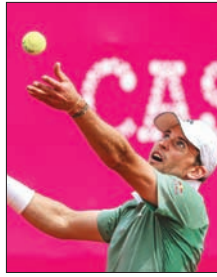


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Balbirnie leads  
Ireland to  
maiden T20 win  
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Austria's Grand  
Slam winner  
Thiem to retire at  
end of season

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FOOTBALL

Mbappe confirms  
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season

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DOHA DIAMOND LEAGUE

## Vadlejch pips Chopra; Bednarek, dos Santos break meet records

In the final round, Chopra sent his spear flying to 88.36m but fell just 2cm short of Vadlejch's throw

By Sahar Bidappa  
Doha

Two of the reigning Olympic and World champions – Neeraj Chopra and Miltiadis Tentoglou – had to contend for the second place at the Doha Diamond League yesterday.

Jakub Vadlejch – the runner-up in Doha for the past two years – got the better of India's golden boy Chopra in javelin by just two centimetres, while Jamaican Carey McLeod stunned Tentoglou in long jump with a massive 8.52m leap in his fourth attempt.

Not all favourites had an off day last night though at the Qatar Sports Club Stadium, with Alison dos Santos and Kenny Bednarek breaking meet records with dominant performances.

Brazilian dos Santos broke his own record in Doha, setting two years to win the 400m hurdles in 46.86 secs – the fifth fastest time ever. The 23-year-old former world champion – who struggled with injuries last year – won by more than one-and-a-half seconds from USA's CJ Allen (48.39) with France's Wilfried Happpio further back in third (49.10).

"This is a very good way to start things – I'm very excited," said Dos Santos. "It's going to be a tough year, so to start in this fashion is very positive."

America's Bednarek, meanwhile, scorched to a world-leading 19.67sec in 200 metres. The 2022 world silver medalist crossed the line a clear winner, smashing Noah Lyles' six-year-old meeting record by 0.15. His compatriot Courtney Lindsey was a distant second in 20.01 and Kyree King made it a US clean sweep by placing third in 20.21.

"I feel great about the race. I knew I was in this shape, I just had to put it down on the track," said Bednarek, who finished second to Canada's Andre De Grasse at the Tokyo Olympics. "I'm healthy, I'm stronger than ever and I'm ready to go."

Olympic champion Steven Gardiner was a comfortable winner of the men's 400m. The 28-year-old, who won the world title in Doha in 2019, finished 0.31 ahead of Muzala Samukonga of Zambia.

The most enthralling contest, however, came in the men's javelin – where Chopra was a clear fan favourite. The affable 26-year-old – who was inundated with selfie requests from Qatar's large Indian diaspora an hour after the event had ended – nearly overcame a foul start to snatch victory from Czech Republic's Vadlejch.

In the final round, Chopra sent his spear flying well beyond the 85-metre line. But he fell just 2cms shy of 88.38m thrown by Vadlejch in round three. "It was a little bit revenge for last year," said Vadlejch, who lost out to Chopra by four centimetres in Doha last year. "I think it's a good rivalry and it's good for the spectators," the Diamond League champion added.

Chopra, who again missed out on joining the elite 90m club, felt he could have done



Czech Republic's Jakub Vadlejch in action during the javelin throw event of the Doha Diamond League at the Qatar Sports Club. PICTURES: Noushad Thekkayil and agencies



Brazil's Alison dos Santos won the 400m hurdles in 46.86 secs – the fifth fastest time ever.

better. "I'm satisfied with the result but I'm not satisfied with my effort," he said. "I think I can do something about this and maybe next competition I will throw far."

Meanwhile, world indoor bronze medalist McLeod upset the small Greece contingent rooting for Tentoglou as the Jamaican wind-assisted leap of 8.52m gave him long jump honours. It was the longest jump of his career in any conditions, but 5.2m tailwind meant it wouldn't count as a personal or meeting record for McLeod.

"It is a great feeling, in order to win I have to jump something amazing. It was not windy, so it was wonderful. I will just go back home to see how well I can prepare for the next competition. 8.52 is amazing," he said.

Tentoglou's best was 8.36m on the night and the 26-year old said: "It was my first competition and I was feeling kind of rusty at the beginning. But every time I was getting better." Swiss Simon Ehammer was third with a wind-assisted 8.30m.



Neeraj Chopra's final throw of 88.36m was just two centimetres behind Jakub Vadlejch.



USA's Kenneth Bednarek (right) celebrates with compatriot Kyree King after breaking the meet record to win the men's 200m.

Kenyan fans, who poured in large numbers, were dancing in delight after world title-holder Mary Moraa held off Britain's Jemma Reekie to win the women's 800m by half a second in 1:57.91, her season's best. Moraa was pushed all the way by Reekie, the world indoor silver medalist. Benin's Noelle Yarigo was third in 1:58.70. "I can say it was a hard race, all of us were in good shape," said Moraa.

Another Kenyan Beatrice Chebet was similarly impressive in the women's 5000m. In the high-quality field – which featured the likes of Ejgayehu Taye and her fellow Ethiopians Medina Eisa and Melknat Wudu – Chebet unleashed a burst of speed with 200m to go to win in a world-leading 14:26.98. Kenya's Brian Komen came out narrowly ahead of compatriots Timothy Cheruiyot – the former world champion and Tokyo 2020 silver medalist – and Reynold Kipkorir Cheruiyot with 3:32.43 in the men's 1,500m.

In the women's pole vault, Britain's world indoor champion Molly Caudery won on countback against reigning world

champion Nina Kennedy of Australia after they both cleared 4.73.

Meanwhile, European bronze medalist Ditaji Kambundji came from behind to win the 100m hurdles. The Swiss 21-year-old came off the final hurdle well to propel herself past USA's Tonea Marshall, winning in 12.49. In a race where 0.05 separated the top four finishers, Marshall was second in 12.51 and Poland's Pia Skrzyszowska was third in 12.53.

In the women's 100m flat, Britain's Darryl Neita edged ahead of USA's Tamari Davis to win by 0.01 in a season's best of 10.98. Celera Barnes was a close third in 11.02. And in the final race of the night, Ethiopia's Samuel Firewu was locked in a fierce sprint with world bronze medalist Abraham Kibiwott in the closing stages of the men's 3000m steeplechase, eventually emerging with victory in a PB of 8:07.25.

Serbian teenager Angelina Topic, the youngest in the field by five years, won the women's high jump with 1.94m, clearing all of her bars up to and including that height on her first attempt.



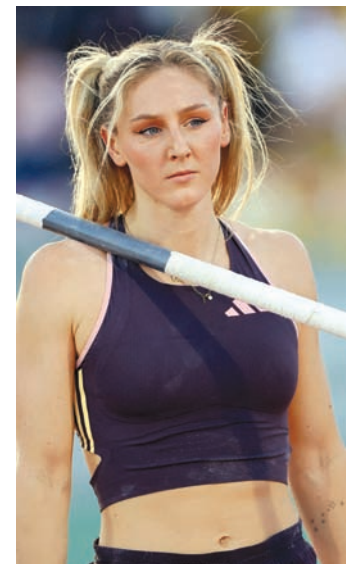
Serbian teenager Angelina Topic, the youngest in the field by five years, won the women's high jump with 1.94m, clearing all of her bars up to and including that height on her first attempt.



World title-holder Mary Moraa of Kenya held off Britain's Jemma Reekie to win the women's 800m in 1:57.91 secs, her season's best time.



In the men's long jump, Jamaican Carey McLeod's monster leap of 8.52m helped him beat Olympic champion Miltiadis Tentoglou's 8.36m.



In the women's pole vault, Britain's Molly Caudery won on countback against world champion Nina Kennedy of Australia after they both cleared 4.73.



SPOTLIGHT

# Anderson's Test career under threat: report

AFP  
London

England cricket great **James Anderson's** record-breaking Test career is set to come to an end later this year following talks with head coach Brendon McCullum, the *Guardian* reported yesterday.

According to the newspaper, McCullum recently made a five-day visit to the UK, travelling 11,000 miles from his home in New Zealand to tell Anderson, over a round of golf, that the Test team is looking to the future.

Anderson, who turns 42 in July, is the most successful pace bowler in Test history with 700 wickets from an England record 197 matches.

Only two spinners, Sri Lanka's Muttiah Muralitharan (800 Test wickets) and the late Australia great Shane Warne (708), are ahead of Anderson on the all-time list of the format's leading bowlers.

But Anderson managed just 10 wickets in four of England's five Tests during a 4-1 series loss in India concluded in March.

And he has taken just 15 wickets in his last eight Tests at an average of 50.8 in the last 12 months, with McCullum keen to refresh England's attack ahead of the 2025/26 Ashes series in Australia.

It was not clear from the *Guardian* report if Anderson will be granted a farewell Test or if he has played his last red-ball match for England.

England do not play a Test again until July when they begin a three-



match series against West Indies. That is followed by another three Tests against Sri Lanka in August and September.

The Sri Lanka series starts at Manchester's Old Trafford, Lancashire hero Anderson's home ground.

Anderson, who made his Test debut in 2003, is second only on the all-time list of Test appearances behind batting great Sachin Tendulkar, who played 200 times in the longest format for India.

After taking his 700th Test wicket, against India at Dharamasala in March, Anderson said he was in the "best shape" of his career. But he also accepted he was longer assured of a spot in the Test side, with Anderson telling the *Tailenders* podcast: "I've got to work hard to prove I'm worth a place."

Anderson struggled during the drawn 2023 Ashes in England, taking only five wickets in four matches.

His long-time new-ball partner Stuart Broad, England's second most successful bowler, retired

after the dramatic finale to that Ashes, when Ben Stokes's side won at The Oval to end the series all square at 2-2.

Following the 4-1 reverse in India - a first series loss for England under the leadership duo of captain Ben Stokes and McCullum, the coach accepted his side's ultra-aggressive 'Bazball' approach required "refinement".

McCullum was also asked if Anderson could be included in the squad for the Australia tour.

"I don't know, honestly," the former New Zealand captain replied.

"Who knows where the end line for him is but for now, just enjoy having Jimmy around and make sure we utilise that experience he's got. He's a great resource for the other guys within the unit."

CRICKET

# Balbirnie guides Ireland to first T20 win over Pakistan

'We are absolutely delighted. We wanted to start the summer well'

AGENCIES  
Dublin

Andrew Balbirnie's 77 helped guide Ireland to their first Twenty20 victory over Pakistan as the hosts won by five wickets with just a ball to spare in Dublin yesterday.

The dramatic encounter gave Ireland a 1-0 lead in a three-match series against a Pakistan side they will also face in the group stage of next month's T20 World Cup in the United States and the West Indies.

The only time the teams had met previously in the format was during the 2009 World T20.

Harry Tector, who made 36 and added 77 with Balbirnie for the third wicket, laid the groundwork for Ireland's pursuit of a target of 183 before Curtis Campher (15 not out) finished the job.

Ireland needed 40 to win from the last four overs, with Abbas Afridi dismissing George Dockrell for 24.

Next over, with Ireland requiring another 28 from 17 balls, Shadab Khan gave Balbirnie a reprieve by failing to hold a tough chance.

Come the penultimate over, Ireland's target was down to 19. But Pakistan quick Shaheen Shah Afridi bowled Balbirnie with a low full toss to end the opener's impressive 55-ball innings, which featured 10 fours and two sixes.

With Ireland needing 11 off the last over, Campher under-edged a boundary off Abbas and eventually sealed victory with a leg bye.

Balbirnie, the Player of the Match, said: "I didn't watch the



Opening batsman Andrew Balbirnie of Ireland in action against Pakistan during their first T20I in Dublin yesterday. Ireland won by five wickets. (@cricketireland)

last over; went to the tent and put a towel over my head. I felt it was my job to get the team over the line. I believe Curtis (Campher) played a ramp shot. To do that in a pressure situation was great. Harry said if we could bat normally till the 13th over, we could get the runs. That was a partnership which set it up. Yes, I was disappointed to get out on the full toss."

Paul Stirling, the Ireland captain, said: "We are absolutely delighted. We wanted to start the summer well and it was almost a perfect day for us. When you come here, especially from Pakistan, the flattest pitches in

the world, ask them to bat first and see what they can get. We were happy to chase 180. Brilliant knock from Balbirnie, he got through the powerplay and picked up the pace later. It was a fantastic knock. We have had great games here especially against Pakistan. Absolutely delighted to get over the line."

Earlier, Pakistan skipper and star batsman Babar Azam top-scored for the tourists with a brisk 57 after losing the toss before falling to Craig Young.

Babar said: "The pitch was two-paced. I think 190 would have been a par score. We lost in

the fielding and batting; don't think we executed the plans. Few fielding lapses cost us. We attacked in the first six overs but didn't finish well. I think we were ahead in the first 10 overs but not in the last 10 overs."

The series continues in Dublin tomorrow.

**BRIEF SCORES**

**Pakistan: 182-6, 20 overs** (Babar Azam 57; C Young 2-27)  
**Ireland: 183-5, 19.5 overs** (A Balbirnie 77; Abbas Afridi 2-36)  
**Result:** Ireland won by five wickets **Series:** Ireland lead three-match series 1-0

CYCLING

# Pogacar crushes Ganna in time trial to seize control of Giro d'Italia



UAE Team Emirates' Tadej Pogacar celebrates on the podium after winning stage 7 of Giro d'Italia yesterday. (Reuters)

AFP  
Rome

Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar won stage 7 of the Giro d'Italia, a 40-kilometre time trial, to extend his race lead in Perugia yesterday.

Pogacar, who had already won stage 2, finished 17 seconds ahead of Italian time-trial specialist Filippo Ganna and two minutes in front of his great rival, Welsh rider Geraint Thomas.

The UAE Team Emirates team leader is now 2min 36sec ahead of Colombian rider Daniel Martinez in the overall standings.

"I prepared well for this time trial and worked a lot on the time trials, my position on the time-trial bike," said Pogacar.

"I felt good after the world championships last year, today was my first race on the time-trial bike again.

"It was a lot of preparation for this and a lot of ups and downs since last year in the time trial so I'm super happy that today I felt good."

After Ganna set a testing time of 52:01 all eyes were on Martinez, who began the day 47sec off the lead, Thomas, who was one second ahead of him, and Pogacar.

While Thomas, who turns 38 on May 25, and Martinez struggled to chew up the tarmac between Foligno and Perugia, Pogacar shifted into overdrive clocking 51.44 at an average speed of 47.1kph.

Only 11th at the halfway point, 44 seconds behind Ganna, Pogacar finished very strongly indeed, taking advantage of the last six kilo-

metres of uphill sections to knock out the competition.

"I remained cautious until the last climb when I gave it my all," he said, admitting he did not have a lot of information from the team car.

"I heard only two times the time gap, and also I wasn't so sure what they said on the radio. I was just focusing on myself," said Pogacar. "I knew the climb suits me, suits me better than other people for sure. That was my advantage on the climb, especially because it was quite steep."

Martinez (Bora) was eighth quickest on the day but gave up 1:49 to Pogacar. He did, however, move up to second place in the GC with a 10-second advantage over a weary Thomas.

"I got stuck," said the Welsh Ineos rider who won the Tour de France in 2018.

"I gave it my best shot, but I was having a bad day."

"I tried to ride within myself and when it was time to go, I felt OK but just lacked it a bit," he admitted.

"I just couldn't get on top of it over those kickers. Yeah, it is what it is. It was just one of those days."

Today's 8th stage, which concludes with a fearsome final 14km climb to the finish at 1,452m altitude, could enable Pogacar, a keen climber, to extend his lead even further.

The Slovenian, who is taking part in the Giro for the first time in his career, is aiming to become the first rider since Italy's Marco Pantani in 1998 to win both the Giro d'Italia and the Tour de France in the same year.

FOCUS

# Record-equalling partnership takes Gujarat to big victory over Chennai

AFP  
Ahmedabad

Shubman Gill and Sai Sudharsan both hit centuries in a record-equalling 210-run opening stand that helped Gujarat Titans defeat Chennai Super Kings by 35 runs in the Indian Premier League in Ahmedabad yesterday.

Chennai captain Ruturaj Gaikwad had won the toss and chosen to field but failed to capitalise as the Gujarat openers propelled the team to an imposing 231-3.

Chennai stumbled at the start of their innings and could only reach 196-8.

Chennai remain fourth in the table while Gujarat jump from last to eighth, keeping their hopes of qualifying for the next phase mathematically alive.

Gill and Sudharsan were quickly into their stride, racing to 58-0 in the first six overs of the game.

Sudharsan struck five fours and seven sixes in his 103 which came off just 51 balls.

Gill's 104 was marginally slower, coming from 54 balls, but included nine fours and six sixes as both openers savaged the Chennai attack.

"We maximised every over and opportunity in



Gujarat Titans' captain Shubman Gill (right) and teammate Sai Sudharsan bump fists during the Indian Premier League match against Chennai Super Kings in Ahmedabad yesterday. (AFP)

front of us," said Gill who was made player of the match.

**BRIEF SCORES**

**Gujarat Titans 231 for 3** (Gill 104, Sai Sudharsan 103, Deshpande 2-33) **beat Chennai Super Kings 196 for 8** (Mitchell 63, Moeen 56, Mohit 3-31, Rashid 2-38) **by 35 runs.**

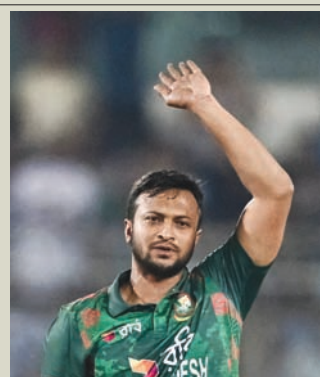
## SHAKIB CLAIMS FOUR AS BANGLADESH EDGE PAST ZIMBABWE BY 5 RUNS

**Dhaka:** Returning all-rounder **Shakib Al Hasan** claimed 4-35 to help Bangladesh recover from a batting collapse and beat Zimbabwe by five runs in yesterday's fourth Twenty20 international in Dhaka.

Mustafizur Rahman chipped in with 3-19, helping the home side bowl out Zimbabwe for 138 runs in 19.4 overs.

Replying to a modest 143, Zimbabwe lost opener Brian Bennett for a duck in the first over and were quickly reduced to 57-4. But they remained in contention after a middle-order rally, with Johnathan Campbell and Ryan Burl putting on a 35-run stand. Mustafizur forced Burl to give a catch to Soumya Sarkar after making 19 runs, and Shakib took the wicket of Campbell for 31 to put Bangladesh on top.

Wellington Masakadza played hit 19 runs from eight balls to take Zimbabwe close, only to go off the strike in the final over when Zimbabwe needed 14.



Shakib, who was playing his first T20I in nearly a year, dismissed Blessing Muzarabani and Richard Ngarava in the final over to wrap up the Zimbabwe innings. Sent in to bat after Zimbabwe won the toss, Bangladesh got off to a flying start when openers Tanzid Hasan Tamim and Soumya made a 101-run stand for the first wicket. Luke Jongwe dismissed Tanzid for 52 off 37 balls to break the opening partnership

and then Soumya fell in the same over for 41. The hosts lost their remaining eight wickets for just 35 runs to be bowled out for the first time in the series. Zimbabwe captain Sikandar Raza sent back Towhid Hridoy for 12 before Bennett struck twice in the same over, dismissing Shakib for one. Bangladesh had already clinched the series after sweeping the first three matches. Zimbabwe wrap up their tour with the fifth and final match of the series in Dhaka tomorrow.

**BRIEF SCORES**

**Bangladesh 143 all out in 19.5 overs** (Tanzid Hasan 52, Soumya Sarkar 41; L. Jongwe 3-20, B. Bennett 2-20) vs **Zimbabwe 138 all out in 19.4 overs** (J. Campbell 31; Shakib Al Hasan 4-35, Mustafizur Rahman 3-19). **Toss:** Zimbabwe **Result:** Bangladesh won by five runs **Series:** Bangladesh lead five-match series 4-0



TENNIS

# Djokovic cruises past sorry Moutet in Rome opener

Djokovic struck with bottle from stands after entering third round

AFP  
Rome

Novak Djokovic was left in agony after being struck with a hard plastic water bottle as he left the court following his 6-3, 6-1 win over France's Corentin Moutet at the Rome Open which advanced him to the third round yesterday.

World number one Djokovic was left crouched on the ground in pain as the bottle hit him on the back of the head as he was signing autographs for fans while he exited the centre court at the Foro Italico. Djokovic was then led from the arena on foot by security staff who covered the 24-time Grand Slam winner while he made his way into the bowels of the stands.

In a video of the incident published by Italian media it is not clear whether the hard reusable bottle was launched deliberately from the stands or fell accidentally onto Djokovic's head.

Tournament organisers did not respond to AFP's request for an update on Djokovic's condition, but should he be OK he will face Chile's Alejandro Tabilo next as the Serb warms up for the French Open with a great chance to add to his array of titles at the Foro Italico, where only Rafael Nadal has won more with 10.

The top seed, who turns 37 a few days before Roland Garros gets underway later this month, easily won his first match since losing to Casper Ruud in the semi-finals at the Monte Carlo Masters.

Djokovic has made no secret in the past that he loves playing in Italy and with a clutch of big names

Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates after winning against France's Corentin Moutet during the Rome Open at Foro Italico in Rome yesterday. (AFP)



either out injured or struggling he will fancy his chances of a record-extending 41st Masters 1000 crown. The Rome tournament, which runs until May 19, is missing two of its biggest stars with Italian world number two Jannik Sinner and third-ranked Carlos Alcaraz both withdrawing from the men's draw before the start.

Meanwhile clay court icon Nadal had a creaky start in the first round against qualifier Zizou

Bergs on Thursday and is on the opposite side of the draw to his great rival, meaning the only way that the pair could face each other would be in an unlikely final.

One of Djokovic's potential threats, third seed Alexander Zverev, breezed into the third round with a 6-0, 6-4 win over Australia's Aleksandar Vukic.

And it was similar story for Djokovic, who after briefly being bamboozled by flamboyant

Moutet's array of shots slowly eased into gear, rattling off seven games in a row from 3-1 down in the first set to take control of the match. Moutet briefly brought a smile to Djokovic and the crowd's faces when his phone went off in the middle of an absorbing opening game of the second set, which lasted nine minutes and saw the Frenchman save four break points before giving way and allowing Djokovic to cruise to victory.

He said he had thought about the decision to end his career "for a very long time". "I am very happy with it (decision) and I am also super excited for everything that is coming next," he said.

In March Thiem said he had a minor recurrence of the wrist injury but returned last month to play events in Estoril, Monte

SPOTLIGHT

# Austria's Grand Slam winner Thiem to retire at end of season

AFP  
Vienna

Former US Open champion **Dominic Thiem** announced yesterday his retirement from tennis at the end of the season following a career plagued by a long-term wrist injury.

The 30-year-old Austrian's career has nose-dived since his crowning moment in 2020 when he beat Alexander Zverev in the Covid-affected US Open final behind closed doors.

"The season 2024 is gonna be my last one. I am gonna finish my career with the end of this season," Thiem said in a video statement posted on social media.

Thiem said several reasons had influenced his decision, mainly his injured wrist and his "inner feeling" that had caused him to "very carefully" reflect on the ups and downs of his "incredible...journey as a tennis player".

He said he had thought about the decision to end his career "for a very long time".

"I am very happy with it (decision) and I am also super excited for everything that is coming next," he said.

In March Thiem said he had a minor recurrence of the wrist injury but returned last month to play events in Estoril, Monte

Carlo, Munich and Madrid. Zverev paid tribute to Thiem after reaching the third round of the Rome Open yesterday.

"He's one of the greatest champions we've had, he's one of the only guys who managed to beat the big three guys on their favourite surfaces, he was a powerhouse for his entire career and I wish him nothing but the best in the future," Zverev said.

"I'm losing one of my best friends on tour, that's the number one thing I'm losing personally," added the German.

Once the world number three, Thiem's ranking plummeted to 352 in June 2022 after a wrist injury sidelined him for nine months and prevented him from defending his US Open title.

He is currently ranked 117th. Over the course of his career, Thiem won 17 tournaments, including the US Open in 2020.

Twice a finalist at the French Open and once at the Australian Open, Thiem has also contested two finals at the Masters in London that brings together the season's eight best players.

Serbia's Novak Djokovic praised Thiem earlier this week, saying the Austrian had "always shown respect on the court and always took the time to say hello", according to APA press agency. "I really like Dominic. We all know how hard it is to come back (after an injury)," Djokovic said.



GOLF

# Schauffele surges to 3-stroke PGA lead at Wells Fargo

AFP  
Washington

Xander Schauffele went three-under over his last three holes to grab a three-stroke lead after Thursday's opening round of the PGA Tour's Wells Fargo Championship.

Fourth-ranked Schauffele, last year's Wells Fargo runner-up, started on the back nine and closed with an eagle at the par-5 seventh, a fortunate par at eight and a birdie at nine to fire a seven-under par 64 at Quail Hollow in Charlotte, North Carolina.

World number two Rory McIlroy, a four-time major winner, sank a 50-foot eagle putt at the par-5 seventh hole and shared second with Sweden's Alex Noren and two-time major winner Collin Morikawa of the United States on 67.

McIlroy is a three-time champion at Quail Hollow, having taken his first PGA title on the layout in 2010 and added crowns in 2015 and 2021.

Schauffele seeks his eighth career PGA Tour triumph but the first for the 30-year-old American since the 2022 Scottish Open. Heavy rain delayed the start by an hour for the field of 69 in the last major tuneup for next week's PGA Championship at Valhalla. The saturated course made things odd for Schauffele from the start. "It was a weird day as a whole," Schauffele said. "We had a delay. The course was soaking wet. I was able to sort of get into some rhythm kind of quickly which was really nice."

Reigning Olympic champion Schauffele began on the back nine and birdied five of the first eight holes. The run included putts from just over 17 feet at the 12th and 16 feet at the par-3 eighth plus three others under six feet, although he made his lone bogey off a tee shot way right into dirt at 18.

Schauffele dropped in a five-foot eagle putt at the par-5 seventh to grab the lead and closed with a six-foot birdie putt at the ninth, but it was the par be-



Xander Schauffele hits an approach shot on the ninth hole during the first round of the Wells Fargo Championship at Quail Hollow Country Club in Charlotte, North Carolina. (AFP)

tween them at eight that felt most special. Schauffele smacked his tee shot well right, deep into trees and rocks, but after finding the ball got relief from a Shotlink tower and two club lengths allowed him to drop into rough.

"The tower was just in the luckiest spot possible," Schauffele. "The club length got me on the very edge of the pine straw. Hit what I thought was an unbelievable pitch to get it up onto the green. Then it was a no-sweat two-putt."

"A really bad drive after two super shots. I was really lucky one that they found it and two to get that kind of relief out of the absolute dead zone."

"A pretty stressful moment turned into a pretty stress-less par," he said, calling the closing birdie "just a cherry on top."

McIlroy, coming off a PGA pairs victory alongside Ireland's Shane Lowry two weeks ago at New Orleans, was pleased at his start. "It was good to play a solid round," he said. "Left a couple out there, but at the same time I've got three more days to try to build on what I've done."

## Jabeur's troubles continue with early Rome exit

Ons Jabeur's tough 2024 continued yesterday after being dumped out of the Rome Open in the second round by Sofia Kenin 7-5, 2-6, 6-4 as defending champion Elena Rybakina was forced to withdraw due to illness.

Tunisia's Jabeur, who is ranked ninth in the world, was beaten by unseeded American Kenin in a gruelling match which lasted two hours and 17 minutes in the hot Rome sunshine.

After reaching the quarter-finals in Madrid Jabeur, who in 2022 became the first Arab and Tunisian player to win a WTA 1000 title, looked to be on the right track.

But she slumped to a poor defeat

on Friday, continuing a dreadful season so far in which the 29-year-old has had to deal with a chronic knee injury resurfacing. Jabeur has a losing record for the year, a far cry from the woman who looked like she had the world at her feet ahead of last year's Wimbledon final, which she lost in straight sets to unfancied Marketa Vondrousova after blasting through a series of Grand Slam champions.

World number 42 Kenin will face either Rebecca Sramkova or Katie Boulter in the third round. Earlier fifth seed Maria Sakkari swept past qualifier Varvara Gracheva in straight sets, 6-2, 6-2. Former Wimbledon champion Ry-

bakina was supposed to open her title defence in the Italian capital on Friday against Romania's Irina-Camelia Begu. Instead the 24-year-old, who represents Kazakhstan, has been replaced by lucky loser Oceane Dodin, the world number 73 from France who was eliminated in the second round of qualifying. "I am disappointed to have to withdraw from Rome this year, but unfortunately I do not feel well enough to compete," world number four Rybakina said in a statement.

"I have such good memories from last year and was looking forward to defending my title."

(AFP)

MOTORSPORT

# Martin sets lap record as Marquez struggles at French MotoGP

AFP  
Le Mans, France

Championship leader Jorge Martin set a lap record on his way to the fastest time in yesterday's practice for the French MotoGP as Spaniard Marc Marquez finished outside the top 10, all of whom go directly into the second qualifying session.

Ducati-Pramac rider Martin clocked 1min 30.388sec, with Italy's two-time defending world champion Francesco Bagnaia second best 0.145sec behind on a Ducati. Spanish teenager Pedro Acosta, 19, was third quickest on a GasGas Tech3 following by compatriot Maverick Vinales (Aprilia) and Italian Fabio Di Giannantonio (Ducati-VR46).

Six-time world champion Marquez fell at the start of the session with the Spaniard unable to find his rhythm aboard his Ducati-Gresini.

The 31-year-old finished in 13th position and will have to go through Q1 today to join the 10 already through to Q2.

The top-10 riders participate directly in today's second qualifying session (Q2) to determine the starting grid for the sprint later in the day and tomorrow's race. "This is the first Friday I've been in trouble," Marquez said.

"It happens, we now have to understand the reasons. Today, I fought against the bike." Frenchman Fabio Quartararo of Yamaha had the tenth fastest time on his 'home' track under the blazing sunshine in western France.

South African Brad Binder (KTM) finished 17th and will also have to participate in Q1 today. The same



Ducati Prima Pramac Racing's Spanish Jorge Martin competes during the qualifying session of the French MotoGP Grand Prix at the Bugatti circuit in Le Mans, France, yesterday. (AFP)

goes for the Italian Enea Bastianini (11th) whose place in the official Ducati team next season is threatened by Marquez and Martin.

Martin leads the championship with 92 points, closely followed by Bagnaia (75 pts), Bastianini (70), Acosta (69), Maverick Vinales (63) and Marquez (60).

## McIlroy on PGA subcommittee set for direct PIF merger talks

Rory McIlroy revealed details on Thursday about a new PGA Tour subcommittee created to conduct direct talks with Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) about finalising a merger deal. Players Tiger Woods, Adam Scott and McIlroy will be on a seven-person PGA Tour Policy Board transaction subcommittee created to sit across the table from the financial backers of rival series LIV Golf and hammer out terms to unite the tours. A framework agreement released last June has not been finalized, the board needing to approve such a move, and talks have stretched well beyond the initial deadline of last December. "There's a window of opportunity here," McIlroy said.

"I think that window closes ever so slightly every day that passes by, so I would say time is of the essence, absolutely." Others on the subcommittee would include PGA Tour commissioner Jay Monahan and Fenway Sports Group boss John Henry, who led an investment group of US sports team owners that created a \$1.5bn for-profit entity PGA Tour Enterprises. McIlroy said that while he is not returning to the tour policy board, he was brought into the subcommittee to provide knowledge and perspective. "A different perspective, maybe more of an international perspective," he said. "My insight is more the position of where the global game is and where it could go."



## FOCUS

# Mbappe confirms he will leave PSG at end of season

'I will play my last game at the Parc des Princes on Sunday'

AFP  
Paris

**K**ilian Mbappe confirmed yesterday that he will leave French champions Paris Saint-Germain at the end of the season, with Real Madrid widely expected to be his next destination.

The announcement brings an end to a prolific association with his hometown team, which began when he signed from Monaco in 2017 in a deal worth 180 million euros (\$194mn).

"I wanted to announce to you all that it's my last year at Paris Saint-Germain. I will not extend and the adventure will come to an end in a few weeks," Mbappe, 25, said in a video posted on social media.

"I will play my last game at the Parc des Princes on Sunday."

PSG have already secured the Ligue 1 title, their 10th in the last 12 seasons, and the Qatar-owned club will pick up the trophy after Sunday's game against Toulouse, which will be their last of the campaign on home turf.

Luis Enrique's side were eliminated from the Champions League by Borussia Dortmund in the semi-finals on Tuesday when a 1-0 loss in the second leg at home sealed a surprise 2-0 aggregate defeat.

It means Mbappe will be denied the send-off he had hoped for in the Champions League final at Wembley on June 1 and will end his seven-year spell at PSG without ever having won Europe's elite club competition.

Mbappe informed PSG privately in February of his intention to depart when his contract expires at the end of the current campaign.

The 2018 World Cup winner had never confirmed publicly he was leaving, though, far less said where he will be going next, but it appears certain that he is bound



for Real Madrid. "It's a lot of emotions, many years where I had the chance and the great honour to be a member of the biggest French club, one of the best in the world," said Mbappe.

"It allowed me to arrive here, to have my first experience in a club with a lot of pressure, to grow as a player of course, by being alongside some of the best in history, some of the greatest champions," he added.

"It's hard and I never thought it would be this difficult to announce that...but I think I needed this, a new challenge, after seven years."

Mbappe's arrival in the capital as a teenager in 2017 came after he had helped Monaco win the league title. After initially joining PSG on loan, his transfer fee became - and still is - the second largest in football history.

It came just weeks after PSG

paid a world-record 222 million euros to sign Neymar from Barcelona.

PSG have dominated French football since their 2011 Qatari takeover, but despite also adding Lionel Messi to their line-up for two seasons, European success has remained tantalisingly out of reach for a club that has spent billions on some of the world's best players.

The closest they came was the 2020 Champions League final defeat by Bayern Munich, when PSG academy graduate Kingsley Coman scored the winning goal against his former club.

The defeat to Dortmund this week ruled out the prospect of Mbappe facing his likely future employers, 14-time European champions Real Madrid, in this year's final.

Mbappe did not find the net in

that tie but has scored 43 goals in all competitions this season, with 26 of those coming in Ligue 1.

He will still hope to add to his club-record tally of 255 goals for PSG and win another medal in the French Cup final on May 25 - Mbappe has so far won six Ligue 1 titles, three French Cups and the now defunct League Cup twice in his seven years at his hometown team.

After tomorrow's game, PSG will complete their league campaign with away matches at Nice and at relegation-threatened Metz, before Mbappe wraps up his career with the club in that Cup final in Lille.

Mbappe was frozen out at the start of the campaign with the club putting pressure on him to sign a new deal or agree to be sold rather than simply run down the last year of his contract.

## SPOTLIGHT

## Arsenal must believe in Premier League glory, says Arteta

AFP  
London

**M**ikel Arteta says Arsenal must cling to the belief that they can pip Manchester City to the Premier League title as he prepares his men to face faltering Manchester United today.

The Gunners are one point ahead of second-placed City, but the defending champions have a game in hand and will retain the title if they win their last three matches.

Arsenal have a terrible record at Old Trafford - they have won just once there in the league since 2006 - but they are facing a troubled United team who have lost their way under beleaguered boss Erik ten Hag.

Arteta, speaking at his pre-match press conference yesterday, said his players must keep their focus even though they are not in control of the title race.

"We have to think it is going to work and what's going to work is that we try to be better than our opponents and beat them and the final outcome, that will be something else," the Spaniard said.

"At the moment that is not in our control. We know the difficulty in our history when you look at what we've done over there (at Old Trafford) so we're going to have to be at our best to

earn the right to win the game."

Arteta warned that United remain dangerous despite winning just two of their past 10 league matches.

United forward Alejandro Garnacho thought he had won the reverse fixture at the Emirates Stadium in September, but his late goal was ruled out for offside and Arsenal scored twice in the final minutes to win 3-1.

"That tells you the difficulty of facing them, their quality," said Arteta.

City, chasing an unprecedented fourth straight Premier League title, travel to Fulham today, with the chance to leapfrog Arsenal before the Gunners kick off in Manchester the following day.

"They've been on an unbelievable journey in the last 10 or 15 years but we want to change that. We're trying to do everything we can to improve and get better and better," said Arteta, who previously worked as Pep Guardiola's assistant at City.

"You have to keep improving and try to be better than them when you face them head-to-head and in a long, long, long season with a lot of demands in this league.

"It's been an unbelievable journey (for Arsenal) in every sense with a lot of changes. We have come far from where we were, that's true, but there's still a lot to come."

### Guardiola won't ask for favour from Man Utd in chase to catch 'incredible' Arsenal

Pep Guardiola won't ask for a favour from Manchester United this weekend as the Manchester City manager tries to overhaul "incredible" Arsenal in the Premier League title race.

City boss Guardiola takes his side to Fulham today knowing a victory would move them two points clear of leaders Arsenal. But the Gunners will reclaim top spot if they win at Manchester United on Sunday, putting City fans in the unusual position of having to support their local rivals.

Asked if he would be cheering on United when Arsenal visit Old Trafford, Guardiola insisted the only thing he is worried about is taking three points from the trip to Craven Cottage. "I'm a City fan, try to beat Fulham, this is all I'm concerned about," Guardiola told reporters yesterday.

City are chasing an unprecedented fourth successive Premier League title and will lift the trophy if they win their last three games against Fulham, Tottenham and West Ham. But they have been pushed to the brink by Arsenal this season in a battle that reminds Guardiola of his team's title fights with Liverpool. Jurgen Klopp's men twice finished runners-up to City and became the only team to stop them winning the title in the last six seasons in 2020. Guardiola ranks Arsenal alongside Liverpool in terms of the quality of opposition posed to City during his reign at the Etihad.

## ANNOUNCEMENT

## Endrick in Brazil's Copa America squad but no Neymar

AFP  
Rio de Janeiro

**T**een phenomenum Endrick was named in Brazil's Copa America squad yesterday by coach Dorival Junior but there was no place for Neymar, who has been sidelined since suffering a serious knee injury on international duty in October.

Real Madrid forwards Vinicius Junior and Rodrygo are both included, with FC Porto attacker Evanilson the only new call-up for the June 20-July 14 tournament which will be held in the United States.

Manchester United midfielder Casemiro and veteran defender Thiago Silva, who will leave Chelsea for hometown club Fluminense at the end of the season, have been omitted. Along with the 17-year-old Endrick, who is due to join Real Madrid from Palmeiras in July, Dorival also selected Girona forward Savio and his club team-mate Yan Couto.

Dorival, 62, only took over at the start of the year from interim boss Fernando Diniz, but he is

confident the players will quickly adapt to his coaching style. Brazil, who lost the 2021 Copa America final on home soil to bitter rivals Argentina, will play Colombia, Paraguay and Costa Rica in Group D.

## SQUAD

**Goalkeepers:** Alisson (Liverpool/ENG), Bento (Athletico Paranaense), Ederson (Manchester City/ENG)

**Defenders:** Danilo (Juventus/ITA), Yan Couto (Girona/ESP), Guilherme Arana (Athletico Mineiro), Wendell (Porto/POR), Lucas Beraldo (PSG/FRA), Eder Militao (Real Madrid/ESP), Gabriel Magalhaes (Arsenal/ENG), Marquinhos (PSG/FRA)

**Midfielders:** Andreas Pereira (Fulham/ENG), Bruno Guimaraes (Newcastle/ENG), Douglas Luiz (Aston Villa/ENG), Joao Gomes (Wolves/ENG), Lucas Paqueta (West Ham/ENG)

**Forwards:** Endrick (Palmeiras), Evanilson (Porto/POR), Gabriel Martinelli (Arsenal/ENG), Raphinha (Barcelona/ESP), Rodrygo (Real Madrid/ESP), Vinicius Junior (Real Madrid/ESP), Savio (Girona/ESP).

## MATCH REPORT

## Olympiakos make history by reaching Europa League final

AFP  
Piraeus, Greece

**O**lympiakos will face Fiorentina in the Europa Conference League final after making history with their 2-0 win against Aston Villa in Thursday's semi-final second leg.

Jose Luis Mendilibar's side clinched a 6-2 aggregate triumph thanks to a double from Villa's chief tormentor Ayoub El Kaabi, who hit a hat-trick in the first leg.

On a raucous night at the Karaiskakis Stadium in Piraeus, Olympiakos, champions of Greece a record 47 times, booked their first appearance in a major European final.

The only other Greek club to reach a European final were Panathinaikos, who were beaten by Ajax in the 1971 European Cup final.

Adding to the sense of destiny for Olympiakos, they will face Italian side Fiorentina on May 29 at the AEK Arena, home of one of their local rivals and just 10 miles across Athens from their own stadium. Mendilibar only took charge in February, but the Spaniard - sacked by Sevilla in October - has already made himself an Olympiakos icon by masterminding a monumental achievement for Greek football.

Owned by Evangelos Marinakis, who also runs Premier League strugglers Nottingham Forest, Olympiakos had failed to get out of the group stage 14 times in 16 attempts in Europe before this season.

If Olympiakos can lift the first European trophy in their 99-year history, it would be a feat to rival Greece's shock Euro 2004 triumph.

It is shaping up to be a golden year for Olympiakos, whose Under-19 team won the UEFA Youth League final against AC Milan in April.

After losing last season's Europa Conference League final against West Ham, Fiorentina booked their return to the showpiece by defeating Club Brugge 4-3 on aggregate in the other semi-final on Wednesday.

Villa's exit was a painful conclusion to their bid to reach a first European final since 1982.

Competing in Europe after a 13-year ab-



Olympiakos' Brazilian defender Rodinei (centre) celebrates with teammates after their victory in the Europa League semi-final second leg match against Aston Villa in Piraeus. (AFP)

sence, Villa must recover from this blow to re-focus on their attempt to qualify for next season's Champions League via a top four finish in the Premier League.

Unai Emery's fourth-placed side are seven points clear of fifth-placed Tottenham, who have three games left compared to Villa's two.

"Olympiakos deserve to be in the final. We lost it in the first 90 minutes at home. We started well this time, but they scored and we were not clinical," Emery said.

"These are great experiences for us but it's difficult to win in these competitions, whether it is the Champions League or Conference League.

"We are a little bit frustrated but we have two games left to get the fourth position, which is amazing motivation."

Olympiakos's Chiquinho had an early sight of goal after evading the Villa defence, but the midfielder shot wide with a hurried effort.

It was a warning Villa failed to heed as Olympiakos carved open the visitors to take the lead in the 10th minute. Daniel Podence, on loan from Wolves, picked out David Carmo's overlapping run and his low cross reached the unmarked El Kaabi, who stretched to poke past Emiliano Martinez from close range.

Villa were out of sync and their spluttering start was encapsulated by Leon Bailey who slipped when he lined up a shot that trickled weakly to Olympiakos keeper Kostas Tzolakis.

Tzolakis made a superb save to repel Bailey's fierce strike with an agile tip over on the stroke of half-time.

But with the tie firmly in their hands, Olympiakos pressed relentlessly and defended in droves to keep Villa at bay.

Morocco forward El Kaabi put the result beyond doubt in the 78th minute when he sprinted onto Tzolakis's punt, eluded Ezri Konsa and slotted home to send Olympiakos into ecstasy.

### Gnabry in doubt for Germany's Euro campaign

Bayern Munich forward Serge Gnabry has been ruled out for the season and could miss Germany's home Euro 2024 campaign with a hamstring injury, the club announced yesterday. Gnabry left the field after 27 minutes in Wednesday's 2-1 Champions League semi-final loss to Real Madrid. Bayern issued a statement saying the 28-year-old would "miss the remainder of the season" after a diagnosis showed a tear in his left hamstring. Bayern have two Bundesliga games remaining before Germany open the Euros against Scotland in Munich on June 14. Former Arsenal forward Gnabry has had a difficult run with injuries this season, which cost him his spot in Julian Nagelsmann's squad.