

To subscribe  
**GULF TIMES**  
Newspaper  
Please call  
**444 666 35**



MOTORSPORT | Page 2

Rossi relishes 'honour' of taking on Le Mans on four wheels



TENNIS | Page 3

Swiatek battles past Kerber as protesters invade courts

To advertise here,  
PLEASE CALL  
**444 666 21**

Tuesday, May 14, 2024  
Dhul-Qa'da 6, 1445 AH

# GULF TIMES SPORT



FOOTBALL

Mbappe bids farewell to PSG fans with defeat in final home game

Page 4

SPOTLIGHT

## Qatar to host World Padel Championships in October-November

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

The International Padel Federation (FIP) and the Qatar Tennis Federation (QTF) announced that the Khalifa International Tennis & Squash Complex in Doha, Qatar, will host the 17th edition of the FIP World Padel Championships from October 28 to November 2, 2024.

The flagship FIP bi-annual event will see 16 national teams across both the men's and women's categories have the opportunity to participate in the pinnacle national team padel tournament in Doha later this year.

Qatar was selected to host this year's tournament based on a range of leading criteria, including but not limited to the world-class quality of the sporting facilities, the player conditions and support, major events delivery experience, security, financial surety, geographic location and

sporting heritage. The popularity of padel in Qatar has also sky-rocketed in recent years, thanks to QTF's leadership and local activations, and the passionate local fan base is another advantage of this host location.

The 17th FIP World Padel Championships will have prize money of €500,000, to be equally distributed between men and women to all countries qualified for the final stage.

Nasser al-Khelaifi, President of Qatar Tennis Federation, said, "We are delighted to host the FIP World Padel Championships 2024 in Qatar at our world class facilities in the Khalifa International Tennis & Squash Complex in Doha. Qatar has an exceptional track record of delivering fantastic major sporting events based on the highest standards, and where the conditions for players and fans are second-to-none. We look forward to partnering with the International Padel Federation to deliver this pinnacle tournament, and continuing to support FIP's mission to drive



the growth and development of padel worldwide."

Luigi Carraro, President of the International Padel Federation, said: "We are

repeatedly delivering unparalleled international padel tournaments; and we look forward to players and fans enjoying the fantastic hospitality and conditions during the most important tournament in our 2024 calendar. The 2024 FIP World Padel Championships will showcase the most talented athletes in the world and we cannot wait to deliver another historic edition of the tournament later this year. The sport had developed rapidly since the tournament was last hosted here in 2021 - padel is now a global phenomenon - and we continue to grow the sport under the banner of unity, uniqueness and professionalism."

The FIP World Padel Championships returns to Doha three years after the extraordinary success of the 2021 edition. In 2021, a total of 16 female teams and 16 male teams from 19 countries competed, with Spain triumphing in both the men's and women's team competitions and Argentina taking home a silver medal in both categories.

FOOTBALL

# Sadd and Duhail to clash in enticing Amir Cup semi-final

Sadd edged past Qatar Cup champions Al Wakrah, Duhail secured a hard-fought win over Al Arabi

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Qatar Stars League champions Al Sadd have set up a mouth-watering Amir Cup semi-final against bitter rivals Al Duhail. It wasn't easy for both teams in the quarters yesterday.

Baghdad Bounedjah's goal in the 20th minute proved to be decisive as Al Sadd edged past Qatar Cup champions Al Wakrah at the Ahmed Bin Ali Stadium. Earlier, Duhail secured a hard-fought 3-2 win over Al Arabi at the Al Janoub Stadium.

The match between Al Sadd and Al Wakrah was fiercely contested, with Wakrah pressing for goals, especially in the first half. However, Al Sadd's sturdy defence and goalkeeper Mishal Barshim's exceptional performance kept them from conceding. There was a contentious moment when VAR ruled out a header by Bounedjah due to a foul committed by the Algerian against an Al Wakrah defender.

Sadd's Mohamed Waad emphasised the significance of the Amir Cup tournament for the club, and said the team was committed to learn from past mistakes, showcasing a resilient attitude.

He said: "I thank our fans who support us wholeheartedly. We learn from our mistakes, and thankfully, we delivered a good performance today, enabling us to achieve a deserved victory and continue our journey in the tournament."

Wakrah's Ahmed Fadel said: "We gave everything on the pitch but we were not lucky. Of course, any match you lose is difficult to take, but in general we are satisfied with our performance in the match."

Earlier, Michael Olunga scored a brace in Duhail's thrilling 3-2 win over Arabi. Michael Philippe Coutinho scored the goal for Red Knights, while Youssef Msakni scored twice for Al Arabi. Despite conceding an early goal to Al Arabi through Msakni's strike in the third minute, Duhail swiftly responded as Olunga headed in an equaliser in the eighth minute. Arabi regained the lead two minutes later with another goal from Msakni, who slotted home after a pass from Jassim Jaber.

But Duhail levelled the score once more with Coutinho's goal in the 25th minute after a cross from Almoez Ali, ensuring parity at halftime. In the second half, Duhail continued to attack and took the lead after a mistake by Senegalese defender Abdou Diallo, who mistimed his pass to Ismail Mohamed, who in turn sent a cross for Olunga to thrash into the net.

Despite Arabi's attempts to stage a comeback, they failed to find the net again. Syrian Omar al-Somah came close to finding the net but his shot was blocked by Al Duhail goalkeeper Salah Zakaria.



Al Duhail's Michael Olunga (left) and Al Arabi's Jassem Gaber go for a header during the Amir Cup semi-final at the Al Janoub Stadium. PICTURES: Noushad Thekkayil

Zakaria expressed his happiness with the victory as the Red Knights remained in contention for the title in a struggling season. "We started on a poor note by conceding a goal in the third minute, but we managed to come back strongly and showed our strong mentality," he said. "We played with fighting spirit, and this is the nature of cup matches, which requires showing a great desire to win."

**GHARAF A LOCK HORNS WITH UMM SALAL; RAYYAN FACE QATAR SC**

In other quarter-final matches today, Al Rayyan will take on Qatar SC at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium, while Al Gharafa face Umm Salal at the Abdullah Bin Khalifa Stadium.

Rayyan go into their clash with confidence after a 4-1 thrashing of Al Khor in the round of 16 last week. Rayyan coach Leonardo Jardim expected the match to be a difficult one but backed his team to win against Qatar SC.

"We are ready for the match and the confidence is high after a brilliant performance against Al Khor. The match is not going to be easy but we are looking forward to maintaining our winning run,"

said Jardim. "It's a knockout tournament and certainly double efforts are required to achieve the desired results," he added.

Qatar SC beat debutants Al Waab to qualify for the last eight and coach Youssef al-Noubi hoped his side could prevail over Rayyan. He said: "Al Rayyan are tough as they have many good players and a great coach. But we are confident and will give our best to reach the quarter-finals."

Meanwhile, Al Gharafa coach Pedro Martins said his team will have to be at their best to get past Umm Salal. Gharafa had needed extra time to beat Al Ahli in the pulsating last 16 encounter.

"I anticipate an exciting game as Umm Salal have been very impressive this season. Small details will make a difference and I hope we will be up to the mark and qualify for the semi-finals," Cheetahs coach Martins said.

Umm Salal also needed two goals in extra time to get past a resilient Al Bidda 3-1 with coach Patrice Carteron urging his players to come up with an improved performance. "We have to be at the highest level against Al Gharafa. We are ready and our target is to clear the hurdle and reach the semi-finals," he said.



Al Sadd's Baghdad Bounedjah (second left) celebrates after scoring against Al Wakrah at the Ahmed Bin Ali Stadium.



Youssef Msakni (right) scored twice for Al Arabi.

MOTORSPORT

# Rossi is relishing Le Mans challenge on four wheels

'THERE ARE A LOT OF SUPERB CARS, SOME VERY GOOD DRIVERS AND A SUPERB ATMOSPHERE'

AFP  
Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium

MotoGP may have seen the back of Valentino Rossi but the seven-time world champion is still hard at work on the track, albeit in cars.

Since quitting two wheels at the end of the 2021 season, the 45-year-old has turned his attentions to four wheels and is currently involved in the World Endurance Championship with the BMW of GT3 team WRT, a road which inevitably leads to next month's Le Mans 24 hour race.

"When I started motorsport, taking part in the Le Mans 24 Hours was my first objective because it's the most prestigious race in the world," Rossi told AFP on the sidelines of the 6 Hours of Spa-Francorchamps, the third leg in the WEC programme.

"Last year I was able to discover the circuit and I really enjoyed it.

It's an honour to be able to compete at Le Mans.

"To win at Le Mans, everything would have to go perfectly!" Long car races are a far cry from the flat-out bike sprints of his past but the Italian sees some similarities and appears to be settling into the world of endurance.

In spite of failing to finish in Spa, he is currently equal 10th in the GT3 world championship standings.

"I really like 24-hour races and I've already done three of them. There are a lot of superb cars, some very good drivers and a superb atmosphere. You have to work hard and push yourself to the limit because the level is very high, but I'm very happy. The big difference is the format because in MotoGP the race lasted 45 minutes, here it's several hours. So there's a lot of strategy and you have to share the car, which I really like.

"There are also similarities, such as braking, finding the right line, hitting the gas at the right



Italian driver Valentino Rossi addresses an interview before the FIA World Endurance Championship 2024 6 hour race of Spa-Francorchamps in Francorchamps, on May 10, 2024. (AFP)

moment... It's very different and similar at the same time." Rossi, however, is unlikely to win

Le Mans overall, certainly not this year when he is competing in the GT3 category.

And he admits that while the draw of the hypercars, which will garner most of the attention at this

year's race which takes place across the weekend of June 15-16 and provide the ultimate winner, is there, he may not be ready for it.

"I'd like to drive the hypercar and I'm pushing BMW hard so maybe at the end of the year I'll try it out," he says.

"But to be honest, they really are the best hypercar drivers and I don't know if my level is good enough.

"Obviously it would be a dream to drive in the hypercar championship, the premier class, but I'm already very happy in GT3 and I hope to become one of the best."

Never a man to shy away from a challenge, Rossi is not intending to be a short-term curiosity in the world of race cars – he insists he is in it for the long-term.

"I hope to continue racing for as long as possible," he says. "Physically, I feel very well.

"As long as I'm fast and I'm enjoying myself, I'll continue. So why not for another 10 years?" said Rossi.

CRICKET

## Gujarat Titans out of IPL play-off race after total washout in Ahmedabad

AFP  
Ahmedabad

Gujarat Titans have been knocked out of the play-off race after rain forced their IPL match against Kolkata Knight Riders to be abandoned without a ball bowled in Ahmedabad yesterday.

The two teams took one point each, confirming a top-two finish for table-toppers Kolkata, who remain the only side to have already qualified for the next stage.

The last time Kolkata ended in the top two in the league stage, they went on to win the tournament in 2012 and 2014.

The top four teams will make the play-offs, but the first and second-placed sides have the advantage of two chances to qualify for the final on May 26 in Chennai.

The unseasonal rain in Ahmedabad left thousands of fans disappointed at the world's biggest cricket stadium.

Rain was unrelenting for close to five hours as the two captains eventually shook hands without



A ground staff takes shelter under an umbrella as rain delays the start of the Indian Premier League match between Gujarat Titans and Kolkata Knight Riders in Ahmedabad yesterday. (AFP)

even going for the toss. Shubman Gill-led Gujarat, who won the IPL in their debut season in 2022 under Hardik Pandya, joined Mumbai Indians and bottom-placed Punjab Kings to be out of the title race.

Kolkata, led by Shreyas Iyer, have been the team to beat in this

edition with 10 wins and 19 points in 13 matches to stay ahead of second-placed Rajasthan Royals.

Six teams including defending champions Chennai Super Kings and Royal Challengers Bengaluru stay in the hunt for the remaining three spots for the play-offs.

## Skipper Du Plessis credits newfound aggression for Bengaluru's five wins in a row

**Bengaluru:** Royal Challengers Bengaluru have dragged themselves back into the Indian Premier League (IPL) playoff race after their early season struggles and skipper Faf du Plessis believes a bolder approach in recent matches had sparked their revival.

After losing seven of their first eight matches, Bengaluru embarked on a superb five-match winning spree, with Sunday's 47-run win over Delhi Capitals lifting them to fifth in the table with 12 points, above Delhi and Lucknow on net run rate.

Needing a win to keep their top-four hopes alive, Bengaluru shrugged off the early dismissals of Du Plessis and top-scorer Virat Kohli as Will Jacks made a 29-ball 41 and Rajat Patidar smashed a 32-ball 52 to help them post 187-9.

Their bowlers ripped through Delhi to dismiss them for 140 in 191 overs, with pacer Yash Dayal claiming three wickets.

"We want to play that style of cricket – RCB talks about playing bold," Du Plessis said.

"Just proud that we can actually do that now, putting our performance together. It's just confidence, isn't it? First half of the season, we were really fighting for it, didn't quite come together for us. You just need a couple of guys to find their form in the tournament and it's happened."

Victory over Delhi marked the third straight match that Bengaluru had bowled a team out and they have posted totals of 200 or more in five of their last seven games.

"There's been a positive change. Even when we were losing, nobody was pointing fingers at anyone," Dayal said. "We've been positive throughout the season and we've become more attacking. We've switched that mode on." Bengaluru face third-placed Chennai Super Kings on Saturday.



Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Virat Kohli celebrates after the dismissal of Delhi Capitals' Jake Fraser-McGurk (left) during the Indian Premier League match between at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru on Sunday. (AFP)

## Rawabi Sports League hosts thrilling cricket tournament



In an exhilarating display of sportsmanship and camaraderie, Rawabi Sports League (RSL) recently held a gripping cricket tournament at Sherbone School. The event, which forms part of Rawabi's innovative approach to enhancing staff empowerment, witnessed enthusiastic participation from Rawabi's workforce.

The tournament showcased intense competition, with teams vying for victory in closely contested matches. After a series of exhilarating encounters, the triumphant team was duly honoured and celebrated for their achievement.



BOXING

## Fury's father gets bloodied in clash with Usyk's entourage on Riyadh media day

Reuters  
Riyadh

Tyson's Fury's father appeared to headbutt a member of Oleksandr Usyk's entourage yesterday in a bloody clash at a media day for Saturday's undisputed world heavyweight title fight in Saudi Arabia.

John Fury, with a cut on his forehead and blood streaks on his face, confirmed to Sky Sports television his involvement in an incident at the event in Riyadh attended by both fighters.

"(He) disrespected my son, the best heavyweight to ever wear a pair of boxing gloves," he said.

"Coming out with all that rubbish. He was in my face, trying to be clever.

"Coming into my space (with) Usyk, Usyk...I was only chanting my own son's name.

"So then he went a step closer and a step closer. So at the end of it I'm a war-



rior, that's what we do. We're fighting people.

"You come in the space, you're going

to get what's coming," he added. Sky reported the Saudi authorities had decided to draw a line under the incident.

Billed as the "Ring of Fire", the fight will unify Briton Fury's WBC heavyweight championship with the WBA, IBF, WBO and IBO belts held by Ukrainian Usyk. Both are undefeated professionally.

"I didn't see anything, I was in the room doing interviews, but I'm not here for all that, I'm here to get the job done and go home and rest," Sky quoted Tyson Fury as saying.

The fight was originally meant to happen on Dec 23rd last year and then set for Feb 17 before being rescheduled when Fury suffered a cut in sparring.

Usyk's manager Alexander Krassnyuk hoped Fury senior would apologise.

"It would be nice if we hear some apologies from John, because this was his behaviour," he told Sky. "We are the example for the whole world...a new generation of kids are taking us as an example. What will they see from this?"

## British middleweight Lawal dies after collapsing on pro debut

**London:** British middleweight boxer Sherif Lawal has died after collapsing in the ring during his professional debut on Sunday, fight organisers said.

The British Boxing Board of Control sent a note of condolences yesterday.

Media reports said Lawal, 29, was hit on the temple in the fourth of six scheduled rounds at London's Harrow Leisure Centre against Portuguese opponent Malam Varela.

"Unfortunately during Sherif's fight, he collapsed and despite the best efforts of the paramedics, he was later pronounced dead," promoters Warren Boxing Management said in a statement. The fight was the first on the card, with the event then cancelled.



British middleweight boxer Sherif Lawal. (@BIBABoxing)

TENNIS

# Swiatek beats Kerber as protesters invade courts

Wearing orange vests, protestors threw a liquid and confetti onto court where Madison Keys was playing

AFP  
Rome

Iga Swiatek saw off Angelique Kerber 7-5, 6-3 at the Rome Open yesterday to set up a quarter-final clash with Madison Keys, who beat Sorana Cirstea despite her match being interrupted by climate activists.

World number one Swiatek is yet to drop a set and is favourite for a third Foro Italico crown before she begins her French Open title defence later this month.

The three-time Roland Garros champion arrived in the Italian capital off the back of a thrilling triumph in Madrid, her third WTA 1000 title of the season after also winning at Indian Wells and Doha.

But the 22-year-old didn't have it all her own way against former world number one Kerber, a three-time former Grand Slam champion who at 331st was the lowest-ranked player ever to reach the last 16 in this tournament.

Swiatek battled to the first set in just under an hour and was frequently put to the test by 36-year-old German Kerber, who fell behind after saving five set points in game 10 and then succumbing two games later.

Kerber went two ahead in the

second set but Swiatek fought back and after the Pole broke serve in game eight she held steady to close out the match.

"I'm a perfectionist but it's impossible to play perfect tennis, so you always have to be humble and not take anything for granted," said Swiatek.

"The pressure is there for sure but this year has been pretty good for me. I started the season well so I don't feel like I have to chase anything."

**'Not the greatest feeling'**

Swiatek will face Keys whose 6-2, 6-1 win was suspended for half an hour by a court invasion from activists from Ultima Generazione (Last Generation).

Wearing orange vests, protestors threw a liquid and confetti onto the Pietrangeli court, where Keys was playing, and court 12 where a men's doubles match was taking place.

There were also protestors in the stands with a tournament spokesman telling AFP that at least one person had tried to glue their feet to the floor in order to slow their removal.

"Obviously it's not the greatest feeling when you're on court, your first reaction is kind of your own safety," said Keys. "It's obviously



Poland's Iga Swiatek signs autographs after winning against Germany's Angelique Kerber during Italian Open at Foro Italico in Rome yesterday. (AFP)

something that's becoming more of an occurrence and something that tournaments are going to have to figure out how to stop."

**Rublev, Osaka out**

And Russian Rublev, fresh from

claiming the Madrid title, suffered a shock third-round defeat by French qualifier Alexandre Muller, 3-6, 6-3, 6-2.

Sixth seed and reigning Monte Carlo champion Stefanos Tsitsipas is still in the fray after beating Brit-

on Cameron Norrie in straight sets 6-2, 7-6 (7/1). Tsitsipas sounded disappointed at the number of big names out of the tournament.

"The extension of the days in the Masters 1000s I think plays a massive role and contributes a lot

to the fact that these players are getting injured," Tsitsipas told reporters.

"You've got to be some type of superhero to be consistent back to back 10 days in each event getting to the very end of it."

Naomi Osaka's return to the Rome Open was ended at the last 16 by China's Zheng Qinwen who breezed past her four-time Grand Slam winning opponent 6-2, 6-4 to set up a last-eight clash with third seed Coco Gauff.

**Medvedev beats Medjedovic**

Daniil Medvedev continued his Rome title defence with yesterday's hard-fought 7-6 (7/5), 2-6, 7-5 win over qualifier Hamad Medjedovic as the men's tournament was left wide open by big-name exits.

Russian Medvedev will face Tommy Paul in the last 16 at the Foro Italico today after battling past Next Gen champion Medjedovic in a gruelling clash of big hitters.

The second seed has a great opportunity to win his first tournament of the year but will be drained by a match which pushed three hours in length and suggested that 20-year-old Medjedovic is a far superior player than his world ranking of 121.

GOLF

# Scheffler up for challenge after the birth of his child

Reuters  
Louisville, Kentucky

The wild card coming into this week's PGA Championship was not Scottie Scheffler but his wife Meredith, who had the golf world on baby watch wondering if her world number one husband would be at Valhalla Golf Club for the year's second major.

That suspense ended with reports of the birth of the couple's first child at the weekend sending new dad Scheffler to Louisville as the red-hot favourite to claim the Wanamaker trophy and get halfway to the calendar grand slam.

With four wins in his last five starts, including a second Masters Green Jacket last month, it seemed the best chance of stopping Scheffler from adding another major to his collection was keeping him at home in Texas thinking about names for their new born. But for the 156 player field there was no such luck.

Having not played a competitive round since his win at the Heritage three weeks ago there will be some rust to shake off but oddsmakers are unmoved, installing Scheffler as the 3-1 favourite ahead of twice champion Rory McIlroy at 7-1.

In 10 starts this season Scheffler has seven top five finishes, his worst result a tie for 17th.

"He's been on such a hot run... he's had so much momentum," said 2008 Masters champion Trevor Immelman, now a golf analyst for CBS.

"You kind of wonder if any rust has started to collect on his game being out of competitive golf of the last three weeks or so, but he has proven to us that his mental toughness, the way he prepares the way he handles things out in competition.

"He seems to be able to just pretty much handle everything that gets there in his way."

**CONFIDENT MCLROY**

The last of McIlroy's four major wins came at Valhalla a decade ago and the Northern Irishman returns to Louisville in blazing form with



Scottie Scheffler of the US celebrates with his green jacket and the trophy after winning The Masters at Augusta National Golf Club, Augusta, Georgia, last month. (Reuters)

back-to-back wins at the Zurich Classic and on Sunday at the Wells Fargo, where he steam-rolled Olympic champion Xander Schauffele.

The world number two will be bursting with confidence after a spectacular final round that saw him come from two shots down to Schauffele to surge to a five-shot victory, even after a double-bogey on the final hole.

"I'm going to a venue next week where I have won it feels like the stars are aligning a little bit," said McIlroy after firing a final round six-under 65 securing his 26th career title.

"I still have a lot of golf to play and a lot of great players to try to beat but I am going into the next major of the year feeling really good about myself."

Tiger Woods, also collected one of his 15 major titles at Valhalla in 2000 with a play-off win over Bob May but no one, except for perhaps the 48-year-old himself, expects a repeat this week.

Battered by injuries, some stemming from a near fatal car crash in 2021 that almost result-

ed in the amputation of his right leg, Woods has seen limited action this year finishing at the bottom of the leaderboard on 16-over at the Masters.

LIV Golf will have 16 players in the field with the spotlight squarely on defending champion Brooks Koepka, who is bidding for a fourth PGA Championship title.

The only player to have won a major as a LIV Golf member, Koepka also arrives in Kentucky in good form coming off a win in Singapore.

"He's a contract killer, simply," said two-times major winner Andy North, a commentator for ESPN. "He shows up at a major championship, opens his locker, and there's like the 'Mission: Impossible' thing: 'Here's your assignment, go kill somebody this week!'"

"That's how he approaches golf at major championships.

"I think the fact that he can raise his game at majors where most people's games go the other way, that's really a huge testament to him and his mental makeup."

FOCUS

# Shaqab to host Al Farrisah Showjumping on May 17

The Longines Arena of the prestigious Al Shaqab equestrian centre will stage the Al Farrisah Showjumping Event for enthusiastic women riders in a spectacular showcase of grace and power on May 17 from 4pm to 7:30pm.

The event is to mark a celebration of the remarkable bond between women and horses and will feature thrilling showjumping performances, highlighting the skill and agility of talented female riders. Women and boys under 10 years can participate in the event which will have competitions in 40cm, 60cm, and 80cm class.

In this edition, Al Farrisah has introduced a dedicated section for local Qatari workshop activations in partnership with Instudio Club.

Participants can also explore shopping booths and engage with



a variety of interactive and exciting booths. This initiative aims to foster engagement among female creatives, providing them with a unique space to network and showcase their talents.

Spectators attending the event can indulge taste buds with a delightful array of culinary delights from participating F&B vendors, including Qahwatna, OH Matcha, Hesh, That Burger Place, AMP Cafe, Lyfe, Original Burger, McLaren, and Chia Nation.

**Pogacar salutes 'almost perfect first week' in Giro**

Tadej Pogacar said his first week of the Giro d'Italia was "almost perfect" after he won three stages to build up a lead of nearly three minutes going into yesterday's rest day. The two-time Tour de France champion is riding in the Giro for the first time and is aiming to become the first winner of both the Giro and the Tour in a single season since Marco Pantani in 1998. "It was an almost perfect first week, I give 10 out of 10 to the team which did a great job," Pogacar told a video news conference. "I'm happy to have a nice lead. Looking at the Tour de France, this can allow me to adopt a more defensive strategy. I'm going to use the team as much as possible to reach the finish line" in Rome on May 26 in the race leader's pink jersey, he added. After nine of 21 stages, Pogacar leads Colombia's Dani Martinez by two minutes and 40 seconds, while Geraint Thomas - the 2018 Tour champion - is third at 2:58. "It's a good thing to have this advantage, but we're preparing for a second week with attacks from our rivals, in particular the Ineos team with (Thymen) Arensman and Thomas," he said. Pogacar believes Tuesday's 10th stage from Pompei and stage 15, which finishes at high altitude in Livigno, could provide decisive moments during the second week. The Slovenian, who came third on his only Vuelta a Espana appearance in 2019, said he was enjoying his first experience of the Giro.

SPOTLIGHT

# McIlroy races away to victory at Quail Hollow

AFP  
Washington

Rory McIlroy delivered a blistering back-nine performance as he powered to victory at the PGA Tour's Wells Fargo Championship at Quail Hollow on Sunday with a final round six-under 65.

McIlroy had begun the day a shot behind Xander Schauffele and trailed him by two strokes after the American made an eagle on the seventh. But from then on the world number two was sensational as he left Schauffele in his

trail, playing the next eight holes at eight-under, including a pair of eagles. The round was only slightly blemished by a double bogey on the 18th, where he found the water beyond the green but the Northern Irishman's total was still the lowest round of the day.

After his win at the Zurich Classic of New Orleans team event last month, with Shane Lowry, McIlroy now heads into the second major of the season, the PGA Championship at Valhalla with back-to-back wins.

McIlroy has not won a major since capturing his fourth at Valhalla 10 years ago but he is now in

buoyant mood. He had begun his round with a birdie on the opening hole and followed it up with another on the fourth but there was little sign of what was to come.

After Schauffele made a tricky 12-foot downhill putt on the par-5 seventh for eagle, McIlroy missed his 10-footer for birdie and fell two behind. Schauffele must have felt that was a potential momentum shift in their tight battle and it proved to be - but not in the way the American hoped.

McIlroy birdied the next two holes, while Schauffele could only make par and then on the tenth the Northern Irishman's brilliant

34-foot putt earned him an eagle.

Schauffele missed his eagle putt, losing his lead with a birdie and it was an advantage he was never to regain as he bogeyed at 12, 13 and 16.

McIlroy turned the screw with birdies at the 13th and 14th before the decisive blow came with an eagle on the 15th, holing out from the greenside bunker with a sublime shot of extreme control to grab a six-shot lead.

Schauffele ended with an even-par 71 and while he may later reflect on a positive week, he accepted that McIlroy had simply been unstoppable.



Rory McIlroy celebrates with the trophy after winning the Wells Fargo Championship at Quail Hollow Club in Clifton, North Carolina. (AFP)

## FOOTBALL

# Mbappe bids farewell to PSG fans with defeat in final game

'I heard applause, the supporters paid him a deserved tribute, he is a club legend despite his youth'

AFP  
Paris

Kylian Mbappe scored on his final home appearance as a Paris Saint-Germain player on Sunday but the French champions suffered a surprise 3-1 defeat against Toulouse on the night they picked up the Ligue 1 championship trophy.

Mbappe confirmed in a video posted on social media on Friday that he would be leaving PSG when his contract expires at the end of the season, ending a seven-year association with the club. Real Madrid is expected to be the next destination for a player whose departure from Paris had been an open secret since February, when he privately informed the club of his intention to move on.

Mbappe wore the captain's armband and opened the scoring early on against Toulouse to take his tally for the season to 44 goals in all competitions.

However, Thijs Dallinga quickly equalised for the visitors against a PSG side which showed 10 changes to the team knocked out of the Champions League by Borussia Dortmund in the semi-finals in midweek, with Mbappe the only player to keep his place.

Yann Gboho put Toulouse ahead with a brilliant strike in the second half, and Frank Magri wrapped up the win in stoppage time as PSG suffered just their second Ligue 1 loss this season, and their first in 27 games since September.

Mbappe has now scored 256 times for PSG, a club-record tally, since signing from Monaco in



PSG's Kylian Mbappe and his teammates celebrate with the Ligue 1 championship trophy at the Parc des Princes stadium in Paris. (AFP)

2017 in a deal worth 180m euros (\$194m).

His tally of 191 goals in France's top flight - including 16 with Monaco at the beginning of his career - puts him in seventh place in the all-time list.

Coach Luis Enrique described the 25-year-old as "a club legend" when he spoke to media on the eve of the game. PSG had indicated that celebrations after Sunday's

match would be dedicated to their title triumph, rather than any specific tribute to Mbappe himself.

There were even some jeers from the crowd for the striker when the teams were read out before the game, although a huge display was unfurled before kick-off at one end of the stadium depicting Mbappe in a trademark pose with his arms folded.

"I heard applause, the support-

ers paid him a deserved tribute, he is a club legend despite his youth," said Luis Enrique who described the banner as "beautiful".

The Qatar-owned club had already wrapped up a record-extending 12th French title, and 10th in 12 years, before hosting a Toulouse side who were themselves safe from any lingering threat of relegation.

PSG's Champions League dis-

appointment means Mbappe will leave the club without ever having got his hands on European football's greatest prize.

With Mbappe, PSG were runners-up in 2020 and have since reached the last four on two further occasions, but the France captain will now hope to finally get his hands on the trophy at his next club. PSG can still finish the season by completing a clean

sweep of domestic honours, as they face Lyon in the French Cup final in Lyon on May 25. As well as Ligue 1, they have also already won the Champions Trophy, France's equivalent of a Super Cup.

Luis Enrique's team will complete their league campaign with a visit to Nice on Wednesday before going to Metz in their final game next Sunday. Elsewhere, Mbappe's first club Monaco clinched second place and automatic qualification for next season's Champions League with a 2-0 win away at Montpellier.

Lille moved up into third place above Brest on goal difference as Jonathan David netted twice in their 2-1 win at Nantes. The top three in Ligue 1 qualify directly for next season's expanded, 36-team Champions League with the team finishing fourth entering the competition in the preliminary rounds.

Nice are fifth and trail both Lille and Brest by four points but still have a chance of a top-four place before hosting PSG in midweek. Lens drew 1-1 at Rennes to hold onto sixth, while Orel Mangala's goal gave Lyon a 1-0 win at Clermont as they kept their European hopes alive.

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang scored twice as Marseille beat Lorient 3-1 to also remain in the European picture. At the bottom, Clermont's defeat means they are relegated, while Lorient are almost certainly down too as they trail Metz by three points with one game left and have an inferior goal difference. Metz, who lost 2-1 at Strasbourg, are therefore set to go into a play-off against a team from Ligue 2 with a top-flight place for next season on the line.

## FOCUS

## Guardiola urges Man City to seize chance to make history

AFP  
London

Pep Guardiola said "history is in front of us" as he prepares his Manchester City team for a potentially tricky match at Tottenham today that could ultimately decide the destination of the Premier League title.

City, chasing an unprecedented fourth straight top-flight English league crown, are one point behind leaders Arsenal but crucially have a game in hand. If City beat Spurs they will be able to seal the championship with a win at home to West Ham on the final day of the season on Sunday, when Arsenal host Everton.

Guardiola's men are charging towards the finishing line, hitting 28 goals in their past seven Premier League matches and conceding just five times. But the City boss, who said he was relishing the high-pressure title run-in, denied that the race was already effectively over.

"Fifteen goals (in four matches) is fine, it gave us the points to be here but it doesn't give you an extra thing for tomorrow when you start the game," Guardiola said. "The mindset is easy, in terms of if we don't win we are not going to win the Premier League and this is what we have to do."

City have never won a league match at Tottenham's new stadium, which opened in 2019, and have not even scored a goal, though they won there in the FA Cup in January. Guardiola said despite his team's poor record at the ground, they had played well there "many times".

"But to do something in this country that has never been done before you have to do something special, exceptional I would say," he said. "It's not ever happened in the Premier League. We have to do it this time. History is in front of us and we have to accept we have not done it. It's the time to do it, otherwise Arsenal will be champions."

Guardiola said he had "huge respect" for Spurs boss Ange Postecoglou, whose team still have an outside chance of securing a Champions League place for next season, though a win for Aston Villa against Liverpool later would end those hopes. "The difficulties are there but at the same time we know what we are playing for - to give us the chance for the last game at home depending on us," he said. "This is the mindset that we have."



Postecoglou dismisses talk that Spurs fans will want to lose against City

Meanwhile, Postecoglou said Tottenham will go all out to beat City, even though it could open the door to bitter north London rivals Arsenal to win the Premier League. Much of the talk ahead of today's game has centred around whether Tottenham fans will want their team to lose in order to deny Arsenal the chance to win the league for the first time in 20 years.

But Spurs manager Postecoglou bristled at the notion that Spurs were focused on anything other than a win at his pre-match press conference. "People are allowed to feel the way they do but I think I've been really consistent and really strong in my beliefs that it's important for this football club to get to where we want to, not look for a silver bullet," he said.

"It's hard work, perseverance, it's resilience, it's quality that will get us what we want, not to fall for any sort of false dawns or any short-term result reactions, stick to the course and thirdly, know what real success looks like. Real success looks like trophies. Anything else in between, bragging rights, whatever, it is absolutely meaningless to me...we've got a game tomorrow we want to win."

The former Celtic boss said he was confident that supporters would be behind Tottenham today and that opinions online were not a good guide.

"If you go by social media there's probably 99 percent of Spurs supporters who don't (want to win against City), if that's your world but please don't tell me that's your world...we'll need to have a counselling session if that's your world," he said.

## ATHLETICS

## Gold in Paris more important than 90m throw for Chopra, says coach

Reuters  
New Delhi

India's Neeraj Chopra is keen to join javelin's elite 90-metre club but will happily settle for a shorter throw in Paris if it proves enough for him to hold on to his Olympic title, his coach said.

The mop-haired Chopra catapulted himself into instant stardom three years ago when he threw 87.58 metres in Tokyo to earn India's first Olympic gold medal in athletics.

The 26-year-old has gone on to become the world champion and in 2022 registered a personal best (PB) distance of 89.94 metres at the Stockholm Diamond League. Chopra is asked about the 90-metre mark in practically every media interaction, but defending the Olympic title remains his absolute priority, his coach Klaus Bartonietz said.

"A medal is more important than a mark. The mark increases almost every year, but the medal stays," Bartonietz said from Doha. "Nobody asks Neeraj how far his throw reached in Tokyo. It was 87.58 and it was enough. If it's 85 metres and still gets you an Olympic gold, you should be okay with it."

Bartonietz said it was tough for athletes to produce personal bests at the Olympics because of the pressure that accompanies performing on the biggest stage in sport.

Although the 90 metre-mark has been surpassed 125 times by 24 athletes since the competition javelin was redesigned in 1986, only three of those throws have come in Olympic competition.



Neeraj Chopra began his season with a second place finish at Diamond League meeting in Doha on Friday. PICTURE: Noushad Thekkayil

"I'd be happy if Neeraj can produce his PB in Paris. It should be enough," Bartonietz said.

"It's one thing to throw 90 metres, and a totally different thing to do it in the most important competition in a four-year cycle."

Chopra, the first Indian to win the Diamond League trophy, has been remarkably consistent in big events, and Bartonietz said he would not be surprised if the thrower from Haryana hits the magical mark in Paris.

"I'd say he's close to the mark," the German said. "For several years, he has been throwing 87-to-high 88s consistently...it will be nice to join the 90-metre club of throwers."

Chopra began his season with a second place finish at the Dia-

mond League meeting in Doha on Friday, falling two centimetres short of Jakob Vadlejch's winning throw of 88.38m.

Bartonietz said the idea was to keep Chopra in good shape before the Olympics to ensure he would not "mess it up at the most crucial time".

One way of doing that was to shield him from any pressure, the coach said. "If you allow yourself to be under pressure, it may break you."

Bartonietz, who succeeded javelin great Uwe Hohn as Chopra's coach, has been impressed by how his charge has matured since the Tokyo Games.

"More than anything else, he knows what not to do to get the best out of himself," the German said.

## REAL WILL USE LA LIGA GAMES TO PREPARE FOR CHAMPIONS LEAGUE FINAL, SAYS ANCELOTTI



Real Madrid have already secured their 36th La Liga title but head coach Carlo Ancelotti is keen to make the most of the remaining games in the build-up to next month's Champions League final against Borussia Dortmund. He said today's home match against mid-table Alaves was part of their preparations as they attempt to win a third trophy this season, having also lifted the

Spanish Super Cup in January. "We have to take advantage of these games in order to build some momentum," Ancelotti told reporters following Real's 4-0 victory at Granada on Saturday. "Those who were rested against Granada will play tomorrow. We'll use it to get into a rhythm and good motivation...the aim is for the whole squad to be at full strength." Ancelotti said the matches will give

players like goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois and defender Eder Militao, who have recently returned from injury, game time before the June 1 final. "(Militao) needs to play more minutes. He's progressing very well, he's getting better every game. Hopefully he can be at his best for the final," added the Italian. "We'll make the necessary decisions the week before the final." Ancelotti also said injured mid-

fielder Aurelien Tchouameni was "not ruled out" from competing in the Champions League final. Tchouameni is a doubt after suffering a stress fracture in his left foot last week. The France international sustained the injury in the semi-final win over Bayern Munich and last October missed six weeks with another foot issue. "He doesn't have much chance,

but he's not ruled out for the final," Ancelotti said. "Now he has an important week, his foot does not hurt a lot, I think it's different from the last problem he had in the foot. He's not ruled out, he could return for the final." Real, unbeaten in all competitions since January, have 90 points from 35 games, 15 points clear of second-placed Girona, with three La Liga matches left.