.

The 32-year-old, who was jailed for spot-fixing in 2011, came out of retirement last month and is grateful to have another crack at the World Cup.

"It's a great feeling to be playing for Pakistan again," Amir told AFP by phone from Lahore this week ahead of the tournament in the United States and the West Indies beginning on June 2.

"I want to complete the unfinished work and, for me, the short-term goal is to win the World Cup."

The young Amir impressed in all formats after breaking into the Pakistan side in 2009 and playing at the T20 World Cup.

Within a year he was one of the hottest young talents in cricket, but his precocious career then crashed to an infamous halt in 2010.

Amir was one of three Pakistan players banned from cricket for five years for spot-fixing during a Test match in England after being caught in a newspaper sting. He was later jailed in the UK for six months.

Pakistan captain Salman Butt, who was deemed the ringleader, and fellow quick bowler Mohamed

Asif were also banned and the pair were jailed for 30 and 12 months respectively.

Amir returned after his ban to play for Pakistan in 2016 but announced a shock retirement in December 2020 after poor form kept him from being selected.

He will form a potent pace bowling attack with spearhead Shaheen Shah Afridi, Naseem Shah and Haris Rauf that sees Pakistan ranked among the World Cup favourites.

"The Pakistan Cricket Board and the team management have shown trust in me so I have to fulfil that trust," said Amir. "I have come back after four years and when you play for your country the feeling cannot be described."

Amir played three of the four

T20 home matches against New Zealand last month, taking three wickets in a 2-2 drawn series, and said he felt part of the attack again.

"To be honest I felt fitter than in 2019 and until you are fit you cannot express yourself, so I am ready to do better and better," said Amir.

He will be in action when Pakistan travel to Ireland for three T20s in Dublin on May 10, 12 and 14.

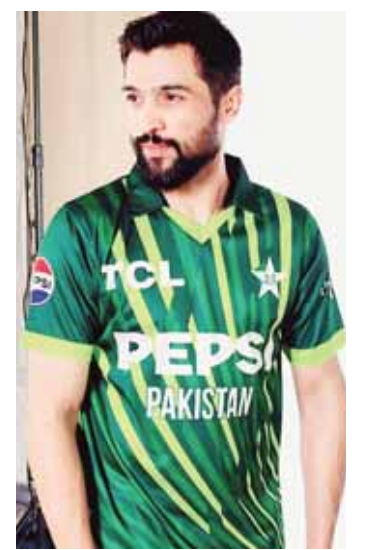
Pakistan then move to England to play the defending T20 world champions in Leeds (May 22), Birmingham (May 25), Cardiff (May 28) and London (May 30).

Brought up in Changa Bangial village in Punjab province, some 60 kilometres from the capital Islamabad, Amir was determined to make his name in cricket after his five older brothers introduced

him to playing. He was picked out at the age of 15 by none other than great left-arm Wasim Akram at a fast bowling camp and within two years grew in height and overcame a stress fracture of the back. Amir said now he only wanted to remember the good events in his career.

"The 2009 Twenty20 World Cup winning memories are special and excite me to this day," said Amir, who took six wickets in seven matches in the tournament.

"I was selected for the first time and then became part of a champion team. When I landed (back) at Rawalpindi airport to go to my village there were so many cars and they were showering flowers on me," he recalled. "I am lucky that I am still playing."



SPOTLIGHT

France is ready to receive Olympic flame

AFP
Marseille

The Olympic flame is set to arrive in the French port of Marseille today in front of a crowd of up to 150,000 people in a first major test of the hugely ambitious plans for the Paris Games.

The transfer of the flame onshore from a 19th-century tall ship will mark the start of a 12,000-kilometre (7,500-mile) torch relay across mainland France and the country's far-flung overseas territories.

Organisers are hoping the first public spectacle of their much-hyped "iconic" Olympics – just 79 days away – will help build excitement after a damaging row about ticket prices and ongoing concerns about security.

"It's something we've been waiting for for a very long time," chief organiser Tony Estanguet told reporters yesterday. "It's here. One hundred years after the last Games, the Games are coming home."

When the Paris opening ceremony begins on July 26, it will be the first time the city has played host for a century after previous editions in 1924 and 1900.

France sees itself at the heart of the modern Olympic movement

after a French aristocrat, Pierre de Coubertin, revived the idea of the Games as practised by the Greeks until the 4th century BC.

After the Covid-hit edition in Tokyo in 2021 and the corruption-tainted Rio de Janeiro version in 2016, the Paris Olympics are seen as an important moment for the sporting extravaganza as a whole.

A measure of public excitement will come when the flame is handed over today evening from the Belem, a historic French trade vessel that has made a 12-day trip from Greece.

"We are going to do beautiful, grandiose, sober and accessible at the same time," Marseille mayor Benoit Payan promised to AFP ahead of the flame arriving, while recalling how his gritty port city was founded by Greek traders in 600 BC.

Over 1,000 other boats will accompany its approach to the harbour and organisers expect around 150,000 people to witness the transfer in the revamped marina of Marseille, which will host the sailing events during the Olympics.

Fireworks and a free concert will complete the show which will be broadcast live on French TV.

In the background, around 6,000 members of the security forces are expected to be on duty in a major test of the vast security plans put in place at a time when



A general view shows the Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games' athletics track of two shades of purple inside the Stade de France stadium, in Saint-Denis near Paris, France, yesterday. (Reuters)

the country is on its highest terror alert.

"It's completely unprecedented for the national police to mobilise so many people on the same day at the same place," regional police co-ordinator Cedric Esson told reporters yesterday.

The honour of being the first torch bearer will fall to four-time

Olympic medal-winning swimmer Florent Manadou.

Other stars scheduled to take part in the parade, which continues tomorrow, include NBA-winning basketball player Tony Parker and footballer Didier Drogba, as well as charity and entertainment figures.

One beach-cleaning charity has

boycotted it to protest Olympics sponsor Coca-Cola, while there is no scheduled against role for Marseille's most famous sporting son, football legend Zinedine Zidane.

Extremely tight security will be a constant feature as the torch travels through more than 450 French towns, cities and territories, and passes by dozens of tour-

ist attractions including the Mont Saint Michel.

Around 200 security forces are set to be positioned permanently around it, including an anti-terror SWAT team and anti-drone operatives.

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin has referred to the risk of protests, including from far-left groups or environmental activists such as Extinction Rebellion.

Organisers have promised a "spectacular" and "iconic" Olympics, with much of the sport set to take place in temporary venues around the City of Light including at the Eiffel Tower and the Invalides.

In the absence of a much-feared security scare, the opening ceremony will take place in boats on the river Seine in a radical departure from past Games which have opened in the main stadium.

All of the major infrastructure has been completed with only two new permanent sporting venues built in a bid to reduce the financial cost and carbon emissions of the global extravaganza.

The idea of the torch rally harks back to the ancient Olympics when a sacred flame burned throughout the Games.

The Paris Olympics will run from July 26-August 11, followed by the Paralympics from August 28-September 8.

CYCLING

Milan claims Giro 4th stage, Pogacar retains the lead

DAY'S PROCEEDINGS MARRED BY CRASH OF ERITREA'S GIRMAY

AFP
Andora, Italy

Italy's Jonathan Milan emerged a popular home winner of the Giro d'Italia fourth stage yesterday with race favourite Tadej Pogacar retaining the overall lead.

The 190km ride from Acqui Terme to Andora on the Italian Riviera was marred by the race-ending crash of Eritrea's Biniam Girmay.

While the man who created history as the first black African to win a Grand Tour stage, in the 2022 Giro, was taken off in an ambulance, Pogacar was safely in the peloton hunting down a two-man breakaway.

Pablo Munoz and Stefan de Bod had forged to the front early in the stage, but their time in the spotlight was numbered with the peloton relentlessly reeling them in.

They were duly swallowed up with 5km to go.

Filippo Ganna of Ineos Grenadiers was the first to attack, and he led over the final hill and down into the day's final destination, the port of Andora.

But it was to be Milan (Lidl-Trek) who took the bunch sprint honours, ahead of Australian Kaden Groves (Alpecin-Deceuninck) and German Phil Bauhaus (BahrainVictorious).

"I have so many emotions now. I said from the beginning we came here with one goal for everyone so today the guys did an amazing job and it was such an amaz-



Team Lidl-Trek's Italian rider Jonathan Milan celebrates as he crosses the finish line to win the 4th stage of the 107th Giro d'Italia cycling race, 190km between Acqui Terme and Andora, in Andora. (AFP)

ing sensation to win here again at the Giro d'Italia," said Milan, who was adding to his stage win last year.

All the top riders in the overall standings finished in the main pack and the general classification remained unchanged.

Pogacar, who crossed in 30th, holds a 46 second cushion over his main title rival Geraint Thomas, with Daniel Martinez a further second back in third in the GC ahead of stage five, over 178km from the port of Genoa down the

coast to Lucca in northwest Tuscany. One man who will be a frustrated onlooker is Girmay.

The Eritrean, third in the stage 24 hours earlier, took a heavy fall on a descent ahead of the final intermediate sprint on a wet right-hand bend around 67km from the finish.

Nursing what appeared to be his right hip he rode off gingerly only to dismount from his bike shortly afterwards and was taken away in an ambulance.

He was one of his Intermarche-

Wanty team's best hopes for a stage win on this year's Giro.

The 24-year-old is the first black African to win one of cycling's classics – in the Gent-Wevelgem in 2022, and a stage on one of cycling's three big Tours, in the Giro the same season.

His Giro achievement was marred by a freak accident on the podium when a cork from a bottle he opened to celebrate his victory flew into his eye and he had to withdraw from the race the following day.

TENNIS

Swiatek feeling the squeeze from crowded Masters calendar

AFP
Rome

After winning a gruelling final in Madrid three days ago world number one Iga Swiatek now has to quickly readjust to the clay in Rome for the Italian Open which began yesterday.

Swiatek said she had spent the first two days in Rome "eating" after coming through "the most intense and crazy final" to avenge her loss to Aryna Sabalenka in last year's Madrid final with a three-hour 11-minute victory in the Spanish capital on Saturday.

The three-time French Open champion said that players were feeling rushed by the expanded format of Masters events which have ballooned to nearly two weeks long and which leave little or no time for physical and mental recovery.

"Overall, the Tour is getting more and more demanding because of the length of the tournaments and all these mandatory rules, both on ATP and WTA," Swiatek said.

"Scheduling-wise, the planning is going to be more important, sometimes even (missing) some tournaments that are important for you, for you to be ready for the next one."

The top seed will make her Rome start in the second round after a bye, playing American Caroline Dolehide.

Swiatek, who won the 2021 and 2022 editions at the Foro Italico before exiting a year ago in the quarter-finals to eventual champion Elena Rybakina, said the calendar squeeze on players can be huge.

"Even if I win (a tournament), it doesn't stick in my head. I celebrate for one day, then I'm off to another tournament... in my head."

"We don't have time to rest properly. You have to use these days (between long-running events) and treat them a little bit like days off."

"These tournaments are longer and it's not possible to have days off (like) before, so sometimes you have to have them during."

The former champion said she's nevertheless glad to be in Rome, where opening day play was halted for around an hour due to light rain. "I'm happy to be here because I love this place. I spent my first two days eating," the 22-year-old joked.

"I've already practiced today in the morning. For sure it's a challenge to adapt. But it's nice to have problems like that."

GAUFF ON THE ALERT TO SHAPE UP HER SERVE IN ROME

Coco Gauff said yesterday she was dedicating training time prior to her second-round start at the Italian Open to cleaning up her serve.

The American third seed was plagued by multiple double-faults in a fourth-round defeat last week to compatriot Madison Keys in



Poland's Iga Swiatek reacts to winning a point against Belarus' Aryna Sabalenka during the Madrid Open final at Caja Magica in Madrid on May 4. (AFP)

Madrid. And the reigning US Open winner said she plans to fix that delivery problem in Rome before heading to Roland Garros from May 26.

"I had like 14 double-faults - that's four or five games," she said. "(If I) just fix that detail, it will save me. Maybe those matches would turn into winning in straight sets instead of losing in three sets."

She added: "For me it's just serving better than I did last week. Honestly, I feel the other parts of my game are improving in the right direction."

"If I can work through, it will set me up for a very good Roland Garros."

Both Gauff and defending champion Elena Rybakina expressed pleasure at returning to the Foro Italico and preparing for the last big event prior to Paris.

"It's nice to be here. (I've seen) some improvements on-site," the Kazakh said. "I'm looking forward to this event."

"I didn't practice for three, four days (after a Madrid semi-final loss to Aryna Sabalenka). Today I managed to hit a bit."

"That's the way to keep on going because it's not easy with our schedule."

Gauff paid tribute to Rafael Nadal, who is likely playing his final Rome event as he nears retirement sometime this season.

"When I saw the little (goodbye) ceremony (in Madrid for Nadal), I was like 'this is real life, this is for real!'"

"I feel a little bit sad; he's definitely one of my favourite players to watch. His mentality, his intensity is something I admire."

"When I practise on the court next to him, I literally zone out of my practice to watch him," the American continued.

"It's something about him and his aura and the intensity. Also just the grace he shows. He's a very nice person."

"His legacy is going to be something that is unmatched when it comes to just the intensity in which he approaches everything."

"That's something that the players will miss and the fans will miss."

Nadal to make Rome return against qualifier Bergs

Spain's Rafael Nadal during practice ahead of the Italian Open in Rome, Italy, yesterday. (Reuters)



ROME: Rafael Nadal learned yesterday that he will play Belgian qualifier Zizou Bergs in the first round of the Italian Open.

It will be the first Lexus ATP Head-2Head meeting between the pair. They will play tomorrow along with the rest of the bottom half of the Rome men's singles draw.

Nadal has tallied a 6-3 record this season, most recently competing in Madrid, where the Spaniard won three matches to advance to the fourth round at the ATP Masters 1000 event. The 37-year-old has plenty of experience at the Foro Italico, where he has claimed a record 10 titles and earned a 69-8 record.

MIDDLE EAST RALLY CHAMPIONSHIP

Al-Attiyah leads impressive field at Jordan Rally

By Sports Reporter
Amman, Jordan

Qatar's rally ace **Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah** will be chasing a staggering 16th victory at the Jordan Rally, the second round of the FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) which will be held on May 17 and 18. The Jordan Motorsport announced that the rally has attracted an impressive 29 entries and competitors from eight nations. They will battle it out over two days and 15 demanding special stages in the Jordan Valley and Dead Sea areas.

Al-Attiyah is a record-breaking 19-time regional rally champion and the Qatari is the star attraction in field that includes seven Rally2 cars, 10 running in the NR4 group, a Rally5 machine and the remainder of the field consisting of Jordanian crews competing for national honours. Al-Attiyah faces competition from Oman's Abdullah al-Rawahi, the winner of last year's Jordan Rally with whom he shared last season's MERC Drivers' Championship in a dead heat. Al-Rawahi is also the defending Jordanian national champion.

Both drivers are entered in a pair of Skoda Fabia RS Rally2s with competition in the premier category coming from a pair of

QMMF-backed Skoda for Abdulaziz al-Kuwari and Khalid al-Suwaidi, local driver Bader al-Fayez, Qatari veteran Nasser Khalifa al-Atya and Denis Krotov at the wheel of an SRT-run Fabia Rally2 Evo - Krotov making a surprise switch from the world of cross-country rallying to try his hand at the MERC for the first time.

Jordanians dominate the showroom NR4 group with Issa Abu Jamous leading an impressive line-up of local stars, who include Ameer Nassif, Shadi Shaban, Shaker Jweihan, Husam Salem, Ihab al-Shorafa and Fadi Dahshan in a fleet of Mitsubishi Lancer Evolutions along with Palestine's Hamada Odeh.

The 10-strong list is completed by Lebanon's Ahmad Khaled and Omani driver Zakariya al-Aamri in the only Subaru Impreza on the NR4 list. Shadi al-Fakh drives a Renault Clio as the solitary two-wheel drive Rally5 entry.

A further five Jordanian crews will compete in Group M2 for national honours. They will run behind the main MERC event and have their own separate classification. The drivers are Salamah al-Gammaz and Feisal al-Gammaz in a pair of older Mitsubishi Evolutions and Asem Aref, Amjad al-Shaikh and Bader al-Helalat in three Subaru Imprezas.

The entry is completed by six Jordanian



and Palestinian crews running at the rear of the field in Group 2. Hashem Kalbouneh (Black Iris), Al-Hassan Khatib (Toyota FJ), Adnan Tiaha (Mitsubishi Pajero), Hassan al-Keid (BMW Buggy), Juma Ferwan (Nissan Navarra) and Mahmoud al-Jabbarin (Hyundai Buggy) complete the list.

Jordan Motorsport has laid on 15 special stages and an increased 223.96 competitive kilometres in a compact route of 532.39km.

Forest lose appeal against points penalty

London: Nottingham Forest have failed in their appeal against a four-point penalty for breaching Premier League financial rules, the English top flight announced. The club were hit with the sanction by an independent commission in March for breaching the profitability and sustainability rules (PSR) threshold of £61m by £34.5m.

Forest appealed but an independent appeal board panel has upheld the original penalty, which relates to a three-year assessment period ending with the 2022/23 season. It means the 17th-placed club remain on 29 points, three points above the relegation zone, with two games left to play. Forest had sought a reduction in the punishment because they felt the original commission should have taken the big-money sale of Brennan Johnson to Tottenham, two months after the end of the financial year ending 2023, into account as a mitigating factor. They also felt the original commission had made a mistake by not wholly or partially suspending the sanction.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Kane must 'deliver' against Madrid, says coach Tuchel

Kane converted a penalty in the 2-2 first leg draw in Munich

AFP
Madrid

Bayern Munich coach Thomas Tuchel called on Harry Kane to fire the German giants past Real Madrid and into the Champions League final, while revealing the striker's passion for coffee. Former Tottenham striker Kane has scored a career-best 44 goals in 44 matches across all competitions in his first year at Bayern, ahead of today's clash at the Santiago Bernabeu.

Kane, yet to win a trophy in his career, converted a penalty in the 2-2 first leg draw in Munich last week as six-time winners Bayern outplayed the record 14-time champions.

"I knew we'd get a big personality into the dressing room on top of everything you can analyse, goalscoring, movements, dealing with the pressure," Tuchel told a news conference. "He was captain of Tottenham and is still captain of the English national team. He brought everything to the table that we could possibly hope for - and tomorrow he needs to prove the point and deliver."

Tuchel had been asked if anything surprised him about Kane, who leads the Champions League scoring charts on eight goals along with Paris Saint-Germain's Kylian Mbappe. "How much cappuccino he drinks a day, it's ridiculous," joked a relaxed Tuchel. "It's very surprising. All the time I go to the kitchen he's on the coffee machine and having a cappuccino. It's obviously good - I started doing it, the guy looks healthy and he's in good shape."

The coach admitted at the other end of the pitch it might not be possible to stop Real Madrid forward Vinicius Junior, who struck twice at the Allianz Arena. "A lot of teams have tried and it's not always possible (with the) quality in the passing, the delivery," said Tuchel.

"I cannot sit here and say you can stop all the deliveries tomorrow, it's impossible... He can still hurt any team in the world, a big part of it is accepting it - it's possible not everything will be perfect for us. It's still possible to overcome difficulties, hang in there, show the right mentality and quality and fulfil our dream, we want to go to Wembley so we need to beat Real Madrid with Vinicius."

Former Borussia Dortmund midfielder Jude



Bayern Munich coach Thomas Tuchel (left) and Harry Kane at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium in Madrid yesterday, ahead of their Champions League semi-final against Real Madrid. (Reuters)

Bellingham has also formed a key part of Madrid's attack this season. Bayern goalkeeper Manuel Neuer said he expected the England international to succeed at Real Madrid, but was surprised by his strong goalscoring numbers. The 20-year-old has netted 22 goals in 38 games for Los Blancos across all competitions, with four in the Champions League.

MADRID COACH ANCELOTTI 'CONFIDENT' OF FINAL

Meanwhile, Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti said he was confident his side could overcome Bayern to reach the final. "I am confident because this is Real Madrid, we have this squad, I'm confident in the fans who will help us," Ancelotti said. "We think we've got it better, but (Bayern coach Thomas) Tuchel will think he does too."

Ancelotti admitted German giants Bayern, six-time winners, were the superior side in the first leg draw at the Allianz Arena. "These are similar clubs, they have great history and a lot of success in the Champions League," continued the Italian coach. "We respect them... they did better than us in the first leg."

The coach confirmed Andriy Lunin would start in goal despite Thibaut Courtois returning from injury and keeping a clean sheet as Madrid clinched their La Liga crown this weekend. The Belgian stopper had been out since last summer with a bad knee injury.

"The plan for a player coming back from injury does not change because of one game," said Ancelotti. "Courtois is doing well but he needs time to get back to his best self - he had an ideal game."

PREMIER LEAGUE

Is time up for coach Ten Hag after Man United implosion?

AFP
London

Erik ten Hag insists he is the man to revive embattled Manchester United after they hit a new low against Crystal Palace. But will he even be there for the FA Cup final? Monday's embarrassing 4-0 defeat at Selhurst Park left the team languishing in eighth place in the Premier League and increasingly unlikely to qualify for Europe next season. The bare statistics make grim reading for United fans and show how far the 20-time English champions have fallen since they dominated under Alex Ferguson more than a decade ago.

The team have now lost 13 games for the first time in the Premier League era and have conceded 81 goals in all competitions - the highest number in a single campaign since 1976/77. United have only failed once to qualify for European competition since the 1989/90 season but with Newcastle and Chelsea finding form in the league, they may have to beat Manchester City at Wembley later to find a route to continental football.

The embattled Ten Hag is adamant he "absolutely" remains the right man to restore the club's fortunes as new co-owner Jim Ratcliffe steps up his revamp of the club's leadership structure off the pitch. "If the right players are there, available, we have a good squad, but we miss almost the whole back line and then we have problems," he said after the defeat at Palace.

"It is very disappointing. Under-performing. Definitely the worst defeat. We should have done better. We are aware, as a team performance, we were not correct, making big mistakes and not following the plan and the script and the rules we have."

But former Manchester United and England striker Michael Owen believes Ten Hag is out of time and that the club need to pull the trigger now, even before the FA Cup final at Wembley on May 25.

"I just wonder, with so much at stake, even though it's only for four games, I wonder whether the board might just have to try



to do something here and now and be quite radical about it," he said. "But he cannot, simply cannot, manage this team next season. He's just not good enough."

United midfield great Paul Scholes, who won multiple trophies under Ferguson, said the match "felt like the final nail in the coffin" for Ten Hag. The Dutchman, who won the League Cup and finished third in the Premier League in his first season in charge, pleads mitigating factors, including a punishing injury list.

The 54-year-old has been unable to sign some of the players he wanted most since he arrived at Old Trafford in 2022, including Harry Kane and Frenkie de Jong. But many of those who have joined on his watch have flopped badly in his second season in charge.

Brazil international Casemiro appears to be a fading force while winger Antony, who joined in 2022 in an £85m deal, has just one goal and one assist in the Premier League this season.

Two years ago, interim manager Ralf Rangnick said the club needed "open heart surgery" after years of under-achievement. Ratcliffe has not wasted any time in reshaping the club's structure as he tries to lay the groundwork for a United resurgence. But now the INEOS boss faces his biggest decision so far. Does he stick with Ten Hag and accept a potentially humiliating end to the season or cut his losses now and deprive Ten Hag of a day out at Wembley?

FOCUS

GWC to sponsor Qatari Paralympic champion Arshid

Gulf Warehousing Company (GWC) has announced its sponsorship of Qatari Paralympic champion Ali Radi Arshid as part of its social responsibility programme.

This initiative aims to support Qatari athletes of determination, enabling them to reach their full potential and compete at the highest level, both domestically and internationally, especially Paris 2024 Paralympic Games.

GWC managing director Sheikh Abdullah bin Fahad bin Jassim bin Jaber al-Thani received Arshid along with a delegation from Qatar Paralympic Committee (QPC) headed by Amir al-Mulla, its executive director.

Arshid has a remarkable track record of accomplishments, including winning the

bronze medal at the Hangzhou Asian Para Games, and the silver medal at the 4th West Asian Para Games in Sharjah.

He is currently preparing for further competitions, standing as a shining example of perseverance, resilience, and unwavering commitment to self-improvement.

His consistent performance and numerous international titles make him a proud representative of Qatari athletes, demonstrating their ability to overcome obstacles and achieve remarkable success regionally and globally. GWC's sponsorship of the Qatari para-athlete reflects the company's full commitment to support local talents and champions, particularly people of determination who contribute to the country's remarkable accomplishments across

major international sports events.

In line with Qatar National Vision 2030, GWC seeks to empower and integrate people of determination through sustainable development programmes, while continuing to support QPC's efforts to promote sporting activities for those with special needs. GWC's social responsibility initiatives focus on youth, education, sports, culture, knowledge creation, and entrepreneurship, contributing to the development of sustainable ecosystems that benefit the community and allow talents to thrive.

Therefore, supporting QPC is an integral part of the company's CSR programme and is a testament to GWC's unwavering commitment to create more inclusive and tolerant societies.



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