

To subscribe
GULF TIMES
Newspaper
Please call
444 666 35



ATHLETICS | Page 3

Britain's
Hodgkinson wins
world indoor
800m gold



FOOTBALL | Page 4

Araujo header
scrapes leaders
Barcelona win
over Rayo

To advertise here.

PLEASE CALL
444 666 21

Monday, March 23, 2026
Shawwal 4, 1447 AH

GULF TIMES SPORT

SPOTLIGHT

Bezzecchi wins
second race of the
season at Brazil
MotoGP

Page 2

FOOTBALL

City win League Cup as O'Reilly sinks Arsenal after Kepa error

'Unbelievable feeling. To win a final, to beat this team we know how good they are. We need to build on it'

AFP
London

Manchester City punished Kepa Arrizabalaga's howler to lift the League Cup as Nico O'Reilly's double sealed a 2-0 win against Arsenal in yesterday's final at Wembley.

Arsenal goalkeeper Kepa already had a tortured relationship with the League Cup and the Spaniard's latest mishap in the tournament's showpiece proved decisive.

Allowing Rayan Cherki's cross to slip through his fingers, Kepa presented O'Reilly with the chance to put City ahead in the second half.

O'Reilly struck again just four minutes later to seal City's ninth League Cup, giving boss Pep Guardiola a record fifth triumph in the competition.

O'Reilly savoured a weekend to remember as he turned 21 on Saturday and followed his birthday celebration with a man of the match performance at Wembley.

"Unbelievable feeling. To win a final, to beat this team we know how good they are. We need to build on it, it will give us good momentum. Buzzing with today," O'Reilly said.

Mikel Arteta chose to ignore Kepa's League Cup history when he selected the former Chelsea keeper instead of first-choice David Raya, but the gamble backfired spectacularly.

Playing for Chelsea in the 2019 final, he infamously refused to be substituted just before the shoot-out, then failed to save a single kick, while in the 2022 defeat against Liverpool he missed a penalty in a shoot-out.

Arsenal's failure to win the first



Manchester City's Nico O'Reilly poses with the trophy as his team-mates celebrate after winning the League Cup final against Arsenal at Wembley Stadium in London yesterday. (AFP)

trophy since the 2020 FA Cup was a painful blow, ending their bid to land an unprecedented quadruple.

They paid the price for Arteta's unnecessarily conservative tactics, but the season is far from over for the north Londoners.

They remain firmly in control of their bid for a first English title since 2004, while also facing Southampton in the FA Cup quarter-

finals and Sporting Lisbon in the Champions League quarter-finals.

After failing to win silverware last season and falling well behind Arsenal in this season's Premier League title race, this was a vital success for City, coming just days after their Champions League last-16 exit against Real Madrid.

Guardiola has yet to confirm

whether he will remain at City next season after another season of speculation that this could be his latest campaign in Manchester.

But the Spaniard's frenzied celebration of his 15th major trophy at City suggested his passion is undimmed. Now Guardiola can focus on using City's first win over Arsenal since 2023 as a springboard to close the nine-point gap

on the Premier League leaders. James Trafford started in goal for City instead of regular first-choice Gianluigi Donnarumma and the understudy quickly repaid Guardiola's faith with a sensational triple save.

Kai Havertz was presented with a golden opportunity by Martin Zubimendi's deft pass. But Trafford spread himself to block the

German's close-range shot before using his chest and then his outstretched foot to twice deny Bukayo Saka from the rebound.

Arsenal stifled City with their well-drilled pressing but showed little creativity after that initial burst. Even the Gunners' trademark dominance at set-pieces was absent and City fans chanted 'boring, boring Arsenal' after Piero Hincapie nodded over from Saka's corner.

City were transformed in the second half, tormenting Arsenal with a spell of unrelenting pressure. City were furious when Kepa escaped with a booking after racing out of his area in a misjudged attempt to stop Jeremy Doku reaching Matheus Nunes' long pass.

But Kepa's habit of making costly mistakes wasn't about to fade away and the Spaniard's blunder gifted City the lead on the hour. The build-up was vintage City as Rodri's lofted pass picked out Bernardo Silva and he fed Cherki for a cross that should have been a routine catch for Kepa.

Instead, he let the ball squirm through his grasp and O'Reilly pounced to head home from close-range. Shell-shocked Arsenal completely lost their composure after Kepa's blunder and City delivered the knock-out blow four minutes later.

Nunes was the catalyst with a perfectly weighted cross to the far post, where O'Reilly steamed past Saka to bury a clinical header past Kepa. Guardiola's joy was unconfined as he punched the air and sprinted down the touchline.

Booked for his extravagant celebration, Guardiola was again unable to contain himself when the final whistle signalled the end of City's trophy drought.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Spurs felled by Forest in relegation battle

AFP
London

Tottenham slipped ever closer to relegation from the Premier League with a 3-0 defeat to fellow strugglers Nottingham Forest yesterday as Sunderland stretched their hex over local rivals Newcastle.

Spurs have not tasted life outside the English top flight since 1978 but remain the only side without a Premier League win in 2026. Goals from Igor Jesus, Morgan Gibbs-White and Taiwo Awoniyi inflicted the latest in a series of damaging defeats on interim Tottenham boss Igor Tudor.

West Ham's 2-0 defeat at Aston Villa ensured Spurs remain one point outside the relegation zone with seven games remaining.

Vitor Pereira's first league win as Forest boss propels his side four points above the drop zone.

Tottenham fans gathered in north London en masse before kick-off to line the streets in a show of support under the banner "all together, always."

But nerves quickly took over the state-of-the-art 63,000 capacity Tottenham Hotspur Stadium after Jesus rose highest to head in a corner just before half-time.

Gibbs-White could have been starting in white rather than red had Forest not stood their ground

after Spurs reportedly met his buyout clause last summer.

The Forest captain instead signed a new deal at the City ground and has played a big role in leading his side away from trouble.

Gibbs-White was left completely unmarked to turn in Callum Hudson-Odoi's cross on the hour mark for his third goal in four league games.

No side has taken fewer points at home in the Premier League this season than Tottenham and they failed to muster a response. Awoniyi inflicted the final blow when he met Neco Williams' cross three minutes from time.

No excuses for Newcastle

Villa took full advantage of defeats for Liverpool and Chelsea on Saturday to close in on a return to the Champions League next season.

Unai Emery's men had taken just one point from a possible 12 in their previous four league games.

But the return of skipper John McGinn from injury has been a timely boost.

The Scotland international curled in from outside the box to give Villa the perfect start.

Ollie Watkins then pounced after Mads Hermansen spilled Morgan Rogers' shot to bounce back from his exclusion from Thomas Tuchel's England squad on Friday.

Villa open up a six-point cushion



Nottingham Forest's Taiwo Awoniyi (right) scores their third goal during the Premier League match against Tottenham Hotspur in London yesterday. (AFP)

on sixth-placed Chelsea with the top five set to qualify for next season's Champions League.

Newcastle's European ambitions and local pride were dealt a major blow as Sunderland came from behind to win 2-1 in the first Tyne-Wear derby at St. James'

Park for 10 years. Bryan Brobbey struck a 90th minute winner for the Black Cats, who have not lost to Newcastle in the league for 15 years.

Defeat compounded a miserable week for Newcastle, who were humbled 7-2 by Barcelona in

exiting the Champions League in midweek.

"I've got very little to use as an excuse. Once you haven't performed and you know how much the game means you have to accept the criticism," said Newcastle boss Eddie Howe.

Defeat sees the Magpies slip below Sunderland in the table to 12th. Newcastle also promised to identify and hold accountable anyone guilty after Sunderland defender Lutsharel Geertruida reported an incident of racist abuse from the crowd in the second half.

CRICKET

PSL cuts venues, crowds due to fuel crisis

AFP
Lahore

Pakistan's Twenty20 league will be held on schedule from March 26 but without crowds and only at two venues to save resources due to the Gulf crisis, the country's cricket chief announced yesterday.

Pakistan depends on oil and gas from the Gulf and the government has in recent weeks introduced a series of fuel-saving measures over fears of a drop in supply.

Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Mohsin Naqvi said the decisions on the Pakistan Super League (PSL) were taken after consultation with Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

"The prime minister has requested restricted movements of

people because of the fuel crisis so we have decided that the PSL would continue as per the original schedule but without crowds," Naqvi told a press conference in Lahore.

To stop fans travelling, the eight-team league has also been reduced to two venues, and not the original six, meaning Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, Multan and Peshawar miss out.

"All PSL matches will now take place in Lahore and Karachi and we hope the league could be held with crowds but that would be contingent on the crisis in Iran ending," said Naqvi, who is also Pakistan's interior minister.

The PSL began in 2016 on neutral grounds in the United Arab Emirates due to safety fears in Pakistan.

"I feel for the Peshawar crowds

who were due to watch a match for the first time," said Naqvi.

Naqvi said the PCB would compensate the franchise owners for the loss of revenue because of no crowds.

The majority of gate money goes to the franchisees.

In the updated schedule 44 matches will be taking place in a space of 39 days with Lahore and Karachi each hosting 22 matches. The opening match between Hyderabad Kingsmen and Lahore Qalandars remains intact, while Lahore will also see Eliminator 1, 2 and the final. Qualifier will be played in Karachi.

With the tournament temporarily shifting to a watch-from-home model, PSL will introduce enhanced broadcast and production features aimed at delivering an even stronger viewing experi-



Pakistan Cricket Board chairman Mohsin Naqvi addresses a press conference in Lahore yesterday.

ence for fans across Pakistan and around the world.

Naqvi said PSL remains confident that the passion of its audience, combined with innovation in coverage, will make this edition one of the most widely watched in its history.

While it is important to prioritise national stability, the crowds gracing the stadia will be sorely missed, he added.

It was estimated that with an average of 30,000 spectators and associated support staff travelling daily for over more than a month would place significant strain on energy resources.

By limiting the tournament to two cities, the PSL is also reducing the extensive operational arrangements including transport, and utility overheads that a six-city event demands, Naqvi said.

MOTOGP

Bezzecchi wins second race of season in Brazil

The Italian finishes ahead of his Spanish team-mate Jorge Martin

Reuters
Sao Paulo

Aprilia's Marco Bezzecchi cruised to victory at the MotoGP Brazilian Grand Prix yesterday for his fourth consecutive Grand Prix win and now leads the championship standings.

The 27-year-old Italian, starting second on the grid, quickly grabbed the lead and never looked back for his second win of the year after his triumph at the season-opening Thailand Grand Prix earlier this month.

Jorge Martin made it an Aprilia 1-2 and VR46's Fabio Di Giannantonio held off Marc Marquez down the stretch to claim third.

Bezzecchi said he and his team were forced to dig deep after struggling during Friday's rain-hit practice.

"It was a tough weekend, it was super tough on Friday, we started in a bad way and it was difficult to keep the motivation super high," Bezzecchi said.

"But the guys did a wonderful job and I pushed myself over the limit to try to compensate everything I could and at the end we found the way to make the bike in a fantastic way.

"I AM SUPER HAPPY"

"I adjusted some details on my riding and from this morning I felt better, so I said, 'Okay, maybe I can try to fight!' It was an amazing race, I'm super happy!"

With the win, Bezzecchi overtook KTM's Pedro Acosta and now leads the championship standings by 11 points.

Bezzecchi dedicated the victory to his friend Roberto Lunadei, a 42-year-old mechanic who died in a road traffic accident last week.

The race distance was cut from 31 laps to 23 amid track degradation concerns and scorching temperatures in Goiania, a change that was



Aprilia Racing's Italian rider Marco Bezzecchi celebrates on the podium after winning the MotoGP Grand Prix of Brazil at the Ayrton Senna International racetrack in Goiania, state of Goias, Brazil, yesterday. (AFP)

only announced just before the start of the race.

Saturday's sprint race was delayed by more than an hour as officials carried out urgent track repairs after a large hole was discovered near the starting line.

The competition at the Ayrton Senna Circuit marked MotoGP's return to Brazil for the first time in more than two decades.

MotoGP action now shifts from South America to North America with the US Grand Prix in Austin, Texas on March 27-29.

FOCUS

South Africa clinch 19-run win over New Zealand in fourth T20



South Africa captain Keshav Maharaj (right) celebrates the wicket of New Zealand's Cole McConchie with teammate Ruben Hermann during the fourth Twenty20 international in Wellington yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Wellington

South Africa's spinners played a decisive role as the tourists won the fourth Twenty20 international against New Zealand by 19 runs yesterday to square the five-match series 2-2.

New Zealand were well placed to clinch the series midway through their chase in Wellington after the Proteas scored 164-5.

However, from 88-3 after 10 overs, they lost wickets in rapid succession to be all out for 145 off 18.5 overs.

It sends the series, played between weakened sides from both countries, to a decider in Christchurch on Wednesday.

The match swung in favour of South Africa when spinners Keshav Maharaj and Prenelan Subrayen turned the screws through the middle stages of the chase.

Captain Maharaj is comfortably the most experienced member of an experimental tour squad and proved hard to score from as he took 2-22 off four overs.

Subrayen, playing his first T20 international, bowled Dane Cleaver for 26 to spark New Zealand's middle order crumble and finished

with 2-13 off three overs. Maharaj said his side played with more energy than in defeats in Hamilton and Auckland.

"It was a perfect response to two disappointing losses in a row," he said.

"Coming into this game, you could see there was a little bit more energy and hunger. We are a young team, finding our way in international cricket so it takes a little bit of time."

Opener Tim Robinson top-scored with 32 for New Zealand while Proteas paceman Gerald Coetzee took 3-31.

South Africa's innings were dominated by an impressive 57 off 36 balls from wicketkeeper Connor Esterhuizen.

He was dismissed by a spectacular outfield catch from Katene Clarke, on his international debut, off Ben Sears' bowling.

Paceman Sears impressed, taking 1-22 off four overs, which included conceding just two runs off the last over of the innings.

BRIEF SCORES
South Africa 164 for 5 (Esterhuizen 57, Jamieson 2-29)
beat New Zealand 145 (Robinson 32, Coetzee 3-31, Subrayen 2-13, Maharaj 2-22, Baartman 2-30) **by 19 runs**

Osaka weighs clay court season, motherhood 'dilemma'

Miami: Former world number one **Naomi Osaka** said she is considering how best to balance her tennis schedule with motherhood after a 7-5 6-4 loss to Australia's Talia Gibson in her opening match on Saturday. Osaka returned to the tour in 2024 after a 15-month break following the birth of her daughter and reached the US Open semi-finals last year. She withdrew ahead of her scheduled third-round match at the Australian Open in January due to an abdominal injury. The four-time Grand Slam champion lost to world number one Aryna Sabalenka in the Indian Wells pre-quarterfinals this month before another early exit in Miami.



and it's very difficult. Because for me, I want to win titles and I want to be the best player I can, but if I have to sacrifice having a lot of time with my daughter, I'd rather not do it. "I'm not going to play Charleston. I hope I can play Madrid, Rome and then, obviously, the French Open," said Osaka. Gibson, 21, will play Iva Jovic in the next round.

Asked about her plans for the clay season, Osaka said she is weighing the demands of the tour with the time she wants to spend at home. "I feel like this also is a dilemma for me," Osaka told reporters. "For me, my daughter is very important, and I want to be a mom. I want to be the best mom I can, but sometimes I feel like I know what I have to do to become a really good player,

TENNIS

Fritz silences Opelka's serve in straight-sets win

Agencies
Miami

Taylor Fritz of the US continued his march through the 2026 Miami Open as he dispatched fellow American Reilly Opelka 6-3, 6-4 in a highly anticipated third-round clash yesterday.

Entering the match, the 6-foot-11 Opelka was riding high after a dominant serving performance against Jack Draper in the previous round, where he blasted 25 aces.

However, the seventh-ranked Fritz proved to be a completely different challenge. Navigating the blistering speed of Opelka's first serve, Fritz relied on his superior baseline game and elite returning to neutralize the big man's primary weapon.

Fritz secured a crucial break in the first set to smoothly take a 6-3 advantage. Maintaining his composure and executing cleanly from the back of the court, Fritz struck again in the second set.

He efficiently managed his own service games, never allowing Opelka the breathing room to dictate the tempo or force a tiebreak. A final 6-4 second set sealed the straight-sets victory for Fritz, extending his dominant head-to-head record over his compatriot.

The impressive win pushes Fritz into the Round of 16 at Hard Rock Stadium, keeping his hopes alive for a massive Masters 1000 title on home soil despite recent battles with knee tendinitis.



American Taylor Fritz returns a shot against Reilly Opelka of the United States at the Miami Open yesterday. (AFP)

Earlier defending champion Jakub Mensik shook off a "horrible" first set to win his opening match. Mensik, who fell in the third round at Indian Wells, was feeling the after-effects of illness as well as the pressure of defending his title in a rocky first set but righted the ship to beat Australian Adam Walton 3-6, 6-2, 6-4.

"The first set it was horrible from my side," the Czech said.

After surrendering his serve twice in the first set Mensik regrouped to break Walton in the opening game of the second set on the way to forcing a third and with a break in hand for a 3-1 lead rolled home.

"It was really difficult to come back to the

match rhythm?" Mensik said. "(I'm) really happy that mentally I stayed focused and tough," he said.

"The pressure that was around, I tried not to focus on that, tried to focus on my game."

Former number one Medvedev also had little time to adjust, but he managed to fight back for a 6-7 (10/12), 6-3, 6-1 victory over 19-year-old Japanese wildcard Rei Sakamoto.

Fourth-seeded German Alexander Zverev cruised into the third round with a 6-2, 6-4 victory over 133rd-ranked American Martin Damm. But eighth-seeded home hope Ben Shelton was ousted by Kazakhstan's Alexander Shevchenko 6-7 (3/7), 7-6 (7/3), 6-3.

Fourth-seeded Coco Gauff led the way into the women's fourth round, roaring back for a 3-6, 6-0, 6-1 victory over fellow American Alycia Parks.

Teenagers Mirra Andreeva and Victoria Mboko booked a last-16 meeting that will be their third clash of the WTA season.

Eighth-seeded Russian Andreeva defeated Czech Marie Bouzkova 7-6 (7/4), 6-2, while 10th-seeded Canadian Mboko downed Russian qualifier Anastasia Zakharova 6-1, 7-5.

Andreeva, 18, and 19-year-old Mboko have split their last two matches, Andreeva winning in the final at Adelaide in January before Mboko sent her packing in the third round at Doha - saving a match point in the three-set win and going on to reach the final.

Alexandra Eala reached the last 16 with a 6-3, 7-6 (7/2) victory over Poland's Magda Linette

ATHLETICS

Britain's Hodgkinson wins world indoor 800m gold

NEW ZEALAND'S TOM WALSH DELIGHTS FANS WITH IMPRESSIVE FOURTH INDOOR GOLD

AFP
Torun, Poland

Keely Hodgkinson won a first world indoor title yesterday thanks to a commanding performance in the women's 800m in Torun, Poland.

In a gun-to-tape performance, the 24-year-old world indoor record holder clocked a winning time of 1min 55.30sec in the four-lap race.

Her time was not only a championship record but also the second fastest time run over the distance indoors.

Switzerland's Audrey Werro took silver in a national record of 1:56.64, with American Addison Wiley claiming bronze (1:58.36).

Starting in the outside lane six, Hodgkinson covered the opening 200m in 27.24sec as she immediately moved to the front of the pack.

Tracked by Ethiopian Nigist Getachew, the Briton went through 400m at pace, in 56.96sec, the pack already split and struggling with her speed.

She refused to let up, building up a lead on her rivals through the bell for the final 200m lap.

Getachew was dropped but Werro fired down the back stretch in a desperate bid to make up some ground, but it was all too little too late as Hodgkinson sped through the line in elation.

Hodgkinson, who set a new indoor 800m world record of 1:54.87sec last month and said Thursday she would have been "quite happy" had the outdoor season already kicked off, announced her full return to global competition in some style after months on the sidelines in rehab



Britain's Keely Hodgkinson celebrates winning the women's final 800m event during the World Athletics Indoor Championships Kujawy Pomorze 2026 in Torun, Poland, yesterday. (AFP)

for knee and hamstring injuries. Untimely injuries have prevented the Briton from taking part in the past three editions of the world indoors.

But Hodgkinson, who earned Tokyo Olympic silver and Paris Olympic gold and who has two world outdoor silver medals and a bronze, touched down in Poland in perfect shape and more than demonstrated that.

Hodgkinson was immediately enveloped by training partner Georgia Hunter Bell, who had won the 1,500m just minutes before the 800m took place.

All eyes will now turn on Hodg-

kinson's plans for the outdoor season.

Given her new world indoor record, there is the mouth-watering possibility of her going after the oldest world record in athletics - the 1min 53.28sec for the outdoor 800m set by Jarmila Kratochvilova of the then-Czechoslovakia in 1983.

WALSH IS THE HERO

New Zealand's Tom Walsh left it late to bag a fourth world indoor shot put title yesterday.

The 34-year-old, who previously won world indoor golds in 2016, 2018 and 2025, managed a

best of 21.82 metres with his sixth attempt. The two-time Olympic medalist had moved into pole position with his fifth effort of 21.66m, and eventually finished 18cm ahead of American silver medalist Jordan Geist (21.64m).

A second American, Roger Steen, rounded out the podium with a best of 21.49m.

"My whole career started in Poland with bronze at the 2014 world indoors in Sopot," said Walsh, who also bagged a bronze in 2022 and a silver in 2024 to go along with his quartet of golds.

"If you told me then that I would still be here winning medals



Men's shot put gold medalist New Zealand's Tom Walsh celebrates on the podium. (Reuters)

at every edition since then I would tell you you were dreaming.

"It is great to see I can still do it against the younger guys."

Walsh, who was also crowned world outdoor champion in London in 2017, added: "My goal for today was to throw 22m and win a medal. I did not quite get to 22 but I won gold so it is pretty good.

"I was glad I was able to build things up as the competition went on. Throwing last when you know you have won sometimes saps the energy out of you but, at other times, it can give you a boost, and that happened for me today."

Portugal's Sao Tome-born Ag-

ate de Sousa won the women's long jump with a best of 6.92m, with just two finals in the morning session of the third and final day of competition in the Polish city.

Italy's Larissa Iapichino claimed silver, just 5cm adrift, with Colombia's Natalia Linares rounding out the podium (6.80).

"Today, I did not think about my opponents and, in my mind, just competed with myself and nobody else," said De Sousa.

"I came here to jump seven metres and that was all I had in my mind.

"It did not come today but I know that it will come again."

FOCUS

DeChambeau wins LIV Golf South Africa in playoff

AFP
Johannesburg

Bryson DeChambeau won back-to-back LIV Golf titles via play-offs when he made a birdie on the first extra hole to beat Spaniard Jon Rahm in the South Africa tournament near Johannesburg yesterday.

Last weekend in Singapore, Canadian Richard T. Lee missed a short putt to gift DeChambeau victory.

This time a brilliant second play-off shot from the American at the par-five 18th set up success. After receiving relief when his tee shot landed in grass muddied by torrential rain, the 32-year-old major winner used a wood and slammed the ball into the heart of the green.

Rahm failed to take advantage of his tee shot landing in the fairway as his second found a greenside bunker.

After reaching the green in three, Rahm watched his birdie putt veer right, leaving DeChambeau needing two putts for victory and a \$4 million first prize.

His eagle putt stopped just short and he tapped in for a triumph that triggered an emotional reaction as he struggled to hold back tears.

"I wish I could tell you why I am so emotional," DeChambeau told reporters after his fourth LIV title.

More than 100,000 spectators watched the four-day event at Steyn City and the champion called it "the best LIV event we have ever had. There was some stellar golf this week."

The atmosphere on the final day, with President Cyril Ramaphosa present, resembled that of a football match, with constant cheering, chanting and singing.

Such was the enthusiasm of the crowds that golf etiquette was occasionally forgotten with cheering continuing as competitors played shots. DeChambeau was always in contention.

He shared the first-round lead and was two shots ahead after the second and third rounds.

He carded a five-under 66 in the final round while Rahm, helped by a long birdie putt on 16, fired a 63



Bryson DeChambeau celebrates with his trophies after winning the LIV Golf South Africa individual and team events. (Reuters)

to force the play-off. Both completed four rounds in 258, 26 under par.

Mexican Anthony Ancer (66), Belgian Thomas Detry (65) and South African Branden Grace (67) finished on 261.

After tournaments this season in Saudi Arabia, Australia, Hong Kong, Singapore and South Africa, the sixth LIV Golf event will be in Mexico from April 16.

Leading final-round scores (par 71):

258 - Bryson DeChambeau (USA)
63-65-64-66, Jon Rahm (ESP) 65-

66-64-63
DeChambeau won at first hole of play-off

261 - Abraham Ancer (MEX) 66-65-64-66, Thomas Detry (BEL) 66-67-63-65, Branden Grace (RSA) 64-66-64-67

262 - Dean Burmester (RSA) 67-64-65-66, David Puig (ESP) 66-64-66-66
263 - Carlos Ortiz (MEX) 67-65-65-66
264 - Charles Howell III (USA) 63-68-66-67, Anirban Lahiri (IND) 69-69-63-63
265 - Scott Vincent (ZIM) 66-68-66-65.

Australia's Green wins historic third tournament in a row

World number seven Hannah Green stormed to her third title in succession yesterday, a rare feat no Australian woman golfer has achieved before. The major winner carded a 69 to finish 16-under at the Ladies European Tour co-sanctioned Australian WPGA Championship to win by four shots from Germany's Alexandra Forsterling and South African Casandra Alexander.

It followed her victory at the Australian Open in Adelaide last week which came on the heels of her seventh LPGA title at the HSBC Women's World Championship in Singapore.

No Australian has ever won three tournaments in succession on international tours, not even the legendary Karrie Webb who accumulated 56 career titles including seven majors.

"It feels really amazing. Again, hasn't really sunk in, but it's been a really crazy month," said 29-year-old Green at the Sanctuary Cove Golf and Country Club on the Gold Coast. "I guess it's been four weeks since I won Singapore. But it's been really special to be able to do this in Australia."

Green skipped two LPGA tournaments to be able to compete in her homeland. She began the day two strokes clear and briefly had a six-shot buffer before successive bogeys saw that advantage reduced to just two. But she held her nerve on the back nine and headed to the 18th with a three stroke lead before ending with a birdie to complete a dominant win.

Green will seek a fourth straight win at the LPGA Aramco Championship in Las Vegas from April 2.

GOLF

South Korea's Im maintains lead

Reuters
Palm Harbor Florida

It might feel a bit different for South Korea's Sungjae Im on the last day of the Valspar Championship.

Im sank a 13-foot putt on the final hole to shoot 2-under-par 69 and stretch his lead to two strokes through the third round Saturday at Palm Harbor, Fla.

"It has been a while since I've been in the lead like this, and I'm sure I will be nervous," Im said. "But the best I can do is just to play my own game."

Im had gone nine holes without a birdie on Innisbrook Resort and Golf Club's Copperhead Course before sinking his last birdie attempt. He enters Sunday's final round at 11-under 202 in search of his first PGA Tour win since the 2021 Shriners Children's Open.

"I'm really thrilled about the birdie on the final hole, and to have a two-shot lead," Im said.

Brandt Snedeker posted 67 to pull into a share of second place with David Lipsky, who turned in an erratic 70. "I'm going to enjoy my late Sunday round tomorrow and go have some fun," Snedeker said.

Snedeker's bogey-free round - beginning with three birdies on the first four holes - gave him a score that matched the best rounds of the day.

"Even though it looked bogey-free, it was definitely up and down," Snedeker said. "There



Sungjae Im of South Korea plays his shot from the 17th tee during the third round of the Valspar Championship. (AFP)

was some struggles in the middle of the round that I was able to survive, which was nice. I finished strong, made some good swings coming down the stretch."

Lipsky moved into a share of the lead with a birdie on No. 15 before giving it back with a bogey - his third of the back nine - on the next hole. His round included five birdies and four bogeys.

"The short game and the putter really saved me and kept me in it," Lipsky said, planning a visit to the driving range "to try to fix for (Sunday)."

England's Marco Penge and England's Matt Fitzpatrick shot matching 68s to hold a tie for fourth place at 8 under. That's two shots clear of South Korea's S.H. Kim and Belgium's Adrien Dumont de Chassart, a duo that shared the day's best round with Snedeker.

Championship and he's back in the mix this weekend.

"The greens are so firm you can't afford to be coming out of the rough for the second shots, just because you can't control your ball," Fitzpatrick said.

Im, who hadn't led through 36 holes of a PGA Tour event since 2021, finished at 69 for the second day in a row. He saved par on No. 16 after a tee shot settled on a cart path. Penge was at 2 over for the round after a double-bogey 6 on No. 6, but he played the back-side bogey-free at 4 under.

Fitzpatrick was steadier. He fashioned nothing but pars - save a three-hole stretch of birdies on Nos. 10-12.

Brooks Koepka looked like he might be a contender after going 3 under through eight holes of the third round. Then came a 3 over backside that included a double-bogey 6 at No. 16. He ended up with 71, putting him at 4 under for the tournament and tied for 11th place.

LA LIGA

Araujo header scrapes Barcelona win over Rayo

'We knew we had to win and what the other teams do is not up to us'

AFP
Barcelona

Ronald Araujo's header helped Barcelona extend their lead on Real Madrid at the top of La Liga to seven points with a tight 1-0 win over Rayo Vallecano yesterday.

Alvaro Arbeloa's Real Madrid host Atletico Madrid, fourth, later on in a derby clash.

Araujo nodded home Joao Cancelo's corner after 24 minutes to secure the three points at Camp Nou but goalkeeper Joan Garcia's superb display played just as big a part in their victory.

"We knew how important it was to get this win before the international break, we did it, but it's true we suffered more than we would have liked," Garcia told DAZN.

"They knew how to cause us damage and we weren't at the level we have been with the ball above all.

"We knew we had to win and what the other teams do is not up to us."

Hansi Flick's side were caught snoozing in the opening stages but Garcia made a fine save to deny Carlos Martin from close range.

Called up by Luis de la Fuente to the Spanish national team for the first time ahead of March's upcoming friendlies, Garcia made several excellent saves to keep Rayo at bay, with the Madrid side dominant in the second half.

At the other end, Raphinha was guilty of profligate finishing on numerous occasions. The winger scuffed wide after picking Pathe Ciss's pocket and charging through on goal.

A few minutes later Ciss appeared to bring down teenage star Lamine Yamal in the area but the Barcelona player's appeals were ignored by the referee.

Yamal's superb cross, with the outside of his boot, created another fine chance for Raphinha but the Brazilian's mis-hit effort was tipped over by Augusto Batalla.

The champions took the lead through Araujo's header from Joao



Barcelona's Ronald Federico Araujo da Silva celebrates scoring during the La Liga match against Rayo Vallecano in Barcelona yesterday. (AFP)

Cancelo's corner midway through the first half.

Araujo has not featured much since taking a mental health break late last year, but came on as a substitute in Barca's 7-2 Champions League rout of Newcastle in midweek.

With Eric Garcia rested following a muscle overload, Flick started the Uruguayan at right-back and was rewarded with what proved to be the winner.

"I feel very good, physically well, it's important that I can help the team," said Araujo.

"I'm in a good rhythm, working hard to be able to support where I have to, I'm always ready to help the team."

The Catalans came close to a second after the interval but Yamal dragged a low effort across the face of goal.

Inigo Perez's Rayo took control and started generating dangerous chances as they searched for

an equaliser. Joan Garcia denied Alvaro Garcia and then produced a spectacular save to push away Unai Lopez's header.

Pacha Espino should have pulled the visitors level but, after beating Barca's high defensive line and staying outside, curled over the bar. Garcia pushed away a Jorge de Frutos drive before six minutes of stoppage time were added but Barca clung on to triumph.

"This is why we bought him," said Flick. "I know how important he is and how (important) his performance today was."

The Barca coach had lots of praise for Rayo coach Perez after his team's impressive display.

"We didn't play our best game but we have to say Rayo played a fantastic game, congrats -- Inigo made a fantastic job," added Flick.

"His team played really great football, a great style, it's really amazing to see this and I'm really happy for him."

Perez's side are 14th and fighting to stay clear of the relegation zone while also playing in the UEFA Conference League.

"The second half was perfect but we lacked the goal," Perez. "(Joan Garcia) appeared in the key moments when we might have been able to draw."

Later on, Alaves produced a sensational comeback from three goals down to beat Celta Vigo 4-3. Quique Sanchez Flores's team climbed to 16th, three points above the relegation zone.

Ferran Jugla struck either side of Hugo Alvarez's goal as Celta, sixth, racked up a seemingly comfortable lead.

However, Toni Martinez pulled one back before the interval to spark Alaves's comeback.

Angel Perez added another before Martinez scored again to level and Abde Feredj cut in from the left and fired home to claim a memorable victory for the visitors.

FOCUS

Qatar Basketball League semi-finals 'playoffs' from today

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Rayyan will take on Al Ahli while defending champions Al Arabi will meet Al Sadd in the 'Playoffs' stage of the semi-finals of the Qatar Men's Basketball League 2025-26 season at the Al Gharafa Club Hall today.

The resumption of the league comes after a temporary suspension due to prevailing regional circumstances. Al Rayyan meet third-placed Al Ahli, who secured their spot through the 'Play-In' stage, at 6pm.

Al Rayyan will be looking to reaffirm their dominance this season, while Al Ahli aim to continue their positive run and surprise the leaders.

In the second match, Al Arabi, last season's champions and current runners-up, will face fourth-placed Al Sadd, who also advanced via the 'Play-In' stage. The game is scheduled for 8pm and promises a special competitive flavor between two teams with rich histories and strong ambitions to reach the final.

The semi-finals will be played under the 'best-of-three' format, with each team needing two victories to secure a place in

the final. This system adds tactical and competitive intensity, making every game crucial in shaping the finalists.

The second round of the semi-finals will take place on Thursday, March 26, 2026. Al Sadd will face Al Arabi at 6pm, followed by Al Ahli vs Al Rayyan at 8pm. The round could prove decisive if any team manages to secure a second win and clinch early qualification.

If the series is tied 1-1, a decisive third game will be held on Saturday, March 28, 2026. Al Rayyan will meet Al Ahli at 6pm, followed by Al Sadd against Al Sadd at 8pm, to determine the finalists.

Should qualification be settled in the first two rounds, the third game will not be played.

The league season will then conclude on Saturday, March 28, 2026, with the third-place playoff at 6pm, followed by the championship final at 8pm.

The Qatar Basketball Federation has announced that all matches will be held without spectators and with attendance limited only to players, technical and administrative staff, organizational crews, and the referees' committee. This measure is part of the precautionary protocols adopted to ensure safety and smooth conduct of the games.

Mainz beat Frankfurt to continue Bundesliga escape act

Mainz continued their impressive rise from last spot to mid-table safety with a 2-1 home win over Eintracht Frankfurt in the Bundesliga yesterday. Paul Nebel's 89th-minute winner gave Mainz all three points after Frankfurt's Nathaniel Brown had equalised for the visitors in the 20th minute, cancelling out Nebel's early opener. Stranded in last spot when former Union Berlin coach Urs Fischer took over in December, Mainz have since lost just two of 18 matches in all competitions and sit 11th in the Bundesliga, six points above the relegation play-off spot.

They are through to the quarter-finals of a European competition for the first time after beating Sigma Olmutz in the UEFA Conference League on Thursday. Later, St Pauli threw away an early lead to lose 2-1 at home against Freiburg and sink closer to the drop. Both Freiburg's goals were scored by Hamburg-born-and-raised Igor Matanovic, who spent 13 years at Pauli, rubbing salt into the home side's wounds. The defeat left St Pauli in the relegation play-off spot, two points behind Cologne, who fired coach Lukas Kwasniok yesterday. Assistant manager Rene Wagner will take over the Billy Goats on an interim basis.

Meanwhile Borussia Dortmund sporting director Sebastian Kehl has ended his tenure "by mutual consent", the club said in a statement released yesterday. The surprise announcement, which sees Kehl leaving with immediate effect, comes amid rumours linking the former Dortmund player, who won three Bundesliga titles during a 13-year stint with the club, to the sporting director job at Hamburg. Lars Ricken, Dortmund's board member for sport - a position above Kehl's in the hierarchy - said the decision came after a "very open discussion". "(We) came to the shared conclusion that the summer is the right time for changes," Ricken said in the statement.

SERIE A

Como swat aside Pisa to boost Champions League hopes

AFP
Milan

Como took another step towards a historic qualification for the Champions League after cruising to a 5-0 victory over lowly Pisa yesterday. Assane Diallo set Como on their way in the seventh minute with a fine low drive, and further strikes from Tasos Douvakis, Martin Baturina, Nico Paz and Maximo Perrone ensured a fifth straight win in Italy's top flight.

Ambitious Como have never played European football but the team coached by Cesc Fabregas sit fourth, three points ahead of Juventus, in fifth, and sixth-placed Roma who beat Lecce 1-0. Robinio Vaz first Roma goal was enough to keep the capital club in the top-four hunt and drop Lecce into the relegation zone in place of Jamie Vardy's Cremonese.

Before kick-off in Como a minute's silence, during which fans broke out into applause, was



Como coach Cesc Fabregas celebrates after his team won the Serie A match against Pisa yesterday. (Reuters)

held for deceased billionaire co-owner Michael Hartono, who died at the age of 86 on Thursday.

Indonesian Hartono and his brother Robert, owners of tobacco giant Djarum which was founded by their father in the 1950s, bought Como in 2019 when the club was

in Italy's third division. Como had far too much for Pisa who look set to go straight back down to Serie B after promotion last season.

Pisa sit bottom of the division, nine points behind Cremonese who are just outside the relegation zone.

LIGUE 1

Marseille downed by Lille as Lyon's struggles continue

AFP
Marseille, France

Olivier Giroud came off the bench for Lille to condemn Marseille to a 2-1 home defeat yesterday as fellow European contenders Lyon's woes continued with another defeat.

Ethan Nwaneri's first-half goal seemed to have put Marseille on course for a third straight win in the league as they look to consolidate the third and final Champions League spot. But Belgian right-back Thomas Meunier struck back for seventh-placed Lille in the 49th minute to level matters at the Stade Velodrome.

Former Arsenal and France striker Giroud then netted his sixth goal of the season to send Lille in front inside the final five minutes. The 39-year-old substitute headed in Meunier's cross to complete the comeback for fifth-placed Lille and move them to within two points of their opponents.

Defeat left Habib Beye's Marseille on 49 points, also just two clear of fourth-placed Lyon after the seven-time French champions went down 2-1 at home to Monaco.

The defeat compounded a miserable week for Lyon after they were eliminated from the Europa League on Thursday following a 2-0 defeat at the Groupama Stadium to Spaniards Celta Vigo.

Paulo Fonseca's charges are now without a win in their last six outings in all competitions.



Lille's Olivier Giroud (right) celebrates with team-mate Hakon Arnar Haraldsson after scoring his team's second goal during the Ligue 1 match against Olympique de Marseille at the Stade Velodrome in Marseille yesterday. (AFP)

Pavel Sulc sent the hosts ahead on 42 minutes but the principality side roared back courtesy of Maghnes Akliouche's leveler shortly after the hour before Folarin Balogun netted from the spot in the 72nd minute to move Monaco into sixth and within one point of Lyon.

They sit on 46 points, two

clear of Rennes, who played out a goalless stalemate with bottom-placed Metz.

Elsewhere, Paris FC moved nine points clear of the relegation play-off spot with a vital 3-2 home win over Le Havre. The capital side sit on 31 points, with Le Havre now four behind them in 14th spot.

Celtic's title defence in tatters after Dundee Utd defeat

GLASGOW: Celtic's grip on the Scottish Premiership is hanging by a thread after a 2-0 defeat to Dundee United yesterday left the defending champions in third with seven games remaining. Martin O'Neill's men trail leaders Hearts by five points and Glasgow rivals Rangers by two after their eighth league defeat of a miserable season. Will Ferry and Emmanuel Agyei struck for United as Celtic lost for the second time at Tannadice this season. The first of those reverses came during Wilfried Nancy's short-lived

tenure in charge of the Hoops in December. O'Neill has steadied the ship in two interim spells either side of the Frenchman's eight-game reign, but now faces a mountain to climb to retain the title. "Of course, it's a concern. Of course, it's a big blow to us. We're beaten in the game and with games running down, we can't really afford to do that, but we're still in it," said O'Neill. "It's been difficult since I've set foot in the place both times (this season). Today is a blow but we're not finished yet."