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Monday, March 16, 2026  
Ramadan 27, 1447 AH

# GULF TIMES SPORT



TENNIS

Sabalenka edges Rybakina to claim long-awaited Indian Wells title

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ANNOUNCEMENT

## Qatar MotoGP rescheduled to November 6-8

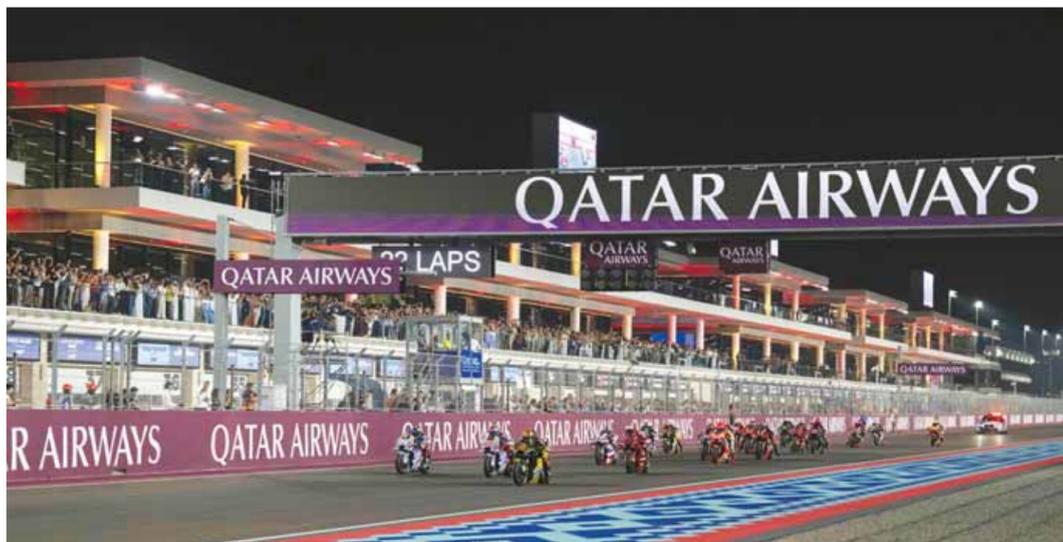
By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Qatar Motor & Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) and Lusail International Circuit (LIC) confirm that the MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar 2026, originally scheduled for April 10-12, has been postponed and rescheduled to November 6-8, following a decision by MotoGP Sport and Entertainment Group, while QMMF and LIC confirmed their respect and support for the decision.

The event will welcome the world's premier motorcycle racing championship back to Lusail International Circuit, continuing Qatar's long standing role on the MotoGP calendar.

Since first hosting a MotoGP round in 2004, LIC has become one of the most distinctive venues in the championship, staging the sport's first ever night race in 2008 to date and establishing itself as one of the most iconic settings in global motorcycle racing.

Abdulrahman bin Abdullatif al-Mannai, President of the Qatar Motor & Motorcycle Federation and Lusail International Circuit (LIC), said: "The Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) and Lusail International Circuit (LIC) respect and support the decision of the MotoGP Sport and Entertainment Group to postpone the MotoGP Qatar Airways Grand Prix of Qatar to November 6-8, 2026. We sincerely thank our fans, teams and partners for their understanding and ongoing support, and we



look forward to welcoming everyone back to Lusail International Circuit."

Carmelo Ezpeleta, CEO of MotoGP, said: "This decision was taken with great care and in full coordination with our partners in Qatar and across the paddock. Our priority is always the safety and wellbeing of everyone involved in MotoGP, as well as ensuring that every Grand Prix is delivered to the highest possible standard. We also recognise the importance of providing

clarity for our fans as early as possible and ticket holders will be given the opportunity to rollover their tickets to the next event"

"I would also like to thank our partners in Portimão and Valencia for their collaboration and flexibility in helping us deliver a smooth transition to the revised calendar. We are confident that the updated schedule will allow us to preserve the quality of the championship while offering fans an exceptional season of racing."

All purchased tickets will remain valid for the rescheduled event. Ticket holders may contact us at tickets@lscs.qa for more information. Further updates will be communicated as soon as they become available.

QMMF and LIC remain committed to supporting FIM and its long term presence in Qatar, reinforcing the nation's position as a key destination on the global motorsport calendar.

### Qatar Football Festival cancelled following travel disruption

The Local Organising Committee, in conjunction with UEFA and CONMEBOL, has taken the decision to cancel the Qatar Football Festival 2026. As a result, the planned programme of events in Qatar, including the Finalissima Qatar 2026 match between Argentina and Spain at Lusail Stadium, will no longer take place in Doha as originally scheduled.

With airspace disruption and travel restrictions still affecting the ability of many fans, players and officials to travel, it has been jointly agreed that relocating the match at this time is the most appropriate course of action. The LOC welcomes the opportunity to host UEFA and CONMEBOL events in the future. All fans who purchased tickets for the Qatar Football Festival will automatically receive full refunds within 30 days to the original payment method. If a refund has not been received after this period, fans are encouraged to contact support@tickets.roadtoqatar.qa for assistance. International fans who purchased travel packages through a tour operator will be contacted directly regarding refunds. The LOC thanks fans for their understanding and continued support.

MOTORSPORT

# Emotional Antonelli wins maiden grand prix in China

Antonelli becomes second-youngest F1 race winner, Hamilton claims first podium with Ferrari, Leclerc fourth

AFP  
Shanghai

An emotional Kimi Antonelli won a grand prix for the first time yesterday in China ahead of Mercedes teammate George Russell and Lewis Hamilton, who made his maiden podium for Ferrari.

The 19-year-old Antonelli converted being the youngest pole-sitter in Formula One history into victory after both McLarens dramatically failed to start the Shanghai race.

Antonelli briefly lost the lead at the start but once he got back in front he controlled the pace to cruise home to the chequered flag by more than five seconds from Russell. Charles Leclerc was fourth in the second Ferrari.

"I'm speechless, I'm about to cry to be honest," said Antonelli as he choked back tears.

"Thank you to the team for helping me to achieve this dream."

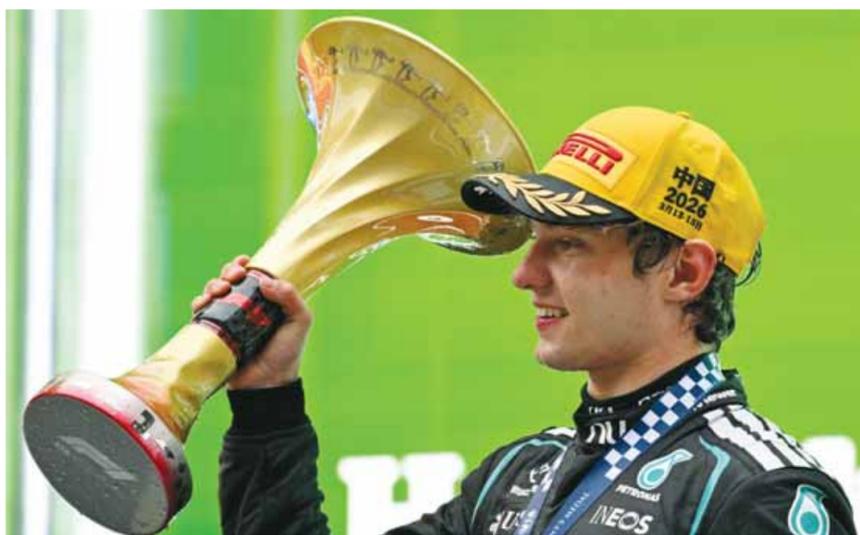
It was an almost flawless drive from the youngster, apart from one heart-fluttering moment when he locked up at the hairpin on his penultimate lap.

But he recovered to avoid nothing more damaging than a small excursion off track.

"I really wanted to bring Italy back to the top and we did today. Even if I gave myself a little bit of a heart attack towards the end a flat spot," Antonelli added.

Early championship leader Russell was full of praise for his young teammate after the dominant Mercedes team secured a one-two for the second race running.

"A huge congratulations to Kimi because it's always very special to win your first race," said Russell, whose lead has been cut to four points by Antonelli.



Winner Mercedes' Italian driver Kimi Antonelli celebrates on the podium after winning the Formula One Chinese Grand Prix at the Shanghai International Circuit in Shanghai yesterday. (AFP)

The Italian replaced Hamilton at Mercedes and the seven-time world champion said he could not be more pleased for the teenager and his old team.

"I'm so so happy for you buddy, and I'm so honoured to be able to share this moment with him," said Hamilton.

"He took my seat obviously, at this great team. So big congratulations to Mercedes."

"They're really pulling ahead at the moment. We've got a lot of work to do to try and keep up."

Hamilton, as he had done in Saturday's sprint, got a great start and had taken the lead by the time the teams emerged from the first complex of turns.

Leclerc also launched brilliantly and managed to get past Russell, who started second on the grid.

The top four swapped places multiple times before a safety car on lap 11 brought them all into the pits.

**MCLAREN, RED BULL WOE**  
Once the dust settled and they went racing again, Antonelli led from Hamilton, with Leclerc third and Russell fourth.

By lap 29 Russell had got past both Ferraris and up to second and set off trying to catch his young Italian teammate, who was by now more than seven seconds up the road. Four-time world champion Max Verstappen continued Red Bull's poor start to the new season when he was told to retire his car on lap 46.

Oliver Bearman was fifth in the Haas, followed home by Pierre Gasly (Alpine) and Liam Lawson

(RB). Rounding out the top-10 points scorers were Isack Hadjar (Red Bull), Carlos Sainz (Williams) and Franco Colapinto (Alpine).

Current world champion Lando Norris and Oscar Piastri both failed to start because of separate issues that left McLaren without a car in the race.

Norris had an electrical problem that prevented him getting to the grid. Piastri did get round to the grid but was pushed back into the garage a few minutes later with a different problem.

"Unfortunately we identified separate issues on both cars which prevented them from starting the Chinese GP," said McLaren in a statement. It has been an awful start to the season for the constructors' world champions.

Last weekend only one McLaren

### F1 races in Bahrain, Saudi cancelled due to war

Formula One races in Bahrain and Saudi Arabia have been cancelled as the Middle East war engulfs the region, motorsport's governing body the FIA announced on Saturday. "It has been confirmed today that, after careful evaluations, due to the ongoing situation in the Middle East region, the Bahrain and Saudi Arabian Grands Prix will not take place in April," the International Automobile Federation (FIA) said in a statement. "While several alternatives were considered, it was ultimately decided that no substitutions will be made in April. The decision has been taken in full consultation with Formula One Group, local promoters and our member clubs in the region."

Bahrain had been scheduled as the fourth GP this season to take place on April 10-12, with the Saudi race a week later. The Gulf has been battered by two weeks of Iranian drone and missile attacks after the United States and Israel started their war on Iran. "The FIA will always place the safety and wellbeing of our community and colleagues first," FIA president Mohammed Ben Sulayem said. "After careful consideration, we have taken this decision with that responsibility firmly in mind. We continue to hope for calm, safety and a swift return to stability in the region, and my thoughts remain with all those affected by these recent events."

took part in the opening race in Melbourne after Piastri crashed on his way to the grid, meaning the Australian is yet to race in a grand prix this season.

RESULTS

1. Kimi Antonelli (ITA/Mercedes) 305km in 1hr 33min 15.607sec, 2. George Russell (GBR/Mercedes) at 5.515sec, 3. Lewis Hamilton (GBR/Ferrari) at 25.267, 4. Charles Leclerc (MON/Ferrari) at 28.894, 5. Oliver Bearman (GBR/Haas) at 57.268, 6. Pierre Gasly (FRA/Alpine) at 59.647, 7. Liam Lawson (NZL/Racing Bulls) at 1:20.588, 8. Isack Hadjar (FRA/Red Bull) at 1:27.247, 9. Carlos Sainz Jr (ESP/Ferrari) at 1 lap, 10. Franco Colapinto (ARG/Alpine) at 1 lap, 11. Nico Hulkenberg (GER/Audi) at 1 lap, 12. Arvid Lindblad (GBR/Racing Bulls) at 1 lap, 13. Valtteri Bottas (FIN/Cadillac) at 1 lap, 14. Esteban Ocon (FRA/Haas) at 1 lap, 15. Sergio Perez (MEX/Cadillac) at 1 lap

Retirements:

10th lap: Lance Stroll (CAN/Aston

Martin) 33rd lap; Fernando Alonso (ESP/Aston Martin) 46th lap; Max Verstappen (NED/Red Bull)

**Did not start:** Gabriel Bortoleto (BRA/Audi), Oscar Piastri (AUS/McLaren), Lando Norris (GBR/McLaren), Alexander Albon (THA/Williams)

**World Championship Standings Drivers:**

- George Russell (GBR) 51 pts,
- Kimi Antonelli (ITA) 47, 3.
- Charles Leclerc (MON) 34, 4.
- Lewis Hamilton (GBR) 33, 5.
- Oliver Bearman (GBR) 17, 6.
- Lando Norris (GBR) 15, 7.
- Pierre Gasly (FRA) 9,
- Max Verstappen (NED) 8, 9.
- Liam Lawson (NZL) 8, 10.
- Arvid Lindblad (GBR) 4, 11.
- Isack Hadjar (FRA) 4, 12.
- Oscar Piastri (AUS) 3,
- Gabriel Bortoleto (BRA) 2, 14.
- Carlos Sainz Jr (ESP) 2, 15.
- Franco Colapinto (ARG) 1

**Constructors:**

- Mercedes 98 pts, 2. Ferrari 67, 3. McLaren 18, 4. Haas 17, 5. Red Bull 12, 6. Racing Bulls 12, 7. Alpine 10, 8. Audi 2, 9. Williams 2

ANNOUNCEMENT

# CT winning skipper Sarfaraz retires at 38

Reuters  
Lahore

Former Pakistan captain Sarfaraz Ahmed, who guided his country to their maiden Champions Trophy title in 2017, announced his retirement from the sport yesterday.

The Karachi-born wicketkeeper-batter featured in 54 Tests, 117 one-day internationals and 61 Twenty20 international matches over nearly two decades, accumulating over 6,000 runs across all formats while he also claimed 315 catches and 56 stumpings.

The popular 38-year-old led Pakistan to Champions Trophy glory in 2017 when they beat India by 180 runs in the final at the Oval.

He had also guided the Under-19 Pakistan team to World Cup victory in 2006.

"It has been the greatest honour of my life to represent Pakistan. From leading the U-19 team to a world title in 2006 to lifting the ICC Champions Trophy in 2017, every moment in Pakistan colours has been special," Sarfaraz said in a statement.

"Captaining Pakistan across all formats was a dream come true. I always tried to play fearless cricket and build a united team.

Seeing players like Babar Azam, Shaheen Afridi, Hasan Ali and others grow into match-winners during my captaincy is one of my proudest achievements."

"I am grateful to my teammates, coaches, family and the fans for their unwavering support throughout my career.

"I would like to thank the Pakistan Cricket Board for the trust they placed in me over the years. Pakistan cricket has always been

very close to my heart and I will continue to support the game in every possible way."

Sarfaraz captained Pakistan in 100 international matches across formats (50 ODIs, 37 T20Is, 13 Tests) and led the side to the No.1 ranking in T20I cricket.

During his captaincy, Pakistan achieved a world-record streak of 11 consecutive T20I series victories and recorded six clean sweeps, which include against West Indies (2016 and 2018), Sri Lanka (2017), Australia (2018), New Zealand (2018) and Scotland (2018).

Sarfaraz' leadership era also saw the emergence of several future stars, including Babar, Afridi, Hasan Ali, Imam-ul-Haq, Faheem Ashraf, Fakhar Zaman and Shadab Khan, whom he backed at the start of their international careers.

With that victory over India at the Oval, Sarfaraz became the



Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Mohsin Naqvi presents a plaque to former Pakistan skipper Sarfaraz Ahmed in Lahore yesterday.

first Pakistan captain to win the Champions Trophy and the only captain till date to win ICC titles at both junior and senior levels, having

earlier led Pakistan to win in the ICC U19 Cricket World Cup in 2006 in Sri Lanka beating India by 38 runs.

In recognition of his services and the Champions Trophy triumph, Sarfaraz was awarded the Pride of Performance in 2018, becoming the youngest Pakistan captain to receive the honour.

Talking about his individual records, Sarfaraz has the Pakistan record of 10 catches in a Test match, which he took against South Africa in Johannesburg 2019.

He is till date only Pakistan wicketkeeper-batter to score an ODI century at Lord's which he scored against England in 2016.

Sarfaraz who played his first international match (ODI) in 2007 made his last international appearance in an international match (Test) against Australia in Perth in 2023.

CRICKET

# Bangladesh seal ODI series over edgy Pakistan

The home bowlers restrict Pakistan to win last ODI by 11 runs

AFP  
Dhaka

Tanzid Hasan struck his maiden ton before Taskin Ahmed took four wickets as Bangladesh pulled off an 11-run victory in the third and final one-day international against Pakistan yesterday to clinch the series 2-1.

Salman Agha hit a valiant 106 but it went in vain as Pakistan were bowled out for 279 while chasing Bangladesh's 290 for five at the Sher-e-Bangla National Cricket Stadium.

Tanzid Hasan, named player of the match and series, hit a run-a-ball 107 that included six fours and seven sixes, to help Bangladesh set up a competitive total on board after being put in to bat.

The 25-year-old shared 105 runs for the opening wicket with Saif Hassan, who made a patient 36 off 55 balls before Pakistan captain Shaheen Shah Afridi broke the stand in the 19th over.

Tanzid continued to dominate the innings, reaching his half-century off 47 balls and then converting it into his first ODI hundred from 98 deliveries.

His fine innings ended when he was caught off Abrar Ahmed in the 37th over, leaving the hosts at 194 for three.

Litton Das tried to accelerate during the final overs, scoring 41 off 51 balls, while Towhid Hridoy provided late impetus with an unbeaten 48 off 44 deliveries.

However, Bangladesh could only add 77 runs in the last 10



Bangladesh's Tanzid Hasan Tamim (left) plays a shot as Pakistan's wicketkeeper Mohammad Rizwan watches during the third ODI at Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. (AFP)

overs while losing two wickets.

Haris Rauf was Pakistan's most successful bowler, taking three for 52 off his 10 overs, while Afridi and Abrar claimed one wicket each.

In response, Pakistan were reduced to 82 for five before staging a fightback, with Agha scoring 106 off 98 balls.

But Taskin Ahmed and Mustafizur Rahman swung the momentum back in Bangladesh's favour with crucial breakthroughs.

Taskin finished with four for

49, while Mustafizur grabbed three for 54.

Bangladesh captain Mehidy Hasan Miraz said yesterday: "Definitely was an excellent match. Boys played really well but yeah, last over 14 runs, everyone was afraid. I think it was an excellent wicket and if we got 300 it would be better. But we are playing well, especially the way Tamim batted."

He added: "Litton Das and Shanto and Towhid Hridoy also played really well. I think Taskin

bowled really well. First three overs he took two wickets and then in the end he got two wickets.

"Throughout the series he and Nahid bowled really well and they have a good partnership. I am really happy."

**BRIEF SCORES**  
Bangladesh 290 for 5 (Tanzid 107, Hridoy 48, Rauf 3-52) beat Pakistan 279 (Agha 106, Masood 38, Afridi 37, Taskin 4-49) by 11 runs

FOCUS

# ICC penalises Pakistan's Agha over reaction to controversial run-out

Reuters  
Dubai

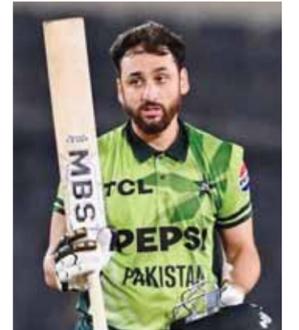
The International Cricket Council (ICC) has reprimanded Pakistan batter Salman Agha for his reaction to a controversial run-out in the second One-Day International against Bangladesh in Dhaka on Friday.

Short of his crease at the non-striker's end, Agha was bending down to pick up the ball to return it to a Bangladesh bowler after his teammate Mohammad Rizwan had driven it towards him.

However, Bangladesh captain Mehidy Hasan Miraz circled around behind Agha to collect the ball and threw down the stumps, sparking a debate about the "sportsman spirit".

An incensed Agha threw down his gloves and helmet following the dismissal, a reaction which earned him a demerit point from the game's global governing body.

The ICC said in a statement Agha had breached a Code of Conduct article relating to the abuse of equipment or clothing during an international match.



Pakistan's Salman Agha celebrates after scoring a century at Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. (AFP)

Mehidy said after the match he had been expecting Agha to attempt a run.

"He was away from the wicket and I was just looking for the ball," he said. "If you miss, he would go for the run. So I was just thinking like that."

Pakistan won the match by 128 runs to level the series at 1-1, but lost the final match yesterday. Bangladesh won the series 2-1.

**'Backing Samson worked out well for India'**

**DUBAI:** A defining tournament call for T20 World Cup champions came at the top of the order when dashing opener Sanju Samson was handed renewed trust, retired Australian star Ricky Ponting said.

Samson's first opportunity came as a cover to opener Abhishek Sharma early in the campaign for India, dropped again, and then recalled for a crucial fixture against Zimbabwe.

Samson turned opportunity into dominance, Ponting said in an interview with the ICC website.

A blazing 97\* in a virtual knockout against West Indies sparked Samon's superb run of form. Scores of 89 (42) in the semi-final against England and 89 (46) in the final against New Zealand followed.

Ponting highlighted the significance of India's faith in him.

"For India to stick with him at the top there, that was a big call to make. A big decision, but one that worked out really well in the end," Ponting said. "If you get the backing of the coaching staff and the captain, then that's all you need... Just a pat on the back or an arm around the shoulder to say, 'we're sticking with you, we believe in you.'"

"When you've got the quality that Sanju's got, and the confidence of the captain and coach behind you, that's when great things can happen," the Australian added. (AFP)

CYCLING

# In-form Vingegaard claims Paris-Nice as Martinez bags final stage

AFP  
Nice, France

Two-time Tour de France winner Jonas Vingegaard claimed his first Paris-Nice title as Frenchman Lenny Martinez pipped him in a sprint finish to win yesterday's final stage.

Vingegaard had already won two stages earlier in the eight-day race but left his charge for the line a fraction too late in the two-up sprint after the pair had broken away on the final climb of the hilly 145-kilometre eighth stage that started and finished in Nice on the French Riviera.

After the peloton reeled in the last of the day's breakaway riders, Frenchman Valentin Paret-Peintre, Vingegaard attacked 21km from the finish, with only Martinez able to hang onto his wheel.

The Dane crested the final climb, the Cote du Linguador, first to seal victory in the polka-dot King-of-the-Mountains competition to go with his inevitable overall victory. He also won the green points jersey. But when it came to the sprint finish, Martinez launched his bid for the line early and Vingegaard simply did not have the power to overhaul him.

"Today was almost the perfect day," said



Bahrain-Victorious' French rider Lenny Martinez celebrates as he crosses the finish ahead of Team Visma - Lease a Bike's Danish rider Jonas Vingegaard, to win the 8th and final stage of the Paris-Nice cycling race yesterday. (AFP)

Vingegaard, who crashed out of the race while wearing the leader's yellow jersey last year. "Finally I'm able to win Paris-Nice. It's been a tough one for me but I'm extremely happy to sit here in the yellow jersey today. Of course I would have loved

to win the stage as well but Lenny was very strong so he deserves to win."

With three victories from his first eight days of racing this season, Vingegaard is in fine form ahead of his tilt at a Giro d'Italia-Tour de France double. And having won



Danish rider Jonas Vingegaard celebrates with the trophy after winning the 2026 Paris-Nice cycling race, flanked by second placed Colombian rider Daniel Felipe Martinez (left) and third placed German rider Georg Steinhauser. (AFP)

two of the three Grand Tours - adding the 2025 Vuelta a Espana to his 2022 and 2023 Tour victories - he has also now won three of the sport's major one-week stage races - claiming the Criterium du Dauphine in 2023 and Tirreno-Adriatico a year later. Colombian Harold Tejada, who won Friday's sixth stage, took third on the day, coming home in a small group seven seconds after the winner. Fellow Colombian

Daniel Martinez, who crashed more than 50km from the finish and lost touch with the leading peloton, battled through pain to limit his losses and came home 51sec back to preserve his second place overall, more than four minutes behind Vingegaard. German Georg Steinhauser took the final spot on the podium some six minutes off the pace, holding off Frenchman Kevin Vauquelin.

TENNIS

# Medvedev beats Alcaraz to reach final

Reuters  
Indian Wells

Carlos Alcaraz's bid for a third straight Indian Wells title was brought to a halt on Saturday by Daniil Medvedev, who swept past the world number one 6-3 7-6(3) to set up a final against Jannik Sinner after the Italian brushed aside Alexander Zverev 6-2 6-4.

Medvedev, who ended Alcaraz's 16-match winning streak to start the season, won six points in a row in the tiebreak before serving an ace to close out the match.

The Russian played smartly to break Alcaraz early and take a 3-1 lead, never relinquishing his advantage to claim the opening set.

The second set was a far more dramatic affair as Alcaraz stepped up a gear to break Medvedev and surge to a 3-1 lead, only for the 30-year-old Russian to dig deep and level at 3-3, taking advantage of the Spaniard's unforced errors.

The pair traded blows to reach the tiebreak, where a ruthless Medvedev sealed his place in the final.

"Playing someone like Carlos, you play many times, you

lose many times," he said. "He's an amazing player with amazing shots, defence, attack, return, everything. So, you need to be at your best."

Earlier in the day, Sinner dismissed fourth seeded Zverev to reach his first Indian Wells final, the world number two firing eight aces and committing just 13 unforced errors, eight fewer than his opponent, while winning seven of his eight net points.

Zverev showed early promise, grabbing a foothold in the opening set, but Sinner broke twice to close it out before breaking again at 4-3 in the second to seal the match.

The 24-year-old has not dropped a set throughout the tournament, a run of dominance that underlines his growing supremacy on hard courts. "It's a great achievement. The first time here in the final, it means a lot to me," Sinner said. "The third time that I've played the semis here ... It was a great performance from my side. Sascha didn't play very well today. I broke him a couple of times in the first set, which gave me confidence to continue, and I served very well at important moments."

Sinner is now seeking to complete the set of all six hard-court



Russia's Daniil Medvedev shakes hands with Carlos Alcaraz of Spain after winning the Indian Wells Open semi-final. (Reuters)

Masters 1000 titles having already won the events in Toronto in 2023, Miami, Cincinnati and Shanghai in 2024 and Paris last year.

**Sinner impressed by aggressive Medvedev's return to form**  
World number two Jannik Sinner

said Medvedev had found his best form again ahead of the Indian Wells title clash between the duo, heaping praise on the Russian's serving and returns in a solid start to the season.

Sinner said the 2021 US Open champion had become notice-

ably more aggressive this season. Medvedev endured a disappointing 2025 campaign in which he failed to go past the second round at the Grand Slams and only lifted one title in Almaty but he has been rejuvenated this year, winning trophies in Brisbane and Dubai.

"He's back to very high level. Very big serve, I feel like. He's returning very well, very deep," Sinner told reporters.

"Everyone's trying to be slightly more aggressive.

"Sascha (Zverev) tried to be more aggressive. He didn't play his best today, but everyone is trying to push."

Sinner and Medvedev have played 15 times in their career with the Italian edging their head-to-head record 8-7.

They will face off for the first time since the season-ending ATP Finals in 2024, when Sinner won his third straight match against the 30-year-old.

"Daniil has found a good, good balance on court, winning a title in Dubai, coming here, making great results," he added.

"But also the last time we played was quite a while (ago) now. So let's see what's coming."

Through to his maiden final in the Californian desert, Sinner is seeking his first title of the year.

"Of course, the next one will be a very tough test, but I'm extremely happy," he said. "We have improved this week, in this tournament, and that for me was the most important part."

FOCUS

# Sabalenka gets revenge, beats Rybakina for title

The world No.1 had lost to Rybakina in the Australian Open final

Reuters  
Indian Wells

Aryna Sabalenka finally conquered her Indian Wells demons yesterday, defeating Elena Rybakina 3-6 6-3 7-6(6) in a breathless final to claim the desert title for the first time and secure her 23rd career crown.

Rybakina dominated the opening set, breaking Sabalenka to surge into a 4-2 lead and exploiting the Belarusian's backhand to close it out.

It was the first time Sabalenka had dropped a set in the tournament.

The second set began no more comfortably, with Sabalenka letting out an audible yell as Rybakina broke her in the opening game. But the four-time Grand Slam champion dug deep, turned the tide and took the set 6-3.

The decider was a match in itself. Sabalenka broke early to lead 3-1, only for Rybakina to claw back, level at 5-5 and take the lead for the first time in the set.

Sabalenka responded immediately to force a tiebreak, where the score reached 6-6 before she pulled clear to seal it 8-6.

With that final point, Sabalenka dropped to her knees - the relief of a champion who had waited three years and endured three finals to finally get her hands on the trophy. Sabalenka ended a frustrat-



Aryna Sabalenka reacts during her match against Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan in the final of the Indian Open at Indian Wells Tennis Garden in California. (AFP)

ing run of finals futility against Rybakina, who had won their last four title clashes starting with a triumph at Indian Wells in 2023 and including a nail-biting loss at the Australia Open in January.

**Djokovic withdraws from Miami Open**  
Novak Djokovic has withdrawn

from the Miami Open with a right shoulder injury, organizers said yesterday. The 24-time Grand Slam champion reached the fourth round at Indian Wells this week, but the six-time Miami champion opted out of the second leg of the "Sunshine Double" - where he fell to Jakub Mensik in last year's final.

Indian Wells marked 38-year-old Djokovic's first tournament since he lost to Carlos Alcaraz in the Australian Open final.

Djokovic played with a compression sleeve on his right arm, telling *Tennis Channel* he was dealing with a forearm injury that was intermittently affecting his serve.

MOTORSPORT

# Katsuta takes first WRC win in Kenya Safari Rally

Reuters  
Nairobi

Toyota's Takamoto Katsuta won a gruelling Kenya Safari rally yesterday for the Japanese driver's first success in the world championship.

Katsuta, in his 94th WRC start, became his country's first WRC rally winner since Kenjiro Shinozuka at the Ivory Coast Rally in 1992.

The former circuit racer won by 27.4 seconds from Hyundai's Adrien Fourmaux with Toyota's Sami Pajari third.

Toyota's Elfyn Evans retained the drivers' championship lead with 66 points, despite retiring from Saturday's penultimate leg with suspension damage, eight points clear of teammate Oliver Solberg after three rounds and 11 ahead of Katsuta.

"It's hard to describe how I felt when I crossed the finish line: it was just crazy. There have been so many difficult moments and these memories all went through my head," said Katsuta. "It hasn't been easy but finally we are here."

Katsuta has a strong record in Kenya, with three podiums from five previous starts, and he arrived

this year on the back of finishing second in Sweden. A double puncture on Friday left the Japanese in seventh position but a dramatic and muddy Saturday took out teammates and frontrunners Solberg, Sebastien Ogier and Evans and allowed him to move back up through the field.

He was one minute 25.5 seconds clear of Fourmaux on Saturday night, enough of a lead to play it safer through the final four stages.

Solberg, Ogier and Evans all restarted yesterday and each took a stage win before Solberg won the final Power Stage for five bonus points.

"The whole team is very happy to see Takamoto and Aaron (Johnston) win this rally. They have been close so many times and they really deserve this," said team boss Juha Kankkunen.

"This was the toughest Safari we've seen since it came back to the calendar, and it was a roller-coaster weekend for us.

"To have three cars retire yesterday was quite a disaster but Oliver, Seb and Elfyn all pushed hard and did well today to get maximum Sunday points for the team."

The Croatia Rally, on asphalt roads around Rijeka, is next on April 9-12.

**Charlie finishes last at Junior Invitational**

**Graniteville, South Carolina:** Charlie Woods, the son of golf legend Tiger Woods, carded an 8-over 80 in the final round at the prestigious Junior Invitational at Sage Valley in Graniteville, South Carolina, to finish in last place in the field of 36 golfers. Woods, 17, a high school junior in Palm Beach, Florida, had a rough final round. His two birdies and two bogeys canceled each other out, and he was left with four double bogeys on the scorecard Saturday. He shot rounds of 75-76-83-80 for the tournament to finish at 26-over 314. His score was 10 strokes behind the 35th-place participant. In the third round on Friday,

Woods' scorecard had a triple bogey, double bogey, seven bogeys and one birdie for the day for his 11-over 83. The winner in the boys' division was Miles Russell of Jacksonville Beach, Florida, at 15 under. Russell, who is ranked No.1 by the American Junior Golf Association rankings, has committed to Florida State along with Woods, ranked No. 20. Woods, who won the AJGA Team TaylorMade Invitational last May, committed to the Seminoles for 2027. Winning the girls' division was Asterisk Talley, who shot a final round 67 to finish at 8-under for the event.

GOLF

# DeChambeau wins LIV Singapore in sensational playoff battle with Lee

Reuters  
Singapore

Bryson DeChambeau forced a playoff with a birdie on No. 18, then saved par on the first playoff hole to win LIV Golf Singapore yesterday. But DeChambeau's joy was Richard T Lee's heartbreak.

Lee, a LIV wild card who qualified for the league by winning LIV Golf Promotions in January, missed a 2-foot putt for par as the duo played the 18th hole again, giving DeChambeau the win after he scrambled for his own par. Both recorded rounds of 66 to finish at 14-under 270 for the tournament at Sentosa Golf Club.

Delighted by his fourth LIV Golf League victory, DeChambeau also was disconsolate when it came to Lee, a 35-year-old Canadian who has spent most of his career on the Asian Tour.

"It was a bit of shock for sure. I thought

he was just going knock it in, and OK, on we go," DeChambeau said about Lee's putt. "He had been playing great golf. He's beaten me numerous times throughout the season already when I've played with him, so he plays great golf, and he deserves to be out here. Honestly, he deserves to be on a team after this performance."

"But it was sour for sure to see him miss that. You never want to see that happen. I wanted to go another hole and have a chance to play great golf on that second playoff hole. Just unfortunately didn't go his way today, and that's just the way the cards sometimes fall."

The weather didn't make it easy for the players, who had to battle heat, humidity and a pair of rain delays.

The stop-and-start nature of the day took its toll on defending champion Joaquin Niemann of Chile, who entered the day atop the leaderboard. After four birdies on the front nine, he struggled on the back nine, with three bogeys leaving

him with a round of 70 and a fourth-place finish, three shots back.

England's Lee Westwood carded a 69, which earned him third place at 12-under - his best finish in his LIV career.

"Really proud," said Westwood, 52. "It's a while since I've been in the final group when it's meant something."

Jon Rahm of Spain finished fifth after his round of 68.

DeChambeau's trip around Sentosa Golf Club was an adventure. After an eagle on the par-5 No. 4, he immediately gave a stroke back with a bogey on the following hole. He finished regulation with four birdies. And then he arrived at the playoff hole. DeChambeau hit his drive into the water left of the fairway. After a penalty drop, DeChambeau's third shot found the rough over the green, but he was able to save par. Lee's drive landed in a fairway bunker on the right, and he laid up his second shot. His third shot landed 10 feet from the hole, giving him a birdie oppor-

tunity on the par-5 hole. But he missed and was left with the 2-footer that he couldn't convert. "There's some slick putts out there. There's some little lies out there," Lee said. "It was a short putt and I wanted to just hit it hard, and I hit it a little too hard. I think the adrenaline was pumping a little bit. Then again, I felt like I had it this week. I played really well."

Lee's showing was the first top-10 result for a LIV wild-card player.

In the team event, captain Dustin Johnson's 4Aces finished first at 27-under, five strokes ahead of Cameron Smith's Ripper GC and six in front of Rahm's Legion XIII.

4Aces have won back-to-back team events and has been on the podium four times this season. The team had not won in 32 weeks before LIV Hong Kong last week. "Obviously the league gets better every single year. It gets harder to win," Johnson said. "You've got to have four really good players if you want to have a chance to win. Right now, I feel like we do."



Crushers GC's Bryson DeChambeau celebrates with his trophy after winning the LIV Golf Singapore at Sentosa Golf Club in Singapore yesterday. (Reuters)

## SHOWJUMPING

## Doha Equestrian Tour's local event concludes at Al Shaqab



Austrian Geoffrey Backe (left) aboard Equitron won the Diamond Category of Doha Equestrian Tour's three-day local showjumping competition. Winners of the Diamond Category (centre) and Small Tour celebrate on the podiums.



By Sports Reporter  
Doha

The Doha Equestrian Tour wrapped up its three-day local showjumping competitions at the Longines Arena in Al Shaqab on Saturday night, showcasing top-level performances from more than 120 riders and 240 horses. Total prize money for the tour exceeded QR490,000.

The tour opened with the Small Tour at a height of 110 cm, where Saudi Arabia's Khalid al-Hadi

claimed first place on Carlton in 22.74 seconds. Qatar's Hadi Mansour al-Shahwani finished second on Monopoly in 23.99 seconds, while American Christine Vanderveen took third on Carniol in 24.22 seconds.

Winners were presented their awards by Abdullah al-Qashouti, Marketing and Communications Manager for the tournament.

In the Silver Round at 130 cm, Kuwait's Anaz al-Anaz topped the leaderboard with a time of 52.05 seconds on De Leones. Vanderveen placed second on Ranz Marie (53.51 seconds) and Saudi rider

Abdullah al-Sharbatly finished third on Dantorido (53.98 seconds). Awards were presented by Salmeen al-Suwaidi, tournament sports director.

Day two began with the Bronze Round at 120 cm, where al-Hadi again finished first on Carlton (23.14 seconds), Vanderveen was second on Liones (24.03 seconds), and al-Shahwani third on Monopoly (24.27 seconds). Mohammed al-Suwaidi, stables manager for the championship, crowned the winners.

The Gold Round at 140 cm saw Saudi rider Abdullah al-Sharbatly

win on Fiumicino in 30.84 seconds. Syrian rider Mohammed Mughith came second on Jaguar (31.08 seconds) and Kuwaiti Anaz al-Anaz was third on De Lions (31.55 seconds).

Winners were presented by Abdulrahman al-Khayarin, deputy facilities manager.

The final Diamond League competition 150 cm with a jump-off, was won by Austrian Geoffrey Backe on Equitron in 30.54 seconds.

Al-Sharbatly took second on Valentino (31.2 seconds), and Vanderveen finished third on

Starbucks (31.68 seconds). All three completed the course without faults.

Awards were presented by Sheikh Talal bin Khalid al-Thani, assistant tournament director.

In a statement, Sheikh Talal said the local competitions are an integral part of the Doha Equestrian Tour, providing riders with opportunities to maintain competitive readiness and continue training in a professional environment ahead of international events. He emphasised that prize money is designed to motivate riders and support their development.

"We are closely monitoring developments and maintaining continuous communication with our partners and relevant authorities, including the International Equestrian Federation, to obtain the necessary official approvals to resume international tours as soon as possible," Sheikh Talal said.

The three-day event highlighted the continuity and resilience of equestrian sport in Doha, drawing top riders from the region and abroad and underlining the city's commitment to providing a safe and competitive environment for athletes and horses alike.

## PREMIER LEAGUE

# Troubled Spurs snatch late draw at Liverpool

AFP  
London

Troubled Tottenham rescued a 1-1 draw at Liverpool thanks to Richarlison's late leveller, while Manchester United bolstered their bid to qualify for the Champions League with a 3-1 win against Aston Villa yesterday.

Igor Tudor's relegation-haunted side trailed to Dominic Szoboszlai's first-half free-kick at Anfield. But Brazil striker Richarlison netted in the 90th minute to spare Tottenham from a sixth successive Premier League defeat.

In grave danger of playing into the second tier for the first time since 1977-78, Tottenham are without a victory in their last 12 league matches -- their worst winless run for 91 years.

However, their first point under interim boss Tudor, who had lost his four previous matches in all competitions since replacing the sacked Thomas Frank, offered a glimmer of hope in their desperate fight for survival.

Tottenham arrived on Merseyside in crisis after suffering an embarrassing 5-2 defeat at Atletico Madrid in the Champions League last-16 first leg in midweek.

Tudor had substituted goalkeeper Antonin Kinsky after just 17 minutes after he made a pair of costly mistakes.

He opted against doing the same to Guglielmo Vicario after his weak attempted save allowed Szoboszlai's free-kick to elude him in the 18th minute.

Tottenham could have crumbled after that, but to their credit they hit back in a spirited second half. Richarlison ensured they didn't finish empty-handed when he steered a close-range finish past Alisson Becker after Andrew Robertson and Virgil van Dijk made a hash of dealing with Randal Kolo Muani's flick from Vicario's long punt.

With eight games left to save



Tottenham Hotspur's Richarlison celebrates after scoring equalise against Liverpool during the Premier League match at Anfield in Liverpool yesterday. (AFP)

themselves, Tottenham remain in 16th place, one point above both fourth-bottom Nottingham Forest and third-bottom West Ham. They face a crucial clash with Forest in north London in a week's time. Lacklustre Liverpool were booed off at the final whistle after a result that left them in fifth place, likely to be the final Champions League slot, two points behind fourth-placed Villa.

At Old Trafford, United took the lead through Casemiro's 53rd-minute header before Ross Barkley hauled Villa level in the 64th minute.

Michael Carrick's side finished strongly, with Matheus Cunha and Benjamin Sesko scoring in the closing stages to seal Carrick's seventh win in nine games since taking over as interim boss.

Sitting third in the Premier League, United are three points clear of top-four rivals Villa.

United co-owner Jim Ratcliffe this week praised Carrick's "excellent" work, but stopped short of committing to the former Old Trafford star on a long-term basis.

But Carrick is making a strong case to earn the job on a permanent basis after stabilising United, who lost at Newcastle last week, following Ruben Amorim's sacking. "We looked a good team. It was a big game coming off the defeat. The boys reacted incredibly well," Carrick said.

"It's a good feeling and something we want to keep getting used to. We are in a good position at the moment."

Bruno Fernandes now has 16 Premier League assists this term, moving the United captain past David Beckham's previous club record of 15 in 1999-2000.

He has 100 assists for United in all competitions since signing from Sporting Lisbon in 2020.

Man United sink Villa 3-1 to boost top-four bid

"He's proven over a period of time how impactful he is in the big moments. He's there all the time, he puts himself forward in training and games," Carrick said.

Spluttering Villa have lost their last three league games and have just one win in seven top-flight matches, leaving them three points above sixth-placed Chelsea with eight games left in the battle for European places.

Nottingham Forest climbed out of the relegation zone after a 0-0 draw against Fulham at the City Ground. Still waiting for their first win under Vitor Pereira, fourth-from-bottom Forest, who have had four managers this term, are above third-from-bottom West Ham on goal difference.

Ten-man Leeds held on for a 0-0 draw at Crystal Palace despite Dominic Calvert-Lewin's missed penalty and a red card for Gabriel Gudmundsson.

## LA LIGA

# Raphinha hits treble as Barca thrash Sevilla

AFP  
Barcelona

Raphinha bagged a hat-trick as Barcelona thrashed Sevilla 5-2 to restore their four-point lead at the top of La Liga yesterday.

After Real Madrid cut the gap by beating Elche on Saturday the Spanish champions responded by romping to a comfortable victory. Dani Olmo and Joao Cancelo also struck for Hansi Flick's side, who host Newcastle in the Champions League on Wednesday.

Fans streamed to the stadium before the game to vote in the club's presidential elections, with either Joan Laporta or Victor Font to be announced the new chief later on Sunday night.

They gave midfielder Gavi an ovation when he made his return from a severe knee injury late on. "It has been very tough, if I'm honest," Gavi told DAZN of his recovery process, on his first appearance since August.

The Spain international also missed most of the 2023/24 season out injured. "This time was much harder than the last time, I was having a bad time of it. It was more of a painful process and it was harder for me day to day," continued Gavi. "But this feeling (to be back at) Camp Nou, with my people, with the fans and all my team-mates is unique and I'm really happy."

After the 1-1 draw in Newcastle in the last-16 first leg, Flick left Lamine Yamal on the bench and handed youngster Xavi Espot his first start, at right-back.

Barcelona were handed two penalties by a sorry Sevilla side to get off to the perfect start at the partially-rebuilt Camp Nou, which finally received clear-

ance to open the north stand. Around 56,000 fans attended and they were able to watch a fairly straightforward rout of the Andalucians, 14th. Djibril Sow clumsily clipped rampaging Barca full-back Cancelo in the box and Raphinha dinked home from the spot to open the scoring in the ninth minute.

The Brazilian winger was afforded another penalty to put Barca two goals up when Jose Angel Carmona, lying on the floor, handled as Cancelo tried to dribble around him. This time Raphinha fired it low to the left and although Odysseas Vlachodimos went the right way he could not keep it out.

The hosts netted a third in the 38th minute when Marc Bernat's deflected cross from the left found Olmo, who produced a clinical finish.

Sevilla pulled one back before the break when Juanlu Sanchez got in behind Cancelo and crossed for Oso to score unmarked at the back post.

Raphinha completed his hat-trick early in the second half with a heavily deflected shot as Barca strolled in the spring sunshine. Cancelo capped an impressive attacking display with a goal of his own, driving into the box and finishing through Vlachodimos's legs. Barca coach Flick sent on 21-year-old midfielder Gavi for the final 10 minutes, and Ronald Araujo handed him the captain's armband. Sow pulled another one back for Sevilla in stoppage time, nodding home Oso's cross, with Barcelona already thinking about Newcastle's visit on Wednesday.

"Barcelona are very good... I think that the two quick penalties (given away) hurt us a lot, after that it was a difficult game," said Sevilla defender Nemanja Gudelj.



Barcelona's Raphinha celebrates his hat-trick during the La Liga match against Sevilla at the Camp Nou Stadium in Barcelona yesterday. (AFP)

## Como continue Champions League charge by beating 10-man Roma

Como are in the hunt for a stunning first appearance in the Champions League after beating 10-man Roma 2-1 yesterday and staying in Serie A's top four. Trailing at the break to Donyell Malen's early penalty. Como showed why they have shaken things up in Italy's top flight by coming back to beat a key rival for the final spot in Europe's elite club competition. Cesc

Fabregas's tiny but wealthy team are fourth, a point above Juventus thanks to Tasos Douvikas' low drive in the 59th minute and Diego Carlos -- who gave away Roma's penalty -- poking home the winner in front of delighted home fans 20 minutes later. Between those two goals Roma defender Wesley was sent off for two bookable offences as the away side failed to deal with

a lakeside onslaught in the second half. Como have never played European football in their turbulent history, which until they were taken over by tobacco giants Djarum in 2019 featured more bankruptcies than on-field success. But there is a real chance that Champions League football might be played at the tiny Stadio

Giuseppe Sinigaglia, in view of one of the world's most famous lakes. Roma haven't qualified for the Champions League since 2018 and trail Como by three points with nine matches left remaining in the season. Later AC Milan are at Lazio with the chance to cut the gap separating them from league leaders Inter Milan to just five points.

## Lyon miss chance to retake third place

Lyon's bid for automatic Champions League qualification suffered another blow in a 0-0 draw at 10-man Le Havre yesterday as they failed to retake third place in Ligue 1 from Marseille. Paulo Fonseca's men have gone four league games without a win to slip from the fringes of the title race to fourth, two points behind OM. Just two weeks ago Lyon were set to move eight points clear of Marseille when leading their top-three rivals before a late collapse saw them slide to a 3-2 loss. Le Havre were reduced to 10 men 10 minutes into the second half when Stephan Zagadou was sent off. But Lyon mustered just one shot on target in a tame second-half display and are now only four points clear of fifth-placed Monaco and sixth-placed Rennes.