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# GULF TIMES SPORT



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First Yamal hat-trick helps Liga leaders Barcelona beat Villarreal

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**FOOTBALL**

# City win at Leeds to close in on Arsenal, Liverpool hit five

Man City, who were without league-leading scorer Haaland, were made to work at Elland Road



Manchester City's Antoine Semenyo (second right) scores against Leeds during the Premier League match at Elland Road. (AFP)

AFP  
London

Manchester City shrugged off the absence of Erling Haaland to close to within two points of Premier League leaders Arsenal with a 1-0 win at Leeds, while Liverpool beat West Ham 5-2 to climb into fifth. Haaland was absent for the trip to the city of his birth due to a minor injury that Guardiola described as "not a big problem". Without the Norwegian, City were far from their best but ground out a vital three points against a Leeds side that had lost just twice in their previous 16 games. Leeds were left to rue not making the

most of their early dominance as Dominic Calvert-Lewin skewed wide a glorious chance just three minutes in. Antoine Semenyo instead proved to be the match-winner with his sixth goal in 11 games since joining City last month. "It means everything," Semenyo said on cutting the gap to two points. "I think we just want to win all our games and whatever Arsenal do we just have to wait and see. We just need to control what we can control, win our games, and yeah, we'll see what happens. But we're all happy." Tempers flared at full-time as Leeds boss Daniel Farke was shown a red card for confronting referee Peter Bankes, while Guardiola was also furious at the officials. The pressure is now on Arsenal to respond

when they host Chelsea in the pick of today's action. Liverpool's new-found strength from set-pieces masked another unconvincing performance against struggling West Ham. All three first-half goals from Hugo Ekitike, Virgil van Dijk and Alexis Mac Allister came from dead balls, putting Arne Slot's men in a commanding position. Liverpool have gone from the worst Premier League performers in terms of set-pieces at the end of 2025 to the best since January 1. "In my opinion we have played better when we lost," said Slot. "We start scoring from set-pieces and things start looking brighter and better than when you don't." Dutch duo Cody Gakpo and Jeremie



Liverpool's Hugo Ekitike scores against West Ham at Anfield. (Reuters)

Frimpong added more goals after the break. Defeat deals another blow to the Hammers' hopes of survival as they remain two points adrift of safety. But they hit back twice in the second half through Tomas Soucek and Valentin Castellanos and could have scored more at Anfield. A place in the top five is almost certain to secure Champions League football next season thanks to the strong results of English sides in European competition this season. Liverpool move three points clear of sixth-placed Chelsea. Burnley's slim chances of survival took another body blow in an agonising 4-3 defeat at home to Brentford. The Bees were cruising to victory and within two points of Chelsea when goals from Mikkel Damsgaard, Igor Thiago and Kevin Schade put them 3-0 up inside 34 minutes at Turf Moor. Michael Kayode's own goal gave the Claret's hope before half-time and they levelled through Jaidon Anthony and Zian Flemming. Flemming thought he had completed a remarkable comeback

only for a VAR review to rule the goal out for offside. Instead, it was Brentford who snatched victory from the jaws of defeat when Damsgaard netted his second goal in stoppage time. There was still time for another VAR review to deny Burnley a point when Ashley Barnes was adjudged to have handled before scoring a 98th-minute equaliser. Everton notched another excellent away win to maintain their hope of European football next season with a 3-2 victory at Newcastle. Three times the Toffees led at St James' Park through Jarrod Branthwaite, Beto and Thierno Barry. Everton have struggled to adapt to their new home at the Hill Dickinson Stadium, but only Arsenal have won more points on the road, with David Moyes' men climbing into eighth. Bournemouth stretched their unbeaten league run to eight games after coming from behind to rescue a 1-1 draw at home to Sunderland in the lunchtime kick-off. Evanilson cancelled out Eliezer Mayenda's opener for the Black Cats.

**BUNDESLIGA**

# Kane scores brace as Bayern beat Dortmund

AFP  
Dortmund

Harry Kane scored twice and Joshua Kimmich bagged a late winner as Bayern Munich came back to win 3-2 at Borussia Dortmund on Saturday and move 11 points clear in the Bundesliga. Bayern trailed at half-time after Nico Schlotterbeck headed Dortmund in front but Kane scored a tap-in and a penalty. Dortmund levelled through Daniel Svensson but Kimmich was in the right place to blast in from close range with three minutes remaining to leave Bayern as runaway favourites for the title. The result all but sews up another Bundesliga crown for the Bavarian giants with only 10 matchdays remaining, while continuing Dortmund's rough week, just days after their Champions League exit at Atalanta. Dortmund have now lost just twice in 24 league matches this season, both times to Bayern. Kane's fourth successive Bundesliga brace took him to 30 goals from 24 games this season. Bayern had played two fewer

matches in the past 11 days but Dortmund looked the fresher early on as they chased a victory to move them five points behind the leaders. With 18 minutes gone, Schlotterbeck caught Josip Stanisic on the shin with his studs. Despite Bayern demanding the Germany defender see red, Schlotterbeck was shown a yellow card. The centre-back was in the thick of the action again just eight minutes later when he rose high to head in a Daniel Svensson corner and put Dortmund in front. Dortmund kept up the energy after the break but Bayern levelled things up against the run of play in simple fashion. Kimmich chipped the ball over the Dortmund defence, onto the head of Serge Gnabry who squared for Kane to score in the 54th minute. With just over 20 minutes remaining, Stanisic tussled with Schlotterbeck again and the Bayern player went down after the defender clipped his trailing leg, bringing Kane to the spot. The England captain converted to give Bayern the lead. Kane now has nine goals in his past five Bundesliga games, four of

which have come from the penalty spot. Dortmund pushed forward in response and Marcel Sabitzer floated in a cross which Svensson swept home to give them hope on 83 minutes. Not content to play for a draw, Bayern sought the goal which would all but secure them the league title. That moment came as Kimmich did remarkably well to adjust his body and hammer in the decisive strike with his left foot after Dortmund had failed to adequately clear a Michael Olise cross in the 87th minute. Former Liverpool defender Jarell Quansah scored with two minutes remaining to snatch Bayer Leverkusen a 1-1 home draw with Mainz. Leverkusen trailed after an excellent Sheraldo Becker goal but Quansah squeezed the ball in at the near post late on. The point moved Leverkusen, who have a game in hand to be played at Hamburg on Wednesday, three behind fourth-placed Stuttgart. Leverkusen looked leggy after a hard-fought scoreless Champions League draw with Olympiacos midweek, which sent them

through to the last 16 where they will face Arsenal. Moments before half-time, Leverkusen right-back Arthur was stretchered off with what appeared to be a serious knee injury. Elsewhere, St Pauli's resurgence continued with a 1-0 win at high-flying Hoffenheim, with Mathias Pereira Lage's goal just before half-time the difference. Pauli have won three of their past four to climb out of the relegation spots, while third-placed Hoffenheim have picked up just four points in their past four games. Borussia Moenchengladbach's Kevin Diks converted a penalty four minutes into stoppage time to take his side to a crucial 1-0 win over Union Berlin. Gladbach's first win since early January took them three points clear of the relegation playoff spot. Fellow battlers Werder Bremen also picked up a crucial victory, winning 2-0 at home to last-placed Heidenheim to move out of the automatic relegation placings. Double winners in 2004, Bremen had picked up just four points in 13 games since their last win in early November, but won thanks to a Jovan Milosevic strike and a late Heidenheim own goal.



Bayern Munich's Harry Kane celebrates scoring during the Bundesliga match against Borussia Dortmund yesterday. (AFP)

## MATCH REPORT

# New Zealand reach semis after Pakistan eliminated

Farhan and Zaman combine in record 176-run opening stand but victorious Pakistan flop on net run rate

Reuters  
Colombo

New Zealand reached the Twenty20 World Cup semi-finals after Pakistan crashed out despite a five-run victory against already-eliminated Sri Lanka in a Group Two Super Eights match in Pallekele yesterday.

An inferior net run rate meant Pakistan had to win big against Sri Lanka in order to pip New Zealand and join group leaders England in the last four.

They racked up 212-8 after Saibzada Farhan (100) and Fakhar Zaman (84) combined in a T20 World Cup record 176-run opening stand.

Pakistan had to restrict their opponents to 147 or less to make the last four, but hosts Sri Lanka finished on 207-6 nearly snatching a victory.

Pavan Rathnayake made 58 and Sri Lanka captain Dasun Shanaka smoked an unbeaten 76 off 31 balls.

Defending champions India will play West Indies in a virtual quarter-final in Kolkata today with the winners claiming the last semi-final spot.

"It could have been a different story had we won the toss," Pakistan captain Salman Agha said.

"Dew was a factor, and we couldn't execute our plans," the Pakistan captain added.

Put in to bat in a do-or-die match at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium, Pakistan



Pakistan's Fakhar Zaman (right) and Saibzada Farhan react during the World Cup Super Eights match against Sri Lanka at the Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Kandy yesterday. (AFP)

could not have asked for a better start.

Farhan led their charge with scintillating power-hitting as he and Zaman denied Sri Lanka a breakthrough until the 16th over.

Sri Lanka's sloppy fielding did not help their cause either.

Dunith Wellalage dropped Farhan on 75, while Janith Liyan-

age caught the batter on 76 but stepped onto the boundary cushion in the process.

#### FARHAN BREAKS KOHLI'S RECORD

Farhan, who also bettered Indian Virat Kohli's record of most runs in a T20 World Cup with his tally of 383, needed 59 balls to become the

first batter to score two hundreds in the same edition of the tournament.

The partnership came to an end when Zaman dragged a Dushmantha Chameera delivery onto his stumps, which triggered a late collapse.

Farhan was caught in the covers off the bowling of Dilshan



Sri Lanka's captain Dasun Shanaka plays a shot against Pakistan at Pallekele International Cricket Stadium in Kandy yesterday. (AFP)

Madushanka after a stellar knock studded with five sixes and nine fours. Having already been eliminated, Sri Lanka faltered early in their chase and were 33-2 having lost both openers inside five overs.

Charith Asalanka fell after a brisk 25 and spinner Abrar Ahmed (3-23) dismissed Kamindu Mendis in his next over.

Rathnayake's belligerent 58 could not force a win for Sri Lanka but knocked Pakistan out of the tournament.

Shanaka, whose job is reportedly at risk after leading Sri Lanka's poor campaign, injected fresh excitement into the dead rubber

by hitting eight sixes. Needing 28 from the last over from Shaheen Afridi, Shanaka began with a four before clobbering three sixes in a row. Afridi recovered from the assault to finish with two fairly wide deliveries which Shanaka could not connect with.

"It was a close game," Shanaka said. "I could have finished it but well bowled to Shaheen."

#### BRIEF SCORES

**Pakistan 212 for 8** (Farhan 100, Fakhar 84, Madushanka 3-33) **beat Sri Lanka 207 for 6** (Shanaka 76\*, Rathnayake 58, Abrar 3-23) **by five runs**

## PREVIEW

## SA to 'maintain intensity' against Zimbabwe

AFP  
New Delhi

Unbeaten South Africa look to "maintain discipline and intensity" in their last Super Eights match of the T20 World Cup against Zimbabwe, batting coach Ashwell Prince said yesterday.

The 2024 runners-up have already secured a semi-final place ahead of their match in New Delhi today.

The Aiden Markram-led side will take to the pitch in the dead rubber game after scoring convincing wins over hot favourites India and two-time champions West Indies in the Super Eights.

Zimbabwe meanwhile have stunned Australia and co-hosts Sri Lanka in the group stages.

"I think you've got to respect the opposition - they've done their bit to qualify for the Super Eights, they've had a fantastic tournament, our neighbours," said Prince.

"From our point of view, we've been really sharp and what we want to ensure is that we maintain that discipline and intensity and that we don't drop off as far as those are concerned."

South Africa had just one close shave against Afghanistan in a group game they won



South Africa's opener Quinton De Kock during a net session. South Africa play Zimbabwe today.

in a double super over, while all the other victories have been fairly comfortable.

But former South Africa batter Prince said victory is all that matters.

"Obviously winning creates good momentum," he said.

"I don't think there's a right or wrong way of doing it or an ideal way - I think it's nice not to have a lot of close games, but I think close games definitely help in terms of team morale."

South Africa beat Australia in the World Test Championship final in June 2025 to win their first major International Cricket Council trophy and shrug off their "chokers" tag.

Prince said the triumph has done a world of good for the players.

"Getting over the line in the World Test Championship was a big moment for us... as a cricketing nation and for this group of players," said Prince.

"And what that creates is a lot of confidence within your teammates and trust that whenever they are going to be called upon and when the moment presents itself, they can step up," Prince added.

Markram has led the team from the front with his 264 runs including three half-centuries an unbeaten 82 in their previous nine-wicket win over the West Indies.

"The phrase that my kids would use is he's really locked in at the moment in terms of his focus, his batting and in terms of his captaincy," said Prince.

"And at the same time the rest of the players are enjoying each other's company," Prince said.

## SPOTLIGHT

## In-form Jacks savours England's 'Brook era' in white-ball cricket

Reuters  
Chennai

Will Jacks hailed Harry Brook's impact as England's white-ball captain after their four-wicket win over New Zealand on Friday secured top spot in the Super Eight stage of the Twenty20 World Cup.

Jacks delivered an all-round performance, taking two wickets in four economical overs before adding a brisk 44-run partnership with Rehan Ahmed in England's chase of 160, which they completed with three balls remaining.

Asked whether England's recent form signalled a return to the "Bazball" style of play popularised by coach Brendon McCullum, Jacks instead pointed to Brook, who struck a 50-ball century against Pakistan in their previous match to seal a semi-final berth and again settled down the innings on Friday after England slipped to 2-2 early in the chase.

"I think this group is the era of Harry Brook. He is our white-ball captain," Jacks told reporters



in Colombo. "And I think that is something that we've been really focusing on. He has got us to play a certain way, and I think the environment around the group led by him is absolutely brilliant."

"Hopefully, everyone can see that we're having fun and we're approaching the game in the right way. And I think that's why we've had some success."

England will face India or West Indies in the semi-finals, with the two sides meeting today. Jacks said England would be ready for either opponent. "We'll be watching their game Sunday and we'll see the outcome. We'll be prepared and I think we'll go into it with optimism and excitement."

## FOCUS

## 'It's surreal': Zimbabwe superfans revel in unexpected ride back to India

AFP  
New Delhi

A group of Zimbabwe superfans told AFP "it felt surreal" to be watching their team in the Super Eights in India - days after the colourful group had returned home thinking their T20 World Cup odyssey was over.

They will be in Delhi today to see their Zimbabwe heroes, who cannot qualify for the semi-finals, sign off in their final match against South Africa.

The six - Malvin Kwaramba, Brian Hwenjer, Godwin Mamhiyo, Leonah Tanikwa, Abel Mataranyika and Ben Gotora - had witnessed their side top their group with famous wins over Australia and co-hosts Sri Lanka.

But the next day, February 20, the fans headed to Colombo airport in Sri Lanka for the long journey home via Dubai, their budget exhausted.

Then a sponsor stepped in and a few days later the colourful band were back in the cricketing cauldron of Chennai to witness

their idols face India in a Super Eights showdown.

India won easily, but it mattered not to the fans who are called "Castle Corner" after the part of the Harare Sports Club ground at which they congregate.

They were just grateful to be there after their cricketing adventure had been unexpectedly extended.

An online video of the fans saying goodbye to Zimbabwe's players went viral and caught the attention of Delta Corporation who stepped in to pay for the fans to go back and finish the tournament in India.

"We returned to Harare on Saturday (February 21) and on February 24 were on a flight to India," Kwaramba told AFP.

"Thanks to Delta and Stella Nkomo, Zimbabwe's ambassador to India, that our visas and bookings everything were taken care of and here we are."

"It's surreal. I still can't believe that I am here in India. You know, the experience is out of this world."

Zimbabwe's fairytale run in the tournament ended with two big defeats to the West

Indies and India in Mumbai and Chennai.

The results were secondary to the experience of a lifetime.

"People here breathe cricket, sleep cricket. Everything about India is cricket. And when we got to the stadium, my word, it was humungous," said Kwaramba.

"The fans, the music, the performance, it was out of this world."

"I got goosebumps. I pinched myself. I was actually in shock and awe. It's an experience that I'm going to cherish and that is going to be in my heart forever."

Mamhiyo, an accountant, said India was unique in its love for the game.

"Everyone here is thinking cricket and has got knowledge," Mamhiyo told AFP.

"You could discuss cricket with the tuk-tuk driver or with the person selling at a store."

Mamhiyo said the greatest part of the trip has been "the connections that I've made with people from Colombo, Chennai, Kandy, some from even London, Australia, Ireland".

"It's been amazing how cricket brings people together and creates so much friendship."



TENNIS

# Medvedev claims title as Griekspoor withdraws

'Not the way I wanted to finish the week here'

AFP  
Dubai

Daniil Medvedev claimed his second Dubai title yesterday following the withdrawal of his opponent Tallon Griekspoor due to a left hamstring injury.

The Russian also said he was unsure if he would be able to play next week's ATP 1000 event in California after UAE airspace was partially closed due to Iranian strikes on the country, following the United States' and Israel's attacks on Iran.

Dutchman Griekspoor picked up the injury towards the end of his opening set of his semi-final win over Andrey Rublev on Friday and looked doubtful for the final when he limped into his post-match press conference.

The tournament announced yesterday that Griekspoor "was deemed unfit to play in the ATP 500 men's final following a medical assessment".

"Not the way I wanted to finish the week here in Dubai," Griekspoor wrote on Instagram, saying he would be "out for a few weeks".

Griekspoor landed awkwardly after a serve on Friday and was unable to recover in time for the final.

"Of course unfortunate, but Tallon, I could see yesterday that maybe he had an injury. You never know how these injuries develop through the night. Sometimes they get easier and you can play, like with some soreness. Sometimes they get worse, so I guess it got worse," said Medvedev in audio quotes provided by the ATP.

"I cannot do anything about it, I played a great tournament, the



Russia's Daniil Medvedev celebrates with the trophy after winning his Dubai Open final against Netherlands' Tallon Griekspoor yesterday. (AFP)

four matches I played. Of course I wanted to play the final, but it is what it is.

"I played an unbelievable match yesterday, so I would, either way, take it as a final for me and I'm happy to win the tournament."

This is the first time Medvedev has been able to repeat a title. The 30-year-old Russian had won 22 trophies in 22 different events before clinching a second Dubai crown yesterday to go with the one he captured in 2023.

"Of course (I take) a lot of confidence. But tennis is a very fast-

going sport, so one week you can play not the way you want and the other week you're playing amazing. So I just hope to bring this confidence from the four matches I played into Indian Wells, for sure.

"I played unreal the whole week, so I was actually really looking forward to the final and trying to play even better than I did. But it is what it is and I'm really happy with how the week turned out in general."

The Dubai doubles final went ahead as scheduled and the singles

final was set to be played despite Iran's ongoing attacks on the UAE on Saturday.

The players are meant to fly straight to California for the upcoming Indian Wells Masters but their travel plans have been disrupted due to regional airspace closures and the suspension of all flight operations at all Dubai airports until further notice.

Medvedev said he still didn't know how he was going to make it to California and will be waiting on updates regarding the reopening of the Gulf region's airspace.

MOTOGP

# KTM's Acosta claims Thailand GP sprint after Marquez penalty

AFP  
Buriram, Thailand

Defending MotoGP world champion Marc Marquez said he had no complaints after a final-lap penalty cost him victory in yesterday's season-opening sprint in Thailand, with Pedro Acosta taking the win.

Ducati's Marquez is launching his bid for a record-equaling eighth world title but he had to settle for second in Buriram after being forced to drop a place for an illegal move.

The decision gave KTM's Acosta his first sprint win, in a 13-lap race that saw pole-sitter Marco Bezzecchi crash out on the second lap. Marquez, who started from second on the grid, shook hands with his fellow Spaniard Acosta after the race and said he would accept the decision.

"In my opinion the race direction decides, so just I follow the rules," said Marquez.

Acosta finished 0.108sec ahead of Marquez, with Trackhouse's Raul Fernandez taking third. Marquez said earlier this week that he was still feeling the lingering effects of a shoulder injury that forced him to miss

the final four races of last season.

But he looked back to his usual aggressive self as he battled back and forth with Acosta.

"Every time Pedro went to me, I went to get straight away on the next corner," said the 33-year-old Marquez.

"Unfortunately I got that penalty but nine points, fair race, after an injury, not bad. I'm happy."

Acosta started from sixth on the grid and quickly emerged as Marquez's biggest challenger after Bezzecchi wiped out early.

The 21-year-old Acosta said it was "super-cool to make a sprint like this versus Marc".

"It's true that maybe I don't feel like a winner because he let me pass, but anyway we have an opportunity tomorrow," he added.

Bezzecchi went into the sprint in red-hot form, having topped the timesheets in all three practices and finishing first in qualifying.

But there had also been warning signs, with the Italian suffering a heavy crash at the end of qualifying.

Trackhouse's Ai Ogura finished the sprint fourth, with Aprilia's Jorge Martin fifth and KTM's Brad Binder sixth.



Red Bull KTM Factory Racing's Pedro Acosta celebrates with a medal after winning the Thailand Grand Prix sprint race in Buriram, Thailand, yesterday. (Reuters)

CYCLING

# Van der Poel romps to cobbled classic win



Alpecin-Premier Tech's Dutch rider Mathieu van der Poel celebrates with the trophy after winning the 81st edition of the men's 'Omloop Het Nieuwsblad' UCI World Tour one-day cycling race, the opening event of the Flemish classics season, 207.6 km from Gent to Ninove, in Geraardsbergen yesterday. (AFP)

AFP  
Ninove, Belgium

Dutch cyclist Mathieu van der Poel broke away 16km from the finish line and soloed to victory at the season-opening cobbled classic Omloop Het Nieuwsblad yesterday.

The former road race world champion entered the classic on the back of a record eighth cyclo-cross world title where he was unbeaten all winter.

The 31-year-old Alpecin rider finished in 4hr 53min 55sec, over 20 seconds ahead of another Dutchman Tim van Dijke and Belgian Florian Vermeersch.

Van der Poel said he would decide Saturday night if would take on Sunday's similar Kuurne-Brussels-Kuurne race.

"I really want to be there," he

said. The 207km route Saturday contained much of the Tour of Flanders roads, and the riders took on 12 hills and eight cobbled sections.

Of the favourites, Vermeersch was first to attack and on the narrow cobbled hill behind him the first pursuers fell after bouncing on a cobble, it was there that Van Der Poel showed his dexterity with a sudden swerve to avoid the fall.

"I don't know how I managed that," Van Der Poel said afterwards. "It was chaos. I unclipped and put my foot down to avoid the head of the Tudor rider then I managed to get back into the rhythm. This was the key moment of the race," he said.

On another of cobbled climb, the Muur of Geraardsbergen, Van Der Poel dropped the whittled-down main pack and set off in pursuit of an early breakaway around a minute up the road. He caught

them within 4km and rode confidently away from them. After he crossed the line, Van Dijke outsprinted Vermeersch for second place.

"Mathieu is the best rider on the planet on this kind of terrain," said runner up Vermeersch.

Omloop is the first race of the season in cycling's heartland of northwestern Europe and is often raced in freezing conditions.

Demi Vollering won the women's 135km edition also on Saturday dominating a sprint finish ahead of the Polish rider Kasia Niewiadoma.

"I was really ideally placed at the foot of the Mur de Grammont and it went like a dream," said Vollering, the 2023 Tour de France champion.

Another Dutchwoman Lorena Wiebes took third from a chasing group at 20 seconds to complete the podium.

MOTORSPORT

# FIA and F1 manufacturers reach compromise on engine dispute

Reuters  
London

Formula One's governing body and manufacturers have reached a compromise solution to tackle an engine controversy that had threatened to overshadow next week's start of the season in Australia.

The sport is entering a new era with the biggest changes in decades to the engine and chassis regulations.

Engine compression ratios have been a major talking point, with Mercedes suspected of exploiting a loophole to gain performance through the thermal expansion of components and talk of possible protests after the Melbourne race. Mercedes have said any change will make no difference to them.

The governing FIA said in a statement yesterday that amendments to the 2026 Formula One regulations had been approved unanimously by an

e-vote of its World Motor Sport Council. "A significant effort has been invested in finding a solution to the topic of the compression ratio," it said.

"The FIA has worked to find a compromise solution which determines that the compression ratio will be controlled in both hot and cold conditions from 1 June 2026 and subsequently only in the operating conditions... from 2027 onwards."

The governing body had initially proposed voting on compliance "not only at ambient conditions but also at a representative operating temperature of 130 degrees Celsius" from August 1. An August date would have covered more than half the 24-race season before any change was implemented.

Mercedes supply their V6 engines to four of the 11 teams - champions McLaren as well as their own works team, Williams and Renault-owned Alpine.

The remaining manufacturers are Red Bull, who are now making their own engines and supply

sister team Racing Bulls, Audi, Honda (Aston Martin) and Ferrari - who also supply Haas and newcomers Cadillac. The compression ratio of the engines is limited in the regulations to 16:1, measured in cold conditions.

While all engines comply with that measurement, Mercedes are suspected of having gained a significant advantage by finding a way to expand the ratio when the engine is running hot.

"The regulations introduced for 2026 represent one of the biggest changes in recent memory," the FIA said.

"All parties acknowledge that with the introduction of such significant regulatory changes, there are collective learnings to be taken from pre-season testing and the initial rounds of the 2026 championship.

"Further evaluation and technical checks on energy management matters are ongoing."

The FIA said additional amendments to the sporting and financial regulations were also approved.

## Smotherman leads by three at Cognizant Classic

Austin Smotherman will carry a three-stroke lead into the weekend at the Cognizant Classic at The Palm Beaches. Smotherman followed his opening 62 with a 2-under-par 69 on Friday at PGA National's Champion Course in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla. That brought him to 11 under, comfortably clear of Taylor Moore, who is in second after his second straight 4-under 67.

Smotherman, 31, is in fine position for his first win on the PGA Tour since turning pro a decade ago. He has won three times on the Korn Ferry Tour, including last June. He suffered three bogeys Friday after a bogey-free opening round, but the key stretch for him after starting on the back nine was between Nos. 17 and 3. He birdied four holes in that stretch, starting with a 54-foot bomb at the par-3 17th hole.

Canadian A.J. Ewart had the round of the day, a 64 that powered him to 7 under for the week. He's tied with Colombia's Nico Echavarría (72), and Joel Dahmen is in fifth at 6 under after a second consecutive 68.

Irishman Shane Lowry, one of the most recognizable players in the field, is in a large knot for sixth at 5 under after posting a 67. Defending champion Joe Highsmith made the cut on the number at even par.

Notable players who missed the cut included Webb Simpson (1 over), Gary Woodland (2 over), Matt Kuchar (2 over) and Canada's Adam Hadwin (3 over).



## LA LIGA

# Yamal nets first hat-trick as Barca beat Villarreal

Leaders are four points clear of Real Madrid, who host Getafe tomorrow

AFP

Barcelona

Barcelona's teenage star Lamine Yamal scored the first hat-trick of his career in a 4-1 win over Villarreal yesterday that took the Catalan giants four points clear at the top of La Liga.

The Spain international struck twice in the first half and, after Pape Gueye pulled one back for the visitors at Camp Nou, stroked in a third for Hansi Flick's side. Robert Lewandowski rounded off Barca's triumph with a late tap-in as they extend their lead on Real Madrid, who host Getafe tomorrow, and third-place Villarreal who now trail the champions by 13 points.

Yamal, who seems to have fully recovered from a groin issue which bothered him for several weeks earlier in the campaign as he struggled to hit top form, was at his effervescent best.

"It was a mix of everything. I wasn't feeling good about myself, plus the (groin issue) as well, I wasn't playing happy, and I think it showed," Yamal said.

"For about a week or so now I've been feeling much better. It was that desire to smile while I was playing that I hadn't felt for a long time, and now I'm happy. I'm happy playing and really content."

The winger became the youngest player to score a hat-trick in La Liga in the 21st century at 18 years and 230 days old.

Yamal has now equalled his tally of 18 goals last season across all competitions, becoming the team's top goalscorer and raising the one area of his game which called for improvement.

"I think that (I've improved over time), what happens is that people want me at 16 years old to score 100 goals and I'd like that too, but it's very hard," continued Yamal, with the match ball tucked under his arm. "So (I'm improving) bit by bit, but I'm very happy, when it's a goal, or two goals, to help the team."

Barcelona might have taken the lead through Jules Kounde early on but the French defender screwed a shot across the face of goal when well placed.



Barcelona's Lamine Yamal (left) celebrates with Fermin Lopez after scoring against Villarreal at Camp Nou Stadium in Barcelona. (AFP)

Yamal tested Villarreal goalkeeper Luiz Junior from distance, offering a brief glimpse of what was soon to follow. Barca took the lead when Fermin Lopez won the ball high up the pitch and fed Yamal, who curled home after 28 minutes.

Yamal's second followed nine minutes later, a stunning individual goal after he drove in from the right.

The teenager left Sergi Cardona and Alberto Moleiro for dead and then whipped a strike into the far top corner. Luiz Junior saved Raphinha's free-kick as Barca sought a third before the interval. Kounde flicked home but was offside and Yamal might have

completed his hat-trick but fired over.

Dani Olmo wasted a good chance early in the second half and soon paid the price as Villarreal pulled one back. Gueye turned home from close range after a scramble in the box as Barca failed to clear a corner. The Yellow Submarine nearly had a second when Joan Garcia came flying out of his goal to try and beat Ayoze Perez to a ball in behind Barca's defence.

The goalkeeper did not win it cleanly and, after Perez recovered possession, the Canary Islander fired just wide with Garcia stranded in no man's land.

Yamal bent another shot agonisingly

wide from the edge of the box as he chased his first ever treble, which eventually came after substitute Pedri played him in with an inch-perfect pass.

The teenager beat Luiz Junior with a clinical finish and was given an ovation when Flick brought him off shortly afterwards. Lewandowski netted Barca's fourth after good work from Pedri and Kounde, who had one of his best games of the season.

Scoring four goals – at least – is what Barcelona need to do on Wednesday, as they host Atletico Madrid in the Copa del Rey semi-final second leg, aiming to overcome a 4-0 deficit.

## PSG Ligue 1 match delayed to aid Chelsea tie preparations

Paris: Paris Saint-Germain's Ligue 1 match against Nantes next month has been delayed to give the Champions League holders more rest between the two legs of their last-16 tie with Chelsea.

PSG were due to face struggling Nantes on the weekend of March 13-15, between their first leg against Chelsea on March 11 and the return match at Stamford Bridge on March 17.

Liam Rosenior's Chelsea will play a difficult Premier League match against Newcastle three days before the second leg.

PSG also successfully requested to have a Ligue 1 game against Nantes delayed last season, between the two legs of their Champions League quarter-final victory over Aston Villa.

## MESSI'S INTER MIAMI TO VISIT WHITE HOUSE: US MEDIA

Inter Miami will visit the White House in March to mark the club's 2025 MLS Cup triumph, with Argentine superstar Lionel Messi expected to attend, the *Miami Herald* reported Friday.

The newspaper cited an unnamed Inter Miami source saying "everyone" on the team will attend the ceremony with US President Donald Trump, two days before Inter plays DC United in the US capital on March 7. Messi, 38, was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by former president Joe Biden January 2025, the highest civilian honor in the United States, but did not attend the ceremony at the White House.

Trump's affinity for football has grown in recent months, with multiple meetings with FIFA president Gianni Infantino and a high-profile visit by Cristiano Ronaldo to the White House. Trump took part in the trophy presentation at the Club World Cup in the United States last year and was on stage at the draw for the 2026 World Cup, where Infantino took the opportunity to award the president the first FIFA peace prize.

## SERIE A

## Last-gasp Lukaku saves Napoli's blushes at rock-bottom Verona



Napoli's Romelu Lukaku (right) celebrates after scoring the winning goal during the Italian Serie A match against Hellas Verona at the Bentegodi Stadium in Verona, northern Italy. (AFP)

AFP

Milan

Romelu Lukaku kept Napoli on course for a Champions League spot with a last-gasp winner in 2-1 victory over rock-bottom Verona, the Belgium forward's first goal of the season.

Lukaku forced home Giovane's cross to give third-placed Napoli all three points with the last kick of the game at the Stadio Marcantonio Bentegodi. Napoli had looked like dropping points in northern Italy when Jean-Daniel Akpa Akpro levelled Rasmus Hojlund's early opener in the 65th minute.

But Lukaku, who only played his first game of the season in late January, gave Napoli a huge win with both Como and Atalanta pushing for a top-four placing. However Napoli's title defence is all but over as they trail runaway league leaders Inter Milan, who host Genoa in a late match, by 11 points after an injury-ravaged season.

Napoli were missing key midfielders Scott McTominay, Kevin De Bruyne and Andre-Frank Anguissa, as well as captain Giovanni

Di Lorenzo. Verona, under interim coach Paolo Sammarco following the sacking of Paolo Zanetti earlier this month, are 10 points from safety after a 12th straight match without a win.

Como, who face Inter in the first leg of the Italian Cup semi-finals on Tuesday, strolled to 3-1 victory over strugglers Lecce to continue their push for a first-ever qualification for European football.

Cesc Fabregas's team are two points behind Roma, in fourth and Juventus' opponents today, and five behind Napoli.

Star man Nico Paz started on the bench for Como ahead of that clash with Inter, the Argentine starlet coming on midway through the second half with the hosts already two goals to the good.

Como went behind early to a fine Lassana Coulibaly header, but Tasos Douvikas, Jesus Rodriguez and Marc Oliver Kempf all netted before half-time to secure a simple three points. Como moved two points ahead of sixth-placed Juve who face Roma trying to stay in touch with the Champions League places after being eliminated from Europe's elite club competition by Galatasaray on Wednesday.

## VAR expanded to include second bookings and corners for World Cup

London: VAR's scope has been extended to cover second yellow cards and corners in time for the World Cup after a meeting of football's lawmakers. The International Football Association Board (IFAB) also approved a package of measures designed to tackle time-wasting.

Despite concerns over further delays to the flow of the game, VAR is set to have an even broader role at the World Cup. Under the current rules, only straight red cards can be subject to a VAR review rather than two bookable offences. IFAB claim that incorrectly awarded corners will only be reversed provided

that the review "can be completed immediately and without delaying the restart".

Countdowns are to be introduced for goal-kicks, throw-ins and substitutions in an attempt to discourage time-wasting. If a player takes too long, possession will switch to the other team, meaning a goal-kick could become a corner, or a throw-in would go to the opposition.

Players will have 10 seconds to leave the field once their number is shown on the substitute board. If they fail to do so, they must still leave the field immediately, but the substitute will not be allowed on until the next stoppage

in play, after at least one minute of play has elapsed.

Players who receive treatment for an injury, or where their injury causes play to be stopped, must leave the field for one minute of play before being allowed back on.

The rule changes agreed at a meeting in Cardiff will officially become part of the laws of the game from July 1, but will be adopted at the World Cup which kicks off on June 11.

The IFAB will also hold consultations to develop measures where players leave the field of play as an act of protest against a referee's decision and where

players cover their mouth when confronting opponents during matches.

The Africa Cup of Nations final was delayed by a walk-off by Senegal after hosts Morocco were awarded a late penalty.

Real Madrid star Vinicius Junior said he was the victim of racial abuse at a Champions League match against Benfica earlier this month while Gianluca Prestianni covered his mouth with his shirt. Prestianni denies racially abusing the Brazilian, but was provisionally suspended for the second leg of the play-off tie between the sides while a UEFA investigation is ongoing.

## PREMIER LEAGUE

## Tottenham players struggling physically, admits Tudor

AFP

London

Tottenham interim boss Igor Tudor has admitted his struggling side are not fit enough as he pledged to "put some petrol in the engine" to avoid relegation.

Tudor has arrived in north London with Tottenham embroiled in a battle to avoid playing in the second tier for the first time since 1977-78. Tottenham have won only two of their last 18 matches in the Premier League and sit just four points above the relegation zone ahead of today's trip to Fulham.

Tudor, hired as a temporary replacement for the sacked Thomas Frank, knows his players' physical condition is a key to their hopes of beating the drop. Traditionally a coach who demands a high level of intensity, the Croatian conceded his squad haven't been able to match the required levels.

"Physically, I believe, we are not in an amazing situation," Tudor said. "They have played lots of games in the last period without lots of players available and it meant the physical condition of the team has dropped down. So, we need to use this period where we don't play the



games to put some petrol in the engine so the engine starts to work better. They are fatigued. To do the pressing high you need to be fit, but all of them because if someone is not in the right shape, there is a problem because someone is coming late. For sure, we will improve and do these things better over time, but in this moment it's a big question what we can do and what we cannot do."

Clips have already gone viral of Tudor getting Tottenham players to do runs in training in scenes reminiscent of pre-season. Given Tottenham's tenden-

cy to produce only one strong half of football in matches under Frank, their conditioning is not a new problem.

Tudor pushed back at suggestions his methods may be too hard for them to cope with amid a gruelling season. "No, never punishing. That's the only way - running. The pitch is 100 yards. You say yards here, 100 yards, it's long, so you need to run," he said. "There are habits. Maybe you have habits to... I don't know... work a bit less? I put some runs without the ball. Players never like runs without the ball!"

## Lens held by Strasbourg in blow to title chances

Paris: Lens saw their chances of winning the French Ligue 1 title suffer a fresh setback on Friday in a 1-1 draw with Strasbourg which gives reigning champions Paris Saint-Germain the opportunity to extend their lead at the summit this weekend.

Having lost 3-2 at home to Monaco last time out to surrender first place to PSG, Lens had to come from behind at the Stade de la Meinau with Mamadou Sangare getting their equaliser after Joaquin Panichelli netted for the hosts.

Second-placed Lens are now just one point behind PSG, but the reigning French and European champions can extend the gap to four points by winning away at struggling Le Havre.

Panichelli gave Strasbourg the lead on 18 minutes in Alsace, the Argentine striker pouncing on a short backpass by Ismaelo Ganiou to run through and beat Lens goalkeeper Robin Riserer with a delightful chip for his 14th Ligue 1 goal this season.

That leaves him joint top of the scorers charts, alongside Marseille's Mason Greenwood. However, Lens had more of the chances following that and drew level just past the hour mark as Malian midfielder Sangare fired in off the post from outside the area after home goalkeeper Mike Penders had punched a corner into his path.