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FOOTBALL

Al-Khelaifi hails PSG's new era after Champions League win

By Sports Reporter  
Paris

Paris Saint-Germain president **Nasser al-Khelaifi** spoke with emotion and pride on France 5's *C à Vous* show, reflecting on the club's emphatic Champions League final win over Inter Milan in Berlin on May 31. Celebrating what he called a "paradigm shift" at PSG, al-Khelaifi emphasised a new team-first philosophy and the rise of a united, hard-working squad over individual stardom — marking a bold departure from the club's past.

Al-Khelaifi said on the show: "Today, the superstar is the team. We are a family, 23 soldiers on and off the pitch. We have stars today, we have Dembele, Marquinhos, Vitinha, Nuno Mendes, Hakimi, we have many players, and the whole team is a star. But today the stars play and work for the team."

PSG's new approach, centred on the collective and the promotion of young talent, marks a break with the era of individual superstars. The PSG president paid tribute

to other major French clubs: "We are proud to represent France alongside Monaco, Brest and Lille. French football is shining in Europe thanks to all these clubs."

The show was punctuated by video messages of congratulations from prominent personalities and players. Ousmane Dembele, PSG's star striker, paid special tribute to his president: "When I signed for Paris Saint-Germain, he told me that we were going to achieve our objectives, that we were going to win the most beautiful competition. Two years later, we did it. It's exceptional."

Al-Khelaifi in return praised the player: "Ousmane Dembele should get the Ballon d'Or. He's a magnificent player, generous on the pitch and off it, he's an example."

Malik Bentalha and Teddy Riner also praised the al-Khelaifi's commitment and vision.

Al-Khelaifi was full of praise for the supporters: "Our supporters are the best in the world. I want to thank all of France and all the French people, for once I felt all of France behind us. That touched us deeply."

The PSG president also had warm words for the club's former iconic players: "I

want to thank Kylian Mbappe for what he gave to the club. Mbappe, Messi, Neymar, Ibrahimovic... all the players, because it was an important period for the club. We're lucky this year, but I wish Mbappe the best at Real Madrid, from the bottom of my heart."

Speaking about the next star that will soon adorn the Parisian jersey, al-Khelaifi was measured: "We haven't decided yet, we want to play with the star for the Club World Cup, but we must remain humble. This star is magnificent, but the most important thing is the name: 'Paris Saint-Germain'."

Behind the scenes of the show, al-Khelaifi had the opportunity to chat with singer Sting, also a guest on the show, who praised the consistency of the PSG's project. Al-Khelaifi said he was particularly touched by these spontaneous exchanges.

Moved, al-Khelaifi concluded by dedicating this victory to his recently deceased mother: "It's difficult to talk about... but she was with me. It was her dream for us to win this Champions League. This trophy is for my mother too."



QUALIFIERS

Brazil, Ecuador  
book WC berths,  
Uruguay on brink

Vinicius Jr scored as five-time world champions beat Paraguay

AFP  
Sao Paulo

Brazil booked their place at the 2026 World Cup in North America on Tuesday with a lacklustre 1-0 home victory over Paraguay, the first win of Carlo Ancelotti's reign.

The five-time world champions punched their ticket to the finals in Canada, the United States and Mexico thanks to Vinicius Jr.

The Real Madrid star poked in from close range in the 44th minute in Sao Paulo after a cross from new Manchester United signing Matheus Cunha.

It was the perfect gift for the Italian Ancelotti on his 66th birthday, having seen his new side held 0-0 by Ecuador last week in his first game as coach. Former Real Madrid boss Ancelotti praised his team's "commitment" and "attitude". "It was a good match with a very good first half, although obviously we suffered a bit because Paraguay are very solid opponents and we slowed down a bit in the second," he said.

Uruguay's 2-0 win over Venezuela in Montevideo had raised the prospect of qualification for both Brazil and Paraguay at Corinthians Arena. Paraguay needed only a point to qualify while Brazil knew they could advance with a win.

In the event it was Brazil who seized the opportunity presented by Venezuela's loss with Vinicius scoring the only goal just before half-time. Brazil had struggled to create many chances up until that point, with Cunha squandering a golden chance in the 35th minute after heading wide from point-blank range.

Cunha made up for it with a key part in the goal, capitalising on good work from Raphinha to dart into the box and whip in a low cross for Vinicius, who stabbed home the finish. The win lifted Brazil into third place in the South American standings with 25 points from 16 games, guaranteeing them a top-six finish and an automatic qualifying berth.

Looking ahead to next summer, Ancelotti said he had "a very long list" of 70 players in mind, including Neymar, who was missing with injury. He added: "I really liked those who were with me in this squad for their commitment, their attitude, and the atmosphere."

The defeat left Paraguay with 24 points, meaning they need one point to secure their first World Cup appearance since 2010. Surprise package Ecuador joined Brazil by sealing qualification with a point following a 0-0 draw with Peru in Lima.



Brazil's forward Vinicius Jr celebrates after scoring during the 2026 FIFA World Cup South American qualifiers against Paraguay in Sao Paulo, Brazil, on Tuesday. (AFP)

In other games, Uruguay edged closer to qualification with their win over Venezuela while Chile were eliminated with defeat to Bolivia. Goals from Rodrigo Aguirre and Giorgian de Arrascaeta secured all three points for Marcelo Bielsa's Uruguay to leave the two-time world champions firmly on course for a place in next year's finals.

Like Paraguay, Uruguay need only a point from their final two games to qualify. Venezuela, who are bidding to reach the World Cup for the first time in the nation's history, are seventh with 18 points from 16 games.

Argentina, who have already qualified, came from behind to frustrate Colombia with a 1-1 draw in Buenos Aires. Liverpool star Luis Diaz fired Colombia into the lead with a superb 24th

minute goal, and the Colombians were given a further boost midway through the second half when the world champions were reduced to 10 men after Enzo Fernandez's dismissal. But Colombia's hopes of a vital win were dashed nine minutes from time when Thiago Almada weaved into the box and found the target to level.

The top six finishers in South America qualify automatically for the World Cup, with the seventh-placed team advancing to an intercontinental playoff. Bolivia defeated Chile 2-0 to end the former South American champions' hopes of qualification.

It is the third straight World Cup that Chile have missed out on. The loss continues a dramatic fall from grace for "La Roja", who won back-to-back Copa Americas in 2015 and 2016.

SPOTLIGHT

Popovic urges  
Australia to do  
'something special'  
at World Cup

AFP  
Sydney

Coach Tony Popovic said Australia want to do "something special" and hailed the character of his side after they qualified for a sixth successive World Cup.

The Socceroos booked their ticket to North America next year with a 2-1 win Tuesday over Saudi Arabia in Jeddah, joining Japan from Asian Group C and consigning the home team to another qualifying round.

"Very satisfying right now. I'm sure it'll sink in as the days go by," said Popovic, who joins an elite group to make a World Cup as a player and a coach.

The former Crystal Palace captain appeared at the 2006 tournament in Germany, where Australia made the round of 16 under Guus Hiddink.

"It's been a very intense period since I've joined, and I've loved it so far," said Popovic, who replaced Graham Arnold in September. "We've done the first part, qualifying automatically, and now the next part is to be bigger and better for the World Cup."

While Australia are at a sixth straight World Cup, it is the first time in 12 years that they have qualified automatically. Australia were fifth in the group when Popovic came in, reeling from

a disastrous 1-0 loss to Bahrain and a 0-0 draw with Indonesia.

After Australia conceded early in Jeddah, Mitch Duke teed up Connor Metcalfe and then scored the winner, before veteran goalkeeper Mathew Ryan saved a penalty to spark huge celebrations. "I think that's been a characteristic from the first day I arrived, we went one-nil down against China, we came back," said Popovic, referring to his first match in charge following Arnold's resignation.

"To do it here in this atmosphere, you know, you gotta deal with the weather as well and it's not easy, and to show that character, resilience and then quality to come back and actually take the lead and win the game, I'm delighted. We've built a good foundation now and we want to really get better, kick on and try and do something special at the World Cup."

For skipper Ryan it was a huge moment. He not only saved the spot kick in his 100th game for Australia, but ensured he will be at a fourth World Cup. "The fairytale has come true," said Ryan, 33, who is currently at French club Lens. "The journey that we have been on to get here, I'm just so proud of everyone. We're going to enjoy obviously that direct qualification now. But in a week's time, or a little bit longer, the prep starts for the next goal we set ourselves."



Australia coach Tony Popovic (right) celebrates with Joe Gauci after qualifying for the World Cup on Tuesday. (Reuters)



FOCUS

# Starc on target for Australia after Rabada's superb 5-for

Pacers of South Africa and Australia find juice in the wicket as World Test Championship final starts



South Africa's Kagiso Rabada celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of Australia's Pat Cummins on day one of the 2025 ICC World Test Championship Final at Lord's Cricket Ground, London, yesterday. (AFP)

AFP  
London

Mitchell Starc led Australia's recovery as the defending champions fought back with the ball against South Africa on the first day of the World Test Championship final at Lord's yesterday.

Australia were dismissed for just 212 after South Africa captain Temba Bavuma won the toss in overcast, bowler-friendly, conditions, with spearhead quick Kagiso Rabada taking 5-51.

But at stumps South Africa had slumped to 43-4 in reply, a deficit of 169 runs.

Given the strength of both teams' pace attacks, the key question was always likely to be which side could put enough runs on the scoreboard.

Australia's total certainly looked a lot healthier when left-arm quick Starc had Aiden Markram playing on for a duck before dismissing Ryan Rickelton (16) to leave South Africa floundering at 19-2.

Novice number three Wiaan Mulder was reprieved on one when wicketkeeper Alex Carey dropped a sitter off Starc.

But he added just five more runs before he was bowled by Australia captain Pat Cummins, having taken 44 balls to make six.

It took Bavuma 31 balls to score his first runs, a two off Josh Hazlewood greeted with raucous cheers by South Africa fans at Lord's. But shortly before the close, Hazlewood bowled Tristan Stubbs.

David Bedingham ended the day's play with consecutive boundaries off Cummins to be eight not out, with Bavuma unbeaten on three.

Rampant Rabada

Australia were in desperate trouble in the early overs in London, reduced to 16-2 after losing Usman Khawaja and Cameron Green in a single Rabada over.

Khawaja fell for a 20-ball duck in the seventh over, edging Rabada to Bedingham at first slip.

Three balls later 12-1 became 16-2 when Green nicked low to second slip, where Markram held a superb diving catch.

Rabada had now taken two wickets for four runs in four balls.

The 30-year-old, who has more than 300 Test wickets, is playing his first Test after serving a one-month ban for cocaine use earlier this year.

Australia have struggled to find an opening partner for Khawaja since David Warner's retirement 17 months ago, with Marnus Labuschagne the latest batsman tried out.

The 30-year-old, without a Test century

for nearly two years, battled hard for 17 off 56 balls before being dismissed by classic fast-bowling from towering left-armer Marco Jansen.

Australia had been in similar trouble in the 2023 final against India across London at the Oval, only for Steve Smith and Travis Head to both score hundreds as they turned the match in their favour.

Head, however, could only manage 11 before he glanced Jansen, with Kyle Verreynne holding an excellent diving one-handed catch. But star batsman Smith (66) and all-rounder Beau Webster (72) repaired the damage with a fifth-wicket stand of 79.

Yet in what could be to prove a key moment in the match, Webster would have been lbw to Rabada for eight if South Africa had reviewed an original not out decision.

Smith went to fifty before falling to part-time spinner Markram when he edged a booming drive and Jansen, at slip, clung on at the third attempt.

Australia lost their last five wickets for just 20 runs, with Rabada ending the innings when he bowled Starc.

**BRIEF SCORES (Day 1 at Lord's)**  
**South Africa 43 for 4** (Bedingham 8\*, Bavuma 3\*, Starc 2-10) **trail Australia 212** (Webster 72, Smith 66, Rabada 5-51) **by 169 runs**



Australia's Mitchell Starc appeals for the wicket of South Africa's Temba Bavuma at Lord's yesterday. (AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

## Duckett stars as England complete T20 sweep against the West Indies

AFP  
Southampton, United Kingdom

Ben Duckett starred with a blistering 84 from just 46 balls as England wrapped up a T20 series sweep of the West Indies with a 37-run victory on Tuesday.

England opener Duckett blasted 10 fours and two sixes as he set a frenetic pace in the hosts' score of 248-3 from 20 overs in Southampton.

Rovman Powell's unbeaten 79 was a defiant response from the West Indies, but they still fell short, finishing on 211-8 as England white-ball captain Harry Brook made it six successive victories to start his reign.

"It was a great pitch to bat on. The ball didn't do a great deal and me and Jamie Smith looked to put pressure straight from the start. The way he took down the seamers made my life easier," Duckett said after being voted player of the match.

"I try and keep it pretty simple as people know. You try to play a bit more expansive shots in T20 cricket but I try to stick to my strength throughout."

Having crushed the West Indies 3-0 in the one-day international series, this was another impressive display of England's batting power.

Smith, who partnered Duckett at the top of the England batting order, smashed 60 in 26 balls, with four boundaries and five sixes.

The pair put on 120 for the first



England's Ben Duckett bats during the third T20 International against West Indies at The Rose Bowl Stadium in Southampton on Tuesday. (AFP)

wicket in 8.5 overs before Brook hit 35 not out and Jacob Bethell produced an electric 36 not out from only 16 balls.

Bethell hit three huge sixes in succession off Gudakesh Motie as the hosts equalled their record T20 score in England.

Pace bowler Luke Wood, who finished with 3-31 from his four overs, and spinner Liam Dawson dismissed West Indies openers Evin Lewis and Johnson Charles for nine each to leave the tourists in trouble.

West Indies skipper Shai Hope went down fighting with 45 be-

fore being bounced out by Brydon Carse. Powell crushed nine fours and four sixes in his 45-ball masterclass, but England had already done more than enough to seal the win.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**England 248-3, 20 overs** (B Duckett 84, J Smith 60)  
**West Indies 211-8, 20 overs** (R Powell 79 no, S Hope 45; L Wood 3-31, A Rashid 2-30)  
**Result:** England won the match by 37 runs  
**Series:** England won three-match series 3-0

COMMENT

## Only the best should showcase cricket in Olympics return at LA28

Reuters  
Dubai

Cricket will return to the Olympics after 128 years at the 2028 Games and the popular view is only the best teams should showcase the game in Los Angeles, even if it means leaving out hosts the United States.

Both the men's and women's competitions will be a six-team contest in the 20-overs format when cricket is played in the Olympics for the first time since 1900.

The International Cricket Council is yet to announce the qualification format but is likely to pick the top six teams in the official rankings at a cut-off date.

The US rank 17th in the men's list and 24th in the women's, which make their position untenable in the cricket competi-

tions of their home Olympics.

"I'd love an associate member to get in there but let's be realistic," Sumod Damodar, who represents associate members like the US in the ICC Chief Executives' Committee, told Reuters.

"Should the US get an automatic place? I'll say let's put the best that we can on show."

"We're coming back into the Olympics after 128 years. We need to make that impressions so that people will say, 'Okay, we don't want them to go back and beg 'please include us' before every Olympics."

"Like track and field, we need to become a regular Olympic fixture. We need to show them that this product is worth it."

With Brisbane hosting the 2032 Olympics and India bidding for the 2036 Games, Botswana cricket chief Damodar hoped cricket will feature in the next three Olympics and beyond.

"We need to send the best six teams to showcase our game from the perspective of what it has in store for us, for the public, and the spectators in the future Olympic Games," he said.

Damodar added the ICC should announce a cut-off date sometime next year giving all members enough time to improve their rankings.

USA Cricket did not reply to a Reuters e-mail seeking its view but Sanjay Govil, who owns the Washington Freedom franchise in the Major League Cricket (MLC) in the US, also said only the best should represent cricket at Los Angeles.

"It should be based on merit, because we also want to make sure that it's competitive, right?" Govil told Reuters.

"I think we should have the best teams because otherwise it would be unfair to leave out a team to accommodate USA."

### WI recall Hope, drop Roach for home series v Australia

**Barbados:** West Indies batter Shai Hope is in line to play his first Test in almost four years after being recalled to the squad for their home series against Australia, but veteran pacer Kemah Roach has been dropped.

The three-Test series, which begins in Barbados on June 25, marks the start of the team's new World Test Championship cycle.

Limited-overs captain Hope has played 38 Tests, the last of which came in Sri Lanka in late 2021. Kevlon Anderson earned a first Test call-up while Brandon King was also included in the squad to

strengthen their batting order against World Test Champions Australia's formidable pace attack.

"Brandon King's inclusion fits a role we have identified that needs special focus to take our team to those closer to the top of the rankings," head coach Daren Sammy said in a statement.

**Squad:** Roston Chase (captain), Jomel Warrican, Kevlon Anderson, Kraigg Brathwaite, John Campbell, Keacy Carty, Justin Greaves, Shai Hope, Tevin Imlach, Alzarri Joseph, Shamar Joseph, Brandon King, Johann Layne, Mikyle Louis, Anderson Phillip, Jayden Seales



MOTORSPORT

# Verstappen needs to stay out of track trouble in Canada

‘McLaren is still ahead, but we’re closing the gap step-by-step’

Reuters  
Montreal

**M**ax Verstappen will have to keep out of trouble as he chases an unprecedented fourth Canadian Grand Prix win in a row this weekend, with only a penalty point between the Formula One champion and a race ban.

The Red Bull driver has won for the last three years in Montreal, the last time after starting alongside Mercedes’ pole-sitter George Russell - the same rival he clashed with two weekends ago - in a qualifying draw.

How Verstappen will respond is an open question but others are sure to want to take whatever advantage they can of the situation at a track famed also for changeable weather.

“He mustn’t do anything wrong over the next two race weekends, and of course he will be told not to do anything rash,” Red Bull motorsport consultant Helmut Marko wrote in a column for [www.speed-week.com](http://www.speed-week.com) post-Spain.

“It would be a catastrophe if he couldn’t start in Austria (the race after Canada).”

While McLaren, with Oscar Piastri leading Lando Norris by 10 points after nine of 24 races, will be the team to beat again, Mercedes will fancy their chances in the season’s second race in North America.

“It’s a track where we’ve tended to find our feet relatively well in the past,” said Mercedes technical director James Allison. “So I’m looking forward to it.

“We’ve got one or two new bits to take with us and we’ll see how we get on.”

Mercedes have not won since Las Vegas last November, with Russell’s second place in Bahrain in April the best they have managed so far.

McLaren have won seven of nine but last triumphed in Canada with Lewis Hamilton in 2012, although historically they have won more



times (13) than any team there. The battle between Piastri and Norris could be about to heat up.

Ferrari, now up to second in the constructors’ standings, last won with Sebastian Vettel in 2018 at a track named after their late local great Gilles Villeneuve.

“McLaren is still ahead, but we’re closing the gap step-by-step,” said team boss Fred Vasseur.

The circuit holds fond memories for Ferrari’s seven-times world champion Hamilton, who took his first career F1 victory there in 2007 and shares with Michael Schumacher the record of seven wins in Canada.

Hamilton was down after Spain, where he finished only sixth and was overtaken by Sauber’s Nico Hulkenberg, and needs a morale booster. Formula One driver Lance Stroll has been declared fit to race at his home race after recovering from hand and wrist pain, his Aston Martin team said yesterday.

The 26-year-old Canadian had

missed the Spanish Grand Prix on June 1 due to the problem, having experienced pain for many weeks which his medical consultant believed stemmed from surgery following a cycling accident in 2023.

“We are pleased to confirm that Lance Stroll will be back with the team competing in Montreal this weekend,” Aston Martin said in a statement.

“He had a successful medical procedure to resolve the symptoms he has been experiencing and completed some laps in an old F1 car at Paul Ricard earlier this week.

“Lance is feeling fit and healthy, and is excited to compete in front of his home crowd.”

Aston Martin were unable to replace Stroll for the race in Spain since he had taken part in qualifying, finishing 14th at the Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya.

“I am excited to get back behind the wheel with the team for my home Grand Prix this weekend.

I was always going to fight hard to be ready to race in front of the Montreal crowd,” Stroll said.

“I’m feeling good after my procedure and put some laps in at Paul Ricard this week to prepare. Thanks for all the support, see you guys this weekend!”

Stroll is 12th in the driver standings with 14 points, with McLaren’s Australian driver Oscar Piastri leading the table with 186.

US-owned Haas will be celebrating their 200th start with a retro grey livery similar to the one they started out with in 2016.

“From nothing to 200 races is significant because not many new teams survive more than two seasons, and they disappear without scoring a single point,” said principal Ayao Komatsu.

“Our aim is high, we want to be at the front of the midfield, and there’s so much going on at this team right now. For our 200th race, I really hope we can celebrate with points.”

TENNIS

## Keys leads American charge into quarters at Queen’s Club

Reuters  
London

**S**econd seed Madison Keys powered into the quarter-finals of the Queen’s Club Championships with a 6-3 6-2 win over Anastasia Zakharova yesterday while fellow Americans Emma Navarro and Amanda Anisimova also progressed.

Australian Open champion Keys had an early wobble in the opening set in her first grass-court match of the season when she found herself 3-1 down as she tried to find her footing.

But she did not panic and quickly recovered to win the next five games, sealing the set with an ace straight down the middle.

Zakharova had her moments in the second set but could not contend with the power of Keys, who converted five break points and clinched victory with an unreturned serve to wrap up the contest in 68 minutes.

“Always tough to play your first match on the grass, especially against someone who’s already played a few matches. But overall, pretty happy and happy that I get another match here,” Keys said.

“The first couple of games felt like I was just trying to find my footing. Once I did, I feel like I played really well.”

Third seed Navarro overcame a nightmare opening set and also saved match point to beat Brazil’s Beatriz Haddad Maia 1-6 7-6(4) 6-3.

After Navarro saved a match point in the second set, Haddad Maia led 4-2 in the tiebreak but the Brazilian lost her momentum when play was paused so an audience member could receive medical treatment.

Haddad Maia then began making errors and Navarro pounced, forcing a decider where the Brazilian lost serve with a double fault before Navarro clinched victory in a match that lasted nearly three hours.

“It wasn’t easy. I think I’ve spent the most time on a match court with Bea than anyone else. We play each other all the time and we always go to three sets,” Navarro said.

“I’ve only been playing on grass for about four days, it’s a quick turnaround.”

Navarro set up a quarter-final clash with Anisimova, who needed only 64 minutes to beat Sonay Kartal 6-1 6-3, the second Briton she had beaten at the tournament after Jodie Burrage.

“I’m so sorry, guys,” she told the home fans. “There’s been some tough matches here but I am enjoying it and glad to be through to the next round.

“There are so many strong girls right now in America and I am so happy to see us doing well. I am sure the match with Emma will be a battle. She is a tough player and I am looking forward to it.”

Any home hopes of British success in the doubles also went up in smoke when Emma Raducanu and Katie Boulter lost 6-2 7-5 to top seeds Erin Routliffe and Lyudmyla Kichenok.

### WTA gives ranking protection for players who freeze eggs

Women tennis players who take time out of the game to freeze eggs or embryos will have their ranking protected, the WTA Tour announced yesterday. Players ranked from 1-750 in singles or doubles who spend at least 10 consecutive weeks out of competition for a “fertility protection procedure” are eligible. The ranking can be used to enter up to three tournaments but the policy does not apply to the premier 1000 events. The special ranking will be based on the 12-week average of a player’s WTA ranking from eight weeks prior to the start of their out-of-competition period. Sloane Stephens, the 2017 US Open champion, told the *BBC* the rule will reduce the pressure on players to return to the court too quickly. Stephens said she had twice previously used the off-season to freeze her eggs. The 32-year-old said in the WTA statement that she was “incredibly proud of our sport in recognising the importance of fertility treatments for female athletes”.

“For any woman, the conversation of family life versus a career is nuanced and complex,” she said. “The WTA has now created a safe space for players to explore options and to make the best decisions for themselves.” The WTA said in a statement that the “Fertility Protection Special Entry Ranking Rule” would enhance the existing package of benefits to help players combine family life with tennis. WTA CEO Portia Archer said: “We understand that professional athletes can face a dilemma between focusing on their career and starting a family, and we are committed to supporting WTA players as they navigate and balance the choices associated with career and family.” In March the WTA and Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund (PIF) announced the introduction of a maternity fund programme, giving players paid maternity leave for up to 12 months and access to grants for fertility treatments. The PIF is a global partner of the WTA Tour.

ATHLETICS

## Duplantis headlines Oslo DL, Warholm eyes 300m hurdles showdown

AFP  
Oslo

**A**rmand ‘Mondo’ Duplantis headlines a star-studded Diamond League meet in Oslo today featuring eight other champions from the Paris Olympics.

Here, AFP Sport looks at five stand-out events at the sixth meeting of the 15-event Diamond League circuit where athletes have collectively won more than 15 individual Olympic gold medals and over 20 world championship golds:

**Women’s 100m:** Julien Alfred made history at the Olympics last summer when she won a first ever medal for her tiny island homeland of Saint Lucia.

Her personal best of 10.72sec is matched in the Oslo field by 36-year-old Ivorian veteran Marie-Josée Ta Lou-Smith. But Alfred will likely come under more pressure from the British pair of Dina Asher-Smith and Daryll Neita. “I want to be at my very best,” Alfred said.

“I’m looking forward to some great competition here, it’s my first 100m of the season.”

Winning Olympic gold had changed her life “for the better”, she insisted.

“I’ve become an ambassador for my country, I’m more recognised now... and there’s a target on my back now. There are more opportunities in life.”

**Men’s 5,000m:** Oslo’s Bislett Stadium is known as a venue where world records are regularly set. When a world-class field lines up for the 5,000m, they’ll be chasing what could be the 72nd world record set at the venue since Adrian Paulen established the first one back in 1924.

Ethiopian Hagos Gebrhiwet missed it by just over a second when he clocked 12:36.73 in the Norwegian capital last season.

This year, both Gebrhiwet and his compatriots Yomif Kejelcha, who finished second last year in 12:38.95, and Berihu Aregawi, with a personal best of 12:40.45, are all lining up with one goal in mind: breaking Joshua Cheptegei’s world record of 12:35.36.

**Men’s 800m:** If the race over 5km proves to be a mouth-watering clash, also don’t rule out the 800m, where meet organisers have brought together what they say is the strongest line-up they’ve ever assembled.

Kenyan legend David Rudisha holds the stadium record of 1:42.04 from 2010. But that could be under threat from compatriot

and reigning Olympic champion Emmanuel Wanyonyi, Algeria’s Djamel Sedjati and France’s Gabriel Tual, respectively second, fifth and sixth fastest ever over the two-lap race.

**Men’s pole vault:** Duplantis remains head and shoulders above the rest, having bettered his own world record to 6.27m in February on the back of a 2024 season when he not only won Olympic gold but also broke the world record three times. The US-born Swede has also registered the 11 highest jumps in the history of the sport, improving the world record one centimetre at a time from 6.17 to 6.27.

He is the undisputed king of the event and was also named Laureus World Sportsman of the Year for 2024. Jamaican sprint legend Usain Bolt is the only track and field athlete to have previously won the award.

The world’s top eight will compete in Oslo, three of them having cleared the 6m mark, notably Greece’s Emmanouil Karalis, who won Olympic silver in Paris and has a personal best of 6.01m and American Sam Kendricks (6.06).

“This time we do happen to have some good weather,” said Duplantis.

“Now it seems like it’s no excuses and all upon us to jump well and put on a good show.”

The vaulters, Karalis added, were “going to have a great show!”

**Men’s 300m hurdles:** Home favourite Warholm headlines a sparkling field in the 300m hurdles, an event that was granted official status earlier this year, but is yet to have a ratified world record. The Norwegian clocked a best of 33.05sec in Xiamen this season. Warholm, reigning world champion and world record holder in the 400m hurdles, will be up against Bislett debutant Rai Benjamin of the USA, the Olympic champion, and Brazil’s Alison dos Santos.

The trio’s personal bests are the three fastest times ever run in the 400m hurdles. Between them they own the 19 fastest races in the event’s history and also won all medals at both the 2020 and 2024 Olympic Games. Now it’s time for crowing rights in the shortened race.

“I believe the introduction of the 300m hurdles can help bring in new athletes now that the long hurdles expand from one to two events,” said Warholm.

There are 50m to cover before the first of the seven hurdles, while there are 10 in the 400m hurdles.

“It’s a weird one because the measurements are different in the beginning but you go back to the 400m pattern,” said Benjamin, making his season debut.





SPOTLIGHT

# England coach Tuchel wants Bellingham to inspire, not intimidate

Tuchel suffered his first loss in four games as England boss after Senegal won 3-1

AFP  
London

England manager Thomas Tuchel is determined to harness Jude Bellingham's "fire" to his side's advantage rather than the Real Madrid star in-timidating teammates or raging at referees.

Tuchel suffered his first defeat in four games as England boss on Tuesday when Senegal became the first African side to ever beat the Three Lions in a 3-1 friendly win. Bellingham thought he had made it 2-2 late on at Nottingham Forest's City Ground only for the goal to be controversially disallowed before Senegal broke away for a third in stoppage time.

Tuchel had to restrain Bellingham's protests at the decision at full-time and said it is a balancing act to retain the 21-year-old's fight without it bubbling over.

"He has a certain something and brings an edge. It's needed if we want to achieve big things," Tuchel said.

"It needs to be channelled towards the opponent and towards our goal, and not to intimidate team-mates or be aggressive towards teammates or referees but always on winning. He has the fire - I don't want to dim that, he should play with that as that's his strength.

"But the fire comes also with some attribute that can intimidate team-mates. Sometimes you see the explosion towards referees and the anger in his game. If he can channel this in the right way he has something that we need and that edge is hard to find."

Tuchel, who won the Champions League at Chelsea and league titles with Paris Saint-Germain and Bayern Munich, was hired with the task of ending England's wait for a major tournament victory since 1966. Under Gareth Southgate they reached the final of each of the last two Euros, plus a quarter-final and semi-final of the past two



England's head coach Thomas Tuchel (right) speaks to midfielder Jude Bellingham as he prepares to enter the pitch during the friendly match against Senegal on Tuesday. (AFP)

World Cups.

Tuchel has a richly talented squad to choose from but has so far failed to find the right blend in three underwhelming World Cup qualifying wins over Albania, Latvia and Andorra before the Senegal defeat. "I

already have an idea of what to do," he added with one year to go till the 2026 World Cup begins. "We did some experiments in the second camp, not everything was bad, we did some good things but the two games were not good enough. It was a good learn-

ing and it brings clarity. Each game is a learning situation and helps us mould the team and find solutions."

Tuchel suggested he is tempted to seek a contract extension as England manager beyond the 2026 World Cup up to the 2028 European Championship, despite his team drawing criticism for recent poor performances. "I will always be tempted to stay because I love the group and the opportunity, it's an honour to be England coach," Tuchel said. "I can tell you that even after the disappointment yesterday. If you ask me today, yes. I am enjoying it, I feel the support, trust and respect of people in the FA. I wanted a new challenge and environment."

The 51-year-old conceded to little enjoyment, however, in the hours after Tuesday's game at the City Ground where Senegal repeatedly punished England's lacklustre defence. "I'm not very good, I didn't sleep well after last night. I'm disappointed, it was a short night, we hate to lose," Tuchel said. "The way we lost, losing at home, didn't make me sleep well."

The German said England lacked joy and energy, which was also evident in their 1-0 win over Andorra in World Cup qualifying on Saturday. "I am trying now and still we feel we are lacking the enthusiasm and joy consistently at international level," he said. "I think it's massively about connections that the team generates, that we have joy in playing together.

"Senegal arrived with the objective to win and to make history. Would we have had the same joy as them if we won? I don't think so. Celebrate the goals more, be more happy, create an environment where the players feel they can express their joy more lively. Or is it just not in us? Is it a way of lifestyle connected to different cultures?"

Tuchel will travel to the United States next week to begin preparations for next summer's World Cup in the US, Mexico and Canada, looking at factors such as heat adaptation.

## Sampdoria's relegation lifeline confirmed with Salernitana play-off

**Milan:** Sampdoria will have a chance to avoid their first ever relegation to Italy's third division after a play-off with Salernitana was confirmed by Serie B.

The former Italian champions fell to a historic low last month when a goalless draw at Juve Stabia on the final day of the regular season led to an 18th-placed finish in the 20-team division. The bottom three in Serie B are directly relegated to the third tier, while the teams in 16th and 17th place face off in a two-legged play-off.

But Brescia dropped down to 18th after being deducted eight points for accounting and administrative infractions, four of which were applied to this past season and the remaining points to their next league campaign. Brescia did not appeal the ruling and are set to go out of existence after 114 years following owner Massimo Cellino's decision not to honour a debt of 3mn euros.

Cellino had until Friday to pay part of Brescia's eight million euros in tax arrears and other overdue tax, and failure to do so has resulted in the club losing the right to take part in the Italian league system. That has given Sampdoria a lifeline, with a showdown with Salernitana deciding the final team to be relegated to Serie C alongside Brescia, Cittadella and Cosenza.

One of seven Italian clubs who have played all their football in the top two divisions, Sampdoria will host Salernitana on Sunday, with the second leg in Salerno in southern Italy the following Friday. Sampdoria were relegated to Serie B in 2023 and close to going bust before being saved by current president Matteo Manfredi and former Leeds United owner Andrea Radrizzani, who has since exited the club.

The club's majority shareholder is Singaporean businessman Joseph Tey. Club icons Alberico Evani and Attilio Lombardo were hired as coaches in April in an attempt to save Sampdoria from the drop after significant transfer market activity both last summer and in January. Evani is Sampdoria's fourth head coach of the season after Andrea Pirlo, Andrea Sottili and Leonardo Semplice.

## QATAR STARS LEAGUE

## Sadd renew Miguel's contract until 2030

Qatar Stars League champions Al Sadd yesterday announced the renewal of Pedro Miguel's contract, extending his stay with the team until 2030.

He joined Al Sadd in January 2016 and has since won 12 titles with the club. The defender also claimed the AFC Asian Cup with the Qatari national team in both 2019 and 2023. The contract renewal aims to bring greater stability to the team's squad.

Miguel expressed his happiness at continuing with Al Sadd, saying: "I am very happy and proud of my new contract. Playing for this team is a big responsibility. This is my tenth season with Al Sadd, so I know the club and its ambitions very well. I am extremely proud to wear this shirt"

"We've experienced many great moments, which have motivated



me to improve over the past seasons—thanks to the club and the efforts of my teammates. Extending my contract with Al Sadd came at the right time." He also extended heartfelt thanks to Al Sadd's fans, saying he hopes to continue being one of their biggest supporters next season.

## WORLD CUP QUALIFIER

## Koeman keeps Depay hungry for goals after equalling Van Persie's record

Reuters  
Amsterdam, Netherlands

Memphis Depay was denied the chance to complete a hat-trick on Tuesday, and take sole possession of the Dutch national team's all-time scoring record in the process, as coach Ronald Koeman said he wanted to keep him hungry for goals.

Depay scored twice inside the opening 16 minutes of the Netherlands' 8-0 win over Malta in a World Cup qualifier to equal Robin van Persie's record of 50. Both players have 50 goals in 102 international appearances.

"I equalled Van Persie, I am happy with that," said Depay, who was taken off in the 72nd minute with the Dutch 4-0 up. "But this



Netherlands' Memphis Depay (centre) celebrates with Justin Kluivert and Denzel Dumfries after scoring against Malta. (Reuters)

is just an interim total. Of course I am also going for 51, 52 and also 53. If I had played longer, I might have scored one more tonight," he told reporters. "I didn't say anything about the fact that the coach took

me off early. I was already happy that I could do what I've been doing for years ... scoring."

Depay scored his first international goal against Australia at the 2014 World Cup in Brazil but

it has not always been smooth sailing over the years with the national team.

"We have had some turbulence over the years," he said. "There have been many coaches and many players have come and gone. The times have shaped me and made me realise what I want. Ultimately, it's important that we're at the World Cup and that we go far."

Koeman has consistently backed Depay over his two spells in charge of the Dutch, even when he struggled with his club form. "I've always thought Memphis is a great player. I think he deserves a great compliment. He's had a year full of injuries, but he's fit and hungry now," said Koeman. "It's great that he didn't score the third, because then he stays hungry," he quipped.

## Son to 'wait and see' on his Spurs future

**Seoul:** Son Heung-min has cast doubt on his Tottenham future after saying he will "wait and see" what happens amid speculation the skipper could move to Saudi Arabia. The South Korean forward has a year left on his contract and has been linked with an exit after helping Spurs end their 17-year trophy drought.

"Rather than saying anything at this moment, I think we should all wait and see what happens," the 32-year-old told reporters after South Korea's 4-0 World Cup qualifying win over Kuwait on Tuesday. "But no matter where I end up, I will always do the best I can. It will never change."

Son lifted the Europa League trophy last month to claim his first piece of silverware with Tottenham after helping his team beat Manchester United 1-0 in Bilbao.

## FOCUS

## Grealish left out of Man City squad for Club World Cup

AFP  
Manchester

Jack Grealish's future at Manchester City was plunged into further doubt after the England international was left out of Pep Guardiola's squad for the Club World Cup. Despite City naming just 27 players from a possible 35 for the tournament beginning in the United States on June 14, Grealish was omitted alongside former captain Kyle Walker.

All four of the club's new signings this week - Rayan Ait-Nouri, Rayan Cherki, Tijani Reijnders and Marcus Bettinelli - are included. Ballon d'Or winner Rodri is also selected after making his comeback from a long-term knee injury just before the end of the Premier League season.

Grealish, who remains City's record signing after a £100mn move from Aston Villa in 2021, has fallen down the pecking order over the past two seasons. He made just seven

Premier League starts in the 2024/25 campaign and was notably not summoned from the bench as City went down to a 1-0 defeat to Crystal Palace in the FA Cup final last month.

The 29-year-old still has two years left to run on his City contract and his reported £300,000-a-week (\$405,000) wages are a barrier to finding a potential suitor. Guardiola threatened last month he could leave the club if the size of his squad is not cut before the new season begins.

Grealish is just one of a number of expected exits, along with Walker. The 35-year-old spent the second half of last season on loan at AC Milan, but the Italian giants have not taken up an option to buy. City begin their Club World Cup campaign against Moroccan side Wydad Casablanca in Philadelphia next Wednesday before facing further group games against Al Ain of Abu Dhabi and Juventus.

Meanwhile, City confirmed the signing of midfielder Reijnders from AC Milan on a five-year contract and

said the Netherlands international will be available for this month's Club World Cup. Financial details were not released but a City team source has put the transfer fee at 55mn euros.

"City are one of the biggest teams in the world, with the best coach, world-class players and outstanding facilities. Under Pep Guardiola, City have won so many titles, and I want to help keep that going with a lot more success in the coming years," Reijnders said in a statement.

"It is also a dream come true to play in the Premier League. This league has seen many of the best Dutch players perform through the years and it's an inspiration to follow in their footsteps."

The 26-year-old, who has been capped 23 times, joined Milan in 2023 on a five-year contract before extending it until 2030 in March. He made 104 appearances for the club in all competitions, winning the Italian Super Cup and was named Serie A's best midfielder last season.



Jack Grealish, who remains City's record signing after a £100mn move from Aston Villa in 2021, has fallen down the pecking order over the past two seasons.