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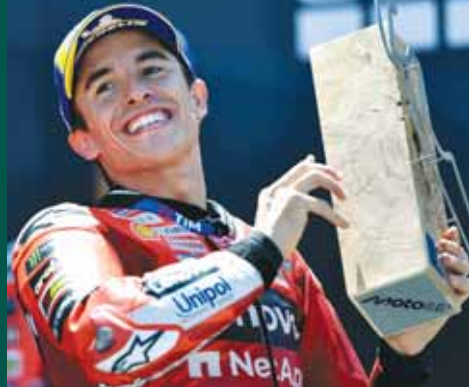
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# GULF TIMES SPORT



MOTORSPORT

Marquez 1-2 as Marc extends lead in Aragon MotoGP stroll

Page 3

## QATAR ARRIVE IN UZBEKISTAN FOR WORLD CUP QUALIFIER



Qatar coach Julen Lopetegui arrived in Tashkent with the squad yesterday, ahead of their 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifying final Group A match against Uzbekistan tomorrow. Asian champions Qatar defeated Iran 1-0 in Asian Qualifiers - Road to 26 Group A tie last Thursday and secured their place in the playoffs, where an additional two tickets are available to next year's global showpiece. Uzbekistan have booked their place in the global spectacle following their 0-0 stalemate against the United Arab Emirates last Thursday.

TENNIS

# Alcaraz saves three match points to stop Sinner and retain French Open crown

Alcaraz overcomes World No. 1 Sinner 4-6, 6-7 (4/7), 6-4, 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (10/2) to clinch his fifth Grand Slam title

AFP  
Paris

Carlos Alcaraz saved three championship points as he produced an astonishing fightback from two sets down to beat Jannik Sinner in a French Open final for the ages yesterday.

Reigning champion Alcaraz rallied from the brink of defeat to overcome world number one Sinner 4-6, 6-7 (4/7), 6-4, 7-6 (7/3), 7-6 (10/2) to clinch his fifth Grand Slam title after five hours and 29 minutes.

"I'm pretty sure you'll be champion not once, but many many times. It's a privilege to share the court with you in every tournament. Making history with you," Alcaraz said, addressing Sinner after the final.

The 22-year-old Spaniard is now unbeaten in five Grand Slam finals after snapping Sinner's 20-match winning run at the majors.

Alcaraz pulled off his first ever comeback from two sets down to stun Sinner in the longest Roland Garros final in history. It easily eclipsed the 1982 final in Paris when Mats Wilander triumphed in four sets over Guillermo Vilas in 4hr 42min.

Alcaraz becomes the third youngest man to win five Grand Slams - after Bjorn Borg and compatriot Rafael Nadal - following an incredible duel between the two stars of a new generation.

Sinner fell agonisingly short of a third successive Grand Slam crown after last year's US Open title and back-to-back Australian Open triumphs.

He suffered his fifth straight loss to Alcaraz in what was their first meeting in a Grand Slam final - and the first championship match at a major between two men born in the 2000s.

"It's easier to play than talking now," said a devastated Sinner. "We tried our best today, we gave everything we had. I won't sleep very well tonight but it's OK."

Alcaraz leads 8-5 overall having also beaten Sinner to win in Rome, where the Italian returned to



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz celebrates with the trophy after winning the French Open final against Italy's Jannik Sinner in Paris yesterday. (Reuters)

competition in May after a three-month doping ban.

Alcaraz put the pressure on Sinner by carving out three break points to start Saturday's final, but the Italian resisted and soon had a chance of his own.

He couldn't take advantage and found himself having to fend off two more break points at 1-1, producing clutch serves to grind out another tough hold.

Alcaraz's persistence paid off in the fifth game when he broke to nudge 3-2 ahead, only for the Spaniard to immediately hand the lead back.

The unshakable Sinner threatened to break again at 4-3, with a brief lapse from Alcaraz eventually enabling Sinner to snatch the first set.

Sinner hit the accelerator to start the second set, surging 3-0 in front. After facing seven break points in the opener, he tightened up considerably on serve.

But Alcaraz brought up his first break point of the second set with Sinner serving for a two-set lead, duly pouncing on the opportunity to check his rival's momentum.

With the swagger back in his step at a crucial juncture, Alcaraz sought to bring the crowd into the contest but Sinner remained unflustered in the tie-break.

The first five points went with serve before Sinner whipped a forehand down the line and Alcaraz then steered an attempted drop-shot wide.

A tame return into the net presented Sinner with four set points. Alcaraz saved two before Sinner unleashed a blistering cross-court forehand to move to within a set of the trophy.

### ALCARAZ PULLS OFF MIRACULOUS COMEBACK

It all looked to be going his way when he broke Alcaraz to begin the third set, but the Spaniard re-

fused to surrender his title quietly and rattled off four games on the bounce to lead 4-1.

Alcaraz lost serve at 5-3 but promptly broke to love to force a fourth set, lapping the roars of the Court Philippe Chatrier crowd. That ended Sinner's run of 31 consecutive sets won at Grand Slams.

Alcaraz saved a break point in the third game amid a series of holds as Sinner doubled down. The Italian appeared to be closing in on victory when he broke at 3-3 as the finish line neared.

But Alcaraz had other ideas as he staved off three championship points at 3-5 and then broke Sinner when he tried to seal the title on his serve.

Successive aces spurred a reinvigorated Alcaraz on in the tie-break and into a decisive fifth set.

A despairing Sinner lost his serve right away and his gloom deepened as Alcaraz saved two



Italy's Jannik Sinner is comforted by former US tennis player Andre Agassi after losing his French Open final in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

break points to pull 3-1 ahead, but incredibly there was another twist. Alcaraz this time faltered with the title within his grasp as Sinner broke at 3-5 to spark a three-game burst that left the Spaniard needing to hold serve to prolong the final.

He kept his nerve to set up a 10-point tie-break, which Alcaraz ran away with as the outrageous shotmaking continued until the very end when he took his first championship point with a sizzling forehand down the line.

Alcaraz thanked the court Philippe Chatrier crowd for their support, which he said helped him throughout the tournament.

"Then Paris, guys, I mean, you have been a really important support to me since the first practice, since the first round," he said.

"You were unbelievable. You were insane for me. I mean, I just can't, can't thank enough, you know, to you for the great support

during the whole week, for today's match," he said.

### Errani, Paolini win French Open women's doubles crown

Sara Errani and Jasmine Paolini won the French Open women's doubles title yesterday, on the same court they clinched gold at last year's Paris Olympics.

The Italian pair beat Kazakhstan's Anna Danilina and Aleksandra Krunic of Serbia 6-4, 2-6, 6-1 for their first Grand Slam title together.

Errani and Paolini finished runners-up at Roland Garros a year ago, when Paolini was also a losing finalist in the women's singles.

The 38-year-old Errani added the women's doubles crown to the mixed title she won alongside compatriot Andrea Vavassori on Thursday.

It was her sixth women's doubles triumph, having already completed a career Grand Slam.

PREVIEW

# Lack of Test preparation no bother for South Africa ahead of WTC final at Lord's

Reuters  
London

**A** lack of preparation for the World Test Championship final will be no problem for South Africa as they get set to take on Australia at Lord's, opener Aiden Markram said yesterday.

South Africa last played a Test in January when they beat Pakistan to book a place in the WTC final and their hopes of an extensive warm-up last week were stymied as their four-day match with Zimbabwe was largely rained out.

"A lot of our series have been two Test series, so in order to win them, you can't start slow, so I suppose there's a little bit of that that's helped us along the way," Markram told a press conference at Lord's, where the WTC final begins on Wednesday.

"We know the importance of starting well, trying to get ahead of the game early and how important each session is going to be,

because there's no second dip at it. "We have to make sure we hit the ground running and are nice and sharp come day one," he added.

South Africa qualified for the final with a seven-match winning streak but also having played seven Tests fewer than Australia, who are defending champions.

"We've had a lot fewer games, so I suppose every time you get in, everyone's obviously getting super pumped up to play Test cricket because we don't play as much of it," Markram said.

South African cricket has a long history of coming close but failing in limited overs tournaments, but Markram felt that would have no impact on their first WTC final.

"This team's obviously very different (in) personnel to what the white-ball squad was, so we haven't addressed it too much," he said. "The few of us that have been a part of previous ICC events that didn't go our way, have dealt with it. We've obviously chatted to each other and made sure we've buried it nicely and taken some good les-

sons from it. But besides from that now it's more about the excitement of having another opportunity to actually do the job. So it's pretty much where the mind is at the moment. If we play good cricket, you give ourselves at least a fairly good chance of winning."

### Australia's Hazlewood does not want to miss WTC final again

A calf injury forced Josh Hazlewood to miss being part of Australia's World Test Championship win two years ago and the fast bowler is keen to avoid a second such heartbreak as they defend their WTC title next week.

Hazlewood is vying with Scott Boland to claim the last slot in Australia's pace attack for the final against South Africa at Lord's from Wednesday.

The 34-year-old arrived late in England, after bowling Royal Challengers Bengaluru to their maiden Indian Premier League (IPL) title on Tuesday.

"I was quite close last time," Hazlewood, who recently recov-

ered from a shoulder injury, said of the 2023 final he missed. "But I feel in much better place this time around, and I think in any format, my numbers over the last two years have been pretty good, so I've got a lot to fall back on."

"Skill wise, I still feel like I'm bowling the best I have in my career and it's just a matter of the body holding up, which it has been in the last few months."

Hazlewood was Bengaluru's most successful bowler in the IPL but he will need to shift from 20-overs cricket in India to a different format and the different English conditions.

Adjusting the length would be particularly crucial, he said.

"In the IPL games, I was probably hitting around that seven-to nine-meters in the powerplay, and not really threatening the stumps as much as you want to in Test cricket, in particular here in England," he said. "So, it'll just be about pushing that length and touch fuller and still getting that zip through the keeper."



Australia's Test captain Pat Cummins (right) is seen with South African skipper Temba Bavuma on the Lord's balcony in London yesterday. (@ProteasMenCSA)

CRICKET

# England chase well to seal series against WI

Luke Wood shines in his comeback match

Reuters  
Bristol, England

**J**os Buttler top-scored again as England chased down an imposing target and beat West Indies by four wickets in the second T20 yesterday to take a 2-0 lead and seal the three-match series, continuing their excellent form under new captain Harry Brook.

Former captain Buttler's 47 from 36 balls at Bristol's County Ground came on the back of his 96 in the first T20 in Durham and set the platform for England to hunt down West Indies' total of 196-6 with nine balls to spare.

It was a second straight series victory for England under the captaincy of Brook after they secured a 3-0 series sweep in the one-dayers.

Jacob Bethell hit a thrilling 26 from 10 balls, which included three sixes, as England spread the runs throughout the team with Ben Duckett (30), Brook (34) and Tom Banton (30) providing solid backup.

England, who won the toss and chose to bowl, got off to the perfect start with Luke Wood, who was the hosts' standout bowler with 2-25, striking Evin Lewis on the pads with the day's first delivery, but the tourists quickly steadied the ship.

Shai Hope took the fight to England with 49 off 38 balls, while Johnson Charles started patiently before he also fell just short of his half century, with 47 from 39 deliveries.



England's Jos Buttler in action against the West Indies during the second T20I at Seat Unique Stadium in Bristol, southwest England, yesterday. (AFP)

The West Indies innings threatened to stall at that point but a rollicking finish peppered with sixes from Rovman Powell, Romario Shepherd and Jason Holder saw them power to a healthy total, even considering the County Ground's short boundaries.

Player of the match Wood, with figures for 2 for 25 on his return to the England team for the first time in close to two years, said: "I've not been in the team for a while now - it's nice to come back in and

make an impact. We discussed as a bowling unit and with Brooky on the field about what was effective; it was pretty clear that slower balls and mixing it up to these guys was the right way to go. It paid off today. It's nice to win any series, especially off the back of the ODIs."

England captain Brook said they were a lot more than a few short: "Small boundaries here, we always thought they were under-par by about 30 runs.

It's a great start in the T20s for the boys. We had a lot of fun out there. They had a very good finish, but we stuck to our plans very well in the middle period. We had a discussion before we went out to bat that it was only a matter of a couple of big overs."

**BRIEF SCORES**  
England 199 for 6 (Buttler 47, Brook 34, Banton 30) beat West Indies 196 for 6 (Hope 49, Charles 47, Wood 2-25) by 4 wickets

## Dane Antonsen and South Korea's An win Indonesia Open crown



Winner Denmark's Anders Antonsen (right) poses on the podium with runner-up Taiwan's Chou Tien-chen following their singles final at the Indonesia Open at Istora Senayan in Jakarta yesterday. (AFP)

**Jakarta, Indonesia:** Danish third seed Anders Antonsen beat Taiwanese Chou Tien-chen 22-20 21-14 to clinch his first Indonesia Open men's singles title yesterday, while South Korea's An Se-young fought back from a game down to claim her second women's singles crown.

The emotional win marked a long-awaited triumph for Antonsen, who had finished as runner-up in 2019 against Tien-chen and again in 2024 against Shi Yuqi, but finally clinched the Super 1000 title on his third appearance in the final. Tien-chen raced to a 15-10 lead in the opening game, but Antonsen clawed his way back to edge it 22-20. The second game was far more one-sided, with Antonsen dominating. Moments after sealing the victory, Antonsen collapsed flat on his back, arms outstretched, as the weight of past near-misses and years of perseverance came pouring out.

The Olympic gold medalist An Se-young beat Chinese world number two Wang Zhiyi 13-21 21-19 21-15. An, ranked number one in the world, had won her first Indonesia Open in 2021, while Wang was chasing a first crown at the event. Wang was off to a bright start, powering her way to a 10-17 lead before comfortably closing out the opening game. An was once again backed into a corner as a dominant Wang raced to a 5-0 lead in the second

game. But the 23-year-old turned the game on its head to level at 18-18 and eventually forced a decider.

An was made to work hard, but the All England Open champion held her nerve to come out on top, winning six of the last 11 points in the final game.

In the women's doubles final, China's world number one pair Liu Shengshu and Tan Ning overcame fourth-ranked Malaysian duo Thinaah Muralitharan and Pearly Tan 23-25 21-12 21-19. It was heartbreak for the hosts in the men's doubles as Indonesian pair Sabar Karyaman Gutama and Moh Reza Isfahani fought hard but fell short in the second and third games against the fifth-seeded duo Kim Won-ho and Seo Seung-Jae of South Korea.

The final result was 18-21 21-19 21-12 to the Koreans. French pair Thom Gicquel and Delphine Delrue took home the mixed doubles title after a 21-16 21-18 victory over Thai duo Dechapol Puavaranukroh and Supisara Paewsampran.

"I couldn't believe it," Gicquel said. "We never thought we'd get this far after the first round. It's crazy, it was one of our goals to win a big tournament this year. It's a lot of hard work behind this, so we're grateful."

It is France's first Super 1000 title. "We are so happy to make badminton a bit more popular (in France) with this win," Delrue said.

CYCLING

# Pogacar edges Vingegaard for Dauphine win after gripping final flourish

AFP  
Montluçon, France

**T**adej Pogacar edged a gripping opening stage of the eight-day Criterium du Dauphine yesterday after an elite clique produced a surprise finale that delivered the first yellow jersey to the Slovenian.

Billed as a potential mass sprint, cycling fans were instead treated to a late breakaway as Jonas Vingegaard attacked late, with Pogacar and Mathieu van der Poel following and double Olympic champion Remco Evenepoel chasing them down.

Race designers had placed four small hills in the closing kilometres of the stage and the idea produced a thrilling four way race for the line.

Pogacar came across the line ahead of Vingegaard after keeping his powder dry until Van der Poel attacked early and both men overtook him. Evenepoel was fourth with all of them clocking 4hr 40min 02sec over the hilly 196km run from Domerat and Montluçon.

Pogacar said he hadn't expected to win but had tracked the moves of others before coming up with an impromptu plan.

"I switched my focus around 2k to go to prepare for sprint. And it worked," said the 26-year-old three-time Tour de France winner.

"I knew that van der Poel was the fastest, obviously, in this group. But after a finish like this, you cannot count all of the rest out," he said.

Pogacar took the overall lead thanks to 10 bonus seconds, with Vingegaard only taking six. It is

already looking like a fascinating battle is warming up between these two riders have won the last five Tours de France between them.

Vingegaard said he was disappointed to be four seconds adrift of his perennial rival but was looking on the bright side.

"It's the first time I finished second in a bunch sprint," said the slender climb specialist. "So I'm happy. And Tadej was just faster than I was. So congrats to him."

With four hilly stages, a time trial and three final days in the Alps, the Dauphine will provide a glimpse of what to expect when the 21-day Tour de France begins on July 5. The short, tough route has attracted an A-list roster of 154 riders from 22 teams.

Today's second stage takes in six more big hills over 204.6km from Premilhat to Issoire.



Alpecin-Deceuninck's Dutch rider Mathieu Van Der Poel (left), Team Visma-Lease a Bike's Danish rider Jonas Vingegaard and UAE Team Emirates' Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar greet each other prior to the start of the 1st stage of the 77th Criterium du Dauphine cycling race, 195.8km between Domerat and Montluçon, yesterday. (AFP)

MOTOGP

# Marquez 1-2 as Marc extends his points lead

The Ducati star led from start to finish for seventh win of 2025

AFP  
Alcañiz, Spain

**S**ix-time world champion Marc Marquez eased to victory over his younger brother Alex in the Aragon MotoGP yesterday to extend his lead in this season's title race.

Marquez led from start to finish on his Ducati to record his seventh win in this race from 11 starts and his fourth victory of the campaign.

He leads his brother by 32 points after eight of the 22-race programme with two-time world champion Francesco Bagnaia, who was third, 93 points adrift.

Marquez is well set for a seventh world title which would bring him level with Valentino Rossi and one shy of the record held by the latter's fellow Italian Giacomo Agostini.

"Yes a perfect weekend," said Marquez, who became the first rider since he did the same in the 2015 German MotoGP to top all the practice sessions, take pole and win the race. "I was more serious than usual as I felt I couldn't afford to make mistakes. I rode in a very good way," added Marquez, who ended a three-race losing streak.

The two brothers got off their bikes halfway round the victory lap and jumped into each other's arms, though, unable to kiss as they still had their helmets on and sending the 50,000 spectators wild.

"To be brothers and Spanish in front of a home crowd is extra special for me," said Alex Marquez, who at 29 is three years his



Winner Ducati Lenovo Team's Marc Marquez celebrates on the podium after the MotoGP Aragon Grand Prix race at the Motorland circuit in Alcañiz, northeastern Spain, yesterday. (AFP)

brother's junior. Marquez echoed his words and said it made up for the disappointment of the Spanish MotoGP in April when Alex won but he only finished 12th.

"I was sad when he won the race in Jerez," he said. "Let's see in Catalunya if we can repeat that but hopefully we swap positions and Alex wins."

A podium finish put a smile back on the face of Marquez's Ducati team-mate Bagnaia, who had described Saturday's 12th spot in the sprint as the "toughest of his career."

"Today I recovered a lot of confidence and I can go to Mugello in a fortnight with a spring in my step," said Bagnaia.

Marquez got a great start leading Alex, but the other front

row sitter Franco Morbidelli fell well back to seventh spot, whilst Bagnaia shot through from the second row to take third spot.

Bagnaia turned the pressure on Alex Marquez but after a while he dropped off and was trading third and fourth places with Pedro Acosta over the opening few laps.

Indeed the Marquez brothers opened a gap back to Bagnaia, Acosta, Brad Binder and Morbidelli, who had recovered a bit from his sluggish start.

By halfway Marquez posted the fastest lap thus far and extended his lead to over two seconds.

It was also the moment that South African rider Binder's hopes of recording his best result after a poor campaign were dashed

as he slid off. His KTM boss Aki Ajo jumped down from his vantage point and wrung his hands in frustration. The race began to take its toll as 2021 world champion Fabio Quartararo also went off whilst contesting ninth spot.

His fellow French rider Johann Zarco's hopes of a third successive podium finish had ended a bit earlier.

Whilst up front was becoming a bit of a procession the more exciting tussle was between Morbidelli and rookie Fermin Aldeguer for fifth and sixth spots.

Both gave no quarter, rubbing elbows as they vied to get the better of each other and it was Morbidelli who eventually prevailed after a final dig into Aldeguer's ribs on the penultimate lap.

FOCUS

# Ogier edges Tanak to win in Sardinia as Evans stays top of the table



French off-road driver Sebastien Ogier (left) and co-driver Vincent Landais celebrate after winning the 22nd edition of the Rally Italia Sardegna, 6th round of the FIA World Rally Championship, in Olbia, Sardinia, yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters  
Rome

**S**ebastien Ogier clinched a record fifth Rally Italy victory yesterday, fending off Hyundai's Ott Tanak by 7.9 seconds after a tense final stage in Sardinia, while Toyota team-mate Elfyn Evans stayed top of the championship standings.

Ogier, with co-driver Vincent Landais, completed the sixth round of the season in three hours 34 minutes and 24.5 seconds to secure the Frenchman's third win in four starts in a part-time campaign.

The eight-times world champion was beaten by Tanak on the island last year by 0.2 seconds after a final-stage puncture but this time Ogier stayed composed and took the win despite a late wobble.

Ogier had built a 17.1-second cushion heading into the Wolf Power Stage, but the 41-year-old overshot a tight, rutted corner in the final kilometres.

This forced him to stop and reverse after his car refused to turn, cutting his advantage by more than half in a tense finale.

"In the ruts, I just couldn't turn the car," Ogier explained.

"There was no speed at all, so I didn't try to force it and hit it - I preferred to stop and reverse. But yeah, not ideal. Still, it was enough to win."

The victory follows hot on the

heels of his Rally Portugal triumph and sent Ogier second in the championship with 114 points to Evans' 133.

Toyota, who have won every rally so far this year, also tightened their grip on the manufacturers' race with 312 points to Hyundai's 243.

"There are many places I've won several times," said Ogier.

"It's just a type of rally I like, where precise driving is needed, but also smoothness for tyre management."

"Thanks to the team, great turnaround after Portugal in terms of speed and set-up, so good job," Ogier said.

Tanak pushed hard in the final stage but fell short, while Kalle Rovanperä, clawing his way up from fifth during Saturday's stages, completed a double podium for Toyota in third, 50.5 seconds behind Ogier.

The Finn dropped to third overall, one point behind Ogier, with Tanak fourth on 108.

Evans and Takamoto Katsuta rounded out a strong showing for Toyota, taking fourth and fifth respectively.

Hyundai's reigning champion Thierry Neuville, fifth in the championship on 83 points, took four points from the Power Stage and one from the 'Super Sunday' format after returning following Friday's retirement.

The next round is in Greece on June 26-29.

SWIMMING

# Ledecky closes US championships with 1,500m free victory

AFP  
Chicago

**N**ine-time Olympic gold medalist Katie Ledecky closed out the US Swimming Championships with her third title of the week, winning the 1,500m freestyle to book another event at this year's World Championships in Singapore.

Bobby Finke and Gretchen Walsh also grabbed their third wins of the week in Indianapolis, Indiana, to set themselves up for multiple medal campaigns in Singapore. Ledecky clocked 15min 36.76sec to win the 1,500m free by more than 25 seconds. Claire Weinstein, who swam in a different heat of the timed finals was second-fastest in 16:01.96.

"I just wanted to put together a pretty even swim, hold a good pace," Ledecky told NBC Sports.

"That one hurt, but I'll take it, move on to Singapore," added the US great, who also won the 400m and a "really good" 800m free this week and finished second in the 200m free.

Ledecky heads to a seventh World Championships aiming to add to her 21 world titles.

"I'm excited," she said. "I mean, I have been to a lot of these, but I still feel like I get the same excite-

ment, the same energy from the team."

Finke won the men's 800m free in 7:43.13, more than six seconds ahead of Rex Maurer.

Finke, who set the men's 1,500m free world record in defending his Olympic title in Paris, also won that event along with the 400m medley - although he has indicated he won't swim the medley in Singapore.

Walsh won the women's 50m freestyle in an American record-equalling 23.91sec to close out a stellar week that saw her win the 100m butterfly with the second-fastest time ever and the 50m fly in the fourth-fastest time ever.

Jack Alexy won the men's 50m free in 21.36, the top time in the world this year.

Santo Condoirelli, the 30-year-old who has competed in the Olympics for both Canada and Italy, was second in 21.68 to earn a chance to represent the United States for the first time in international competition.

Shaine Casas won the men's 200m individual medley in 1:55.73, just three-hundredths of a second in front of Carson Foster, Casas notching another victory after his triumph in the 100m butterfly.

Alex Walsh won the women's 100m medley in 2:08.45 with Phoebe Bacon taking second in 2:09.22.

GOLF

# Seeking first individual LIV victory, India's Lahiri produces bogey-free round in Virginia

Reuters  
Gainesville, Virginia

**P**ursuing his first individual win with LIV Golf, Anirban Lahiri of India played a bogey-free second round at 7-under 64 on Saturday and holds a two-shot lead at LIV Golf Virginia on Saturday in Gainesville, Virginia.

A runner-up four times with LIV Golf, Lahiri sank seven birdies and made a 39-foot par putt on No 16, then finished strong with a par on No. 18 after landing in the rough. On the 18th, he had to get up and down from a distance of more than 100 yards.

"Yeah, those felt like birdies as well," Lahiri said of his impressive finish to the day at Robert Trent Jones Golf Club.

"I think the first 15 holes was about as solid as I could have played. I missed a few putts and I still made quite a lot of birdies."

"Then 16, I was trying to hit like an in-between 9-iron and I tried to compress it a little bit too much, and everyone else saw what happened. It was nice to make that putt."

Veterans Bubba Watson, Martin Kaymer and Graeme McDowell - who are also chasing their first individual LIV Golf win - are at 9-under par entering Sunday's final round, just two shots behind the leader.

"It's always good to be close to the lead, have a chance on the last



Anirban Lahiri of Crushers GC tees off at the fifth hole on day three of LIV Golf Virginia at Robert Trent Jones Golf Club in Gainesville, Virginia. (AFP)

day," Watson said. "Looking forward to it. Looking forward to the challenge of this golf course."

"You hit your driver good, you hit your irons in the right spots, you have a chance to play this golf course."

RangeGoats GC captain Watson birdied Nos 17 and 18, then closed his round with pars on Nos 1 and 2 en route to a 6-under 65.

Kaymer, who shared the first-round lead with Crushers GC

captain Bryson DeChambeau, shot a 4-under 67 to keep himself firmly in the running.

Meanwhile, McDowell notched three straight birdies on Nos. 15-17 to put himself in contention with a 5-under 66. He'll play the final round with Lahiri and Watson.

"I'm excited to be up there (on the leaderboard)," McDowell said. "I'm excited to give myself probably my first opportunity on LIV."

I've underachieved greatly so far in my career out here. Certainly expect more of myself."

Joquin Niemann, DeChambeau and Jon Rahm, the top three in the individual standings, are tied for fifth at 7 under, four shots off the top spot.

On the team front, Lahiri and DeChambeau have the Crushers at 21 under par, one up on McDowell's Smash GC squad and well ahead of the other foursomes.

## BJORN, CLARKE CLOSE STRONG, MAINTAIN LEAD AT TPC WISCONSIN

**Madison, Wisconsin:** The team of Thomas Bjorn and Darren Clarke stayed on the attack at TPC Wisconsin on Saturday, reaching 25-under par after two rounds of the American Family Insurance Championship in Madison, Wisconsin. Playing a scramble format in the second round, where each team chooses the best shot of the two players and each one hits their next shot from there, the

Bjorn-Clarke duo delivered five birdies on the front nine before taking charge on the back. Clarke, of Northern Ireland, and Bjorn, of Denmark, were under par on seven of the final nine holes, including an eagle 3 at the par-5 11th hole. The 13-under 58 came after a 12-under 59 in the first round on Friday. "In the end, it seemed like the hole was the size of a bucket, and you get like that, but

you also know that a night's sleep, you can wake up and it can seem like very small tomorrow," Bjorn said. "That's the way golf goes. But today... we probably felt like we did when we were 28, hitting those kind of golf shots." Clarke was particularly impressive on the day, delivering three birdies on the front nine and going 7-under by himself on the back. Both players birdied the last four

holes. "It's really exciting to go out there with a chance to win any tournament, and then to go out there and have a chance to win tomorrow playing with Thomas in a team event, it's brilliant," Clarke said. "That's what we practice for, that's what we play for. If it happens, great. If not, then so be it, we've done our best." Steve Stricker and Mario Tiziani moved into second place at 22 under with the

low round of the day at 15-under 56. They combined to shoot a 28 on both sides, with each recording an eagle 3 at the par-5 seventh hole. Stricker and Tiziani had a birdie or better on 11 of the final 13 holes. "We were in position every hole to make birdies," Tiziani said. "I can't really think of one we were not. Maybe 17, I guess. But other than that, yeah, we were in position. We just ham-and-egged it, we really did."

## NATIONS LEAGUE

# Mbappe fires France past Germany for bronze medal

'They did it with all the great players in history in France and I'm the next. But I'm OK with that'

AFP  
Stuttgart, Germany

**K**ilian Mbappe bagged a goal and an assist as France beat Germany 2-0 in the Nations League bronze-medal match in Stuttgart yesterday.

Mbappe wove his magic in a heavily changed France squad.

Germany dominated the opening half but Mbappe provided the breakthrough just before half-time, carving a shot through a crowded penalty box to bring up his 50th goal in France colours.

Late in the second, with the hosts desperately looking for an equaliser, Mbappe snatched a poor Germany pass on the half-way line and rampaged forward, before setting up Michael Olise. Mbappe had not scored in open play for France for more than a year.

After the match, the France captain hit back at criticism levelled against him, telling DAZN "since I arrived in the international team, everyone always talks about me... when they have an opportunity to talk bad, they talk bad."

"They did it with all the great players in history in France and I'm the next. But I'm OK with that. I just try and do my job."

France and Real Madrid midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni praised his club and international teammate Mbappe, saying "everyone in the team loves him."

"He's a very important player for us and when he plays like he did today, it's just amazing."

For Germany, who lost two straight matches for the first time since 2023, questions remain over how much they have truly improved under Julian Nagelsmann. Striker Niclas Füllkrug lamented his side's wastefulness, telling DAZN: "if we had taken our first chance and scored, it could have been three or four nil for us."

In the lead-up to Sunday's encounter, France coach Didier Deschamps admitted the Nations League clash with old rivals Germany "isn't the most important game for us," with a clear focus on next year's World Cup.

Deschamps made eight changes from the semi-final loss to Spain, with only captain Mbappe, goalie Mike Maignan and midfielder veteran Adrien Rabiot keeping their starting spots. Nagelsmann also rotated heavily, making four changes including bringing Füllkrug back into the starting XI.

The Germans had a wealth of chances in the opening half. Karim Adeyemi won a penalty but it was overturned by VAR for diving. Florian Wirtz hit the post.

Mbappe struck just before half-time. The Real Madrid man collected a pass which floated over Joshua Kimmich's head, took a touch and hammered a shot home with his preferred right foot.

Nagelsmann replaced rookie striker Nick Woltemade with



France's forward Kylian Mbappe celebrates scoring the opening goal during the UEFA Nations League third place play-off match against Germany in Stuttgart yesterday. (AFP)

Deniz Undav at half-time. The move seemed to have paid immediate dividends Undav had the ball in the net, but his effort was chalked off for a foul in the

build-up. Germany dominated possession and field position, but that left them vulnerable on the break to France's lightning-fast forwards, led by Mbappe. Marcus

Thuram hit the post on 58 minutes. Then Mbappe and substitute Olise, who plays in Germany for Bayern Munich, combined to seal the match for France. The French

captain pounced on a poor Robin Koch clearance on the half-way line and ran goalwards, squaring for the onrushing Olise to tap home with six minutes remaining.

## FOCUS

## Sloppy England give Tuchel food for thought on road to World Cup

AFP  
London

**T**homas Tuchel will put England's flops to the test in tomorrow's friendly against Senegal after admitting their sloppy 1-0 win over Andorra underlined how much they need to improve ahead of the World Cup. Tuchel's side were booed in Saturday's World Cup qualifier in Barcelona after failing to impress against a team ranked 173rd in the world.

Harry Kane's 50th-minute goal extended Tuchel's winning start to three games. But after underwhelming victories over Albania and Latvia in March, the Euro 2024 runners-up were well below their best in a dismal display that left Tuchel bemoaning his players' lacklustre attitude.

"The last half-an-hour I don't like it at all because I think we lacked everything that is needed in a World Cup qualifier," Tuchel said. "There's lots to get better. At the moment everything is a learning period so we're smarter than before."

"We will talk about it honestly and directly and try to do it better."

Senegal sit 19th in the world rankings and will pose the toughest test for Tuchel since he took charge at the start of the year.

With only a small number of international breaks left before the 2026 World Cup, Tuchel won't go easy on his players, even though they looked fatigued after a gruelling domestic campaign.

"I don't forget because there's not so many matches," he said.

"I think it's necessary that we have a good look at it and then present in detail to the players what we don't like, and to present it in a video session what we have to do better and what are the standards and what we did good."

### 'We got away with it'

Kane has scored in all three matches under Tuchel, his former manager at Bayern Munich, with his latest effort extending the striker's England record tally to 72.

But England captain Kane took little pleasure from his latest goal and echoed Tuchel's belief that the Andorra game should be used as a lesson.

"It's down to us now to go analyse it, look back and try and learn from it because condition-wise it's going to be very similar to next summer - dry pitch, warm weather, humid," he said.

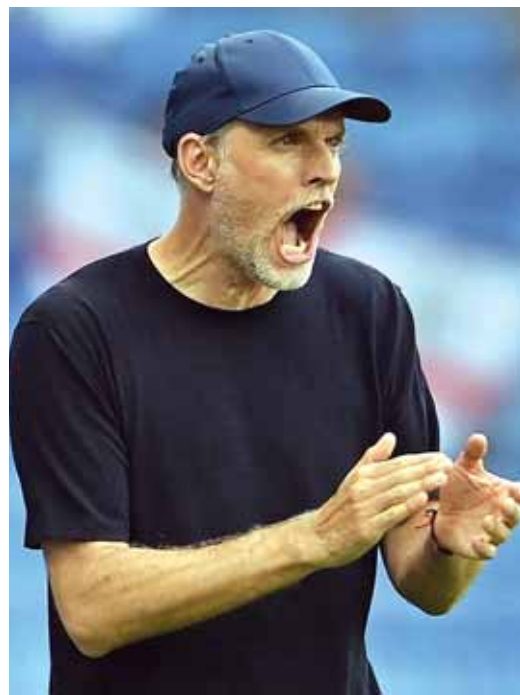
"We were just lacking quality, looked a bit fatigued both physically and mentally and, yeah, we got away with it because we're a good team and they had a couple of half-chances there where we didn't get punished. But ultimately, it wasn't good enough."

Tuchel wants England to play with a more dynamic approach that mirrors the swashbuckling style used by many Premier League teams. But he knows it will be hard to implement his tactics with so few opportunities to work with the players.

"Absolutely. It's our second camp. I think we can do much better, all of us, and that includes me," he said. "It always takes two to tango, but we need to do better at breaking down deep opponents. We played now three times against a 5-4-1, but there are no excuses."

"The lack of counter-pressing and the lack of ball wins and the lack of being aggressive in duels is basic in football."

"If you don't show this, then it becomes more or less a game that we saw, which is not attractive, which does not have the quality that we want to show."



## SPOTLIGHT

## Italy coach Spalletti says Moldova match will be his last

AFP  
Rome

**I**taly coach Luciano Spalletti has said that today's World Cup qualifier against Moldova would be his last.

Spalletti had come in for criticism after the Italian side lost 3-0 to Norway in their opening World Cup qualifying match last week.

"We spoke with the president of the Italian federation on Saturday and I was told that I would be relieved of my duties as coach of the national team," Spalletti told a press conference yesterday.

"I'm not happy about it. Given the relationship we have, I had absolutely no intention of leaving. Especially when things aren't going well, I would have preferred to stay and do my job."

"But this is a dismissal and I have to accept it. I've always seen this role as a service to the country and I want to facilitate the future of the national team. I think it's right to strive for the best."

Spalletti, 66, took over from Roberto Mancini as Italy coach in August 2023.

In his time as head of the Nazionale, the team won 11 times, drew six and lost six.

Spalletti's dismissal came only hours after he had been stoutly defended by the same man who then fired him, Federation president Gabriele Gravina.

Gravina, who is not without his own critics, said earlier on Sunday Spalletti "was an extraordinary person" adding he "believed in the team and (Spalletti's) project" which he declared was "amazing."

"He is a noble soul. The at-



Italy's coach Luciano Spalletti reacts from the sidelines during the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifying Group I match against Norway at the Ullevaal Stadium in Oslo on Friday. (AFP)

tacks on him are not merited," said Gravina.

Gravina had conceded the manner of the defeat to Norway was "unacceptable" though he intimated Spalletti would be responsible for leading the recovery.

"We have to face difficult times with our heads held high and we have to get back up immediately."

Two names have popped up on

a regular basis as to who would replace him, AS Roma's experienced Claudio Ranieri, 73, most famous for guiding Leicester City to the unlikely Premier League titles in 2016, is one of them.

The other is Stefano Pioli presently the coach of Saudi outfit Al Nassr but prior to that the 59-year-old won the 2022 Serie A crown with AC Milan.

## AGUIRRE UNHAPPY AS MEXICO CONCEDE FOUR AGAINST SWITZERLAND

**Salt Lake City:** World Cup co-hosts Mexico were beaten 4-2 by Switzerland in a friendly at Rice-Eccles Stadium on Saturday, leaving coach Javier Aguirre far from happy. El Tri were facing the Swiss as part of their warm-up for this month's Concacaf Gold Cup but their frailties were exposed by Murat Yakin's team.

"When you concede four goals, you have to hang your head and go home to train," said Aguirre. "We made a lot of mistakes, both collectively and individually, and when you do that against teams of

this calibre, you get punished," he added. Switzerland took the lead in the 20th minute when Ricardo Rodriguez sent a deep pass to Bree Embolo, who fired past goalkeeper Raul Rangel. Swiss keeper Gregor Kobel denied Mexico in the 29th minute when he blocked a point-blank shot from Santiago Gimenez with his chest. Vincent Sierro hit the bar for Mexico in the 34th minute while at the other end Rangel did well to keep out a dangerous shot from Silvan Widmer. Gimenez brought Mexico level

with a 51st minute header but the Swiss restored their advantage 13 minutes later with Zeki Amdouni side-footing home from close range. Dan Ndoye made it 3-1 firing home from a tight angle after being well set-up by Fabian Rieder but Mexico gave themselves some hope when Angel Sepulveda was foud by Alexis Vega and beat Kobel with a superb, first-time shot. But as Mexico pushed forward in search of an equaliser, the Swiss hit them on the break with Rieder providing the finish with a deft chip from the edge of the box.

Mexico will face Türkiye tomorrow in North Carolina while Switzerland face the USA in Nashville.

### David double as Canada beat Ukraine 4-2

**Toronto:** Jonathan David scored twice as World Cup co-hosts Canada enjoyed a convincing 4-2 win over Ukraine in a friendly match at BMO Field on Saturday. Jesse Marsch's side got off to a fine start when David, put them in front when he followed in to tap home after his header from a Tajon Buchanan cross was parried out

by Anatoly Trubin. Right-winger Buchanan was causing the Ukraine defence plenty of problems with his speed and trickery and he was also the creator of the second goal - whipping in a cross which was perfectly glanced home by David. Canada were effective in their high pressing and from a turnover Promise David raced clear and confidently slotted home his first international goal to make it 3-0 in the 31st minute. The chances continued to arrive after the break and substitute Jayden Nelson struck the post as Canada looked to put

the game completely beyond the Ukrainians. The fourth goal arrived in the 81st minute when Luc De Fougerolles headed goalwards and Buchanan turned it home. Ukraine got some consolation in the final minutes with a goal from Illia Zabarnyi and Oleksandr Zinchenko penalty. The game is part of a four-team mini-tournament, The Canadian Shield, which also features New Zealand and the Ivory Coast. Canada face the African side tomorrow as they warm-up for the Concacaf Gold Cup later this month.