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Pogacar wins stage four to reclaim Tour de France lead



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GULF TIMES SPORT



TENNIS

End of an era as 'disappointed' Murray withdraws from Wimbledon singles

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EURO 2024

Malen doubles up as Netherlands beat Romania 3-0

GAKPO GUIDES DUTCH TO VICTORY WITH GOAL AND ASSIST

AFP
Munich, Germany

The Netherlands swept into their first European Championship quarter-final since 2008 as Donyell Malen scored twice in a 3-0 win over Romania in the last 16 yesterday.

Cody Gakpo gave the Dutch an early lead but they were unable to convert pressure into a crucial second goal until the Liverpool forward set up Malen with seven minutes remaining in Munich.

Romania were gritty but outclassed, lacking the quality to punish their opponents' profligacy before Malen added his second on the counter in stoppage-time.

The victory put the Oranje on course for a quarter-final clash with Türkiye or Austria, who beat the Netherlands in 3-2 in the group stage.

"We played a good game. I'm very pleased. Especially after the last game we needed a reaction and today was a good step in the right direction," Gakpo said.

"We talked a lot about the aggression, the intensity and defending like a team. It was a good step. Sacrifice something for each other and work really hard to be at your best. Good game overall."

Ronald Koeman's side will need to improve their effectiveness in front of goal should they wish to emulate their manager, who was a player for the Dutch when they won the 1988 Euros on German soil. Prior to the game, Netherlands' captain Virgil van Dijk said his side lacked energy and the "will to win" in the loss to Austria. But the Dutch were still strangely



Netherlands' forward Donyell Malen celebrates scoring his team's second goal during the UEFA Euro 2024 round of 16 match against Romania in Munich yesterday. (AFP)

flat in the early stages despite Van Dijk's rallying cry.

Group E winners Romania, whose 3-0 victory over Ukraine in their opening game, was just their second ever win in the Euros, pinned the Dutch back early.

Romania went close when Dennis Man latched onto a superb diagonal ball from Nicolae Stanciu, but the Parma winger blasted over.

The Dutch broke Romania's momentum shortly after when Gakpo got on the end of a sweeping move to open the scoring on 20 minutes. Jerdy Schouten sliced a perfect, long pass through the midfield to Xavi Simons, who found Gakpo on the left flank. Gakpo eluded

Andrei Ratiu and seemed to catch goalkeeper Florin Nita off-guard, blasting in at the near post.

The goal ignited a period of Dutch dominance, Stefan de Vrij heading inches wide five minutes later. The Netherlands wasted a perfect chance to double their lead with half-time approaching when Denzel Dumfries picked Bogdan Racovitai's pocket and found Simons, who got tangled up and failed to get a decent shot away.

Koeman's team squandered an array of opportunities early in the second half. Memphis Depay and van Dijk went agonisingly close before Gakpo's second was ruled out by VAR for offside. With eve-

ry missed chance, the nerves in the Dutch camp seemed to grow, but Romania lacked the quality to truly punish them. Gakpo, the most impressive man in orange, took matters into his own hands with seven minutes remaining, dribbling through a crowded penalty area and finding Malen who tapped home.

"We work very hard with each other to do our best and I'm happy I could assist Donnie with his goal today," Gakpo said.

With Romania launching a final attack, Malen broke through on the counter and slid the ball into the goal in the fourth minute of stoppage-time to seal the victory.

MOTORSPORT

2025 FIA WEC calendar revealed, Qatar 1812KM race to be season opener

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The FIA World Endurance Championship published its calendar for 2025 here revealing Lussail International Circuit (LIC) as host to the FIA World Endurance Championship (WEC) official prologue and season opener in 2025.

The Qatar 1812KM race, named in honour of Qatar's National Day, is scheduled for February 28, 2025, kicking off an eight-round global championship.

With a minimum of 14 manufacturers expected to compete, the 2025 season promises intense competition from the start. Following Qatar, the WEC will travel to Imola, Spa-Francorchamps, Le Mans, São Paulo, Austin, Fuji, and conclude in Bahrain. This event solidifies LIC's position as a premier motorsports hub on the international stage, setting the tone for a thrilling season that spans four continents.

Following the tremendous success of the 2024 and inaugural edition in March 2024, LIC is set to welcome WEC again in 2025. The Qatar Airways Qatar

1812 KM, proved to be an exhilarating spectacle; the ten-hour endurance race, starting in daylight and finishing under LIC's iconic floodlights, saw Porsche Penske Motorsport emerge victorious. The event featured intense competition across all classes, with Manthey Purcell claiming the first-ever LMGTE3 class victory. The race weekend also offered spectators a range of entertainment, including an air show, cultural activities, and a vibrant Fan Zone.

Amro al-Hamad, Executive Director of the Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) and CEO of LIC, stated: "LIC has firmly established itself as a premier destination for global motorsports events. We're excited to maintain this momentum by hosting the 2025 WEC season opener. Our track record of successfully organising international races like WEC, MotoGP, and Formula 1 reflects our commitment to making world-class motorsports accessible to our community and fans worldwide. We're dedicated to delivering an exceptional race experience and eagerly anticipate welcoming back teams, drivers, and enthusiasts to enjoy the unique ambiance and top notch facilities at LIC."



FOCUS

Demiral double sends Türkiye into quarters

AFP
Leipzig, Germany

Merih Demiral was Türkiye's unlikely hero with both goals in a 2-1 win over Austria yesterday that booked their place in the Euro 2024 quarter-finals.

The Al Ahli centre-back smashed home after just 58 seconds and produced a towering header on the hour mark to double Türkiye's lead. Michael Gregoritsch quickly pulled a goal back for Austria and only a stunning save from Mert Gunok denied Christoph Baumgartner a dramatic equaliser deep into stoppage-time. Türkiye advance to face the Netherlands in the last eight in Berlin on Saturday.

Austria had emerged as dark horses to go far on the perceived weaker side of the draw after topping a group including France and the Netherlands. Ralf Rangnick's side had also thrashed Türkiye 6-1 in a friendly in March, but this time they failed to recover from a nightmare start.

Real Madrid's Arda Guler was a constant threat to the Austrian



Türkiye's Merih Demiral celebrates scoring their first goal with teammates Ismail Yuksek and Ferdi Kadioglu during their Euro 2024 round of 16 match against Austria in Leipzig, Germany, yesterday. (Reuters)

defence and his teasing delivery from a corner caused chaos inside the first minute. Baumgartner's clearance off the line hit teammate

Stefan Posch, goalkeeper Patrick Pentz clawing it out to Demiral, who lashed into the roof of the net for the second fastest goal

ever at a European Championship. Türkiye's raucous fans exploded in a deafening celebration, but they were nearly brought back down to

earth straight away. Baumgartner fired inches wide from the edge of the box before Demiral somehow prevented the RB Leipzig midfielder from scoring at his home ground as a dangerous Austrian corner flashed across goal. Türkiye coach Vincenzo Montella said that absent captain Hakan Calhanoglu, who was missing due to suspension, was "irreplaceable."

However, Guler assumed responsibility in the playmaking role and nearly produced a stunning second for his side with an audacious attempt from the halfway line that drifted wide.

Only Portugal, Spain and the Netherlands have had a higher winning percentage in European football since Rangnick took charge of Austria two years ago.

The former Manchester United boss made two changes at half-time, including the introduction of Gregoritsch, who scored a hat-trick when the sides met three months ago. Rangnick got the reaction he desired as Austria began cutting through the Turkish defence. Gunok spread himself brilliantly to deny Marko Arnautovic when one-on-one before Bayern Munich's Konrad Laimer lacked

the finish to a fine run through the middle. However, they failed to learn their lesson from Guler corners as another inviting delivery was powered home by Demiral.

In doing so the 26-year-old became the first European defender to score twice in the knockout stages of a major tournament since Lillian Thuram for France at the 1998 World Cup.

It was also a set-piece at the other end that got Austria back in the game seven minutes later.

Posch flicked on Marcel Sabitzer's corner for Gregoritsch to sweep high into the net. A torrential downpour could not drown out a sensational atmosphere in Leipzig, with Türkiye's huge expat population in Germany again making it like a home game for Montella's men.

The fervent atmosphere turned sour as Sabitzer was struck by an object thrown from the crowd as he prepared to take a corner. Baris Alper Yilmaz was denied a third for Türkiye by a fine save from Pentz in stoppage-time. That nearly proved crucial as Gunok then had to produce a remarkable stop to prevent Baumgartner's downward header finding the far corner.

CYCLING

Pogacar flexes his muscles, grabs Tour de France lead

'I'M IN BETTER SHAPE THAN LAST YEAR. WE'RE GOING TO TAKE IT STAGE BY STAGE'

Reuters
Valloire, France

Tadej Pogacar made an early statement in the Tour de France as he dropped defending champion Jonas Vingegaard to claim victory in the first mountain stage and take the overall leader's yellow jersey yesterday.

The Slovenian attacked 800m from the top of the Col du Galibier, when the slope was at its steepest, and only Vingegaard followed but the Dane had to watch his rival fade in the distance 300m further ahead.

Pogacar pushed harder on the pedals, briefly looking back, before hitting the descent to Valloire at breakneck speed and gradually increased his lead over Vingegaard, who was then caught by other top contenders, including three-times Vuelta champion Primoz Roglic and Belgian prodigy Remco Evenepoel.

Capping off an impressive show of strength by his UAE Emirates team, Pogacar finished the 139.6km fourth stage 35 seconds ahead of Evenepoel and Spain's Juan Ayuso.

"I'm in better shape than last year," said Pogacar.

Last year, Vingegaard got the upper hand first, on his way to his second consecutive title, with his rival cracking in the final week.

"We're going to take it stage by stage," Pogacar added.

Overall, he leads Evenepoel by 45 seconds.

Vingegaard, who easily responded to Pogacar's first move in the second stage, was just a notch down yesterday and finished the day gasping with his head down.

The Visma-Lease a Bike rider, however, can still take comfort from the fact that he had not raced in almost three months after suffering a collapsed lung in the Tour of the Basque Country in April.

He will have the opportunity to make his own statement in Friday's 25.3km time trial, a year after he humiliated Pogacar in the solo effort against the clock on the Tour, beating him by 98 seconds over 22.4km.



UAE Team Emirates' Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar (left) and Red Bull - BORA - hansgrohe team's Slovenian rider Primoz Roglic (second left) cycle with the pack of riders (peloton) in the Galibier ascent during the 4th stage of the 111th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, 140km between Pinerolo in Italy, and Valloire in France, yesterday. Inset: Pogacar celebrates on the podium after the fourth stage. (AFP)

This year's race was billed as a duel between the winners of the last four editions and it is already turning out to be the expected two-man battle, although Slovenian Primoz Roglic and Evenepoel are still in the mix.

They were glued on the road

when Pogacar attacked, but limited their losses while former Giro d'Italia champion Richard Carapaz cracked and saw his yellow jersey vanish in the rarefied air of the Col du Galibier, which is 2,642 metres above sea level, losing more than four minutes on the line.

A breakaway group of 17 took shape in the climb to Sestriere (39.9km at 3.7%), the first ascent of the day, but Pogacar's UAE Emirates team and Carapaz's EF Education-Easy Post set the pace at the front of the peloton, keeping the fugitives on a tight leash.

Pogacar's men forced a devilish speed from the Col du Lautaret, the stepping stone of the climb to the Galibier, whose flanks were covered in snow.

Vingegaard yesterday was without a teammate when Matteo Jorgenson cracked 4.5km from the

top while Pogacar still had Adam Yates, Ayuso and Joao Almeida by his side.

Shortly before the summit, Pogacar burst away and Vingegaard followed before gasping for air and letting the 2020 and 2021 champion ride away.

SPOTLIGHT

Save the Dream, Project Partners host final conference of 'Crossing the Boundaries through Sport' project

Save the Dream and its partners in the EU ERASMUS+ Crossing the Boundaries through Sport "CrosSport" project the International Olympic Truce Centre (IOTC), Spanish Fundación Sevilla Fútbol Club, and Italy's Fondazione Lazio 1900 hosted the final conference of the project held at Centro Desportivo Nacional do Jamor in Lisbon, Portugal.

The event represented an opportunity to commemorate the World's Refugee Day by sharing a positive message of integration, inclusion, cohesion, tolerance, and solidarity. Discussions revolved around an insight-sharing debate where project partners, participating organisations, the Community Leader for Sport Inclusion in the hosting communities (CLIS) and of the Sport for Inclusion Activist in the refugee community (SIA), and representatives of the refugee community who presented key activities, results, and challenges of the project.

Participants also shared insights on the future perspectives of the project implemented as a pilot action which tested a new working methodology and adjusted it to each country's specific conditions, with a focus on the benefits for the refugees and the stakeholders supporting them.

CrosSport project is a trans-European partnership that fosters inclusion and integration of youth refugees through sport by establishing collaborative mechanisms and peer to peer platforms with the aim of empowering sport organizations and connecting them with integration-focused social development organisations.

It was designed and implemented to support young refugees in Europe by using sport as a trans-



formative tool to offer opportunities for their integration and social inclusion while tackling the challenges that migration flows pose to the four selected countries: Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain.

The 36-month EU-funded project established a national and European collaborative mechanism and a network of key "like-minded" players in the sport-for-inclusion ecosystem while building the capacities of sport and social development organizations.

During the project's implementation, all partners, stakeholders and refugees have worked together to create national focus groups and collect good practices; design and implement new educational tools aimed at empowering committed stakeholders and refugees through the creation of the figures of CLIS and of SIA.

"A ball can change the world. This is my motto. Sport helped me be where I am today. Today I am in Germany, where I started a training in an IT company, and I feel very good there," said Shakiba Shaeedi, refugee from Afghanistan, playing football at Team Hestia in Greece,

Champion of the Global Goals World Cup Europe 2019.

Bushra Shehadah, refugee from Syria, and archery athlete, said: "After five years from the beginning of the war, I started looking for my inner peace and I found it with sport. I knew archery and since 2016 my life changed. Sport for me was like a bubble where I could live a good life during the war. I participated in national competitions and then I got the chance to apply for a scholarship outside of Syria. With sport, I had that chance that other people wouldn't have. Thanks to the Save the Dream scholarship I participated in the TASEM project and then I went on with my studies and made a life in Portugal."

Massimiliano Montanari, Save the Dream CEO, said: "CrosSport project sent a clear message that sport is a significant tool for inclusion, integration, and socialization among young refugees. This final conference marks the culmination of years of collaborative effort between partners dedicated to using sport as a platform to promote physical and mental health among refugees in host countries."

Anderson takes 7 wickets ahead of England farewell

London: England great James Anderson took seven wickets for Lancashire in a County Championship match against Nottinghamshire yesterday - just eight days before his final Test appearance.

Anderson had figures of 6-19 as he ripped through the Nottinghamshire top order at Southport as the visitors slumped to 74-6 in their first innings on the third day of four in a rain-marred clash. He then added another after the interval, finishing with a superb return of 7-35 in 16 overs as Nottinghamshire were made to follow-on after being dismissed for 126 in reply to Lancashire's first innings 353-9 declared.

This is the first match the 41-year-old has played all season as he prepares for the first Test of a three-match series against the West Indies at Lord's starting on July 10. The match will be the 188th Test of a career that



Lancashire fast bowler James Anderson is seen with the club's overseas player Nathan Lyon during their county match against Nottinghamshire at Southport yesterday. (@lanccricket)

started with Anderson's debut in 2003. Anderson is the first seamer and only third bowler to have taken 700 Test wickets after spinners Shane Warne and Muttiah Muralitharan. But

he has decided to end his Test career following next week's match at Lord's, with England having made it clear they wanted to move on ahead of the 2025/26 Ashes.

FOCUS

Dutch golfer Luiten says he won court battle for spot in Paris Games

Dutch golfer Joost Luiten said yesterday he won a court case that will get him into the Paris Olympics after the Netherlands Olympic Committee and Netherlands Sports Federation (NOCNSF) opted not to send him despite being eligible.

Luiten, who did not say where the court case took place, had qualified for Paris but his national committee decided not to enter him into the golf competition, believing his world ranking, which was 147th at the time, was too low to give him a realistic chance in a 60-player field.

"The Olympic rings are coloured again," Luiten wrote in an

Instagram post announcing the court's decision while adding that the NOCNSF had to enter him into the men's golf competition.

Darius Van Driel and Dewi Weber of the Netherlands had also qualified for the Olympic men's and women's golf competitions, respectively, but were denied a chance to play.

It was not clear if the court ruling shared by Luiten also impacted Van Driel and Weber.

The International Golf Federation uses the Official World Golf Ranking to create the Olympic Golf Rankings as a method of determining eligibility.

The top 15 world-ranked play-

ers are eligible for the Olympics, with a limit of four players from a given country.

Beyond the top 15, players are eligible based on the world rankings, with a maximum of two players from each country that does not already have two or more players among the top 15.

Luiten is 40th in the Olympic rankings. At the time of the NOCNSF's decision, Van Driel was ranked 237th in the world ranking and 40th in the Olympic ranking. Weber was 302nd in the women's world ranking and 58th in the Olympic ranking while Dutchwoman Anne Van Dam, No 108 and No 34, was permitted to compete.

TENNIS

British star Murray pulls out of singles in Wimbledon farewell, set to play doubles

Reuters
London

Twice Wimbledon champion Andy Murray pulled out of the singles competition but will play doubles alongside his brother Jamie in his farewell appearance at the Grand Slam, with the 37-year-old saying yesterday he had taken the right decision.

Murray, who underwent surgery on June 22 to remove a spinal cyst which was compressing his nerves and made him lose control and power in his right leg, decided he was not fit enough for the demands of singles competition.

"I wanted to sleep on it, make sure I was happy with the decision and give myself the chance when I woke up to see if it felt much better," Murray said, a few hours after his team announced the decision.

"I ran around a bit at home this morning when I got up - it wasn't where I wanted it to be, unfortunately.

"It's probably a few days too soon but I'm proud I worked extremely hard to give myself a chance to play. It's the right decision."

Murray was due to face Czech

Tomas Machac on Centre Court in singles yesterday, having informed the All England Club that he would take as long as possible to decide.

"Andy - we're sorry to hear you won't be playing singles this year," Wimbledon said yesterday on social media.

"But we are so looking forward to seeing you compete in the doubles and celebrating all the memories you have given us."

Fans arriving at Wimbledon to watch Murray were left disappointed as the news spread around the grounds.

"It's a real shame because I really wanted to see him," said Lewis Jones, who could return to watch Murray play doubles.

"We were going to sit on the hill and enjoy his match today so I'm really disappointed. He means everything (to the people). He's a British star at Wimbledon."

Murray said he expected to be competitive when he and his brother take on Australians Rinky Hijikata and John Peers later this week.

"It's not like we were going to roll over and lose the match. We've got a good chance of winning," Murray added.

"Me and Jamie play great doubles together and if both of us are



Brothers Andy (left) and Jamie Murray of Britain during a practice session at the All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club, London, Britain, yesterday. (Reuters)

fit and well on the court we can definitely win the match."

Murray, who in 2013 ended a 77-year wait for a British men's singles champion at Wimbledon and won the trophy again in 2016, had previously said that he was unlikely to continue his career beyond this year and could bow out at the Olympics in Paris.

The tennis competition at the Olympics begins on July 27.

"It was going to be his last (Wimbledon) so I imagine it would have been a fairly memorable thing from that point of view," said Cheryl McBlane.

"We've got Centre Court tickets. So we would have seen him. That's a bit disappointing."

Sally Bolton, the chief executive of the All England Club, had suggested on Monday that Murray could join Fred Perry, the last British men's singles champion before the Scotsman, in having a statue built at the venue.

"As we reflect on the shape of these grounds and we think about the potential development over

the road, we've got time to think about where any kind of physical celebration of Andy's career might be," Bolton said.

"In any event, we would want to work with Andy on that and he understandably isn't ready to have those conversations yet. We'll make sure we get this right because this is for all time."

Following a victory over Alexei Popyrin at the Queen's Club Championships in his 1,000th tour-level singles match, Murray withdrew due to the injury while trailing 4-1 in the first set of his second-round match against Jordan Thompson.

The issue had flared up following Murray's participation in the French Open and Stuttgart before Queen's, leaving the former world number one in a race to be fit for Wimbledon, where he has captured two of his three Grand Slam titles.

Murray had revived his career after having hip-resurfacing surgery in 2019 but has struggled to make the latter stages of the leading tournaments and had to deal with an ankle injury sustained at the Miami Open in March.

He was replaced in the Wimbledon draw by experienced Belgian David Goffin.

WIMBLEDON

Vondrousova out; Djokovic through

EASY VICTORY FOR TOP SEED SWIATEK, RUBLEV ELIMINATED

AFP
London

Marketa Vondrousova yesterday became the first defending women's Wimbledon champion to lose in the first round for 30 years.

Novak Djokovic barely broke sweat as he launched his bid for a record-equalling eighth men's singles title and women's top seed Iga Swiatek eased through.

But it was a painful day for Czech sixth seed Vondrousova, whose time in the Wimbledon spotlight was cut short as she went down down 6-4, 6-2 to Spain's unheralded Jessica Bouzas Maneiro in 66 minutes.

Vondrousova is only the second defending champion to lose in the first round at the All England Club in the Open Era.

The only other time it has happened was 30 years ago, when Lori McNeil defeated three-time defending champion Steffi Graf.

World number 83 Bouzas Maneiro, playing in only the third Grand Slam main draw of her career, broke her opponent five times in the match under the roof on Centre Court.

Vondrousova, who said she was wary in her first match since she hurt her hip at last month's Berlin grass-court tournament, struggled with her serve and racked up 28 unforced errors.

"Practice was fine and everything," said the Czech. "Today I was a bit scared because of my leg too. But I don't think that was the reason. I felt nervous from the start." She added: "It's tough to go out defending the title."

It was a different story for women's world number one and five-time Grand Slam winner Swiatek, who beat former Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin 6-3, 6-4 with a minimum of fuss.

Elena Rybakina, the 2022 champion, cantered past Romania's Elena-Gabriela Ruse 6-3, 6-1 while fifth seed Jessica Pegula lost just two games against US compatriot Ashlyn Krueger in a 6-2, 6-0 demolition job.

Djokovic had a knee operation after pulling out before his French Open quarter-final - sparking fears he would not be fit in time for Wimbledon. But the Serbian world number two, who was beaten by Carlos Alcaraz in last year's final, dismissed Czech player Vit Kopriva 6-1, 6-2, 6-2 without facing a single break point. He knows time is not on his side as he



Serbia's Novak Djokovic reacts as he plays against Czech Republic's Vit Kopriva during their match on the second day of the 2024 Wimbledon Championships in southwest London yesterday. (AFP)



Spain's Jessica Bouzas Maneiro celebrates winning against Czech Republic's Marketa Vondrousova yesterday. (AFP)

bids to equal Federer's Wimbledon title record and become the first player - man or woman - to win 25 Grand Slam singles titles.

"I tried to really focus on the game and not think about the knee too much," said Djokovic, bidding for a record 25th major.

"Everything that I could do, I have done over the last three weeks along with my team to be able to play here for you today. I

think if it was for any other tournament I probably would not have risked it, would not have rushed as much but I just love Wimbledon, love coming back here."

An angry Andrey Rublev, a quarter-finalist last year, exited in four sets against Argentina's Francisco Comesaña, playing his first Grand Slam match.

The Russian sixth seed repeatedly smashed his racquet against

his knee in the third set in frustration and lost 6-4, 5-7, 6-2, 7-6 (7/5).

Zverev reaches round two

French Open runner-up Alexander Zverev, the fourth seed, made light work of Spain's Roberto Carballes Baena 6-2, 6-4, 6-2.

Zverev, 27, has never gone past the fourth round at Wimbledon - his worst record at a Grand Slam.

"I've struggled over the years on these beautiful courts, unfortunately, but I feel different this year, somehow much more into it and more alive on these courts. Hopefully I can show that in the next few matches," Zverev said on court.

"For some reason, very early in my career I decided that I hate grass courts, then for some reason this year, I decided that I love them. That is the biggest change. I also feel this is the most open Wimbledon in 20-plus years. We had great champions like (Roger) Federer, (Rafael) Nadal, (Novak) Djokovic, (Andy) Murray and it was always between them. It is much more open this year, if somebody has two great weeks then they can do great things.

"I hope, for once, it is going to be me."

SINNER AND BERRETTINI SET FOR ALL-ITALIAN WIMBLEDON SHOWDOWN



Jannik Sinner



Matteo Berrettini

London: Jannik Sinner may be the new spearhead of Italian tennis after taking the baton from Matteo Berrettini but the world number one will brace himself for a tough challenge in their Wimbledon second-round showdown today.

While Australian Open champion Sinner has enjoyed a steady rise in recent months, 2021 Wimbledon runner-up Berrettini has struggled with a string of injury problems and finds himself 59th in the world rankings.

Sinner won the pair's only previous clash in Toronto last year and is unbeaten in 13 tour-level main draw matches against fellow Italians, but the 22-year-old is fully aware of the threat his compatriot will pose on grass with a booming serve.

"It's a tough one," said Sinner, who needed four sets to beat Germany's Yannick Hanfmann and book the clash with Berrettini. "He played the final here and he knows very well how to play on this surface, so it's a big challenge for me. But I'm looking forward to it. Let's see what's coming."

Berrettini, who was beaten by seven-times champion Novak Djokovic in the final three years ago, said he was surprised by how much Sinner had improved having watched him up close late last season. "At the end of last year I was injured and I

wasn't on tour to see him live with my eyes. And then I had the chance to go to the Davis Cup and it was unbelievable," Berrettini said.

"We were looking at each other saying, 'Is this guy real?' Because he wasn't missing. Hitting every ball with full power. The confidence he built throughout the year was unbelievable. "He just kept improving all the things that he is working on with his coaches. I think his secret is that he's really hungry for improvement. And the humbleness he has about it."

"Personally, it gives me so much energy to just try to be there and to play against him and to be at his level."

Also in action today will be French Open champion and third seed Carlos Alcaraz, who will resume his bid for a second Grand Slam title this year when he meets Aleksandar Vukic. Fifth seed Daniil Medvedev will open proceedings on Centre Court against Frenchman Alexandre Muller.

In the women's draw, second seed and US Open champion Coco Gauff will square off with Romanian Anca Todoni while four-times Grand Slam winner Naomi Osaka faces 19th seed Emma Navarro. Local favourite and former Flushing Meadows champion Emma Raducanu will take on Belgian Elise Mertens on Court One.

FOCUS

F1 engine expert Cowell joins Aston Martin

Former Mercedes Formula One engine boss Andy Cowell is joining Aston Martin as group chief executive in place of Martin Whitmarsh, the Silverstone-based team said yesterday.

Cowell will start on Oct. 1, reporting to the team's co-owner and executive chairman Lawrence Stroll, with Whitmarsh handing over responsibility before the end of the year. The Briton was managing director of Mercedes AMG GPP (High Performance Powertrains) during a period of dominance for Mercedes who won a record eight

successive constructors' championships.

A key man also in the success of seven-times world champion Lewis Hamilton, he stepped down in July 2020 and moved to a consulting role. Aston Martin are switching from Mercedes engines to Honda, currently the suppliers of world champions Red Bull, from 2026 when the sport enters a new era with changed engine and aerodynamic regulations.

Whitmarsh hailed Cowell as "an incredible asset" and said he would be stepping away to focus on other projects.

EURO 2024

Ronaldo on redemption trail after Slovenia penalty ride

'I will always do my best for this shirt, whether I fail or not, and I'm going to do this my whole life'

AFP
Frankfurt, Germany

Cristiano Ronaldo has so often been Portugal's saviour that potentially becoming the villain brought him to tears.

The 39-year-old superstar was shown crying after missing an 105th minute penalty in the Selecao's Euro 2024 last-16 victory over Slovenia on Monday.

Despite multiple attempts at goal and then Jan Oblak saving his spot kick, Ronaldo could not pierce Slovenia's sturdy defensive wall and eventually the match finished goalless across 120 minutes, leading to penalties.

Taking Portugal's first spot kick, this time the former Real Madrid hitman did find the net and his team triumphed 3-0 on penalties after Diogo Costa saved all three Slovenia efforts. Ronaldo is now on a redemption trail and his side face France next in a rematch of the 2016 final which Portugal won in Paris to clinch their first ever European Championship.

Eight years ago Ronaldo was not the hero either, going off early with an injury and seeing the lesser-known Eder striking in extra-time to defeat Les Bleus.

Without a goal to his name at the Euros, the all-time men's leading international goalscorer with 130 strikes has at times appeared desperate. "I will always do my best for this shirt, whether I fail or not, and I'm going to do this my whole life," Ronaldo told Portuguese television channel RTP.

"I've been doing this for 20 years - as you saw I missed the penalty, but I wanted to be the first to score.

"We have to take responsibility... you can't be afraid, I've never been afraid to face things head on, sometimes I get it right and sometimes I don't, but giving up is something you'll never hear attached to my name."

Ronaldo made his Euros debut in 2004 in his homeland but Portugal came up fractionally short, losing in the final against unfancied Greece.



Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo reacts after winning the UEFA Euro 2024 round of 16 match against Slovenia in Frankfurt. (AFP)

The forward, who went on to star for Manchester United, Madrid and Juventus, now plays for Al Nassr in Saudi Arabia.

If he scores in the Euros he will become the oldest ever goalscorer in the competition's history - so long as his 41-year-old teammate Pepe doesn't find the net.

'THE LAST EUROS'

Ronaldo is appearing in a record-extending sixth Euros and has scored 14 times in the competition, far ahead of French great Michel Platini's runner-up tally of nine. "It's undoubtedly the last Euros (for me) of course," said Ronaldo. "The most important thing about this career I have made is the enthusiasm that I have still to be here."

Portugal coach Roberto Martinez agreed and said Ronaldo's tears were a sign of how much this all means to him.

"When you see a player, the only player to play in six Euros, with the desire and that belief (of a) young man, those emotions are incred-

ible for someone who has won everything and experienced everything," said the Spanish coach.

"He doesn't need to care that much and that is why I thank him... I was certain he had to be the first taker (in the shoot-out) and show us our way to the victory. "Everyone is very proud of our captain. He gives us all a lesson, to have real high standards and never give up."

Ronaldo had multiple free-kicks either off target or saved by his former nemesis, Atletico Madrid's Jan Oblak.

The striker has scored at every major tournament he has played at but is without a goal in eight Euros and World Cup games, having taken 20 shots without success in Germany this summer.

Ronaldo is aiming to put that right against France.

"We will now have a difficult game against France, who are the favourites to win the competition along with Germany and Spain, but let's go to war," he said. "We will fight until the end."

The 'game of my life', says Portugal penalty hero Costa

Frankfurt: Portugal goalkeeper Diogo Costa said he had the best game of his life against Slovenia yesterday as he saved three penalties to send his team into the Euro 2024 quarter-finals. After a goalless draw over 120 minutes of the last 16 clash in Frankfurt, Porto goalkeeper Costa produced three saves to thwart Slovenia's three takers as his team claimed a 3-0 shoot-out win.

Cristiano Ronaldo, who missed a penalty in extra-time, converted in the shoot-out along with Bruno Fernandes and Bernardo Silva for Portugal, who face France on Friday in the last eight.

The 24-year-old also made a vital one-on-one save with his foot in the second period of extra-time when Slovenia's Benjamin Sesko bore down on his goal following a defensive error. "I think this is probably the best game of my life, maybe the game I was most useful in," Costa told reporters. "I just went with my gut, of course

we analysed the shooters, but players change their minds, and they change the way they shoot. I had to go with my gut, that's what I felt. I am very, very happy, and I am very excited to help the team." Costa said he tried to anticipate what Sesko was going to do for his crucial save near the end of extra-time. "I thought 'I need to stop this, I'll give it my best effort,' he explained. "I tried to read his body language and thankfully I managed to help the team, which was the key thing."

Costa was pleased Ronaldo dusted himself down and scored after his 105th-minute penalty miss that left the superstar striker in tears. "We all felt we needed to keep believing - myself and Cristiano, everybody makes mistakes, but the most important thing is what we do after these mistakes," added Costa. "We need to believe in ourselves and that's what we did. And now we're all very happy and all friends."

Selecao coach Roberto Martinez said Ronaldo's emotions showed how much he still cared in his sixth European Championship, despite a long and illustrious career. "Those emotions are incredible for someone who has done so much, that's why I thank him... only the penalty takers can miss penalties," said Martinez. "I was certain he had to be the first taker (in the shoot-out) and show us our way to the victory. "Everyone is very proud of our captain. He gives us all a lesson, to have real high standards and never give up."

Martinez also hailed Costa, saying the shot-stopper is a "very well kept secret in Portuguese football". "I've worked with a lot of goalkeepers and he's up there with the best," said Martinez. "The key is his maturity, his experience, and we now get to benefit from his performances."

(AFP)



Portugal's players greet goalkeeper Diogo Costa (centre) after winning the match against Slovenia. (AFP)

FOCUS

USA crash out of Copa in group phase

AFP
Kansas City

The United States crashed out of the Copa America on Monday after a 1-0 defeat to Uruguay, as Panama sealed their place in the quarter-finals with a 3-1 win over Bolivia.

The tournament hosts suffered an upset 2-1 defeat to Panama last week and went into Monday's final Group C game at Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City needing to match or better Panama's result against Bolivia to advance.

But US coach Gregg Berhalter's side never looked like doing enough to seriously threaten a well-drilled Uruguay who advanced to the last eight as group winners.

"Just looking at the faces of the staff and the players, we're bitterly disappointed with the results," Berhalter said.

"We know that we're capable of more and in this tournament we didn't show it. It's really as simple as that. We should have done better. We'll do a review and figure out what went wrong, why it went wrong, but it's an empty feeling right now for sure."

USA captain Christian Pulisic blamed a lack of attacking quality.

"We had a good start and brought a lot of energy, but just didn't have enough quality," he said. "We just couldn't find a solution."

Hopes of a great escape for Berhalter's men faded inside the first 30 minutes as news filtered through that Panama had taken a 1-0 lead against Bolivia in Orlando. US hopes were revived early in the second half after Bolivia equalised, leaving the hosts on course for qualification, provided they continued to hold Uruguay.

Yet the US optimism was punctured just moments later when Uruguay took the lead in contro-



Mathias Olivera of Uruguay celebrates after scoring a goal during the CONMEBOL Copa America 2024 Group C match against Uruguay at GEHA Field at Arrowhead Stadium in Kansas City, Missouri. (AFP)

versial circumstances through Mathias Olivera on 66 minutes.

Ronald Araujo's powerful header from Nicolas de la Cruz's free-kick was parried away by US goalkeeper Matt Turner, but only into the path of Olivera, who tucked away the rebound.

Replays appeared to show that Olivera was offside when Araujo first made contact with the ball, but despite a lengthy VAR review, Peruvian referee Kevin Ortega ruled that the goal should stand.

"It's pretty crazy," Berhalter said. "I don't understand it, I feel like I know the offside rule pretty well. It's disappointing. It really is. But you know that that happens in football, and we have to live with it."

The mathematics of qualification looked even more bleak for

the US after news that Panama had scored again through Eduardo Guerrero to regain the lead at 2-1, and the final nail in the coffin came when Cesar Yanis added a third for Panama in stoppage time.

The USA's first-round exit raises fresh questions about the future of Berhalter, who remains deeply unpopular amongst swathes of American fans.

Berhalter was only reappointed to the US job in June last year following a hiatus after leading the team to the 2022 World Cup.

The nature of Monday's early exit is certain to reignite debate about whether he is the best man to lead the United States into the 2026 World Cup on home soil.

Failure to defeat Uruguay, 14th in the latest FIFA rankings, extends

Berhalter's poor record against top 20 teams. Berhalter has just five wins in 20 matches against top-20 teams during his reign, and four of those victories came against regional rivals Mexico - who were also eliminated from the Copa in the first round. That dismal sequence continued after a toothless attacking performance against Uruguay, where the US registered only three shots on goal in a misfiring offensive display.

Defender Antonee Robinson described the officiating as "amateur hour" but stressed responsibility for the defeat lay with the players. "Just not enough quality in the final third," Robinson said.

"At the end of the day we weren't good enough to get the result today. This is on us."

SPOTLIGHT

Kroos control can help Germany 'hurt' Spain

AFP
Herzogenaurach, Germany

Germany winger Leroy Sane said his side could "hurt" Spain in Friday's Euro 2024 quarter-final, thanks to the impressive return of midfielder **Toni Kroos**.

Sane started from the bench in all three of Germany's pool games but returned to the starting line-up at the expense of Florian Wirtz in Saturday's last 16 win over Denmark.

With pre-tournament favourites England and France struggling despite reaching the quarter-finals, Spain have emerged alongside hosts Germany as favourites for the tournament.

The only side to win all four of their games, Spain are the form team of the tournament, having scored nine goals and conceded just one. Sane said Germany and Spain had "played the best football" of the tournament. "We need to keep control of our game, then we can hurt the Spaniards."

Both Spain and Germany each have three Euros titles - more than any other team.

Germany lost 6-0 to Spain in the Nations League in 2020, during a desperately poor period. After winning the 2014 World Cup and reaching the semi-finals of Euro 2016, Germany were eliminated at the group stage of the past two World Cups and lost to England in the last 16 of the Euros in 2021.

"The heavy defeat hurt a lot, but that's in the past," Sane, who started that match in Seville, told reporters.

The 28-year-old Bayern Munich winger said 2014 World Cup winner Kroos, who returned to the national team in the lead up

to Euro 2024 having retired from international football three years prior, had given Germany control again.

"Before we weren't always stable enough, that was a big weakness of ours.

"He took away that weakness with the calmness he brings with him. Now things are going well and we're happy he's come back and made us stronger."

Handed his first Germany start of 2024, Sane struggled for rhythm against Denmark but provided speed running behind the lines. The former Manchester City winger said "it is still not clear whether I will start or not," but the team's trust in coach Julian Nagelsmann's decisions "is what makes us special".

Midfielder Emre Can was the only member of Germany's 26-man squad not to train on Tuesday, but the federation said his omission was just a precaution.

Antonio Rudiger, Manuel Neuer and Pascal Gross completed the training session despite carrying niggling injuries.

