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O'Connor climbs to 'brutal' Alpine stage win as Pogacar leads



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Star forward Isak considers Newcastle exit, say reports

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CRICKET

Crawley and Duckett run riot before India hit back in fourth Test

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FORMULA 1

Horner's exit has no impact on my future plans: Verstappen

World champion suggests he expects to stay with Red Bull until his current contract expires in 2028



AFF
Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium

Max Verstappen insisted yesterday that Christian Horner's shock departure as team boss of Red Bull will have no impact on his future plans.

The four-time world champion, who has been linked with a move to Mercedes next year, suggested that he expects to stay with Red Bull until the conclusion of his current contract in 2028.

Speaking to reporters in the paddock ahead of this weekend's Belgian Grand Prix, one of his 'home' races as he was born in Belgium and his mother is Belgian, the 27-year-old Dutchman said he was concerned only with improving the speed and performance of his car.

The rest, he said, was not of great interest to him, adding that past tensions between Horner and his father Jos Verstappen had no bearing on decisions about his future. Asked if Horner's exit after 20 years as team boss made it more probable that he would stay at Red Bull next year, Verstappen said: "No, it doesn't. Not really."

He said the well-publicised discord between his father and Horner was never a problem.

"People can have a difference of opinion and I expect that to happen because if everyone agrees, there is a problem. You need to have differences in opinion. Now, we will work in a different direction and I am excited about it and I don't think it will matter at all for the decision over my future. The only thing that matters is that we work on the car and make it as fast as we can and try and be more competitive this year, a little bit, but for sure with the new regulations next year."

Verstappen had earlier welcomed the appointment of Frenchman Laurent Mekies, promoted from junior team Racing

Bulls, as Horner's successor and clearly sensed that it could usher in a stronger technical and engineering focus at the team. "I had already quite a few meetings with Laurent as well, you know. The last two weeks have been quite intense," he said. "I'm equally excited for the team now moving forward because that's what we have to do."

Verstappen gave an oblique response when asked if he had a decision to make about his future. "There is also the possibility of not waking up tomorrow and so there is no driving. Life is unpredictable and, in general, I am happy with where I am at... The target was that when I signed my deal, I would drive here until the end of my career."

Verstappen will be hoping to end the speculation and give both the team and new boss Mekies a boost with a convincing performance this weekend on his favourite circuit. The Dutchman finds himself in the unaccustomed position of third in the drivers' standings, behind leader Oscar Piastri and Lando Norris, both of McLaren.

VERSTAPPEN AND WOLFF LAUGH OFF SARDINIA HOLIDAY STORIES

Verstappen and Mercedes boss Toto Wolff laughed off suggestions they held talks about a potential team move while both happened to be on holiday at the same time in Sardinia ahead of the Belgian Grand Prix. The pair were reported to have been seen and photographed together on the Italian island following the British Grand Prix and after the shock sacking of Horner.

But Verstappen told reporters that he was "swimming in the ocean at the time" and Wolff said he was impressed that people were producing "photo collages", and that it was coincidental they were both in Sardinia.

"Well, I was swimming in the ocean at the time," said Verstappen of the claims before dismissing them. "I don't really

care about those things. Because I went on holiday with my friends, my family, and when other people also are there at the same time, that can happen. I mean, there are more people on the island than just me and Toto and the family. If you go to the same island, that can happen."

Wolff conceded it was unlikely Verstappen would be joining Mercedes after rumours had abounded in recent weeks about a shock team move. "The direction of travel is definitely that we want to continue with George (Russell) and Kimi (Antonelli). That is the absolute priority," he said.

"But you can't look past someone like Max and the plans he has for the future. We did that, but I don't think there will be any big surprises. What is new is that people are doing photo collages with aeroplanes. We've never had that before! But if you spend your holidays close to each other, it doesn't mean that you're going to work together in Formula One. We have always got along well and by chance we like to spend our holidays at the same places!"

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP STANDINGS

Drivers: 1. Oscar Piastri (AUS) 234 pts, 2. Lando Norris (GBR) 226, 3. Max Verstappen (NED) 165, 4. George Russell (GBR) 147, 5. Charles Leclerc (MON) 119, 6. Lewis Hamilton (GBR) 103, 7. Kimi Antonelli (ITA) 63, 8. Alex Albon (THA) 46, 9. Nico Hulkenberg (GER) 37, 10. Esteban Ocon (FRA) 23, 11. Isack Hadjar (FRA) 21, 12. Lance Stroll (CAN) 20, 13. Pierre Gasly (FRA) 19, 14. Fernando Alonso (ESP) 16, 15. Carlos Sainz (ESP) 13, 16. Liam Lawson (NZL) 12, 17. Yuki Tsunoda (JPN) 10, 18. Oliver Bearman (GBR) 6, 19. Gabriel Bortoleto (BRA) 4, 20. Franco Colapinto (ARG) 0, 21. Jack Doohan (AUS) 0
Constructors: 1. McLaren 460 pts, 2. Ferrari 222, 3. Mercedes 210, 4. Red Bull 172, 5. Williams 59, 6. Sauber 41, 7. RB 36, 8. Aston Martin 36, 9. Haas 29, 10. Alpine 19

FOOTBALL

Duhail sign Cameroon defender Castelletto

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Duhail SC have announced the signing of Cameroonian international Jean-Charles Castelletto on a one-year deal from French side Nantes. In a statement on its website, the Qatar Stars League club confirmed that Castelletto will join the first team for the new season, describing him as a valuable addition to the squad's defensive line thanks to his experience at both club and international level. The experienced defender attracted interest from United Arab Emirates side Al Jazira and Qatari club Al Wakrah, but Al Duhail managed to sign him in a deal worth €4mn, according to reports.

The 30-year-old is Duhail's fifth summer signing, following the arrivals of Italian midfielder Marco Verratti, Polish defender Krzysztof Piatek, Senegalese full-back Youssouf Sabaly, and Algerian centre-back Adel Boulbina.

Castelletto, a versatile centre-back, began his career in France with Auxerre and went on to play for Mouscron and Club Brugge in Belgium, before returning to France with stints at Red Star, Brest, and most recently Nantes. He represented France at youth level before committing to Cameroon at senior level, where he has since become a key figure in the national team setup.

Al Duhail are currently preparing to face Iran's Sepahan Isfahan in a crucial AFC Champions League play-off for a place in the group stage. The match is scheduled for August 12 in Doha.

FATHEDDINE JOINS AL AHLI ON A FOUR-YEAR DEAL

Al Ahli have signed midfielder Yannis Fatheddine on a four-year contract from Al Waab Club. The club confirmed that the 22-year-old has signed a deal that will keep him at the club until the summer of 2029.

The signing comes as part of Al Ahli's efforts to strengthen the squad with high-potential



talent ahead of the new season. The club described Fatheddine as one of the most gifted midfielders in the Second Division, noting his standout performances with Al Waab last season and his strong technical abilities.

Fatheddine has already joined Al Ahli's pre-season training camp, currently underway in the Dutch city of Eindhoven and continuing until August 4, as the team prepares for the new season.

This signing is part of a broader recruitment strategy ahead of a landmark campaign for Al Ahli, who will compete in the AFC Champions League for the first time in their history, following a fourth-place finish in the Qatari Stars League last season.

Al Ahli are set to open their league campaign against Al Shamal on August 14.

AL RAYYAN TO REPRESENT QATAR IN GULF CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

The Qatar Football Association (QFA) announced Al Rayyan Sports Club has been selected to represent Qatar in the upcoming edition of the Gulf Champions League. Al Rayyan earned its spot in the tournament after finishing fifth in the 2024-2025 Qatar Stars League.

The Qatari side will join seven other clubs approved by the Gulf Cup Federation to take part in the next edition: Al Shabab (Saudi Arabia), Al Ain (UAE), Al Qadisiyah (Kuwait), Al Nahda (Oman), Zakho (Iraq), Al Tadamon Hadramaut (Yemen), and Sitra (Bahrain). The tournament is set to kick off in October, preceded by a group-stage draw that will divide the eight teams into two groups. Iraqi club Duhok are the reigning champions.

SPOTLIGHT

Hamilton takes matters into his own hands to 'gee up' Ferrari

AFF
Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium

Lewis Hamilton revealed yesterday he had prepared his own reports to present to Ferrari's senior management during a series of recent meetings in a bid to power the team to a first world title since 2008.

The seven-time world champion told a news conference ahead of this weekend's Belgian Grand Prix that he was not prepared to accept the fate of other multiple world champions like Fernando Alonso and Sebastian Vettel. "If you look at the team over the last 20 years, they've had amazing drivers like Kimi (Raikkonen), Fernando and Sebastian, all world champions, but they (Alonso and Vettel) didn't win a world championship with Ferrari – and I refuse for that to be the case with me," he said.

"So I am going the extra mile and I've been fortunate to have experiences in two other great teams – and whilst things will be different because of the culture, if you take the same path, you will get the same results."

Hamilton added: "I am trying to create allies in the organisation and get them geared up. I am here to win, and this is crunch time for me. I truly believe in the



potential of the team. I really believe they can win multiple world championships moving forward. They already have an amazing legacy, but... during my time, that is my sole goal."

Raikkonen was Ferrari's last drivers' champion in Hamilton's maiden season in Formula One in 2007, while their most recent constructors' title came the following season when the now 40-year-old Briton won his first individual title with McLaren.

Hamilton left McLaren for Mercedes and went on to win six more drivers' championships before joining Ferrari this year. He and teammate Charles Leclerc have struggled and are without a win, while Hamilton is without a podium success at the halfway stage of the 24-race campaign.

FOURTH TEST

Openers Crawley, Duckett run riot before India hit back

England were 225-2 at stumps on the second day at Old Trafford, a deficit of 133 runs

AFP
Manchester, United Kingdom

Zak Crawley and Ben Duckett got England off to a flying start in their first innings of the fourth Test before India ensured both openers fell agonisingly short of centuries.

England were 225-2 at stumps on the second day at Old Trafford, a deficit of 133 runs, after they dismissed India for 358, with captain Ben Stokes taking five wickets and an injured Rishabh Pant making a gutsy fifty for the tourists.

The hosts are 2-1 up in this five-match contest, and a win in Manchester would see England clinch the series ahead of next week's finale in London at the Oval. Crawley (84) and Duckett (94) shared an opening stand of 166 – just the duo's fifth century partnership in 53 Test innings together.

The inconsistent Crawley, labelled the “luckiest player to have won as many England caps as he has” by 2005 Ashes-winning skipper Michael Vaughan, played some trademark stylish drives, but he also survived a confident lbw appeal on 26 from Mohammed Siraj after offering no stroke to the fast bowler.

Crawley, however, fell frustratingly short of what would have been merely his sixth century in 58 Tests when he nicked Ravindra Jadeja to slip, where KL Rahul held a fine low catch. It was the end of a sparkling 113-ball innings, featuring 13 fours and a six.

Duckett was no slouch either, taking three fours off debutant Anshul Kamboj's first over in Test cricket. Kamboj was only in the side after fellow paceman Nitish Kumar Reddy was ruled out due to a knee injury suffered during England's dramatic 22-run win at Lord's last week.

But Duckett also flicked Jasprit Bumrah, the world's top-ranked Test bowler, off his pads for two fours in three balls. The left-hander was eyeing his second hundred of the series, following a brilliant 149 in England's five-wicket win in the first Test at Headingley, when he edged an intended cut off Kamboj to reserve wicketkeeper Dhruv Jurel, deputising for the injured Pant. As Kamboj celebrated his maiden Test wicket, a crestfallen Duckett trudged off with England 197-2.



England's Zak Crawley (right) and Ben Duckett shared an opening stand of 166 against India in the fourth Test at the Old Trafford Cricket Ground in Manchester yesterday. (Reuters)

Pant returned to action earlier yesterday after a severe foot injury. The vice-captain had to retire hurt on 37 during Wednesday's opening day when struck a painful blow on the foot attempting an audacious reverse-sweep off a Chris Woakes yorker.

After Shardul Thakur fell to Stokes for 41, leaving India 314-6, Pant slowly made his way down the dressing room steps and out into the middle. The left-hander's movements were restricted but runners are no longer allowed in international cricket.

However, there was nothing Pant could do as Stokes cleaned up the tail at the other end. When Kamboj was caught behind off the England skipper for a duck it meant Stokes had his first five-wicket haul in a Test since a career-best 6-22 against the

West Indies at Lord's in 2017.

The all-rounder finished with 5-72 in 24 overs, a fine return after his future as a lively medium-pacer was threatened by repeated hamstring trouble. Pant reached his half-century in 69 balls, including a pulled six off Jofra Archer despite his lack of mobility, before he was bowled by the paceman for 54.

India resumed earlier yesterday on 264-4 and, in overcast, bowler-friendly conditions, soon slumped to 266-5 as Archer struck with just his fifth ball of the day, an excellent delivery inducing Jadeja, on a run of four successive fifties, to edge low to second slip where Harry Brook held a sharp low catch to remove the all-rounder for 20.

Stokes went against history by sending India into bat on Wednesday. No team winning the toss and bowling first has ever won a Test at Old Trafford. But India need to make history of their own if they are to maintain their hopes of a series victory as they have never won a Test at Old Trafford.

SCOREBOARD

India 1st Innings (overnight: 264-4)	
R. Pant b Archer	54
R. Jadeja c Brook b Archer	20
S. Thakur c Duckett b Stokes	41
W. Sundar c Woakes b Stokes	27
A. Kamboj c Smith b Stokes	0
J. Bumrah c Smith b Archer	4
M. Siraj not out	5
Extras (b4, lb8, nb4, w14)	30



India's Rishabh Pant made a gutsy fifty despite a severe foot injury. (Reuters)

Total (all out, 114.1 overs, 554 mins) 358
Fall of wickets: 1-94 (Rahul), 2-120 (Jaiswal), 3-140 (Gill), 4-235 (Sudharsan), 5-266 (Jadeja), 6-314 (Thakur), 7-337 (Sundar), 8-337 (Kamboj), 9-349 (Pant), 10-358 (Bumrah)

Bowling: Woakes 23-5-66-1 (1w); Archer 26.1-3-73-3 (3w); Carse 21.1-71-0 (4nb); Stokes 24-3-72-5 (2w); Dawson 15-1-45-1; Root 5-0-19-0

England 1st Innings

Z. Crawley c Rahul b Jadeja	84
B. Duckett c sub (Jurel) b Kamboj	94
O. Pope not out	20
J. Root not out	11
Extras (b4, lb6, nb6)	16
Total (2 wkts, 46 overs, 223 mins) 225	
To bat: H Brook, B Stokes, J Smith, L Dawson, C Woakes, B Carse, J Archer	
Fall of wickets: 1-166 (Crawley), 2-197 (Duckett)	
Bowling: Bumrah 13-4-37-0 (2nb); Kamboj 10-1-48-1 (2nb); Siraj 10-0-58-0; Thakur 5-0-35-0; Jadeja 8-0-37-1 (2nb)	
Match position: England are 133 runs behind with 8 first-innings wickets standing.	

T20

Mirza, Farhan star in Pakistan win but Bangladesh take series



Pakistan's Sahibzada Farhan plays a shot during the third and final Twenty20 match against Bangladesh. (AFP)

AFP
Dhaka

Paceman Salman Mirza grabbed three wickets and opener Sahibzada Farhan struck an aggressive fifty in Pakistan's consolation 74-run win in the third T20 yesterday as Bangladesh took the series 2-1.

Mirza, playing only his third international, demolished Bangladesh's top order with figures of 3-19 as the home team was bowled out for 104 in 16.4 overs in Dhaka. Farhan's 41-ball 63 studded with five sixes and six fours got Pakistan off to a strong start and Hasan Nawaz clubbed 33 off 17 balls to help them to 178-7 after they were sent in to bat. Mirza struck with the second ball of the innings, dismissing Tanzid Hassan caught behind for nought which triggered a batting collapse. Only Mohammad Saifuddin contributed a score of note as he made an unbeaten 35.

Mohammad Naim (10) was the only other Bangladesh batsman to reach double figures. Seamer Faheem Ashraf took 2-13 and Mohammad Nawaz wrapped up the win with the final two wickets.

"I am proud of my team," said Pakistan captain Salman Agha. "This is what we talked about as a team, no matter what situation we are in, we want to show character."

Bangladesh skipper Litton Das praised his team's effort in the series win. "We played some good cricket and it's great to win a series against Pakistan," said Litton, who also led the team to a T20 series win in Sri Lanka last week.

Having already won their first-ever T20 series against Pakistan with victories in the first two matches, Bangladesh rested five of their main players including spearhead Mustafizur Rahman. Pakistan had scored 110 and 125 in the first two matches – also in Dhaka – losing by seven wickets and eight runs respectively.

Farhan, who replaced Fakhar Zaman as one of two changes for Pakistan, put on 82 for the opening stand with Saim Ayub (21). Farhan fell in the 12th over to spinner Nasum Ahmed who finished with 2-22 in his four overs. Pace bowler Taskin Ahmed took 3-38. Mohammad Nawaz chipped in with 27 off 16 balls down the order to help Pakistan add 46 runs in the last five overs.

BRIEF SCORES

Pakistan 178-7, 20 overs (Sahibzada Farhan 63, Hasan Nawaz 33, Mohammad Nawaz 27, Saim Ayub 21; Taskin Ahmed 3-38, Nasum Ahmed 2-22) **bt Bangladesh 104 all out, 16.4 overs** (Mohammad Saifuddin 35, Mohammad Naim 10; Mohammad Salman Mirza 3-19, Mohammad Nawaz 2-4, Faheem Ashraf 2-13)
Player of the match – Sahibzada Farhan (Pakistan)
Player of the series – Jaker Ali (Bangladesh)

SPOTLIGHT

Unbeaten New Zealand thrash Zimbabwe by 60 runs in tri-series

AFP
Harare

Tim Seifert hit a second successive half-century and Ish Sodhi took four wickets as New Zealand beat Zimbabwe by 60 runs in their T20 tri-series match in Harare yesterday. New Zealand won all four matches in the round robin phase of the tournament. They will play South Africa in the final at the same venue tomorrow. Seifert hit 75 in a New Zealand total of 190 for six – the highest of the tournament – and Sodhi took a career-best four for 12 as Zimbabwe were bowled out for 130.

Seifert and Rachin Ravindra (63) put on 108 for the second wicket to set up New Zealand for the highest total in the six round robin matches. Zimbabwe scored 21 off the first two overs in reply before leg-spinner Sodhi came on to bowl in the third over. He struck with his second ball and took three wickets for five runs in two overs in the powerplay.

Sodhi came back later to claim a fourth wicket and become the third player to take 150 wickets in T20 internationals on a list headed by fellow New Zealander Tim Southee with 164. It was his fifth and least expensive four-wicket haul in the format.



He said the number of players who had “put their hands up at different times” gave New Zealand a selection headache ahead of the final.

BRIEF SCORES

New Zealand 190-6 in 20 overs (T. Seifert 75, R. Ravindra 63; R. Ngarava 4-34, T. Maposa 2-33) **bt Zimbabwe 130 in 18.5 overs** (T. Munyonga 40; I. Sodhi 4-12, M. Henry 2-34) **by 60 runs**

South Africa select Brevis, Pretorius for Australia tour

Cape Town: Batters Dewald Brevis and Lhuan-dre Pretorius have been included in South Africa's Twenty20 and One Day International squads for their white ball tour of Australia next month, as off-spinner Prenelan Subrayen earns a maiden limited overs call-up. South Africa play their hosts in three T20 matches between August 10-16 before a three-game ODI series from August 19-24. Subrayen, 31, recently made his test debut in Zimbabwe, as did Brevis, 22, and Pretorius, 19. All three players have been included in both limited overs squads.

Having rested several regulars for the tri-series tournament in Zimbabwe this month that also includes New Zealand, South Africa have recalled Aiden Markram, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton and Tristan Stubbs. Key all-rounder Marco Jansen misses out on the tour through injury. Markram will captain the T20 side, and Temba Bavuma will lead the ODI team.

T20 squad: Aiden Markram (captain), Corbin Bosch, Dewald Brevis, Nandre Burger, George Linde, Kwena Maphaka, Senuran Muthusamy, Lungi Ngidi, Nqaba Peter, Lhuan-dre Pretorius, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Tristan Stubbs, Prenelan Subrayen and Rassie van der Dussen.

ODI squad: Temba Bavuma (captain), Corbin

Bosch, Matthew Breetzke, Dewald Brevis, Nandre Burger, Tony de Zorzi, Aiden Markram, Senuran Muthusamy, Keshav Maharaj, Wiaan Mulder, Lungi Ngidi, Lhuan-dre Pretorius, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Tristan Stubbs and Prenelan Subrayen.

LORD'S TO HOST HISTORIC WOMEN'S TEST MATCH IN 2026

Lord's will host a women's Test for the first time next year when England play India at the London ground. The dates for the historic fixture were announced by the England and Wales Cricket Board yesterday as part of the full 2026 home schedule for both the men's and women's teams.

England women's last home Test, in 2023, ended in defeat to Australia at Trent Bridge in a match played over five days, but the India game will revert to the usual women's format of four days, played from July 10 to 13.

The team also has white-ball series against New Zealand, India and Ireland. England's men will face New Zealand in a three-match Test series in June, with three Tests to follow against Pakistan, starting in August. The white-ball team take on India in July in five T20s and three one-day internationals, with Sri Lanka visiting in September.

TOUR DE FRANCE

Aussie O'Connor climbs to 'brutal' Alpine stage win

Pogacar stretches his overall advantage to a commanding 4:26 seconds

AFP
Col de la Loze, France

Ben O'Connor won stage 18 of the Tour de France with a world-class climb over three Alpine mountains yesterday as defending champion Tadej Pogacar tightened his grip on the yellow jersey.

Australian O'Connor, 29, took off alone 15km from the finish and navigated the mountain mist to win 1min 45sec ahead of Pogacar atop the Col de la Loze. Vingegaard crossed the line in third place, nine seconds behind the Slovenian. "It was brutal, I've never lived anything so hard. The team did well and we had a good plan, but I couldn't take any time off Tadej," said Vingegaard.

Pogacar now holds a 4min 26sec lead over the Dane in the general classification with three days to go before the finish in Paris. Starting the day with a deficit of 4min 15sec, Vingegaard had attacked a massive 71km out. "Our tactics fell apart when they attacked so soon," said Pogacar explaining he simply tracked his rival on instinct.

Pogacar eventually dropped the Dane near the finish line to gain another 11sec on the Team Visma rider who won the 2022 and 2023 Tour de France. O'Connor, from the Jayco-Alula team, said he was relieved to triumph again four years after his success in the Alps at Tignes.

"Putting your hands in the air is an extraordinary thing. It was about time for me being an Aussie rider in an Aussie team," said a beaming O'Connor, who joined Jayco in January. "I had to go from the bottom of the valley before the last climb. It was the only way to beat them."

Pogacar said O'Connor had put in a great ride. Team UAE's Pogacar is now on the cusp of a fourth Tour de France title, after reversing the roles and sitting on Vingegaard's wheel, wasting little energy. He remained vigilant however. "It's not over, there's three days left. It's so long this three weeks thing. You get annoyed with everybody by the third week. You need good legs and good luck and only then is it okay," added Pogacar.

German breakout star Florian Lipowitz wilted near the end in his bid for both third place and the white jersey awarded to the



Team Jayco Alula team's Australian rider Ben O'Connor rides during the 18th stage of the 112th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, 171.5km between Vif and Courchevel Col de la Loze, in the Alps, southeastern France, yesterday. (AFP)

best young rider. The 22-year-old British rider Oscar Onley closed to within 22 seconds. Both riders are making their Tour de France debut.

After 10 opening days of rolling terrain in the north and west of France where Pogacar and Vingegaard kept a watchful eye on each other as emerging riders stole the headlines, the real fight began in week two.

Pogacar attacked Vingegaard on the first mountain, taking over two minutes out of him on one climb as things looked grim for the Slovenian's rivals. It was a costly off day for Vingegaard as in retrospect this was where Pogacar made the real difference in the race. The following day on a time-trial Pogacar whacked another 40sec into the Visma star who did however take over four

minutes off the Slovenian on a single stage to win the 2023 Tour. Today's majestic five-mountain slog amid the imposing panoramas between Albertville and La Plaine will be the last chance for a reversal of fortunes with 60km of steep slopes to negotiate. The race ends Sunday in Paris with the finish line at the Champs Elysees after three climbs to the Sacre Coeur Basilica along the cobbled lanes of Montmartre.

STAGE 18 RESULTS BETWEEN VIF AND COL DE LA LOZE

1. Ben O'Connor (AUS/JAY) 5hr 03min 47sec, 2. Tadej Pogacar (SLO/UAD) at 1min 45sec, 3. Jonas Vingegaard (DEN/TVL) 1:54, 4. Oscar Onley (GBR/DFP) 1:58, 5. Einer Rubio (COL/MOV) 2:00, 6. Felix Gall (AUT/

- DAT) 2:25, 7. Primoz Roglic (SLO/RBH) 2:46, 8. Adam Yates (GBR/UAD) 3:03, 9. Tobias Johannessen (NOR/UXT) 3:09, 10. Sepp Kuss (USA/TVL) 3:26.

- Selected:** 11. Florian Lipowitz (GER/RBH) 3:37, 12. Kevin Vauquelin (FRA/ARK) 4:34, 17. Ben Healy (IRL/EFE) 9:28.

OVERALL STANDINGS

1. Tadej Pogacar (SLO/UAD) 66 hr 55min 42sec, 2. Jonas Vingegaard (DEN/TVL) at 4:26, 3. Florian Lipowitz (GER/RBH) 11:01, 4. Oscar Onley (GBR/DFP) 11:23, 5. Primoz Roglic (SLO/RBH) 12:49, 6. Felix Gall (AUT/DAT) 15:36, 7. Kevin Vauquelin (FRA/ARK) 16:15, 8. Tobias Johannessen (NOR/UXT) 18:31, 9. Ben Healy (IRL/EFE) 25:41, 10. Ben O'Connor (AUS/JAY) 29:19.

Tsitsipas splits with coach Ivanisevic after less than two months

Stefanos Tsitsipas has ended his collaboration with coach Goran Ivanisevic after less than two months, the former world number three said. "Working with Goran Ivanisevic was brief but an intense experience and a truly valuable chapter in my journey," Tsitsipas posted on his Instagram story.

Tsitsipas, ranked 29th, appointed Ivanisevic as his coach in May after a string of disappointing results at the Grand Slams. The 2021 French Open and 2023 Australian Open runner-up was forced to retire from his Wimbledon first-round match in June while trailing 6-3 6-2 to French qualifier Valentin Royer due to a back injury.

Following Tsitsipas' opening round exit at Wimbledon, Ivanisevic gave a scathing assessment of the 26-year-old Greek, saying he has "never seen a more unprepared player" in his life. Tsitsipas has made one quarter-final in his last nine Grand Slam tournaments. Tsitsipas expressed thanks "for the time, effort and energy he dedicated to me and my team".

Ivanisevic, who won Wimbledon as a player in 2001, helped Novak Djokovic claim nine of his 24 Grand Slam titles before leaving his team in March last year. He then had a short stint with Kazakh world number 12 Elena Rybakina this season.

VENUS GRANTED CINCINNATI WILD CARD

Venus Williams has received a wild card main draw entry into the Cincinnati Open, as the 45-year-old American enjoys an age-defying return to the spotlight. The seven-times Grand Slam singles champion became the oldest player to win a WTA singles match since 2004 when she beat world number 35 Peyton Stearns at the Washington Open on Tuesday, after a 16-month absence from the game. Williams, who will play Magdalena Frech in the next round in Washington previously declined a wild card entry invite for Indian Wells earlier this year. The Cincinnati Open also offered a wild card invite to hometown talent Caty McNally, who recently returned to action after undergoing elbow surgery.

SWIMMING

USA to use worlds as springboard to LA 2028

AFP
Los Angeles, United States

Nine-time Olympic gold medallist Katie Ledecky leads a United States swimming team aiming to shore up its global dominance at the world championships in Singapore with an eye already on the 2028 Los Angeles Games.

Ledecky is headed to a seventh world championships on a high note, having lowered her longstanding world record in the 800m freestyle in May - her first long-course world mark since 2018. She also posted the second-fastest 1,500m free ever this season and swam the second-best 400m free of her career - all signalling that she remains a force, 13 years on from her breakthrough Olympic gold in the 800m free in London in 2012.

The world championships begin tomorrow and if Ledecky sweeps her three individual events and is part of a winning 4x200m free relay, she would take her tally of world golds to 25. That is just one shy of Michael Phelps's overall record of 26 world titles.

The 28-year-old Ledecky said she isn't focusing on that type of comparison, or indeed on comparisons with her younger self.

After years in which she felt she could threaten a world record in virtually every race, Ledecky said she had stopped putting expectations on herself. "I just kind of swim a little more free and just try to improve in different areas, improve off of the previous year or the previous two years or whatever it is, rather than always comparing myself to my 19-year-old self or whatever it may be," she said.

Ledecky is right to be cautious, especially with newly minted world record-holder Summer McIntosh waiting in the 400m free. Ledecky's presence and level-headed approach will anchor a US team that is a mix of experience and young talent.

The men are aiming to bounce back from a lacklustre Paris Olympics at which Bobby Finke's record-breaking 1,500m free gold was



Katie Ledecky is headed to a seventh world championships on a high note, having lowered her longstanding world record in the 800m freestyle in May. (AFP)

the only victory for the US men. The United States still topped the medals table with eight golds to Australia's seven, and 28 medals in total, but it was the Americans' lowest Olympic total since the 1988 Games in Seoul.

After the women kept America afloat in Paris they look strong again. Gretchen Walsh has twice lowered her 100m butterfly world record this year and won the 50m fly at the US trials with the fourth-fastest swim ever.

Regan Smith, the 100m backstroke world record-holder, heads a formidable women's backstroke line-up eager to challenge Australia's Kaylee McKeown, who won double backstroke gold at the Tokyo and Paris Olympics.

With Finke again leading the way, the US men emerged from the domestic championships in June with contenders in multiple events. Luke

Hobson became the first American since Phelps to break 1min 44sec in the 200m freestyle with a time of 1:43.73 and Jack Alexy posted a sizzling 46.99sec in the 100m free.

Luca URLando owns the first and third-fastest times this year in the 200m butterfly and Shaine Casas signalled he's ready to take the fight to French star Leon Marchand in the 200m individual medley. "The US men are pretty strong, so I think that was a really encouraging week of swimming for all of us," Carson Foster said in June after securing his place in Singapore with a series of second-place finishes at the US trials. "I'm really excited for worlds."

Ledecky called the Singapore squad "a great group." "It will be a lot of good energy," she said. "We want to set the tone as a whole team, a whole unit, this summer, and build from there."

TENNIS

Fritz and Medvedev advance at DC Open

AFP
Washington

Top seed Taylor Fritz romped into the last 16 at the ATP/WTA DC Open on Wednesday as Russian eighth seed Daniil Medvedev overcame an early scare to advance to the third round.

World number four Fritz, playing his first match since losing to Carlos Alcaraz in the semi-finals at Wimbledon earlier this month, cruised past Australia's Aleksandar Vukic 6-3, 6-2 in 59 minutes.

The American dominated Vukic with a powerful service game while producing a slew of superb backhands in a stream of 28 winners to ease into a last 16 clash against Italy's Matteo Arnaldi. "I felt like I played pretty well all around, but the shot that stood out was the backhand line," Fritz said after his win. "I don't usually like that shot but it just felt like every single one I tried today was going in."

Fritz was always in control of his game against the current world 105 Vukic, breaking to open up an early 3-0 lead before closing out the first set. A similarly dominant start saw him take a 4-0 lead early in the second before he wrapped up a comfortable win.



American Taylor Fritz cruised past Australia's Aleksandar Vukic 6-3, 6-2 in 59 minutes at DC Open in Washington, DC. (AFP)

Usyk ordered to face Parker in heavyweight defence

Paris: Oleksandr Usyk has been ordered by the WBO to face New Zealander Joseph Parker in a mandatory heavyweight title defence.

The Ukrainian was crowned undisputed world heavyweight champion on Saturday after beating Daniel Dubois in a fifth-round stoppage at Wembley Stadium.

The victory, sealed when he left the Briton on the canvas with a left-handed punch, secured a 24th professional win for the

undefeated 38-year-old, who won back his IBF belt and added it to WBA, WBC and WBO titles.

After becoming undisputed world heavyweight champion for a second time, Usyk mentioned Parker as a possible future opponent. Yesterday, a letter from the WBO ordered negotiations to take place between Usyk and Parker for a mandatory heavyweight title bout.

Both fighters have 30 days to reach terms

otherwise purse bid proceedings will be ordered. Parker defended his WBO interim title in Riyadh in February with a second-round stoppage against Martin Bakole, a late replacement for Dubois who withdrew due to illness.

The New Zealand fighter had previously held the WBO title from 2016 to 2018 and is on a six-fight winning streak since losing to Joe Joyce in 2022.

FOOTBALL

Isak to explore move away from Newcastle: report

Forward has been linked with English champions Liverpool



Saudi-owned Premier League club said the 25-year-old forward would miss the Asia tour “with a minor thigh injury”.

AFP
London

Alexander Isak has reportedly told Newcastle he wants to explore a move away as the club confirmed he was not part of the squad travelling to Asia for pre-season friendlies. *The Daily Mail* said yesterday that Newcastle bosses “are aware of Isak’s wish to consider his options this summer”.

It came hours after the Saudi-owned Premier League club said the 25-year-old forward would miss the Asia tour “with a minor thigh injury”. Isak’s 23 Premier League goals last season made him one of the world’s hottest properties and he has been linked with English champions Liverpool. *The Mail* said Liverpool were still interested in acquiring the Sweden international despite announcing the signing of Eintracht Frankfurt striker Hugo Ekitike on Wednesday. Ekitike’s arrival, for a reported initial fee of £69 million (\$93 million), takes Liverpool’s spending during the current transfer window to more than £250mn.

Isak still has three years left on his contract at Newcastle, whom he joined in 2022 from Spanish side Real Sociedad. He was left out of Saturday’s 4-0 defeat in a friendly at Celtic.

But Newcastle boss Eddie Howe said at the time he was “confident” that Isak would stay at St James’ Park, adding that he expected him to be part of the Asia tour. “It’s difficult for me to give 100 percent clarity on any player,” he said. “I’d never sit here and do that because it’s football and you never know what could happen. All I can say is that Alex is happy at Newcastle. He loves the players that he plays with, the staff, the team.”

Newcastle face Arsenal in Singapore on Sunday before flying to South Korea, where they will play a K League all-star team and Tottenham.

Meanwhile, Liverpool’s big-money investment on transfers is the result of long-term planning, club CEO Billy Hogan said, adding that winning a record-equalling 20th English top-flight title convinced the club it was time to act like a modern powerhouse.

Liverpool’s latest acquisition, French striker Ekitike has taken the club’s transfer expenditure this window to nearly 300mn pounds. Outgoings, six players including Trent Alexander-Arnold, have so far generated around 64mn pounds.

The outlay marks a sharp departure from Liverpool’s traditionally measured approach in the market. However, Hogan insists the club has not deviated from the club’s policy of fi-

nancial sustainability. “It doesn’t just happen; it’s been years in the making,” Hogan said. “One of the things we’re constantly focused on is that ‘virtuous circle’. Trying to run the club in the right way to ensure that we can generate as much revenue as we possibly can. That obviously helps in terms of being able to put more back into the team. The difficulty is if you just look at one individual summer. That probably skews the data. There were a lot of comments made last summer that we didn’t spend enough...”

Hogan explained the approach reflects the ambitions of American-led Fenway Sports Group (FSG), who are seeking to build on last season’s Premier League title under manager Arne Slot. “We also recognise, having won the English league title for the 20th time, that this is one of the biggest clubs in the world. We want to make sure that we are behaving like one,” he added. “Having massive global stars come and play at Anfield, filling out stadiums in Hong Kong and Japan, those are things we expect and want to do.”

Liverpool face AC Milan in Kowloon, Hong Kong tomorrow, before taking on Yokohama FM in the J League World Challenge in Yokohama on Wednesday. They begin their Premier League title defence at home against Bournemouth on August 15.

ROUND-UP

Cardoso hoping to make history as first US player at Atletico

New Atletico Madrid signing **Johnny Cardoso** said he wants to “make history” as the first player from the United States at the club. The American midfielder joined the Rojiblancos from Real Betis last week for an estimated 25mn euros. “All of this is very special and I hope to make history here as the first American to play at this club,” Cardoso said. The 23-year-old made his international debut in 2020 and has 22 international caps. Diego Simeone’s side have rebuilt this summer after letting Saul Niguez, Axel Witsel, Angel Correa, Cesar Azpilicueta and others depart. Cardoso joined along with Alex Baena from Villarreal, Thiago Almada, Marc Pubill and Matteo Ruggeri.

The midfielder highlighted some of Atletico’s players he was excited to play with. “Koke is a player who I learn a lot from watching him play, (Antoine) Griezmann and Julian (Alvarez) are phenomenons. We have a lot of players here who I will enjoy being with every day and I am sure I will evolve with them.”

Cardoso said he was looking forward to working with Simeone. “It’s very special and a unique opportunity to be coached by him,” he added. “His professionalism is an example, so to be able to share, learn and have all his advice will be very special.”



in South Korea could also be scrapped. The Spanish giants had been due to play J-League side Vissel Kobe on Sunday before travelling to South Korea to face FC Seoul on July 31 and Daegu FC on August 4.

Vissel Kobe, for whom Barcelona and Spain great Andres Iniesta played at the end of his career, said in a statement yesterday that they were “currently investigating the situation”.

NEYMAR CONFRONTS FAN AFTER LATE GOAL RULED OUT

Striker Neymar had a heated exchange with a fan after his late goal was ruled out, condemning his club Santos to a 2-1 defeat and leaving them in the Brazilian Serie A relegation zone. The 33-year-old, who has had a frustrating time since returning to his boyhood club this year, went over to the stands at the end of the game with Internacional on Wednesday night to talk with a fan who appeared to be remonstrating with him.

Videos showed Neymar agitated and gesticulating, then raising a thumbs up as a teammate ushers him away. Santos had been pushing for a comeback from two goals with Alvaro Martin Barreal scoring a minute into added time. Three minutes later, Neymar thought he had scored with a left-footed shot and celebrated in front of cheering home fans. But boos rang out across Vila Belmiro stadium as the referee ruled the ball had not crossed the line. Santos are 17th in the 20-club league, where the bottom four are relegated to Serie B at the end of the season. The former Barcelona and Paris St Germain player has had a torrid time since returning; sidelined with injury, sent off for a handball and suffering Covid-19.

BARCA’S TER STEGEN FACES THREE MONTHS OUT AFTER BACK SURGERY

Barcelona goalkeeper Marc-Andre ter Stegen is set to undergo back surgery on a long-term problem and will miss three months as a result, the Germany international said. The Spanish champions signed Espanyol goalkeeper Joan Garcia this summer, who is expected to become the team’s first choice, with Wojciech Szczesny as back-up.

Spanish media reported Barcelona were hoping to sell Ter Stegen, 33, who signed for the club in 2014, to help register new signings Garcia and Marcus Rashford. Last summer a long-term injury to defender Andreas Christensen allowed Barcelona to use a La Liga loophole to register playmaker Dani Olmo on a temporary basis after he signed from RB Leipzig.

BARCELONA’S ASIAN TOUR ON ROPES AFTER JAPAN GAME CANCELLED

Barcelona have cancelled their Asian tour pre-season friendly against Japan’s Vissel Kobe citing unspecified “serious contractual breaches”, warning matches

TRANSFER

Arsenal sign Valencia defender Mosquera

AFP
London

Arsenal yesterday announced the signing of Valencia defender **Cristhian Mosquera**, taking their spending during the summer transfer window close to £140mn (\$189mn). The Spain under-21 international joins for an initial fee of around £13mn, with performance-related additions, and is understood to have agreed a five-year deal with an option of a further year.

The 21-year-old, Arsenal’s fifth signing in recent weeks, is set to provide cover for William Saliba and Gabriel at the heart of the Gunners’ defence, but can operate anywhere along the back line. Mosquera, who played 41 times for Valencia last season, has joined Arsenal for their tour of Singapore and Hong Kong.

“It means a lot to me,” he told the club website. “There’s been a lot of hard work behind all of this. It’s an opportunity that came up and I couldn’t let it pass me by. I’m joining a historic, massive club. When you arrive here with your family, you really feel the greatness of this place.”

Manager Mikel Arteta described Mosquera as “an intelligent player with good

pace, who can play centrally and on both sides”. “As a 21-year-old defender, Cristhian has already performed consistently well with significant experience in La Liga. He is a young player with exciting talent & enormous potential, who will fit well into our squad as we continue to prepare for next season. Cristhian adds good quality to our squad.”

Mosquera follows Spain midfielder Martin Zubimendi, goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga, Christian Norgaard and Noni Madueke in moving to the Emirates. Gabriel and Myles Lewis-Skelly have also put pen to paper on new contracts in the off-season, with a long-term extension for teenager Ethan Nwaneri believed to be all but completed.

Arsenal remain hopeful of signing striker Viktor Gyokeres from Sporting Lisbon, although it is not believed a deal, which could be worth as much as £65mn, is imminent. According to multiple reports, Gyokeres is to undergo his medical today evening in London. He’ll then fly with Sporting director Andrea Berta to Singapore to join up with Arsenal’s pre-season tour.

Gunners, who have finished as Premier League runners-up three times in a row, launch their 2025/26 campaign at Manchester United on August 17.



First foreign firm takes ownership of Saudi football club

Riyadh: A foreign company sealed the purchase of a Saudi football club – a first in the kingdom – the country’s sports ministry said, as it announced the privatisation of three teams in the Saudi Pro League.

The Harburg Group – led by American Ben Harburg – said it had “officially completed the 100 percent acquisition of Al Kholood Club, of the Saudi Pro League, as part of the groundbreaking privatisation initiative of Saudi Vision 2030.”

Last season, Al Kholood finished ninth out of the 18 teams in the Saudi Pro League. The Harburg Group currently owns a 6.5 percent stake in Cadiz, a club in Spain’s second division. In a separate statement, the ministry said: “The first three Saudi sports clubs have been privatised through a public offering – Al Ansar, Al Kholood, and Al Zulfi – with their ownership transferred to investment entities.”

Saudi Arabia has shaken up football by spending heavily on

stars from Europe, starting with Cristiano Ronaldo’s move in late 2022, and the desert nation will host the World Cup in 2034. For the past two years, Saudi football fans could watch the likes of Ronaldo and Karim Benzema on any given weekend during the Saudi Pro League season in the kingdom.

The oil-fuelled Saudi football project has drawn comparisons with the Chinese Super League, which imported players on exorbitant salaries until team owners went bust as the Chinese economy fizzled. But with Saudi Arabia set to host the World Cup, and desperate to re-model itself as a tourism and business magnet before global oil demand falls for good, there is probably more to come from the Pro League.

Sports are a major component of the Vision 2030 reform agenda overseen by de facto ruler Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, which aims to diversify the economy of the world’s top crude oil exporter.

India sets house in order, targets doping menace to boost 2036 bid

New Delhi: The usually fractious Indian Olympic Association (IOA) put on a united front and declared a war against doping yesterday to boost the country’s bid to host the 2036 Games in the western Indian city of Ahmedabad.

The world’s most populous nation, which staged the 2010 Commonwealth Games in its capital New Delhi, has confirmed bidding for the 2036 edition of “the greatest show on earth”.

Indonesia, Turkiye, and Chile are also bidding for the 2036 Olympics, and Qatar

on Tuesday became the latest country to show interest in hosting the Games.

An Indian delegation visited the International Olympic Committee (IOC) headquarters in Lausanne this month and media reports said the IOA was told to put its house in order and address the threat of doping.

IOA President PT Usha spoke to media yesterday, accompanied by several executive council members, who discussed a no-confidence motion to oust her last year. “What came out (in the media) was prob-

ably exaggerated,” executive council member Harpal Singh told reporters. “In the interest of the nation, we have resolved all those minor differences within ourselves. I assure you that going forward, we will strongly stand united and bid for the 2036 Olympic Games.”

The IOA has decided to address the country’s dismal doping record in recent years. Rohit Rajpal, another IOA executive council member, said India had made “significant strides” but an “organised racket” stood in the way of cleaning up sports. “All

these areas are going to be attacked by all of us in a very aggressive manner, and hopefully we’ll have a free-and-fair sport,” Rajpal said after announcing a new anti-doping education programme.

IOA chief executive Raghuram Iyer was upbeat about India’s chances of getting the 2036 Games.

“We are in the stage of continuous dialogue with the IOC,” said Iyer. “It’s a lot about sustainability, athlete-centric work and the legacy that you’re going to leave.”

With new IOC President Kirsty Coventry

pausing the venue selection process, Iyer is expecting more countries to enter the race to host the 2036 Games.

“I think in the next couple of years is when we will really get to know which direction it is going to,” Iyer said. “It was a very positive meeting with the IOC top brass. The follow-up would be, at some point in time, they would look at coming down to India very soon.”

India is also bidding to host the Commonwealth Games again in 2030.