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# GULF TIMES SPORT



**TENNIS**

'Concerned' Djokovic to undergo scans as shock Rome exit follows bottle drama

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**AMIR CUP FOOTBALL**

## Al Arabi to face Al Duhail in quarters today

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Title holders Al Arabi are treading cautiously ahead of their Amir Cup 2024 quarter-final against Al Duhail to be played at the Al Janoub Stadium today.

The winner of the clash will meet the winner of the Al Sadd and Al Wakrah last eight match which will also be played today at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium at 10.30pm.

Al Arabi beat Al Saliya 2-1 in their Round of 16 match. Having finished the league championship in fifth position, The Dream Team are keen to retain their Amir Cup title.

Speaking ahead of the quarter-finals, Al Arabi coach Younes Ali said: "Facing Al Duhail will be tough. Our matches against them are always thrilling and both teams are seeking redemption to clinch



Al Duhail coach Christophe Galtier and Al Arabi coach Younes Ali (right) during their team's training sessions.

the cup this season. Our goal is to reach the semis." For his part, Al Duhail player

Ibrahima Diallo said: "We have a tough match against Al Duhail and our aim is to qualify for the semis."

Al Duhail, who failed to defend their league title and ended up sixth this season, are also

eager to bag the title.

Al Duhail coach Christophe Galtier said: "We face a strong team, the title holders with good and talented players. However, our focus is on ourselves. Improving our performance on the field and not repeat our previous mistakes."

Al Duhail player Youssef Ayman said: "This is Al Duhail's first year without any titles, and our goal is the championship is to win the Amir Cup."

**Al Sadd to meet Al Wakrah**

League champions Al Sadd, who edged Al Markhiya 3-2 in the last 16 match, are wary of Al Wakrah.

Al Sadd coach Wesam Rizik said: "This is an important match for us against a strong competitor, one of the best clubs in Qatar recently."

Al Sadd player Anas Abdulsalam said: "It's a crucial match in a prestigious championship. All players in our team understand the value of representing Al Sadd. We

will try to avoid mistakes and we hope for our fans' support."

Al Wakrah coach Ali Rehman Marri said: "The match will be tough for both teams. It is our fourth clash against Al Sadd this season."

Al Wakrah player Trent Sainsbury said: "The match will be tough due to the number of games we've played in a short period but everyone at the club is supporting us and our preparations for the match have been good."

**QUARTER-FINALS SCHEDULE**

**Today**  
Al Duhail vs Al Arabi at 7.45pm at Al Janoub Stadium  
Al Wakrah vs Al Sadd at 10.30pm at Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium

**Tomorrow**  
Umm Salal vs Al Gharafa at 7.45pm at Al Janoub Stadium  
Qatar SC vs Al Rayyan at 10.30pm at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium.

**PREMIER LEAGUE**

# Arsenal down Man Utd to take title race to the wire

'Twenty-seven wins in the Premier League is the most in the history of this club'

AFP  
Manchester

Arsenal kept their Premier League title dreams alive by ending an Old Trafford hoodoo to grind out a 1-0 win at Manchester United yesterday, moving back top of the table and taking the championship battle down to the last weekend.

Leandro Trossard scored the only goal on 20 minutes as Arsenal won for just the second time in 17 games away at United to go a point clear at the summit. Manchester City still have the destiny of the title in their own hands as the defending champions have two matches left to Arsenal's one.

However, the Gunners kept the pressure on Pep Guardiola's men ahead of their tricky trip to Tottenham on Tuesday.

"Our history wasn't very optimistic (here) but we found a way to win it and that says a lot about how much the team wants it," said Arsenal boss Mikel Arteta.

"We want to knock that door and open that box of dreams to have in front of our people the opportunity to win the Premier League."

Arsenal host Everton on the final day next Sunday, while City entertain West Ham. Defeat further dented United's chances of competing in Europe next season.

Erik ten Hag's men showed more spirit than in a dismal 4-0 defeat to Crystal Palace on Monday, but have now won just one of their last eight Premier League games. United remain eighth in the table, three points adrift of both Newcastle, who they face on Wednesday, and Chelsea.

Arsenal have been in scintillating form in 2024 to remain in the race for their first league title in 20 years.

Arteta's men have won 15 and drawn one of their 17 league games since the turn of the year. But Arsenal were far from their flowing best as the expected onslaught of an injury-ravaged United never materialised under unusually stifling heat in England's north-west.

The manner of defeat at Pal-



Arsenal's Leandro Trossard scored the goal against Manchester United during their Premier League match in Manchester yesterday. (Reuters).

ace had increased the scrutiny on United boss Ten Hag. The Dutchman's options were again hamstrung by a lengthy list of absences with captain Bruno Fernandes among those sidelined and a bench littered with youngsters.

"It's like trying to swim with your hands tied behind your back," said Ten Hag of United's injury crisis. "You see the fans are behind us. They fought with us. Today we gave them (something) back but that should be the standard in every game."

"You see even when we miss seven starting players we are competitive with one of the best teams in the league."

However, Ten Hag's decision to retain Casemiro as a makeshift centre-back after his woeful showing against Palace will become another stick with which to beat the beleaguered coach. After

United had managed to keep the free-scoring visitors at bay for the opening 20 minutes, Casemiro was culpable for the goal.

The 32-year-old was laboured in pushing up from a United goal-kick to play Kai Havertz outside and Trossard then stole in on the blind side of Casemiro to tap in the German's cross.

United's new co-owner Jim Ratcliffe was in attendance at Old Trafford rather than at Wembley to see the club's women pick up their first ever major trophy in the FA Cup final.

The work that lies ahead of Ratcliffe has been laid bare in recent weeks and he saw first hand the improvements that are also required at Old Trafford as rain poured through a leaking roof once the sun turned to a thunderstorm late on.

Alejandro Garnacho was Unit-



ed's one live wire but Arsenal were rarely seriously troubled as they held out for a sixth clean sheet in their last seven away league games. The Gunners victory also set a club record of 27 wins in a Premier League season.

Yet, even that may not be enough should City maintain their ruthless run.

Arsenal forward Kai Havertz said he will become the "biggest fan" of north London rivals Tottenham when they host Manchester City tomorrow as the Gunners hope for a twist in the title race.

The first of those comes in mid-week when Pep Guardiola's men travel to a stadium where they have lost without scoring in each of the past four Premier League seasons. "I am going to be the biggest fan of Tottenham ever," said Havertz. "Let's hope for the best!" City have been relentless in

recent weeks, winning their last seven league games to close in on an unprecedented fourth consecutive English top-flight title.

Arsenal have had to be nearly flawless themselves just to remain in the race. They have taken 46 from the last 51 available points to register a club record 27 wins in a Premier League season.

"It is a phenomenal thing they are doing," said Arteta.

"Winning I think encourages you to win more, to be better equipped and prepared to win in different contexts."

"Twenty-seven wins in the Premier League is the most in the history of this club. That is not progress, that is history. Big compliments to the players."

By contrast, United are at risk of failing to qualify for European competition for just the second time since 1989/1990.

### Kane-less Bayern beat Wolfsburg to go second

Thomas Tuchel's heavily changed Bayern Munich line-up made short work of Wolfsburg at home yesterday, winning 2-0 to leapfrog Stuttgart into second spot. Tuchel made eight changes to the side eliminated from the Champions League with a 2-1 loss at Real Madrid on Wednesday, with England captain Harry Kane ruled out with back issues and missing his first league match of the season.

If the England captain returns next week, Kane - currently on 36 league goals this season - will have just one match remaining to try and reach Robert Lewandowski's all-time record of 41.

Croatian midfielder Lovro Zvonarek, aged just 19, celebrated his first start by scoring after four minutes, while Leon Goretzka was set up by Thomas Mueller for a second goal just 10 minutes later.

The win sends Bayern, who already ceded the Bundesliga title to Xabi Alonso's Bayer Leverkusen in April, two points clear of Stuttgart in second with one game remaining. Still unbeaten, Leverkusen can take a major step to becoming the first side to go a season without defeat in Bundesliga history by avoiding defeat at Bochum in Sunday's late game.

Currently on a streak of 49 games without loss, Leverkusen have two more league games to achieve the feat. Four minutes after Goretzka's goal, Spain winger Bryan Zaragoza, also making his first league start for Bayern, thought he had home side's third when he turned in a Mueller pass.

The goal was chalked off however with VAR finding Mueller offside in the build-up. Bayern, who will finish the season without a trophy for the first time since 2012, gradually took the sting out of the match and handed further debuts in the final stages. Israel goalkeeper Daniel Peretz came on late in the second half, replacing Bayern captain Manuel Neuer who was playing his 500th Bundesliga game, along with teenagers Matteo Perez Vinlof and Jonathan Asp-Jensen. The loss means Ralph Hasenhuettt's Wolfsburg are yet to win in the Bavarian capital after 27 games.

FOCUS

# Raza's 72 not out guides Zimbabwe to win

AFP  
Dhaka

**S**ikandar Raza and Brian Bennett hit half-centuries as Zimbabwe secured an eight-wicket consolation victory over Bangladesh in the final Twenty20 international in Dhaka yesterday to avoid a 5-0 whitewash.

Captain Raza hit an unbeaten 72 off 46 to guide Zimbabwe to 158-2 after they restricted Bangladesh, who won the first four matches of the series, to 157-6.

Bennett struck 70 off 49 balls after picking up 2-20 with the ball at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

Zimbabwe lost opener Tadiwanashe Marumani for one, but Bennett and Raza added 75 runs for the second wicket to put the visitors firmly in control.

Mohamed Saifuddin dismissed Bennett, who struck five fours and as many sixes, but Raza defied a muscle injury to see Zimbabwe to victory.

He struck six fours and four sixes in his unbeaten knock before

Johnathan Campbell hit the winning single with nine balls to spare.

Zimbabwe were "obviously very disappointed" with the series defeat, Bennett said after the match. "It took us four or five games to win.

"Credit to our bowlers, they have done very well," he said. "It's just the batting, especially in the powerplay. We know what we can do. So, hopefully we can take the momentum forward."

Bangladesh captain Najmul Hossain Shanto was happy with their performance in the series ahead of the T20 World Cup, despite the crushing defeat in the final match.

"It's been a very good series," he said. "Winning the series definitely increases confidence.

"The satisfaction is that the experiments that we did, the things that we needed to see, that worked as we won a few close matches."

Earlier, Mahmudullah Riyad hit 54 off 44 balls for Bangladesh.

The right-hander, who struck six fours and a six, put on 69 runs with Najmul to help Bangladesh recover from 15-3 after they were asked to bat.

All-rounder Shakib Al Hasan added 21 off 17 balls after Najmul's departure for 36 runs after facing 28 balls.

The hosts were in trouble when Blessing Muzarabani removed opener Tanzid Hasan Tamim for two and Bennett struck twice in successive overs.

Bennett had opener Soumya Sarkar caught by Sean Williams at backward point for seven before he forced Towhid Hridoy to edge behind for one.

Mahmudullah launched a counter-attack, cracking three fours off the first four balls he faced.

Wellington Masakadza dismissed Najmul to break the partnership but Shakib's brief cameo kept the scoreboard ticking over.

Luke Jongwe brought a premature end to Shakib's innings, but Jaker Ali Anik hit an unbeaten 24 off 11 balls. Muzarabani took 2-22 for Zimbabwe.

**BRIEF SCORES**

**Zimbabwe 158 for 2** (Raza 72\*, Bennett 70, Shakib 1-9) **beat Bangladesh 157 for 6** (Mahmudullah 54, Shanto 36, Bennett 2-20) **by 8 wickets**



Zimbabwe's Sikandar Raza plays a shot during the fifth Twenty20 international against Bangladesh in Dhaka yesterday. (AFP)

SECOND T20I

# Rizwan, Fakhar guide Pakistan to 7-wicket win

The visitors draw level against Ireland in the three-match series

AFP  
Dublin

**P**akistan beat Ireland by seven wickets in the second Twenty20 international in Dublin yesterday to set up a deciding showdown in the three-match series.

Ireland made a dynamic start after being put into bat as the hosts blasted 29 runs in the first three overs.

But Shaheen Shah Afridi put the brakes on Ireland's assault, dismissing opening pair Paul Stirling and Andrew Balbirnie in the fourth over.

Lorcan Tucker and Harry Tector (32) put on 62 for the third wicket, with the former scoring 51 in 34 deliveries.

Curtis Campher (22) and George Dockrell (15) boosted the score before Gareth Delany's 28 off 10 balls helped the hosts post 193 for seven.

Pakistan spluttered at the start of their chase as Saim Ayub was caught in the first over and skipper Babar Azam nicked Graham Hume behind to depart for a duck in the second.

But Ireland's hopes of sealing a famous series win with a game to spare were dashed as Mohamed Rizwan (75 not out) and Fakhar Zaman (78) put on a stunning 140-run partnership.

**Quickfire knock by Azam**

Azam Khan added 30 (four 6s) from 10 balls to take Pakistan home with 3.1 overs unused.

Ireland had claimed their first ever T20 victory against Pakistan in the series opener on Friday, winning by five wickets with one ball to spare.

Rizwan, the Player of the Match, said yesterday: "They



Mohamed Rizwan of Pakistan hits a shot to the leg side during his team's second T20I against Ireland in Dublin yesterday. Rizwan scored 75 not out as Pakistan won by seven wickets. (@TheRealPCB)

played really well against us. (on batting with Fakhar) It was not an easy chase because the Ireland bowlers knew their conditions better, they gave us difficult

time early on, but we decided that chasing 194, we have to attack. You're always in pressure when you lose especially with World Cup around the corner."

When asked about his average of 50 in T20Is, Rizwan said: "If you look at the average, you are an average player. If you look at the conditions and what game demands that will make you better. We have learned a lot of things from Virat Kohli, I respect him."

Babar, the Pakistan captain, said yesterday: "I'm relieved, credit to all batters. After bowling, we decided to chase before 18th over. We lost a few wickets early on but we kept the momentum going. It was a good decision (to bowl) because it was overcast and there was a bit of rain. Bowling in second half was good but the way Ireland played last three overs, all credit to them."

Babar added: "Fakhar is very experienced and played according to situation which demanded positive intent. It's a good side, we got positives in this match and will look to give 100% in the next match. Very excited to (see Pakistan fans), it was jam-packed, enjoyed the vibe and hope families will come to support us in the next match."

Paul Stirling, the Ireland captain, said yesterday: "Catches cost us a little bit, but that's how it goes. Important to take those early opportunities. I'm pretty happy with the energy, don't think there is any major cause of concern (on fielding). Certainly it's a fair result, they thoroughly deserved the win today as we did in the last game."

Pakistan will also face Ireland in the group stage of next month's T20 World Cup in the United States and the West Indies.

**BRIEF SCORES**

**Pakistan 195 for 3** (Fakhar 78, Rizwan 75\*) **beat Ireland 193 for 7** (Tucker 51, Shaheen 3-49) **by 7 wickets and 19 balls remaining**

SPOTLIGHT

# Chennai beat Rajasthan to boost play-off hopes



Chennai Super Kings' Simarjeet Singh celebrates after taking the wicket of Rajasthan Royals' Jos Buttler during the Indian Premier League match at the M A Chidambaram Stadium in Chennai yesterday. (AFP)

AFP  
Chennai

**S**kipper Ruturaj Gaikwad's unbeaten 42 and three wickets by Simarjeet Singh helped holders Chennai Super Kings move closer to an IPL play-off spot with a win over Rajasthan Royals yesterday.

Five-time champions Chennai restricted Rajasthan to 141-5, a total they overhauled with five wickets and 10 balls to spare in their last home game at M A Chidambaram Stadium.

Chennai moved to 14 points and third place with seven wins in 13 matches. Sunrisers Hyderabad, also on 14, slipped to fourth, while Delhi Capitals and Lucknow Super Giants remain close with 12 points each. Rajasthan remain second in the 10-team table led by Kolkata Knight Riders, who are the only team to have already qualified for the play-offs.

The top four teams will make the play-offs with the final on May 26 in Chennai.

"Very normal to keep thinking about the qualification at this stage. The conversations we are having is to control what we can do," Rajasthan skipper Sanju Samson said.

"At the team brief, I will proba-

bly ask them to continue the process and hoping to get on the better side next game."

Gaikwad anchored Chennai's tricky chase as they lost wickets at regular intervals including when Ravindra Jadeja was called out for "obstructing the field".

Jadeja was sent back by Gaikwad while attempting a second run and he changed direction on the pitch when the throw from wicketkeeper Samson hit his hand and the third umpire ruled him out after an appeal from the opposition.

Gaikwad kept his cool and put on an unbeaten 24-run stand with impact substitute Sameer Rizvi, who hit the winning boundary.

Earlier disciplined bowling kept Rajasthan down to a below par total on a slow pitch as Simarjeet returned figures of 3-26 and fellow medium-pace bowler Tushar Deshpande took two wickets.

Riyun Parag top-scored for Rajasthan with an unbeaten 47. Yashasvi Jaiswal, who made 24, and Jos Buttler, who made 21, started cautiously but the innings suffered from a lack of partnerships.

**BRIEF SCORES**

**Chennai Super Kings 145 for 5** (Gaikwad 42\*, Ashwin 2-35) **beat Rajasthan Royals 141 for 5** (Parag 47\*, Simarjeet 3-26, Deshpande 2-30) **by 5 wickets**



Chennai Super Kings' Ravindra Jadeja (right) speaks with umpires after his dismissal as captain Ruturaj Gaikwad (second left) watches during the IPL match against Rajasthan Royals in Chennai yesterday. (AFP)

## GUTSY BENGALURU WIN FIVE IN ROW

**Chennai:** Rajat Patidar's attacking fifty and inspired bowling set up Royal Challengers Bengaluru's fifth straight win to improve their IPL play-off hopes with a 47-run thrashing of Delhi Capitals yesterday. Bengaluru posted 187-9 after Cameron Green hit an unbeaten 24-ball 32 and bowlers then combined to bowl out Delhi for 140 in 19.1 overs at their home M Chinnaswamy Stadium. Bengaluru, who moved to fifth, have mounted a late charge to make the play-offs but will need to win their last league match and other results to go in their favour to be in the top four.

Delhi slipped to sixth and go into their final match with 12 points. Bengaluru have also 12 points from 13 matches, but boast a better run-rate. Star batsman Virat Kohli took charge after he smashed 27 off 13 balls to lay the foundation of Bengaluru's total in a match where Delhi missed skipper Rishabh Pant, who was suspended after a slow over-rate offence. Kohli remains the leading batsman this season with 661 runs including one century and five half-tens. Patidar, who hit 52, soon took control in a 88-run stand with

England batsman Will Jacks, who smashed 41, before a late charge by Green. Delhi faltered in their chase after they lost David Warner for one off left-arm spinner Swapnil Singh. Left-arm quick Yash Dayal took down Abishek Porel and then ran out Jake Fraser-McGurk in successive balls and soon Delhi slipped to 30-4.

**BRIEF SCORES**

**Royal Challengers Bengaluru 187 for 9** (Patidar 52, Jacks 41, Salam 2-23, Khaleel 2-31) **beat Delhi Capitals 140** (Axar 57, Dayal 3-20, Ferguson 2-23) **by 47 runs**



Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Rajat Patidar plays a shot during the IPL match against Delhi Capitals at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru yesterday. (AFP)

TENNIS

# Tabilo shows the exit to Djokovic at Italian Open

'It's incredible. I'm trying to wake up, trying to process everything'

Reuters  
Madrid

Chile's Alejandro Tabilo claimed the biggest win of his career when he beat world number one Novak Djokovic 6-2 6-3 in the third round of the Italian Open in a match that lasted just 67 minutes yesterday, two days after the Serbian was hit on the head by a water bottle.

Djokovic has won the tournament six times, with his last title coming in 2022, but Tabilo broke the top seed four times on Centre Court while not conceding a single break point.

Djokovic looked far from his best and the 36-year-old blamed Friday's "unfortunate" incident where he was accidentally struck on the head by a fan's water bottle while signing autographs after his second-round win.

The victory made the 26-year-old Tabilo - who won a Challenger Tour tournament two weeks ago - the first Chilean in 17 years to beat a world number one since Fernando Gonzalez beat Roger Federer at the ATP Finals in 2007.

"It's incredible. I came on court just looking around and soaking it all in, trying to process everything. I'm trying to wake up right now," said Tabilo, who is ranked number 32 in the world.

The result also means Djokovic - who made a double fault on match point - has failed to reach a single final in 2024 and has played only six matches on clay in the build-up to the French Open.

The Serbian had reached the semi-finals of the Monte Carlo Masters but a premature exit in



Chile's Alejandro Tabilo celebrates with fans after winning his match against Serbia's Novak Djokovic at the Men's ATP Rome Open at Foro Italico in Rome yesterday. (AFP)

Rome could hamper his preparations for Roland Garros where the year's second Grand Slam begins on May 26.

When asked about his French Open chances, Djokovic said: "Everything needs to be better for me to have at least a chance to win it."

Also yesterday, Grigor Dimitrov advanced to the fourth round for the first time since 2020 on Sunday when he overcame French qualifier Terence Atmane 7-6(3),

6-3. The eighth-seeded Bulgarian was made to work hard in the hot conditions in Rome, where he edged Atmane in a tight first set.

He then played with more freedom in the second set to seal victory after one hour and 44 minutes in the pair's first Lexus ATP Head2Head clash.

"For the past five days I have been playing lefties, so it will be nice to get a righty, but it is what it is," said Dimitrov, who beat lefty Yoshihito Nishioka in his

opening match. "It was a very difficult match. Probably one of the most difficult matches this year. The conditions were so difficult. I rolled my ankle on one side, there was not much clay left.

"You have to adapt and today that is what I did.

"I played an OK game and that was enough but at the same time I am not happy with where my game is at. But I keep winning matches like this and that is what counts."

SPOTLIGHT

## 'Concerned' Djokovic to undergo scans after bottle drama in Rome

AFP  
Rome

Novak Djokovic described his shock third-round elimination from the Rome Open by outsider Alejandro Tabilo yesterday as "concerning"; two days after he was hit on the head by a bottle which he said has caused nausea and dizzy spells.

Djokovic's bid for a record-extending 41st Masters 1000 title was ended in just over an hour by Chilean Tabilo, who is ranked 32nd in the world and claimed his first win over a top-10 opponent, 6-2, 6-3.

The 24-time Grand Slam winner said that his subdued performance on a court where he has won six titles might have been due to the blow suffered while greeting fans on Friday night.

He had initially laughed off being accidentally struck on the head by a hard water bottle following his straightforward second-round win over Corentin Moutet, by wearing a cycling crash helmet to training on Saturday morning.

"I don't know, to be honest. I have to check that. Training was different. I was going for kind of easy training yesterday. I didn't feel anything, but I also didn't feel the same," Djokovic told reporters.

"Today under high stress, it was quite bad - not in terms of pain, but in terms of this balance. Just no co-ordination. Completely different player from what it was two nights ago."

Djokovic also said that he would have scans to "see what's going on" before the French Open in Paris, where he will head not just worried by the after-effects of the bottle incident but also his form.

The last time Djokovic got to Roland Garros without a title to his name that season was in 2018, when his first honour of the campaign came at Wimbledon.

With the French Open getting underway in two weeks and where he is the defending champion, Djokovic admitted that "everything needs to be better in order for me to have at least a chance to win" a 25th Grand Slam.

"The way I felt on the court



today was just completely like a different player entered into my shoes," added Djokovic. "It's a bit concerning."

Djokovic's early elimination is a blow for the last major tournament before Roland Garros which started without Italian world number two Jannik Sinner and third-ranked Carlos Alcaraz then lost ageing clay-court icon Rafael Nadal on Saturday.

It also leaves the men's tournament wide open with third seed Alexander Zverev taking on home hope Luciano Darderi, ranked 54th in the world, in the day's final match on centre court.

Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka cruised into the last 16 of the women's tournament with a straight-sets victory over Dayana Yastremska, 6-4, 6-2.

Second seed Sabalenka claimed her first win in four matches against Ukrainian Yastremska to set up a clash in the next round with either Elina Svitolina, a two-time winner at the Foro Italico, or Anna Kalinskaya.

The 26-year-old Belarusian made short work of Yastremska, dispatching her opponent in one hour and 28 minutes without dropping a service game and never looking in trouble.

Sabalenka, who has never won in Rome but is a two-time champion on the Madrid clay, looks in good shape to at least match her 2022 run to the semi-finals.

"Every time I was losing here, I was so sad," she told reporters.

"I felt like I lost on the Grand Slam because it was one of the dream tournaments for me to win."

Earlier fifth seed Maria Sakkari lined up a probable last-16 clash with Victoria Azarenka.

MOTORSPORT

## French driver Ogier clinches his record sixth Rally of Portugal win



Toyota French driver and co-driver Sebastien Ogier (right) and Vincent Landais celebrate their victory next to their Toyota GR Yaris Rally1 Hybrid after winning the WRC Rally of Portugal, in Matosinhos, yesterday. (AFP)

AFP  
Paris

Sebastien Ogier won the Rally of Portugal for a record sixth time yesterday after safely holding onto his overnight lead on the punishing gravel roads.

The French driver, behind the wheel of a Toyota Yaris, moved one ahead of Finland's Markku Alen, a five-time champion with Fiat and Lancia in the 1970s and 1980s.

"I had nothing against being tied with Markku Alen," said Ogier, also a winner in Portugal in 2010, 2011, 2013, 2014 and 2017.

"He is a legend, but I heard for many years 'when will you beat this record?'"

"It was not a great weekend for the whole team, but it was a good rally for us and I am glad we could bring some points."

Ogier, who is only racing part-

time in the 2024 world championship, finished 7.9 seconds clear of Ott Tanak to salvage an otherwise challenging weekend for his team.

Reigning world champion Kalle Rovanperä, a teammate of Ogier at Toyota, crashed out on Saturday after Japan's Takamoto Katsuta saw his hopes hit by a broken suspension.

Championship leader Thierry Neuville of Belgium came a distant third overall, but stretched his lead over Elfyn Evans to 24 points after five of 13 events.

More than six minutes behind Evans was more than six minutes off the pace in sixth place in the other Toyota.

Citroën C3 Rally2 driver Nikolay Gryazin took seventh overall ahead of Jan Solans, who was the best-placed WRC2-registered driver in eighth. Solans edged Josh McErlean by just 3.2sec while Lauri Joona completed the top 10.

Competitors face more hot weather and rough roads as the WRC moves to the Mediterranean island of Sardinia later this month. Rally Italia Sardegna is based in Alghero from 30 May - 2 June.

Rally of Portugal results

1. Sebastien Ogier/Vincent Landais (FRA/Toyota) 3h41min 32.3sec.
  2. Ott Tanak/Martin Jarveoja (EST/Hyundai) +7.9sec.
  3. Thierry Neuville/Martijn Wydaeghe (BEL/Hyundai) +1min 09.8sec.
  4. Adrien Fourmaux/Alexandre Coria (FRA/Ford) +1min 47.8sec.
  5. Daniel Sordo/Candido Carrera (ESP/Hyundai) +2min 48.9 sec
- World championship standings (after five legs of 13)

Drivers

1. Thierry Neuville (BEL) 110 pts.
2. Elfyn Evans (GBR) 86.
3. Ott Tanak (EST) 79.
4. Adrien Fourmaux (FRA) 71.
5. Sebastien Ogier (FRA) 70

CYCLING

## Kooij pips Milan in sprint to win Giro stage 9, Pogacar retains lead

Reuters  
Naples

Dutchman Olav Kooij won stage nine of the Giro d'Italia yesterday, pipping Jonathan Milan by half a wheel right at the finish line in a breathless sprint at the end of a 214km ride from Avezano to Naples.

Ineos Grenadiers' Jhonatan Narvaez looked set to win his second stage when he attacked early and sowed panic in the peloton on the final climb through the streets of Naples.

He was leading with some 150 metres to go before Maglia Rosa holder Tadej Pogacar got involved in the lead-up to help his UAE Team Emirates colleague Juan Sebastian Molano and Narvaez was caught.

Milan was set up well by his Lidl-Trek team mate Simone Consonni but just as he was about to clinch his second stage victory, Team Visma-Lease a Bike's Kooij took the opportunity to steal the win from him, while Molano was third.

"My first Grand Tour stage win



Dutch rider Olav Kooij celebrates after winning the 9th stage of the 107th Giro d'Italia cycling race yesterday. (AFP)

was what I was looking for but it's been a difficult and unlucky first week for our team and a hard stage today," Kooij said.

"We weren't sure to catch the breakaway riders but the team remained committed. The guys put me in an ideal position. It's been tight but I really wanted this first Grand Tour win and I hope there are many more to come."

Pogacar retained his overall lead, two minutes 40 seconds ahead of Daniel Felipe Martinez,

while Geraint Thomas is third, 18 seconds further behind.

"I haven't become a lead-out man but Molano did a very good job to be at the front in the finale. He didn't get the win but third is a good result and I was happy to help a friend," Pogacar said. "I have a comfortable advantage before the first rest day. It's nice to relax in Napoli." Today is a rest day and the Giro d'Italia resumes tomorrow with stage 10, a 142-km ride from Pompei to Cusano Mutri.

## Masterful Lomachenko knocks out Kambosos

Perth: Ukrainian boxing great Vasilij Lomachenko clinched the IBF lightweight world title yesterday after producing a supreme performance to stop Australia's George Kambosos in the 11th round in Perth. In the main event at a sold-out 15,000 RAC Arena, heavy favourite Lomachenko defied the rowdy home crowd and dominated throughout. Lomachenko left the Australian bloodied and sealed the 135-pound belt in the 11th round after dropping Kambosos several times before the fight was stopped by the referee. It was the first IBF lightweight



belt in the glittering career of former WBA and WBC lightweight champion Lomachenko, who has also won world titles featherweight and super featherweight. He is also a two-time

Olympic gold medalist. "I'm again world champion. I want to come back home and spend time with my family," said 36-year-old Lomachenko, who remained coy on his future. Kambosos, a former champion, was unable to reproduce the form from his famous upset of Teofimo Lopez in 2021 at Madison Square Garden. His pre-fight taunts of sending the 36-year-old Lomachenko into retirement fell flat. "He's one of the best of all time. We tried our best, but he's a true champion," said Kambosos, who was defeated for the third time in 24 fights.

## FOCUS

# First Jr. NBA League in Qatar tips off at QF's Education City

**B**asketball fever is gripping Qatar Foundation's Education City as the first Jr. NBA League in Qatar tips off, bringing together nearly 450 girls and boys from across the country to represent all 30 NBA teams.

The league, which began last month and will take place over several weekends, concluding with the finals on 7-8 June, is being hosted by Qatar Foundation (QF), in collaboration with the NBA, and supported by the Qatar Basketball Federation.

Designed to promote the core values of basketball such as teamwork, respect, and perseverance, the programme aims to foster a love for the game from a young age and encourage grassroots participation, while increasing involvement at all levels of the sport.

The NBA's Her Time to Play programme, which provides opportunities for girls and women to play basketball and pursue careers in coaching and athletic leadership, is running alongside the league, and a series of panel discussions and teaching clinics are being



hosted as part of the initiative.

Sylvia Fowles, two-time WNBA champion, 2017 WNBA Most Valuable Player, eight-time WNBA All-Star, and four-time Olympic gold medalist, attended the launch of the Her Time to Play programme and the Jr. NBA

Draft, saying: "I am loving seeing the talent that you are presenting for the future - Qatar's youth looks phenomenal, and I can't wait to see what this looks like in the next couple of years."

And, as she spoke to the young athletes, she offered them some



advice as they participate in the league, saying: "Enjoy the moment, be present, and have fun."

Aljazi T al-Henzab, Director of Media, QF, said: "The Jr. NBA League isn't just about basketball, it's a platform for our young athletes to grow, learn, and develop.

We are focused on instilling crucial life skills, like teamwork, discipline, and sportsmanship, that go beyond the court. To all the young athletes joining us, success goes beyond winning and losing - it's about the lessons learned, friendships made, and the character you

build along the way. Embrace challenges, strive for excellence, and always play with integrity."

Palestinian Salim Abdalla is 12 years old and plays for Evolution Sports Qatar - his team is representing the Sacramento Kings. "I have been playing basketball for about 4-5 years," he said. "My favourite thing about it is the games - and the tight moments when you need your teammates the most."

"I am really looking forward to being part of this league - my dream is to hopefully play in the NBA one day."

12-year-old Mira Hajor is from Lebanon and plays for Qatar Academy for Science and Technology - part of QF's Pre-University Education. Her team is representing the New York Knicks, and she said: "I have been playing since I was five years old. I am looking forward to having fun and enjoying myself during the league - and I am excited for the finals. I love basketball because it creates a sisterhood and I make new friends. I just enjoy it from the bottom of my heart."

## MOTORSPORT

# Martin stays strong to claim thrilling French MotoGP

'We keep learning things on this bike and today we were fast'

AFP  
Le Mans, France

**J**orge Martin landed his "perfect weekend" and extended his lead in the championship with a thrilling victory in the French MotoGP at Le Mans yesterday.

The Spaniard, who won Saturday's sprint, battled the entire race with rival Francesco Bagnaia before Marc Marquez, starting from 13th spot on the grid, arrived late to steal second place.

Pramac Ducati rider Martin heads the standings with 129 points, 38 ahead of Bagnaia who moved into second spot. Marquez is third a further two points back.

"There's not a lot I can say today," said Martin.

"I had a lot of doubts at the beginning of the race but finally I demonstrated to myself and all the people that need something else to prove that I was the best today.

"So, (I am) really happy. Thanks to my team because after some crashes they repaired the bike. The bike was perfect.

"Making one, one (two firsts) here in Le Mans I think was the best and perfect weekend."

Martin, a winner already this season in Portugal, did not make the best of starts from pole position, losing first place to Bagnaia on the opening lap.

The two were then locked



Prima Pramac Racing's rider Jorge Martin celebrates on the podium after winning the French MotoGP Grand Prix at the Bugatti circuit in Le Mans, France, yesterday. (AFP)

wheel to wheel for the remainder of the race. Bagnaia, on his factory Ducati, fought off several attacks from Martin before he finally slipped through seven laps from

the end. Bagnaia tried hard to reclaim the lead but found himself under pressure from Marquez, the six-time champion, who was eyeing victory in France following a

superb ride in Spain when he came second behind Bagnaia. Plagued by injuries and then vision issues in the past few years some feared his best days were behind him.

Marquez, however, picked up pace even as the tyres on his Gresini Ducati began to wear and picked off Bagnaia on the final lap to snatch another valuable second which lifts him to third in the standings.

"The most impressive thing is that when I was alone the pace was there and I was catching the top guys," Marquez said.

"In the end I tried for five laps to overtake Peco (Bagnaia) but he was braking super late.

"On that last lap I said 'OK, I try' and it was a good overtake. This time I was able to defend the line and defend well the last sector.

"We keep learning things on this bike and today we were fast."

It was ultimately a disappointing day for defending two-time champion Bagnaia who might easily have won but had to settle for the bottom step on the podium.

"I tried everything... but these two in the last laps had something more," he said.

"Let's move on to the next one. I'm sure that for the future we can better."

Bagnaia's next opportunity will come on May 26 at the Catalan MotoGP in Barcelona.

## FOOTBALL

# De Paul stunner fires Atletico past Celta towards top 4 finish

AFP  
Madrid

**R**odrigo De Paul's superb volley earned Atletico Madrid a 1-0 win over Celta Vigo yesterday to virtually guarantee Champions League football next season.

Diego Simeone's side, fourth, move eight points clear of fifth-place Athletic Bilbao with just three games remaining.

After the Copa del Rey winners drew against Osasuna on Saturday, Atletico left it late but were able to take advantage to move further clear.

De Paul struck after 84 minutes to delight fans at the Metropolitan stadium just as it seemed all the hosts' pressure would come to nothing.

"When I'm on the edge of the box I've got confidence and I know I have to finish the move so there's no counter-attack, I knew I'd hit it if it fell to me," De Paul told DAZN.

"We need two more points to make (Champions League qualification) mathematics."

Atletico Madrid dominated from the start but found it hard to beat former Crystal Palace goalkeeper Vicente Guaita.

The Spaniard saved well

from Angel Correa and Rodrigo Riquelme in the early stages and then stopped Marcos Llorente's tame effort before half-time.

Atletico's Jan Oblak did well to deny Iago Aspas early in the second half when Celta carved out a rare chance of their own.

Guaita saved a Memphis Depay effort at his near post before brilliantly tipping Pablo Barrio's acrobatic shot on to the crossbar among a string of fine stops.

The goalkeeper thwarted De Paul moments before Atletico took the lead, when the Argentine took a touch to control a clearance on the edge of the box and slashed a volley across goal and into the top corner.

Defeat leaves Celta 16th, five points above the drop zone after Cadiz, 18th, scraped a narrow 1-0 win over Getafe.

"We had so little to go to get a point... each point is important because we're in a situation where the sooner we can be mathematically safe, the better," said Guaita.

Granada, 19th, were relegated to join Almeria in the second tier next season on Saturday before kicking a ball in their 4-0 home defeat by champions Real Madrid. Barcelona, third, can overtake second place Girona with a win against Real Sociedad today.



Atletico Madrid's midfielder Rodrigo De Paul celebrates his goal during the La Liga match against Club RC Celta de Vigo at the Metropolitan stadium in Madrid yesterday. (AFP)

## SPOTLIGHT

# Hungry Madrid parade league title with eye on European glory

AFP  
Madrid

**I**f anything defines Real Madrid it is a relentless hunger for silverware and that remained clear even as they celebrated their 36th La Liga title triumph yesterday.

Los Blancos players partied with fans at their traditional location outside the city's Cibeles palace but the upcoming Champions League final remained in focus.

The record 14-time European champions face Borussia Dortmund at Wembley on June 1 and various players said they hoped they could return to celebrate again after the final.

"Thank you for being here to celebrate this day... I hope we see each other again in June," said veteran midfielder Luka Modric, a five-time Champions League winner with Real.

Madrid sealed their triumph last weekend with four games to spare, taking the title back from rivals Barcelona, but delayed the cel-

bration to concentrate on beating Bayern Munich in midweek to reach the Champions League final.

Dominant Madrid have lost just one match this season in La Liga, against rivals Atletico Madrid last September, and at present have scored more goals and conceded fewer than any other side in the division.

They won both Clasicos against Barcelona and twice defeated their closest challengers for much of the season, Catalan upstarts Girona.

Coach Carlo Ancelotti was a central figure in the celebrations, once again toting a cigar and wearing sunglasses as he did at Madrid's last parade in 2022.

The day began early with RFEF president Pedro Rocha delivering the league trophy to Madrid's Valdebebas training ground at 0730 GMT, with captain Nacho Fernandez lifting it, for the first but certainly not the last occasion on the day.

"Today is the day to enjoy it, when it's something so deserved, something so big as winning the league, it's the day to go to Cibe-



Real Madrid players parade onboard a bus as they celebrate their 36th Spanish La Liga trophy at the Cibeles square in Madrid yesterday. (AFP)

les," said Nacho.

There were other stops on the way for Madrid's jubilant players, first heading to the Madrid regional government's headquarters, presenting the trophy to president Isabel Diaz Ayuso.

"This team has overcome a lot of adversity, with a lot of injuries," said Madrid chief Florentino Perez, referring to Thibaut Courtois, Eder Militao and David Alaba's long-term absences in particular. "This squad rebelled against the

situation, this club badge achieves everything that seems impossible - the attitude (you need) in the face of life. I want to thank all of the players that now form part of the history of the club - they have won it all and are still hungry."

Of course, Perez was keen to highlight the team's next target. "We will leave our soul out there to come back with the 15th," he added. Ayuso congratulated Madrid on "years of glory" and said the club was a "joy" for the city and Spain itself, before receiving a shirt signed by the players and a replica of the trophy.

"At Wembley, we will win!" declared England international Jude Bellingham, the club's top scorer this season, who has taken Spain by storm since his arrival from Borussia Dortmund last summer.

Players addressed masses of fans from a balcony, with fans chanting responses. "Vinicius, Ballon d'Or," cried the supporters, who also called for out of contract stars Luka Modric, Toni Kroos and Nacho Fernandez to stay.

The team presented the trophy at the Madrid town hall, to mayor Jose Luis Martinez Almeida - an Atletico Madrid supporter.

The last stop was Plaza Cibeles, where thousands of fans were waiting as Madrid arrived on an open-top bus.