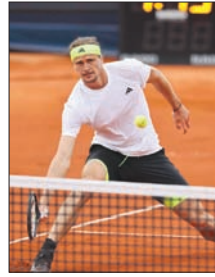


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McIlroy completes career Grand Slam with emotional Masters playoff win

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CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Enrique says PSG wary of favourites tag at Aston Villa

French champions travel to Birmingham with a 3-1 lead

Reuters
London

Paris St Germain cannot afford any complacency as they prepare to visit Aston Villa in the second leg of their Champions League quarter-final today, manager Luis Enrique insisted despite his side's two-goal cushion in the tie.

Desire Doue, Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and Nuno Mendes scored in the first leg to earn PSG a 3-1 comeback win and dent Villa's hopes of making it to the semi-finals. Asked if PSG's lead had made them favourites to progress to the competition's final four, Luis Enrique told reporters: "The road to the Champions League is paved with favourites who have been eliminated along the way."

"Of course, we were better in the first leg and deserved the win, but that story is behind us. Now a second story begins. We'll see who's better, who's going to win. We have that advantage but it doesn't fit in with our philosophy of thinking with certainty. We still have this idea of not calculating. If Aston Villa score or win, we have to show in this match that we have the level required to reach the semi-finals."

PSG, who have already won a fourth straight Ligue 1 title and have also reached the French Cup final, are aiming to capture an elusive Champions League title and secure a treble. Luis Enrique said he was delighted with his side's ability to block out the noise despite their success this season, adding: "As time goes by, the scenarios around us change."

"We've gone from the maximum pessimism we saw at the start of the season to the excessive motivation and joy we're seeing at the moment. The key in these cases is the maturity we're seeing despite the youth of my team. The ability to forget everything that's going on and stay focused on the game. Because nothing's done, it's not over yet. It's going to be difficult and we expect to suffer. If we're prepared to suffer, that means we're ready to achieve our objective, which is victory."

Enrique added that he expected the home supporters to create a daunting atmosphere at Villa Park, but called on his side to embrace the challenge. "We want to try to solve the problems that Aston Villa are going to present us with," he added. "Our objective is to win. For us, it's always about being competitive in a stadium like Villa Park. We like to play at home and away. It's not a problem but a motivation."



Paris Saint-Germain players take part in a team training session at Villa Park in Birmingham, central England, on the eve of their UEFA Champions League match against Aston Villa. (AFP)

VILLA BANKING ON HOME ADVANTAGE AGAINST PSG, SAYS EMERY

Aston Villa manager Unai Emery said his side must make home advantage count and draw energy from their supporters against PSG. "PSG have a lot of experience playing in away matches. They are playing in France and Europe and we have experience as well," Emery said. "But we will be connecting with our supporters and transmitting the energy... if we do, tactically and individually, good things on the field, the supporters are going to up our energy and help us a lot. They are going to transmit that energy always for our players."

Emery said Villa would stick to their gameplan, adding: "Our expectation is to get a good result of the second leg. Of course the fact that they won 3-1 is changing something. But a lot? No. Why? Because we have to win. We had to win with 2-1 and with 3-1 now. But now, we have to win with one more goal... We

played how we wanted to in Paris but the result obviously wasn't what we hoped for. If we are winning, we can be close. Our objective is to play with one strong plan in our tactical way tomorrow and try to be consistent and try to understand how the match is going in 90 minutes."

The Spaniard said striker Ollie Watkins, who has started one of Villa's last five matches due to a knee issue, was in fine form despite his lack of minutes, pointing to his goal off the bench in a 3-0 Premier League win at Southampton on Saturday.

"He showed us he is feeling fantastic. He is scoring goals. He played 30 minutes performing really well (against Southampton)," Emery added. "This is the variety we have with our players. We have to try to use their quality to help the team - be it 30 minutes, 10 minutes or five minutes. That is the mentality we need tomorrow."

SPOTLIGHT

Flick expects Barca's 'best' against Dortmund despite first-leg lead

AFP
Dortmund, Germany

Barcelona coach Hansi Flick said he expects his side's "best performance possible" in the Champions League quarter-final against Dortmund today despite holding a 4-0 first-leg lead.

Speaking during a pre-match press conference, Flick stressed the dominant showing in Barcelona by his team would not alter their approach for the return tie. "The idea we have of football is to give our best performance possible," said Flick. "We've got high quality in our team and our expectation is to show that game after game."

Flick returns to Germany where he won a remarkable six titles including the Champions League after taking over mid-season at Bayern Munich in 2019-20 - in what was his first season as a head coach at a top-flight club. The man he took over from, Niko Kovac, will be in the opposing dugout today.

The 60-year-old has Barcelona on track for a remarkable treble in his first season in charge. Barcelona are four points clear of Real Madrid in La Liga and are into the Copa del Rey final, where they also face Los Blancos.

Regardless of his success with Bayern or his potential achievements this season, Flick told reporters he was focussed only on the present. "I don't live in the past or in the future. That's all up in the air. We're focussed on Dortmund and everything

that comes would be welcome. We want the players to enjoy tomorrow, measuring themselves against some of the best in Europe.

"We don't take anything lightly. We're in the quarter-finals and have the chance to make it to the semis. And then there's a chance at the end that we can achieve even more."

Barcelona goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny, one of the elder statesmen in the team, echoed his coach's statements. "It's a big moment for everyone and a big moment for me," said the former Arsenal and Juventus shotstopper. "We need to manage a game where everyone thinks it's finished, but it's not. If you let them back into the game, they'll take their chances."

Szczesny came out of retirement to play for Barcelona in October after first-choice 'keeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen got injured. He revealed he was on the golf course when Barcelona sporting director Deco called him, saying: "I was playing golf with my son, which makes everything even more bizarre. At that time, I was more of a golfer than a footballer."

The 34-year-old will play at Dortmund's Westfalenstadion, where the Poland goalie thought his career ended when he hung up his gloves after a 1-1 draw with France at Euro 2024. "I was on the beach a few months ago but now I get to play with what I believe is the best team in Europe," he added. "Winning is a nice feeling. I missed that, so winning is the thing I enjoy the most."



Barcelona's forward Lamine Yamal (left) and head coach Hansi-Dieter Flick attend a training session in Dortmund, western Germany. (AFP)

Qatar's Cherif and Ahmed cruise into Asian Beach Volleyball Tour quarters



Qatar's beach volleyball duo Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan have advanced to the quarter-finals of the Asian Beach Volleyball Tour in Samila, Thailand, after an emphatic 2-0 (21-13, 21-9) victory over Iran. The win ensured the Qatari pair topped Group B with six points, having earlier defeated teams from Hong Kong and Kazakhstan. Their dominant group-stage performance underscores their strong form heading into the knockout rounds. The draw for the final stages of the tournament is set to take place today. The top two teams from each of the eight groups have earned a spot in the quarter-finals.

FOCUS

Qatar players fall in first round of Padel GP

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatari padel teams bowed out in the first round of the Qatar Padel Grand Prix 2025, which kicked off yesterday at the Khalifa International Tennis and Squash Complex.

Mohammed Saadoun al-Kuwari and Hassan Adel were defeated by the Spanish-Argentine pair of Miro Castillo and Ignacio Alborno in straight sets, 6-1, 6-2. Rayan Abdullah and Abdullah al-Hajji lost 6-0, 6-0 to the Spanish duo of Anton Sans and Marc Quins. In a more closely contested match, Meshari Nawaf and Rashed Nawaf claimed the first set in a tiebreak but could not maintain momentum, eventually falling 6-7, 6-0, 6-3 to Spain's Mario Hernandez and Mexico's Dennis Thomas. Despite the early exits, the home teams gained exposure on padel's biggest stage, facing off against seasoned international competitors.

The tournament, organised by the Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel, and Badminton Federation, opened with the men's and women's Round of 64. A total of 48 men's and 40 women's teams are competing across six specially prepared courts. The Round of 32 gets under-



The tournament, organised by the Qatar Tennis, Squash, Padel, and Badminton Federation, opened with the men's and women's Round of 64 matches.

way today, with the world's top 10 ranked men and women entering the tournament after receiving byes into the second round.

In the women's draw, Egypt's Laila El Nemr and Mora Hakim fell to Spain's Maria Rodriguez and Requel Barrera, 6-2, 6-1. Spain's Morito Perez and Herlano Navarro defeated

the Omani-Spanish duo of Fatima al-Nabhani and Portillo Perez, 6-0, 6-1.

The Ooredoo Qatar Padel Grand Prix is the largest event on the Premier Padel World Tour. The tour features 25 tournaments across 18 countries and five continents, reflecting the sport's continued global rise.

SPOTLIGHT

High-octane action marks finale of QSDRC

The fifth and final round of the Qatar Sand Drag Racing Championship (QSDRC) wrapped up at the Qatar Racing Club (QRC) track in the Sealine area, showcasing intense battles and thrilling challenges featuring some of the most powerful sand vehicles.

Over the course of two action-packed days, the event drew top athletes from Qatar and the Gulf region.

Held under the patronage of QRC Chairman HE Sheikh Khalid bin Hamad al-Thani, the finale delivered impressive results, reflecting the high level of competition across all 16 categories of the championship.

In the motorcycle and Polaris vehicle competitions, Abdulrahman al-Nasr claimed his first victory in the Motocross category (two-wheeled bikes), marking his fifth podium finish this season. He outperformed Ahmed al-Bakr.

In the ATV (four-wheeled quad bikes) competitions, which were divided into three categories, Mohammed al-Mazmi secured his second consecutive win in the Modified category.

The title in the Professional Modified category went for the fourth consecutive round to racer Mohammed al-Mazmi while Da-



QRC Director General Sheikh Jabor bin Khalid al-Thani crowned the top three winners in each category. **Right:** Action from one of the races.



wood al-Sharshani achieved his first win in the Open category. As for the UTV vehicles, racer Hassan Ali Abdulkarim recorded his second consecutive and third overall win in the championship.

In the Professional Modified category, Muhanna al-Naimi climbed to the top of the podium, leaving the second and third spots to racers Hassan Ali Abdulkarim and Mohammed Safar, respectively.

The strongest UTV category – the Unlimited category – wit-

nessed Yaqoub Mubarak al-Alawi claiming his fourth title, and finally, in the Polaris category for Kids, Hommod al-Sulaiti claimed first place.

As usual, the intensity of the competition ramped up on the second day with the arrival of the most powerful engines with the action kicking off with the buggy categories.

The title in the first category (Spring Suspension) went to the winner of the opening round, Mo-

ammed al-Sulaiti, while the winner of the previous three rounds, Abdullah al-Sulaiti, finished second.

Muhanna al-Naimi returned to claim his second title of the championship by winning the second category (Airbag Suspension), outperforming Mohammed al-Mohannadi.

In the cars powered by 6-cylinder engines, the Nitrous category title was won by Faisal al-Balushi, ahead of Muhanna al-Naimi in

second. As for the Turbocharged 6-cylinder category, it was split into two divisions: one for cars with their original chassis and one for modified chassis.

In the original chassis division, Khalid al-Habsi took the win ahead of Hassan al-Zaabi while Abdullah al-Dhahmani came out on top in the modified chassis division.

For the 8-cylinder engine cars, there were also two categories: Nitrous and Turbo.

Issa Musharbek claimed his sec-

ond consecutive title in the Nitrous category with Ibrahim al-Shunaifi topping the Turbo category.

The final and most thrilling category was the Open class, which witnessed fierce battles.

In the end, Mishaal al-Khalidi emerged victorious, followed by Abdulaziz al-Yahya in second and Musaed al-Hatlani in third.

QRC Director General Sheikh Jabor bin Khalid al-Thani crowned the top three winners in each category.

CRICKET

Cool Dhoni snaps CSK's five-match IPL losing streak

CSK remain bottom of the 10-team table with 2 wins in 7 matches

AFP
Lucknow, India

Former India captain M S Dhoni rolled back the years with an unbeaten 26 as Chennai Super Kings bounced back from five losses to down Lucknow Super Giants by five wickets in the IPL yesterday.

Chasing a tricky 167, Chennai rode on an unbeaten stand of 57 between Shivam Dube, who hit 43, and Dhoni to achieve their target with three balls to spare at Lucknow's Ekana Stadium.

The 43-year-old Dhoni, who took over as captain from the injured Rituraj Gaikwad in their previous defeat, strode in at number seven and smashed four fours and a six in his 11-ball knock to silence suggestions that he had lost his touch as a master finisher.

The left-handed Dube, who came in as an impact substitute for the five-time champions, got the winning boundary in his 37-ball knock.

The result snapped Chennai's streak of losses but they still remain bottom of the 10-team table with two wins in seven matches.

They started strongly with openers Shaik Rasheed and New Zealand's Rachin Ravindra, who hit 37, putting together a 52-run partnership inside five overs.

Pace bowler Avesh Khan struck first to cut short Rasheed's knock on 27 and Lucknow's ploy to bring in part-time spinner Aiden Markram worked when the South African dismissed the left-handed Ravindra.



Chennai Super Kings' captain M S Dhoni plays a shot during the IPL match against Lucknow Super Giants at the Ekana Cricket Stadium in Lucknow yesterday. (AFP)

Impact substitute Ravi Bishnoi struck with two key blows as he caught and bowled Rahul Tripathi for nine and then had Ravindra Jadeja taken at long-on for seven to dent Chennai's chase.

But Dube took charge and took Chennai over the line alongside Dhoni who walked in to loud cheers from the Lucknow crowd largely supporting Chennai.

Lucknow suffered their third loss in seven matches but can take consolation from skipper Rishabh Pant's back-to-form 63 in their 166-7 after being in-

ited to bat first. Wicketkeeper-batsman Pant, who had scores of 0, 15, 2, 2, 21 in his previous five innings, started cautiously with Lucknow on 23-2.

The swashbuckling left-hander played six dot balls to Afghanistan left-arm wrist spinner Noor Ahmad in the middle of his knock but finished with four fours and four sixes in his 49-ball stay.

Pant's innings involved key stands, adding 50 with Mitchell Marsh, who hit 30 on his return after he missed the previous

match, and 53 with Abdul Samad, who made 20.

Pant finally fell to Sri Lanka pace bowler Matheesha Pathirana, who took two wickets in the 20th over.

Jadeja stood out with figures of 2-24 in his three overs of left-arm spin.

BRIEF SCORES
Chennai Super Kings 168 for 5 (Dube 43*, Dhoni 26*, Rasheed 27, Bishnoi 2-18) **beat Lucknow Super Giants 166 for 7** (Pant 63, Jadeja 2-24) by five wickets

Islamabad United beat Peshawar Zalmi by 102 runs



Peshawar Zalmi's Pakistani wicketkeeper Mohammad Haris (right) dives to field the ball as Islamabad United's Pakistani batsman Sahibzada Farhan (left) looks on during the PSL match at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi yesterday. Batting first, Islamabad United scored 243/5 after opener Farhan scored 106 off 52 deliveries. In reply, Peshawar Zalmi were bowled out for 141 in 18.2 overs. Islamabad won by 102 runs. (AFP)

FOCUS

Van der Poel demands action after hit in face

AFP
Roubaix, France

Mathieu van der Poel was struck in the face by a water bottle thrown from the roadside during his third consecutive win at Paris-Roubaix on Sunday, prompting the Dutch cyclist to call for action.

The 30-year-old is a huge star on the road cycling scene but is not universally popular and has had his share of run-ins with fans over the years.

"It was like getting hit by a stone. The bottle was nearly full and weighed half a kilo and when someone throws it like that it's not nothing," he said in his post-race press conference at the Roubaix velodrome. The incident happened 37km from the end of the race on a cobbled mining road packed with fans, who had been out in the fields for hours.

"Something should be done about it. People spitting and throwing things, it's too much and I'm going to ask for action to be taken," he said.

"I hope we can identify who did it and take action."

Van der Poel was spat upon at the recent E3 Saxo Classic in Belgium, where he was roundly booed by an unruly section of the Belgian fans.

He has frequently had urine thrown at him on the cyclocross circuit and also had a confrontation with a fan in a spitting incident in 2024.

Van der Poel was himself arrested after a run-in with teenagers who he accused of playing 'knock-a-door-run' on his hotel door on the eve of the 2022 world championship race, for which he was the favourite.

CCTV images showed Van der Poel dressed only in underwear chasing the teenagers back to their room.

BOTTOMLINE

The Return of Al Farrisa – Celebrating Women in Equestrian Sport

Al Farrisa is back! This exclusive ladies-only showjumping competition returns with renewed energy, offering a unique platform for Al Shaqab Academy female riders to compete and develop their skills through participation in equestrian sport.

Taking place on the April 18th from 4pm-9pm at the Equine Education Department Arena, Al Farrisa carries a name that reflects the strength and determination of the female rider. The event brings together a community of outstanding equestrian ladies and a crowd of enthusi-

astic female spectators eager to witness a day of showjumping competition.

From precision to power, the competitors will showcase their exceptional skills in a purpose-designed arena built to challenge and inspire. Open exclusively to women, Al Farrisa is a space for female riders to shine, share their passion, and lift each other up in the spirit of friendly competition. Whether you're an experienced female equestrian or a supporter of women in sport, the Equine Education Department at Al Shaqab invites you to experience something truly special.



QSL, We Make Events sign deal

QATAR CUP 2025

The Qatar Stars League (QSL) and We Make Events have signed a sponsorship agreement, under which the latter will be the commercial partner for Qatar Cup 2025. Hassan Rabiah al-Kuwari, Executive Director of Sales, Marketing and Communication at QSL, and Hamza Taleb al-Sairi, Founder and CEO of We Make Events, signed the agreement.

Qatar celebrate thrilling title win, eye bigger and better events in the future

Doha: After witnessing resounding success in hosting the 4th International Camel Handball Championship at the Libsear Heritage Field in Al Shahaniya, Qatar are planning to stage 'bigger and better' camel handball events in the future.

This was said by Dr Hazam bin Nasser al-Maqarih, Secretary-General of the Arab Union for Camel Races (AUCR) and Director General of the championship, following Qatar's spectacular title win on Sunday.

In the final, Qatar beat Iraq 15-12 to seal their second title win in four editions of the hugely popular tournament.

A total of 17 nations from five continents featured in the three-day tournament that was broadcast live on national sports TV channels.

"After the success of the fourth edition, the next event will have new plans and surprises that everyone is eagerly waiting for," Dr Hazam said when asked to about his views on the popularity of the sport. "We, in the organisation, were keen on the success of the tournament in a transparent and fair manner and we did that. We



AUCR president Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Kuwari and Dr Hazam bin Nasser al-Maqarih, Secretary-General of AUCR, during the prize distribution ceremony at the Libsear Heritage Field in Al Shahaniya.

have many plans for the future," he said. "The details will be announced in due course of time," he added.

"No work gets completed without proper planning. We worked really hard. The widespread publicity that our tournament achieved was due to the collective effort of everyone in the organising committee," Dr Hazam stated during a ceremony at the Al Rayyan Hotel honouring the event's organising

committees.

"The ceremony, attended by committee heads and staff, was held to celebrate the effort that contributed to the tournament's success. The championship, which also saw Morocco finish third and Somalia fourth, highlighted the growing international interest in camel sports," Dr Hazam said. Dr Hazam emphasised Qatar's continued commitment to hosting world-class sporting events.



Dr Hazam bin Nasser al-Maqarih, Secretary-General of the Arab Union for Camel Races (AUCR).

"Since the historic hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup, Qatar continues host world-class sporting events," Dr Hazam said. "We are constantly striving to create works that rival the best of the World Cup, embodying our Qatari and Arab heritage," he added. "Without a doubt, every Qatari wishes for victory for their country in any activity, let alone a sport that is popular," Dr Hazam said regarding the team's victory. "We consider this win historic, and we



Action from one of the matches in the 4th International Camel Handball Championship.

thank God for it," Dr Hazam said. Dr Hazam applauded the contributions of AUCR president Abdullah bin Mohammed al-Kuwari, saying he remains 'a key figure in the event's success'. "Our president deserves our respect. He is multi-talented in camel and equestrian sports, and he has a unique leadership style," Dr Hazam said. "Everyone knows he gives great support, guidance, strategies. He also provides plans to boost our sport.

"In the end, I want to thank all supporters, sponsors, and partners for their roles in the success of the tournament," he said. Dr Hazam also praised the organising committee and the media's coverage.

"Every success is built on facts. What the audience witnesses is merely the surface; the real driving force is the dedicated work of our teams and committees," he said. "We thank everyone from the bottom of our heart," he said.

TENNIS / MUNICH OPEN

Zverev shakes off recent funk to ease past Muller

'I'm very happy with the match. I want to play my best tennis again'

AFP
Munich, Germany

World number three Alexander Zverev got his clay court season back on track with a 6-4, 6-1 over Frenchman Alexandre Muller in the first round of the ATP event in Munich yesterday.

The German lost his opener at last week's Monte Carlo Masters to Italian Matteo Berrettini, missing the chance to bump Jan-nik Sinner from the world the No 1 position.

Instead, that defeat and the Carlos Alcaraz's victory in the final on Sunday saw Zverev dropping down a place in the rankings and dented his preparations for next month's French Open.

Yesterday, Zverev broke his opponent in the first game. Muller broke back at 3-3 before Zverev recovered to win the set in 47 minutes.

The number one seed found his rhythm in the second, breaking his opponent three times.

The 27-year-old completed victory in one hour and 20 minutes.

Zverev has played six tournaments since losing the Australian Open final in three sets to Sinner in January, but has not made it



Germany's Alexander Zverev returns the ball to France's Alexandre Muller (not in picture) during their singles match of the Munich Open in Munich, southern Germany, yesterday. (AFP)

past the quarter-finals at any.

"I'm very happy with the match," Zverev told *Sky Germany*. "I want to play my best tennis again - and this was a very good step in the right direction."

Since winning back-to-back titles in Munich in 2017 and 2018, Zverev has not made it past the final eight. He will face either

countryman Daniel Altmaier or Taiwan's Tseng Chun-hsin in the quarter-finals.

Earlier yesterday, world number 15 Ben Shelton made a stuttering start to the tournament, coming from a set down to beat world number 410 Borna Gojo 4-6, 7-6 (8/6), 7-6 (7-3).

Shelton, seeded second in

Munich, fought off three match points, winning both of his sets via tiebreak in two hours and 24 minutes.

Defending champion Jan-Lennard Struff, who beat American Taylor Fritz in the final last season, opens his campaign against Argentinian Francisco Cerundolo today.

COMMENT

Alcaraz slams critics before Barcelona Open



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz (left) with the trophy after winning against Italy's Lorenzo Musetti at the Monte Carlo Masters final on Sunday. (AFP)

AFP
Barcelona

World number two Carlos Alcaraz took aim at his critics yesterday after winning the Monte Carlo Masters at the weekend.

The 21-year-old is gearing up for his French Open title defence next month but has struggled for consistency at times this year, including suffering an early exit at the Miami Open in March.

The four-time Grand Slam winner continues his clay court preparation this week at the Barcelona Open, where he is aiming for a third triumph.

"It is true that perhaps there have been results that have not been enough for some people, even for myself," Alcaraz told reporters in the Catalan capital.

"I've reached a point where no defeat is just nothing but (instead) it is a learning process, and we have to move forward.

"It is easy and free to talk, when someone has an expectation that is not met. It is very easy to talk, that is what I can say."

Alcaraz, who had to come from a set down to beat Lorenzo Musetti in the Monte Carlo final, admits he is not at his best and is looking to improve his form.

"I can say that in Monte Carlo I gained a lot of confidence," Alcaraz told reporters ahead of his round of 32 match against the American Ethan Quinn today.

"I honestly didn't expect to win that title, instead just to pick up rhythm, play matches, add more hours on the clay. I don't think that I am at my best level, I think I've played at a better level this year (at other points)," he continued.

"I have played better matches than those in Monte Carlo. It is one thing to win, another to really feel you played well.

"The truth is I think I'm having a good year. Maybe the last month has been a bit worse but I think having a good year."

Alcaraz's idol Rafael Nadal is the player who has the most Barcelona Open titles with 12.

The Spanish superstar retired from tennis at the Davis Cup last November but Alcaraz said the sport still had a bright future.

"I think tennis is in a very good moment right now, in the sense that there are many young players capable of winning big titles and fighting for great things," he added.

"There's a very wide range of players who can do great things.

"We young players are showing strength that we can fight for great things, and that's great for the world of tennis."

MOTORSPORT

Perfect Piastri puts McLaren in driving seat



AFP
Sakhir, Bahrain

Oscar Piastri wrapped up a dream weekend in Bahrain to leave McLaren with their two drivers atop the drivers standings. The Australian bossed practice and qualifying, and then produced a controlled drive under floodlights in Sakhir to follow up his success in China last month.

Teammate Lando Norris was being characteristically hard on himself after a qualifying session that left him starting in sixth.

A brilliant start in Sunday's nocturnal dust-up in the desert jumped him up to third, and despite a five-second penalty for positioning his car out of place on the grid, he secured a valiant third, with only George Russell's Mercedes denying a famous McLaren 1-2.

The result lengthened McLaren's lead in the constructors' championship. In the drivers' title race, Norris leads his teammate by only three points, with Max Verstappen slipping to third, a further four points away.

Red Bull left Bahrain looking for answers on their problematic car after Verstappen had to settle for sixth. McLaren face a wel-

come but nonetheless potentially complex question of how to deal with two talented teammates battling for the same prize.

McLaren chief principal Andrea Stella's man-management skills could be tested to the full over the next 20 races.

For now, the papaya team owned by Bahrain's sovereign wealth fund, are enjoying the moment, not that Piastri plans to over-indulge in the celebrations.

"I'm sure there's going to be a hell of a party! I'm not going to get involved, because I've got to race again next week (in Saudi Arabia)" said the man from Melbourne.

"I'm very proud of what I've done this weekend and proud to do it here in Bahrain as well. It's obviously a very important race for us, given our ownership.

"It's never been a track that's been kind to us, so it's great to finally get the first win for the team in Bahrain," he said after McLaren finally clicked in the Gulf kingdom at their 21st attempt.

Norris was more measured.

"An up and down race today," he said.

"Some frustrating mistakes but still plenty of positives to take away with a strong points finish for the team in Bahrain." "It was a really good race throughout, everyone pushing hard, right on the limit,

which is always fun to be part of. "Congratulations to Oscar and the whole team for today's result. I'll now keep my head down and work hard as we head to Saudi Arabia next weekend."

Stella praised the backing the team has received from Bahrain - through good times and bad.

"When we were building the team and not achieving the results we are seeing now, they were patient and gave us the resources we needed to set out on our current trajectory," he said.

"Oscar drove pretty much the perfect weekend. He was very solid in each session, every situation, and took the car to a deserved victory.

"Lando, starting P6, was always going to have to work hard this evening, and a five-second penalty made his job even harder - but he put in a very strong performance and ensured we get to celebrate a double podium finish, which is important for both Championships.

"I hope everyone will be enjoying the victory this evening."

Everyone except Piastri, who if he is true to his word will be getting some shut eye in preparation for Jeddah's Corniche circuit on the Red Sea next week.

GOLF

McIlroy completes career Grand Slam with Masters win

McIlroy snapped an 11-year major win drought despite squandering lead three times in final round

AFP
Augusta

Rory McIlroy completed golf's career Grand Slam with a tearful Masters victory on Sunday, sinking a tense four-foot birdie putt on the first hole of a sudden death playoff to defeat Justin Rose.

World number two McIlroy snapped an 11-year major win drought despite squandering the solo lead three times in the final round, weeping as he finally captured the green jacket that so long eluded him. "It feels incredible," McIlroy said. "This is my 17th time here. I was wondering if it would ever be my time. I'm thrilled and so proud to be able to call myself a Masters champion."

McIlroy joined Jack Nicklaus, Tiger Woods, Gary Player, Gene Sarazen and Ben Hogan as the only players to win all four majors. "The last 10 years coming here with the burden of the Grand Slam on my shoulders and trying to achieve that, I'm sort of wondering what we're all going to talk about going into next year's Masters," McIlroy said.

Needing a par on the 72nd hole to win, McIlroy plunked his approach at the par-4 18th into a greenside bunker, blasted out to five feet but then missed a tension-packed par putt, the ball going left of the hole as the crowd groaned. "My battle today was with myself," McIlroy said. "How I responded to setbacks, that's what I'll take from this week." That set up the playoff at the 18th, which Rose had birdied from 20 feet in regulation. Rose dropped his approach 15 feet from the hole but McIlroy then landed his second shot four feet from the pin.

Tension built as Rose missed right of the hole and tapped in for par, leaving McIlroy a second chance to win and make history. This time, McIlroy's stroke was true and the emotions exploded after 10 prior failed attempts to complete a career Slam at Augusta National. "I've dreamed about that moment for as long as I can remember," McIlroy said.

As the crowd roared, McIlroy grabbed his head, sank to his knees and put his head down on the 18th green and began crying. "There was a lot of pent up emotion that came out on that 18th green," McIlroy said. "A moment like that makes all the years and all the close calls worth it."

McIlroy recalled when he led by four strokes in 2011 seeking his first major at age 21 only to collapse on the back nine at shoot 80. "I would say it was 14 years in the making, from going out with a four-shot lead in 2011 and feeling I could have done something there," McIlroy said.

McIlroy hugged caddie Harry Diamond, put his head down and hands on his knees



Northern Ireland's Rory McIlroy lets out his emotions on the 18th green of the 1st play-off hole after winning The Masters and completing a career grand slam, with his caddie Harry Diamond holding the pin and runner-up Justin Rose looking dejected. (Reuters)

and wept again. He stepped off the green and hugged his wife and daughter, again crying as emotions poured out while the crowd chanted his name. In addition to the champion's green jacket, McIlroy received a record \$4.2m winner's prize from a record \$21m purse.

The 35-year-old from Northern Ireland endured a nightmare start, back-nine collapse and the 72nd-hole bogey to secure his fifth major title in epic fashion with an iconic day-long fightback for the ages. "It's the best day of my golfing life," McIlroy said. "I'm very proud of myself for never giving up and always fighting back."

McIlroy, who had not won a major since the 2014 PGA Championship, fired a one-over par 73 in the final round to finish 72 holes on 11-under 277 alongside Rose, who shot a closing 66 with birdies on six of the last eight holes. The Masters hung on a knife's edge with Rose and McIlroy level at 10-under when McIlroy, who plunked a third shot into Rae's Creek and double-bogeyed the par-five 13th then bogeyed 14, birdied the par-five 15th to regain the lead.

Rose replied with a his birdie at 18 but with history on the line, McIlroy blasted his approach at the par-four 17th to two feet and

tapped in for birdie to reclaim the lead - albeit briefly. It was part of the back-and-forth that began when McIlroy opened with a double-bogey to surrender his two-shot lead, then briefly fell behind playing partner Bryson DeChambeau.

McIlroy then benefitted from two-shot swings on the next two holes for a three-shot lead and birdied the ninth to leap four ahead, holding on through the wild back nine to claim his third title of the year after The Players Championship and the Pebble Beach Pro-Am, giving him 29 career US PGA Tour triumphs.

McIlroy factfile

Name: Rory McIlroy
Nationality: Northern Ireland
Date of birth: May 4, 1989
Place of birth: Hollywood, County Down
Height: 5ft 9in (1.75m)
Weight: 161 pounds (73kg)
Current world ranking: 2
Career Major Titles: 5 (2011 US Open, 2012, 2014 PGA Championship, 2014 British Open, 2025 Masters)
Career PGA Tour titles: 28
Career DP World Tour titles: 18



Rory McIlroy poses with daughter Poppy and wife Erica Stoll holding the Masters trophy.

All-time list of major golf winners

Read as: Total: Masters, US Open, British Open, PGA Championship

| | | | | | |
|------------------|----|---|---|---|---|
| Jack Nicklaus | 18 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 5 |
| Tiger Woods* | 15 | 5 | 3 | 3 | 4 |
| Walter Hagen | 11 | 0 | 2 | 4 | 5 |
| Ben Hogan | 9 | 2 | 4 | 1 | 2 |
| Gary Player | 9 | 3 | 1 | 3 | 2 |
| Tom Watson | 8 | 2 | 1 | 5 | 0 |
| Harry Vardon | 7 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 0 |
| Bobby Jones | 7 | 0 | 4 | 3 | 0 |
| Gene Sarazen | 7 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Sam Snead | 7 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 3 |
| Arnold Palmer | 7 | 4 | 1 | 2 | 0 |
| Phil Mickelson* | 6 | 3 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| Nick Faldo | 6 | 3 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Lee Trevino | 6 | 0 | 2 | 2 | 2 |
| James Braid | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| J.H. Taylor | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| Byron Nelson | 5 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| Peter Thomson | 5 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 0 |
| Seve Ballesteros | 5 | 2 | 0 | 3 | 0 |
| Brooks Koepka* | 5 | 0 | 2 | 0 | 3 |
| Rory McIlroy* | 5 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 |

(Asterisk indicates active player)

SPOTLIGHT

Qatar's al-Jumaat wins double bronze at ISF Gymnasiade Chess tournament



Khaled al-Jumaat poses with his two bronze medals.

Qatar's rising chess talent Khaled al-Jumaat won two bronze medals at the International School Games (ISF) U15 Gymnasiade 2025 in Zlatibor, Serbia, delivering a standout performance in both the rapid and blitz formats of the under-12 category. Al-Jumaat secured third place in both events, which featured 32 players from 17 countries, marking a significant achievement for Qatar on the international school chess stage.

In the under-15 category, Hamad al-Kuwari also impressed, finishing eighth in the rapid competition. His performance earned him 116 rating points, reflecting his rapid improvement and potential for future international success.

President of the Qatar Chess Association (QCA), Mohammed

al-Mudahka, expressed his pride in the team's achievements. Speaking to Qatar News Agency (QNA), he said: "Winning two bronze medals in such a competitive tournament is a proud moment for Qatari school sports. Khaled and Hamad represented the country with skill and determination."

He added that the Qatari team made a strong impression at one of the premier international school championships, and that this result is the fruit of the QCA's continuous investment in developing young national talent.

"We have placed great emphasis on international participation in recent years," al-Mudahka noted. "These efforts are paying off, as we see our players consistently improving and competing at a high level globally."

Liverpool set for 'big summer' of transfers, says Van Dijk

Liverpool: Virgil van Dijk says he expects a "big summer" for Liverpool in the transfer market as he reportedly closes in on a deal that will secure his future at Anfield. Arne Slot's men are on the brink of a record-equalling 20th English league title after Sunday's 2-1 victory at home to West Ham, in which Van Dijk scored the winner.

They are 13 points ahead of second-placed Arsenal with just six games to go and could wrap up the title next weekend if results go their way. Van Dijk's own future is likely to be secured later this week, with the announcement of a two-year contract to match Mohamed Salah's new deal.

Forward Federico Chiesa was the only outfield signing in last year's post-season transfer window but he has rarely featured and Liverpool manager Arne Slot will be eager to strengthen. "I think Liverpool should be able to challenge for titles in the upcoming years," said Van Dijk, who captained the team for the 100th time in the league against West Ham.

"Whatever happens in terms of players going out, players coming in, I think it should be a big summer. I think they're planning to make it a big summer, so we all have to trust the board to do the right job. I think we 100 percent can improve. I think we shouldn't forget the quality that the Premier League possesses, especially this season. It's incredible how everyone can beat everyone."

The Dutch international, 33, said Liverpool would also benefit from a pre-season, with no major international competition taking place this year.

Van Dijk is set to become only the second Liverpool captain to lift the Premier League trophy and he is looking to add to that.

NEWCASTLE MANAGER HOWE RECOVERING FROM PNEUMONIA

Newcastle United manager Eddie Howe is recovering in hospital after being diagnosed with pneumonia and will miss this week's matches, the Premier League club said. The

47-year-old sat out Sunday's 4-1 Premier League win at home to Manchester United as he was kept in hospital after feeling unwell for several days.

He missed Newcastle securing their first league double over the Old Trafford side since the 1930-31 season. Howe has become a hero in Newcastle after arriving at the club in 2021 after coaching Bournemouth and Burnley.

He led the club to a League Cup final triumph over Liverpool in March, becoming the first home-grown coach to win one of England's top domestic honours since 2008 and securing the club's first domestic trophy in 70 years.

He was celebrated by 150,000 Newcastle fans in the streets of the city and honoured with a massive banner unfurled outside St James' Park. Jason Tindall and Graeme Jones will take charge of the team for the matches against visitors Crystal Palace tomorrow and away to Aston Villa on Saturday. Newcastle are fourth in the table with 56 points.

FOCUS

Teams arrive for Artistic Gymnastics World Cup

Several teams have arrived in Doha to participate in the four-day 17th Artistic Gymnastics World Cup (Taishan), which kicks off tomorrow at the Aspire Dome.

Yesterday, national teams from Uzbekistan, Chinese Taipei and Hungary landed in Doha to begin their training camps ahead of the championship. The teams are training at the Al Laqta Training Centre, home to one of the premier gymnastics facilities in the Middle East.

Qatari gymnasts Rakan al-Hareth and Salma Nasser are also undergoing daily training at the centre, under the guidance of head coach Mahmoud al-Saadi and coach Mohammed al-Dulaimi, following their recent participation in the Artistic Gymnastics World Cup in Croatia.

Meanwhile, the Organising Committee, chaired by President of the Qatar Gymnastics Federation (QGF) Ali al-Hitmi, held an extensive coordination meeting with heads and co-ordinators of the working committees, in the presence of a large number of volunteers. The meeting was held at the competition venue with the goal of reviewing final preparations and ensuring that all teams are ready for this global event.



Gymnasts train at the Aspire Dome yesterday, ahead of the Artistic Gymnastics World Cup Doha.