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Sabalenka sinks Gauff to win second straight Miami Open title

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Italian teenager Antonelli claims Japanese GP to take championship lead

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QSL CUP

Muaither win penalty shootout against Arabi to enter final

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Goalkeeper Majed Abdullatif emerged hero as Muaither SC advanced to the final of the 2025-2026 season QSL Cup after defeating Al Arabi 3-2 on penalties at Thani Bin Jassim Stadium yesterday.

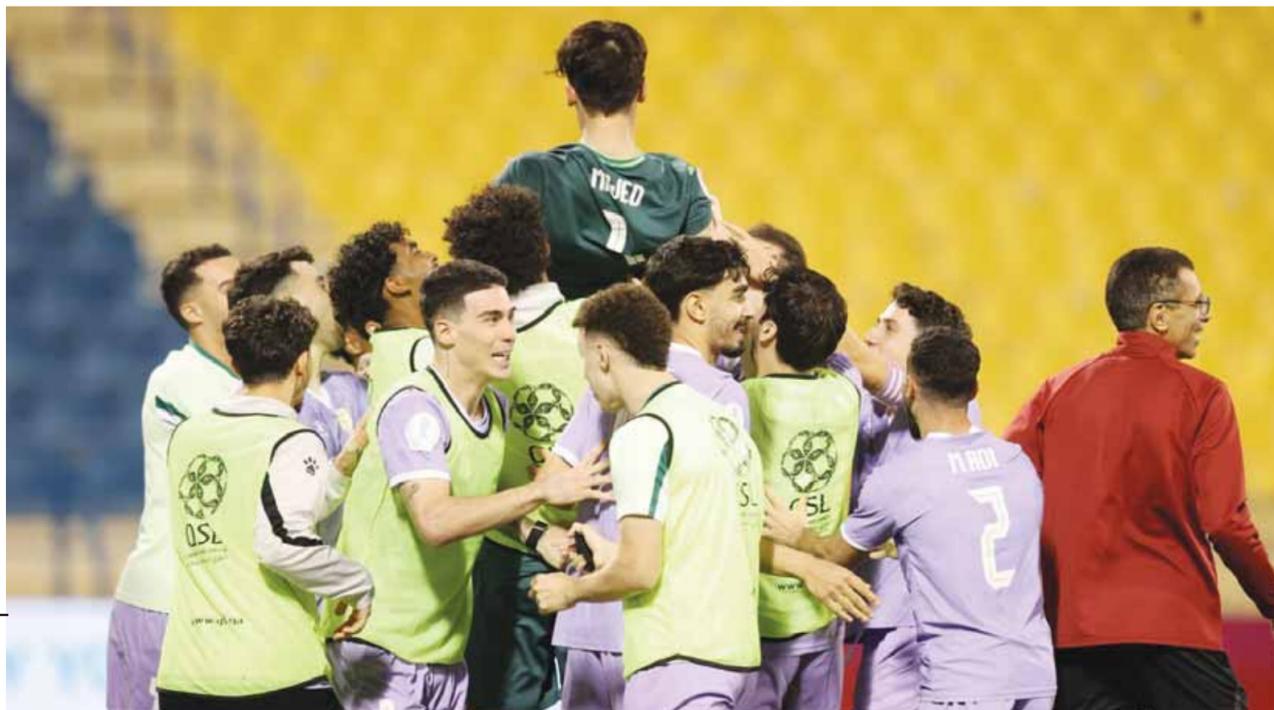
The thrilling semi-final ended 3-3 after regulation time, with Al Arabi's Alexis Perez scoring a dramatic last-gasp equaliser to force the shootout. In the decisive penalties, Muaither's Pakistani goalkeeper saved three kicks to secure victory and book a place in the final against Al Rayyan.

The match witnessed an explosive start. Joao Pedro headed Al Arabi into the lead in the seventh minute, but Muaither responded immediately as Etyan Morales equalised seconds later, cleverly clipping the ball past goalkeeper Mohamed Saeed Ibrahim.

Fouad Saleh put Muaither ahead in the 11th minute with a powerful low drive. Albert Ramis Luque then extended the lead from the penalty spot just before halftime after Morales was fouled by the Al Arabi keeper.

Al Arabi mounted a strong comeback in the second half, with Pablo Sarabia reducing the deficit in the 51st minute. Despite sustained pressure, Muaither looked set for victory until Perez's late strike sent the tie to penalties.

Muaither will now face Al Rayyan, who qualified after a marathon penalty shootout win over Umm Salal.



Muaither players celebrate with goalkeeper Majed Abdullatif after they beat Al Arabi 3-2 on penalties to make the QSL Cup final at the Thani Bin Jassim Stadium yesterday.

SHOWJUMPING

Cherif flies to 5-star Grand Prix win, secures Al Shaqab Cup

'IT'S A DREAM COME TRUE. I AM STILL SOAKING IN AND I CAN'T BELIEVE THAT I HAVE WON'



His Excellency Dr. Thani bin Abdulrahman al-Kuwari, Second Vice President of Qatar Olympic Committee and a member of the Al Shaqab Board of Directors, crowned the Grand Prix champions of Al Shaqab Cup at the Longines Outdoor Arena of Al Shaqab yesterday.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar-based French rider Cyrene Cherif claimed victory in the prestigious CSI5* Grand Prix Two Rounds with Jump Off 1.60m event, clinching the Al Shaqab Cup yesterday.

Riding the 10-year-old bay gelding Triple T Calamando Blue at Longines Outdoor Arena, Cherif delivered a flawless performance, finishing the jump-off in 42.51 seconds to surpass Qatar's Faleh Suwead al-Ajami.

Only two riders advanced to the decisive jump-off stage after the initial two rounds, and Cherif's win earned her €81,250 in prize

money.

Al-Ajami was swift in the jump-off, recording 40.99 seconds, but incurred four penalties on the course, which relegated him to second place with a €65,000 reward.

America's Kristen Vanderveen, aboard Bull Run's Jireh, secured third place after completing the second round in 53.82 seconds, having picked up one penalty in the first round. Vanderveen added €48,750 to her earnings.

"It's a dream come true. I am still soaking in and I can't believe that I have won," Cherif said in a post-event press conference.

"I had the same horse from start to end through the week and I am delighted with the victory!" Assistant Director of the Qa-

tar Equestrian Tour Sheikh Talal bin Khaled al-Thani thanked the riders, organisers and the media for making the event a success. "We had over 150 riders from 22 countries participating. The event was held with spectator attendance as per the national guidelines," he said.

Earlier, Jordan's Nasouh Kayali claimed victory in the CSI3* Grand Prix with Jump Off 1.50m aboard Figueras de Laume, completing a double clear round in 55.73 seconds. Austria's Gerfried Puck finished second on Idiala Special H.J. with four faults in 49.99 seconds, while South Africa's Matthew Morrison took third riding Quebec with one fault in 85.51 seconds in the first round.

Earlier at Longines Outdoor



Cyrene Cherif astride Triple T Calamando Blue clinched CSI5* Grand Prix Two Rounds with Jump Off 1.60m title at the Al Shaqab Cup yesterday.

Arena, Vanderveen topped the CSI5* Faults & Time 1.50m aboard Starbucks 27, delivering a clear round in 66.99 seconds.

Qatar's Bassem Mohammed finished second on Wathnan Charly Brown in 74.46 seconds, while Egypt's Zain Shady Samir claimed third riding Le Boss in 75.52 seconds.

In the CSI1* Grand Prix 1.35m at Longines Indoor Arena, Qatar's Khalid Jassim al-Suwaidi emerged victorious riding E.T.'s Queeny Z with a double clear in 35.01 seconds.

Hussain Said Haidan followed closely in second on D Saucedo in 35.26 seconds, while Mohammed Jassim al-Thani completed the all-Qatari podium aboard Hazel de Luxe in 36.21 seconds.

Qatar's Mohammed Yousef al-

Jaber claimed victory in the CSIY-B CSIY 1.30m Jump Off aboard Christa 27, delivering a double clear round in 34.98 seconds.

Bahrain's Sultan Abdulaziz Mayoof Alromaihi on Johelys de Fondcombe finished second in 39.15 seconds with four faults, while Qatar's Haya Khalid al-Hitmi secured third riding Tom Ford in 40.03 seconds with eight faults.

In the CSI3* Accumulator 1.40m, Kuwait's Hussain Alkharafi topped the standings on Gk C'Est Un Reve with 65 points in 50.97 seconds.

Qatar's Saad Ahmed al-Saad aboard Gary de Cerisy took second in 53.14 seconds, while his compatriot Mohammed Khalifa al-Baker placed third on Emiro Delle Sementarecce in 55.05 seconds, both also on 65 points.

Ghanim Nasser al-Qadi led a Qatari victory in the CSI3* Faults & Time 1.30m, guiding Mukaynis to a clear round in 64.54 seconds. Saudi Arabia's Khaled Abdulaziz al-Eid on Amazing vh Keizershof Z finished second in 66.64 seconds, while Germany's Frederike Staack took third aboard Wathnan Popeye in 67.89 seconds.

Meanwhile, Ahmad Jassim al-Suwaidi won the CSI1* Accumulator 1.20m on Power Girl Jmg with 65 points in 44.43 seconds. Saudi Arabia's Khalid al-Hadi on DSP Cessy placed second in 47.21 seconds, while Sultan Salem al-Naemi finished third aboard Cethys de Vernay in 47.46 seconds.

Riders will now prepare for the Qatar Equestrian Federation Cup - part of Doha Equestrian Tour - to be held from April 2 to 4.

COMMENT

'Excited' Buttler rejuvenated for IPL stint

AFP
New Delhi

England's **Jos Buttler** insists he still has the hunger for runs, saying a complete break from cricket in the Alps has rejuvenated him for the Indian Premier League after a horror T20 World Cup.

The wicketkeeper cut a downcast figure opening the England batting in the global showpiece, scoring just 87 runs in eight matches up to the semi-final defeat to eventual champions India this month.

"It's great to have a nice break," Buttler, whose Gujarat Titans team will begin their campaign against Punjab Kings in New Chandigarh tomorrow, told AFP.

"I actually went to the Alps so I couldn't have been further away from cricket which was really nice.

"Had some time away and I'm really excited now, looking forward to another IPL

season," added the former England white-ball captain. Opener Buttler, who has scored 4,037 T20 runs for England since his 2011 debut, was a shadow of his usually destructive self in the T20 World Cup in India and Sri Lanka.

Buttler's top score was a less-than-fluent 26 against Nepal in England's opening match.

He hit a scratchy 21 against the West Indies in the next group game then had a run of five single-digit scores before scoring 25 in the semi-final defeat.

Buttler's slump in form has left a question mark over his future in Harry Brook's England side, but the 35-year-old said he retained his motivation for the game.

'STILL HUNGRY'

"I'm still hungry to score runs," said Buttler. "I think I'm at a stage in my career now and having just had those few weeks to reflect, I just want to look forward and play what's in front of me and not make

any plans really. "Whether you're playing well in terms of runs or not scoring runs... you have to have the same energy and motivation to go to practise and to the next match.

"As long as I've got that energy to turn up to the next one, I'll keep going," he said.

Buttler has made just one half-century in his last four International Cricket Council white-ball tournaments. But is looking to regain his form in the IPL, where he has been one of the most successful overseas batsmen. In 2022, Buttler equalled Virat Kohli's record of four centuries in a season.

"The onus is on you to get going quickly in your innings and play aggressively," he said. "But I think the biggest thing for me and maybe a lesson to learn is just to stay in my own lane and just focus on my own cricket and my own game and play my own way."

Buttler plays in other T20 franchise tournaments, including England's The Hundred and Australia's Big Bash League.

He agreed with recent comments from Australia captain Pat Cummins that players chasing lucrative franchise league pay days was creating tension with national selectors. England Test opener Ben Duckett was due to play for Delhi capitals before pulling out of this year's IPL to manage his workload and focus on international cricket.

"For players, it's becoming a thing to weigh up what is the most important thing for you and your cricket at that time," said Buttler, who believes English players put their country first. "I can only speak on England's behalf and you can feel it that the guys want to play for England - and play for England as long as they can."

There is a danger that Test cricket could be marginalised, but Buttler said the five-day game would always be the ultimate format for him.

"It's different for different countries," he said. "I am still of the generation that (feels) Test cricket is the pinnacle."



IPL

Rohit, Rickelton shine as Mumbai hammer Kolkata

BOLD BATTING LIFTS FORMER CHAMPIONS ON HOME SOIL

AFP
Mumbai, India

Openers **Rohit Sharma** and **Ryan Rickelton** hit blistering half-centuries to lead Mumbai Indians to a six-wicket win over Kolkata Knight Riders as they opened their IPL campaign in style yesterday.

Chasing 221 for victory, five-time champions Mumbai rode a commanding 148-run opening stand from Rohit (78) and Rickelton (81) to reach their target with five balls to spare at the Wankhede Stadium.

The 38-year-old Rohit, who plays just the 50-over format for India after retiring from Test and T20 internationals, hit six fours and six sixes in his 38-ball knock.

His batting blitz came a day after long-time international teammate **Virat Kohli** steered Royal Challengers Bengaluru to a big win in the tournament opener.

It needed a special effort to dismiss Rohit and Anukul Roy pulled off a stunning catch while running back from mid-on to finally dislodge the star batter.

South African wicketkeeper-batter Rickelton kept up the attack as he hit his eighth six after Rohit's departure, continuing the pummelling of the Kolkata attack.

He was finally run out after a direct throw from Roy hit stumps at the non-strikers' end.

Mumbai's chase slowed down before skipper **Hardik Pandya**, unbeaten on 18, and **Tilak Varma**,



Mumbai Indians' Rohit Sharma in action against Kolkata Knight Riders during an IPL match at Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai yesterday. (Reuters)

who made 20, helped the team get over the line.

Mumbai - the most successful team in the IPL along with fellow five-time winners Chennai Super Kings - won their opening match in the league for the first time since 2012. Pandya won the toss and invited three-time winners Kolkata to bat first amid a loud roar from the home Mumbai

crowd. Skipper Ajinkya Rahane and New Zealand's Finn Allen handed Kolkata a blazing start and the team finished on 220-4.

Rahane went on to hit 67 off 40 balls after Allen fell for 37. Australia international Cameron Green contributed 18.

Rinku Singh's unbeaten 33 off 21 balls gave Kolkata a late lift, but it wasn't enough to challenge

Mumbai medium-pace bowler **Shardul Thakur** returned figures of 3-39, while **Jasprit Bumrah** finished wicketless.

BRIEF SCORES
Mumbai Indians 221 for 4 (Rickelton 81, Rohit 78, Narine 1-30) **beat Kolkata Knight Riders 220 for 4** (Rahane 67, Raghuvanshi 51, Thakur 3-39) **by six wickets**

PSL

Hasan, Shamy guide Quetta Gladiators past Hyderabad Kingsmen

Agencies
Lahore

Hasan Nawaz and **Shamy Hussain** struck half-centuries, while **Abrar Ahmed** starred with the ball taking key wickets as Quetta Gladiators opened their account in Pakistan Super League 11 with a 40-run win over Hyderabad Kingsmen yesterday.

In the first match of the second double-header, Gladiators successfully defended their 174-8 total by restricting Hyderabad Kingsmen to 134-8 in 20 overs.

Hyderabad suffered two early setbacks as **Alzarri Joseph** dismissed **Saim Ayub** for eight in the first over and **Abrar Ahmed** removed **Maaz Sadaqat** for naught in the next. **Usman Khan** also fell to **Abrar** in the sixth over after making 14, leaving Hyderabad struggling at 35 for three.

Their troubles deepened when **Usman Tariq** removed **Syed Saad Ali** on the last ball of the ninth over and skipper **Marnus Labuschagne** fell to **Saud Shakeel** four deliveries later for 23 with Hyderabad reeling at 57 for five in 9.4 overs.

Hassan Khan then offered some resistance with a 19-ball 31, striking three fours and a six during a 48-run sixth-wicket stand with **Muhammad Irfan Khan** (33, 25b, 2x4s, 3x6s).

Once **Hassan** was dismissed by **Ahmed Daniyal** in the 15th over, Hyderabad lost their way and finished on 134 for eight in 20 overs. **Abrar** led the charge with three for 23 in four overs and **Daniyal** returned two for 13.

Earlier, Kingsmen struck twice in first 20 deliveries with **Meredith** removing **Saud** and **Rilee Rossouw** with 25 runs on the board.

At this juncture, **Hasan** joined **Shamy** to rebuild the innings with an 89-run stand for the third wicket. The pair collected 15 runs off **Akif Javed** in the sixth over to take Quetta to 45 for two at the end of the powerplay.

Hasan then shifted gears,



Shamy Hussain of Quetta Gladiators celebrates with his team of the Match award after his team beat Hyderabad Kingsmen in the PSL match in Lahore yesterday.

launching **Hassan Khan** for a straight six in the ninth over before dispatching a **Labuschagne** full toss for another maximum to move Quetta to 78 for two at the halfway mark.

Shamy followed suit in the 12th over, striking **Hassan** for two sixes - one over wide long-on and the other straight down the ground as he ransacked 18 runs off the 12th over. **Hasan** kept the momentum going with another six off **Saim**, but Quetta's progress was checked when **Meredith** returned in the following over to claim his third wicket as **Shamy** (54, 41b, 3x4s, 3x6s) departed.

Maheesh Theekshana then dealt a double blow in the next over, removing **Khawaja Mohammad Nafay** for six and **Ben McDermott** for naught off successive deliveries.

Hasan, who brought up his 10th T20 half-century and also 2,000 T20 runs, was run out for 53 off 40 balls leaving Quetta 128 for six in 15.5 overs. **Tom Curran's** late assault, which yielded 31 off 18 balls including three sixes and one four, lifted Quetta to a competitive total.

BRIEF SCORES
Quetta Gladiators 174 for 8 (Shamy) 54, Nawaz 53, Meredith 3-38, Theekshana 2-24) **beat Hyderabad Kingsmen 134 for 8** (Irfan 33, Abrar 3-23, Daniyal 2-13) **by 40 runs**

Stokes sidelined after gruesome facial injury

London: England Test captain **Ben Stokes** will be sidelined for the first month of the county season as he recovers from facial injuries sustained in a training accident.

Stokes suffered a broken cheekbone after being hit by the ball during a net session with his Durham team-mates last month.

The 34-year-old said that his subsequent surgery was a success, although his photo on Instagram, showing a badly swollen and bruised face, revealed the extent of the horror injury.

The prolonged rehabilitation process means that Stokes has had to delay his return to action.

The all-rounder, who has not played since the final game of England's Ashes series thrashing in

Australia in January, was originally hoping to make his comeback against Kent in Durham's first round of County Championship fixtures next week. But he now looks likely to sit out the first four matches of the domestic campaign before preparing for the New Zealand Test series by facing Worcestershire and Kent in May.

"He was going to play the first game, he's been training so hard to be ready. But he won't play in that, obviously. We have to wait for the specialists to clear him," Durham coach **Ryan Campbell** said.

"Unfortunately, it's made a change, the accidental bump. He is pencilled in for Worcester and Kent and I think it will just be those two, to be honest. He has got to recover from the facial injuries."

KARACHI KINGS BEAT LAHORE QALANDARS



Karachi Kings players celebrate during their PSL win over Lahore Qalandars in Lahore yesterday. Batting first, Qalandars scored 128/9 in their 20 overs. Kings chased down the target for the loss of six wickets with three deliveries to spare. **Adam Zampa** was declared the Man of the Match for his 2 for 11 off four overs.

FOCUS

Refreshed Kohli's one-format focus fuels strong start in new IPL season

Reuters
Bengaluru

Virat Kohli's decision to scale back his international commitments has not dampened his appetite for runs, with the former India captain guiding Royal Challengers Bengaluru to victory with an unbeaten 69 in the Indian Premier League opener.

The 37-year-old retired from Twenty20 Internationals after India's 2024 World Cup triumph and brought the curtain down on his 123-Test career last year, leaving one-day internationals as his sole format. He featured in 13 ODIs last year, scoring 651 runs, and returned to the IPL after last playing for India in January.

Bengaluru captain **Rajat Patidar** told reporters after their six-wicket win over Sunrisers Hyderabad on Saturday that it was a pleasure to watch Kohli at the crease.

"Virat Kohli is our number one chase master," he said.

"I always enjoy watching his



Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Virat Kohli celebrates after scoring a half-century (50 runs) during the 2026 IPL match against Sunrisers Hyderabad in Bengaluru on Saturday. (AFP)

batting from the dugout - the way he plays, the shots he picks, and how he reads situations.

"I feel he's at his peak right now. From what I've seen in the nets, the

energy and eagerness to perform and dominate are still the same."

Kohli, who struck the winning runs as fans chanted his name at a packed stadium, said playing in a single format had helped him stay mentally fresh.

"The kind of scheduling that we've had over the last 15 years and the amount of cricket I've played, for me there was always a risk of getting burned out rather than being undercooked.

"So these breaks helped me immensely," he added.

The win carried deeper resonance after last year's maiden IPL title celebrations were overshadowed by a stampede outside the stadium that claimed 11 lives.

Bengaluru paid tribute by leaving 11 seats vacant, players wearing number 11 on their backs during the warm-up and black armbands throughout the match, before observing a minute's silence ahead of the contest.

"They were like family members because everyone was supporting RCB for years. We miss them," Patidar added.

TENNIS

Sabalenka sinks Gauff, bags second straight Miami Open

'MY GOAL ALWAYS BEEN TO PUT MY NAME IN THE HISTORY, AND I JUST DID IT. IT MEANS A LOT'

AFP
Miami

Aryna Sabalenka won her second straight Miami Open title yesterday beating Coco Gauff 6-2, 4-6, 6-3 to complete a "Sunshine Double" Indian Wells-Miami sweep.

The world number one from Belarus, fresh off her first triumph in the California desert, became the fifth woman - and the first since Iga Swiatek in 2022 - to win both of the elite early season hardcourt WTA 1000 titles.

"My goal always been to put my name in the history, and I just did it. It means a lot," Sabalenka said after joining Poland's Swiatek, German great Steffi Graf, Belgian Kim Clijsters and fellow Belarusian Victoria Azarenka on the list of women to win both titles in the same year.

Sabalenka underscored her WTA dominance in a season in which her only defeat to date was her Australian Open final loss to Elena Rybakina - who she went on to beat in the Indian Wells title match and in the semi-finals here.

She handed Gauff her first ca-

reer defeat in a hardcourt final. The American had won her first nine, including a triumph over Sabalenka in the 2023 US Open championship match.

Gauff had also beaten the Belarusian for the title on the red clay of Roland Garros last year.

So Sabalenka said she wasn't surprised to see Gauff dig in, even after the Belarusian pocketed the first set with a ruthless display of power and precision.

She broke Gauff to open the match and, after Gauff saved three break points in a gritty fifth game, broke the American again in the seventh before serving it out in 37 minutes without facing a break point herself.

In a tense second set, Gauff's first break point chance - from a blistering backhand passing winner in the second game - sparked a jubilant reaction from the crowd at Hard Rock Stadium, home of the NFL's Miami Dolphins that is just about an hour away from Gauff's Delray Beach home.

But Gauff couldn't convert, slamming a forehand into the net on the next point as Sabalenka held. It needed another gutsy hold from Gauff to keep it on serve in the fifth game.



Aryna Sabalenka poses with the Butch Buchholz trophy after defeating Coco Gauff of the United States in the Miami Open final. (AFP)

Up 40-0, she wasted three game points with a pair of errors off the ground and a double fault then had to save a break point before tak-

ing the game. But Gauff was finding more depth on her returns and broke Sabalenka for the first time to take the second set. "I knew

that she's going to try her very best to fight in this match," Sabalenka said. "I was just trying to keep a positive mindset going into the

third set. I'm super happy how well I handled my emotions how well I stayed focused from the very beginning to the very end."

And the third set, again, was virtually all Sabalenka.

She broke to open the final frame and broke again when Gauff sailed a backhand long on Sabalenka's first match point.

"What a month," said Sabalenka, who along with two prestigious titles acquired a new puppy and got engaged to boyfriend Georgios Frangulis. Gauff was also feeling grateful after a rocky March that saw her withdraw from her third-round match at Indian Wells with a nerve issue that caused "scary" pain in her left arm.

She had said after a dominant semi-final win over Karolina Muchova that she was making progress with the inconsistencies in her serve and forehand, although seven double faults hurt her cause against Sabalenka.

And after considering skipping the event, the 22-year-old was thrilled to reach the final for the first time. "I feel like I'm nowhere near my peak of my tennis, so I think it gives me comfort a little bit playing these tournaments and having great results," she said.

CYCLING

Hard to stop: Vingegaard clinches Tour of Catalonia

AFP
Barcelona

Jonas Vingegaard triumphed at the Tour of Catalonia yesterday as he continued his strong start to the season, while Brady Gilmore sprinted to a surprise stage seven victory.

Vingegaard topped the general classification one minute 22 secs ahead of France's Lenny Martinez and a further eight seconds before German Florian Lipowitz.

Australian cyclist Gilmore, racing with former Barcelona football great Andres Iniesta's NSN team, edged out Dorian Godon and Remco Evenepoel over the line in a thrilling bunch sprint finale.

Yesterday's 95 kilometre final stage took in seven circuits of Montjuic in Barcelona, where the Tour de France will start in July.

Vingegaard, who was the race favourite in his first participation, took control in the Pyrenees with stage five and six solo victories.

The Dane, who also won two stages and the overall title at Paris-Nice earlier this month, is planning a Giro d'Italia and Tour de France double assault later in



Winner Team Visma-Lease a bike's Danish rider Jonas Vingegaard celebrates with his child on the podium of the 2026 'Volta a Catalunya' cycling tour of Catalonia, after the seventh and last stage, a 95.1 km race in and around Barcelona, yesterday. (AFP)

the year. "We won two stages and now the GC, it's been a really good week and we're super happy with it, I'm super happy with it," said Vingegaard. "It's been an amazing start to the year for me and I hope I can keep it going."

Vingegaard has six victories

from just two weeks of racing this season. "I feel very good at the moment, my shape is very good, (but) not the very best yet - we made a plan this year to progressively get better over the year. I'm pretty sure I still have more in me."

Godon, who won two sprint stages in the race, seemed set to grab a third but Gilmore edged him over the line.

"In the end maybe I was just too confident, there was another rider who came from behind and nabbed it," said Frenchman Godon, who won the points jersey. "Still a good week but disappointing today."

Double Olympic champion Evenepoel, who crashed earlier in the week and then cracked on the first uphill finish to scupper his chances of overall victory, frequently tried to attack but the Belgian Red Bull rider had to settle for third on the day's podium.

Some expected Vingegaard to try and seal his triumph with a third consecutive stage win but the two-time Tour de France champion said he had been focussed on defending his lead.

"My main focus today was the GC, and especially the Red Bull guys. They did a very good job today, they made me be there alone and tried to attack me on shift," continued Vingegaard.

"Luckily I was able to defend myself and my GC. From there it was more thinking about the GC rather than trying to win a stage."

Philipsen sprints to In Flanders Fields victory

Wevelgem, Belgium: Belgian sprinter Jasper Philipsen won the In Flanders Fields one-day cobbled classic race in Belgium yesterday after breakaway riders Mathieu van der Poel and Wout van Aert were caught within a kilometre to go.

Just two days after Van der Poel held off four chasers after a 40km solo break to win the E3 Saxo Classic race, the Dutchman and his old rival Van Aert came up just one kilometre short of another stunning escape. Having gone clear with 36km to ride, the pair were caught 4km from the finish by a counter-attack from Belgian Alec Segaert before the peloton swallowed them up with 1,000m to race.

Van der Poel's Alpecin-Premier Tech teammate Philipsen had the strongest kick for the line, with Dane Tobias Lund Andersen in second and Van Aert's Visma-Lease a Bike partner Christophe Laporte taking third.

"This race has been one I've been wanting to win for many years but never had the legs in the end," said Philipsen, who secured a 60th career victory.

"Everything came together today, and I was able to take the victory."

It was agonisingly close for Van der Poel and Van Aert - two one-day classics specialists and long-time rivals - after 240km of a race known as Gent-Wevelgem until it was renamed this year as In Flanders Fields-From Middelkerke to Wevelgem.



Belgian Jasper Philipsen of Alpecin-Premier Tech holds up his trophy after winning the men elite 'Middelkerke-Wevelgem - In Flanders Fields' one day cycling race, 240.8 km from Middelkerke to Wevelgem, yesterday. (AFP)

"We were both also keeping something for the sprint as well," said Van der Poel, who admitted he had not fully recovered from Friday's efforts.

"If we had gone all out, not thinking about it, we could have made it to the finish. "Without Jasper in the back, it would have been a different story," added the 2023 world champion, who has dominated the cobbled classics in recent years but has never won this race.

Van Aert, the 2021 winner, lit up the race with around 57km to ride on the tough, cobbled Kemmelberg climb, bursting out of the peloton and taking Van der Poel and Florian Vermeersch with him.

The trio caught the earlier breakaway riders and formed a lead group of nine which built a lead of more than 40 seconds on the peloton. The next time they tackled the Kemmelberg with 36km left, Van der Poel put in a searing acceleration, with only Van Aert able to follow and Vermeersch shipping 10 seconds by the summit, with the peloton cresting a minute back.

It was then a simple pursuit to the finish, with Vermeersch stuck in no-man's land, until he was swallowed up by the group with 12km to go.

The fast-finishing peloton closed to within 10 seconds of the leading duo with about six kilometres to go.

Segaert counter-attacked out of the peloton and even caught the pair with 4km left. He then kicked for home on his own as the trio were finally caught with a kilometre to race but it was to be the sprinters' day.

GOLF

Fitzpatrick claims Indian Open for first DP World Tour win



England's Alex Fitzpatrick poses with the trophy after winning the Indian Open in Gurgaon yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Gurgaon, India

England's Alex Fitzpatrick hit a three-under-par 69 in the final round to clinch the Indian Open by two strokes yesterday for his maiden DP World Tour title.

Fitzpatrick hit five birdies on the back nine and eight overall on day four to topple overnight leader Eugenio Chacarra of Spain at the DLF Golf and Country Club in Gurgaon.

Fitzpatrick, 27, was behind last year's winner Chacarra by four shots at the end of day three but bested the tough course in round four with good drives and putts.

"I'll try and explain (how it feels) without crying, it's been a lot of hard work for a long time," said an emotional Fitzpatrick, who finished at nine under overall.

"Over the moon, probably go-

ing to cry, but yeah, ecstatic." The Englishman joins his elder brother, European Ryder Cup star Matt Fitzpatrick, as a winner on Tour.

The siblings made history as the first ever to win in successive weeks on the DP World Tour and the PGA Tour.

Matt is a 10-time winner on the DP World Tour, most recently at the World Tour Championship in November, and also won last week's Valspar Championship on the PGA Tour to climb to a career-high world number six.

"I see my mum and dad tomorrow and we're going to meet my brother in Florida," Alex said.

"It's been a good few weeks for the Fitzpatricks."

Chacarra was second after hitting three-over in the final round.

South Africa's MJ Daffue carded five-under to finish joint third with Frenchman Ugo Coussaud and England's Andy Sullivan.

JOO KIM RE-WRITES 54-HOLE RECORD IN ARIZONA

Chandler, Arizona: South Korea's Hyo Joo Kim took an emphatic step toward defending her title at the Ford Championship on Saturday, setting an LPGA 54-hole record to build a four-stroke lead in Chandler, Arizona.

Despite that hot start, Kim is focused on keeping her approach consistent in the final round. "This course, anyone is capable of scoring low, so I will continue to just focus on the same game plan that I did today," Kim said. If that focus nets similar results, Kim will be in historic territory. Kim matched her first-day, 11-under-par 61 to put her at 25 under for the tournament, a pace through 54 holes that is the best in LPGA history.

Her 25-under stretch broke the previous record held by four play-

ers by one stroke. Her bogey-free round included birdies on four of her first seven holes before she exceeded that hot start with four straight holes under par on Nos. 10-13. That stretch included an eagle on the par-5 No. 12. Kim finished her remarkable day at the Cattail Course at Whirlwind Golf Club with birdies on 16 and 17, giving her nine birdies and an eagle on the day.

"I play with my mind, just focusing on one shot at a time," Kim said. "When I think about the shots, whether it's striking a certain distance or how I play, I just focus on each at a time."

Kim's closest pursuer, unsurprisingly, is World No. 2 Nelly Korda, who led after two rounds and carded a 5-under 67 to get to 21 under.

FORMULA 1

Teenager Antonelli claims Japanese GP to take lead

Antonelli takes a nine-point lead in the standings over Russell, becomes youngest-ever championship leader

Reuters

Suzuka, Japan

Mercedes driver Kimi Antonelli benefited from an opportunely timed safety car in yesterday's Japanese Grand Prix to clinch his second straight Formula One win and become, at just 19 years of age, the sport's youngest ever championship leader.

The Italian, who started from pole but dropped to sixth after a tardy start, crossed the line 13.7 seconds clear of Australian Oscar Piastri, who handed reigning champions McLaren their first podium of the season. Ferrari's Charles Leclerc was third.

Antonelli's win, his second from the opening three races, gives him a nine-point lead in the overall standings over teammate George Russell. The Briton, who had held a four-point advantage going into Sunday's race, finished a distant fourth.

"Of course, it's too early to think about the championship," said Antonelli who also became the first Italian to win two Formula One races in a row since Alberto Ascari in 1953.

"But we're on the good way," he added, acknowledging the lucky timing of the safety car but also pointing to his speed in the second half of the race.

Antonelli made a tyre smoking getaway that left him a sitting duck and allowed his rivals to stream past.

Piastri, starting third, led into the first corner from Leclerc, reigning world champion Lando Norris, Russell and seven-times

world champion Lewis Hamilton.

It wasn't until lap 21 that Antonelli found himself back in the lead, inherited after his rivals, including teammate George Russell, pitted for fresh rubber.

A heavy crash a lap later for Haas racer Oliver Bearman triggered a safety car and turned the race in Antonelli's favour.

That gave the Italian the opportunity to make his stop while his rivals were running at reduced speed and keep the lead, leaving Russell, who had stopped just a lap earlier and had been leading from Antonelli, cursing his luck.

Briton Bearman was given the all-clear by doctors after limping away from the high-speed 50G crash. Replays showed him having to take avoiding action as he rapidly closed in on Franco Colapinto's Alpine, with a significant speed differential between the two cars. That sent Bearman onto the grass and into a heavy collision with the barriers. The 20-year-old was given an X-ray at the circuit's medical centre which revealed a right knee contusion but no fractures, a Haas spokesperson said.

Piastri's podium helped McLaren bounce back from a dismal Chinese Grand Prix at which neither of their two cars were able to make the start in Sunday's race.

It was also redemption for Piastri, who until Sunday had only turned racing laps in China's Saturday sprint, having crashed out ahead of his home race in Australia. "Yeah, we do alright when we get to start!" joked the 24-year-old.

Norris was fifth in the other McLaren ahead of Hamilton and



Mercedes' Italian driver Kimi Antonelli celebrates with his team after winning the Formula One Japanese Grand Prix at the Suzuka circuit yesterday. (AFP)

the Briton, like Antonelli, benefited by pitting under the safety car to move up to third.

But despite another Sunday afternoon of wheel-to-wheel battling, he was unable to hang on to the podium spot.

Pierre Gasly was seventh for Alpine. Four-times world champion Max Verstappen, who said he was "beyond frustration" after a poor qualifying on Saturday, salvaged some points in eighth.

Liam Lawson was ninth for

Racing Bulls with Esteban Ocon 10th in his Haas.

Fernando Alonso handed Aston Martin their first finish of the year at power unit partner Honda's home race. The Spaniard was 18th.

RESULTS

1. Kimi Antonelli (ITA/Mercedes) 307km in 1hr 28min 3.403sec
2. Oscar Piastri (AUS/McLaren) at 13.722sec
3. Charles Leclerc (MON/Ferrari) 15.270

4. George Russell (GBR/Mercedes) at 15.754

5. Lando Norris (GBR/McLaren) at 23.479

6. Lewis Hamilton (GBR/Ferrari) at 25.037

7. Pierre Gasly (FRA/Alpine) at 32.340

8. Max Verstappen (NED/Red Bull) at 32.677

9. Liam Lawson (NZL/Racing Bulls) at 50.180

10. Esteban Ocon (FRA/Haas) at 51.216

11. Nico Hulkenberg (GER/Audi) at 52.280

12. Isack Hadjar (FRA/Red Bull) at 56.154

13. Gabriel Bortoleto (BRA/Audi) at 59.078

14. Arvid Lindblad (GBR/Racing Bulls) at 59.848

15. Carlos Sainz (ESP/Williams) at 1:05.008

16. Franco Colapinto (ARG/Alpine) at 1:05.773

17. Sergio Perez (MEX/Cadillac) at 1:32.453

18. Fernando Alonso (ESP/Aston Martin) at 1 lap

19. Valtteri Bottas (FIN/Cadillac) at 1 lap

20. Alexander Albon (THA/Williams) at 2 laps

Retirements:

Lance Stroll (CAN/Aston Martin), mechanical failure lap 31

Oliver Bearman (GBR/Haas), crash lap 21

World championship standings:

Drivers

1. Kimi Antonelli (ITA) 72 pts,

2. George Russell (GBR) 63,

3. Charles Leclerc (MON) 49,

4. Lewis Hamilton (GBR) 41,

5. Lando Norris (GBR) 25,

6. Oscar Piastri (AUS) 21,

7. Oliver Bearman (GBR) 17,

8. Pierre Gasly (FRA) 15,

9. Max Verstappen (NED) 12,

10. Liam Lawson (NZL) 10,

11. Arvid Lindblad (GBR) 4,

12. Gabriel Bortoleto (BRA) 2,

13. Carlos Sainz (ESP) 2,

14. Esteban Ocon (FRA) 1,

15. Franco Colapinto (ARG) 1

Constructors

1. Mercedes 135 pts,

2. Ferrari 90,

3. McLaren 46,

4. Haas 18,

5. Alpine 16,

6. Red Bull 16,

7. Racing Bulls 14,

8. Audi 2,

9. Williams 2

FOOTBALL

Tudor leaves after just seven games as Spurs battle for survival

AFP

London

Tottenham parted company with coach Igor Tudor by mutual consent yesterday after just seven games in charge as they battle to stay in the Premier League.

Tudor lost five of those matches in a 44-day reign to leave Spurs out of the Champions League and hovering just one point above the relegation zone in the Premier League.

The 47-year-old did not appear in front of the media after last weekend's damaging 3-0 defeat to fellow strugglers Nottingham Forest after learning of his father's death just after the game ended.

"We can confirm that it has been mutually agreed for head coach Igor Tudor to leave the club with immediate effect," Tottenham said in a statement.

"We also acknowledge the bereavement that Igor has recently suffered and send our support to him and his family at this difficult time.

"An update on a new head coach will be provided in due course."

Tottenham are not in action again for another two weeks when they travel to Sunderland.

Former Brighton and Marseille coach Roberto de Zerbi has been linked with the job, while reports have suggested the club could turn to Sean Dyche's Premier League experience to dig them out of trouble for the final seven games of the season.

Tudor was appointed in February following the dismissal of Thomas Frank.

Hired with a reputation of mak-



ing an immediate impact during a nomadic coaching career, the Croatian was powerless to stop Tottenham's slide towards the relegation trapdoor for the first time since 1977.

The London club, ravaged by injuries this season, have not won a league match since late December and are out of every cup competition. Even Tudor's sole victory was fruitless as a 3-2 win over Atletico Madrid failed to overturn a 5-2 first leg deficit in the Champions League last 16. His decision to start and then substitute backup goalkeeper Antonin Kinsky after just 17 minutes of the first leg in Madrid summed up a chaotic short-lived reign.

In the Premier League, he managed just one point from five games, which came against the odds in a 1-1 draw at Liverpool.

A 4-1 home defeat against north London rivals Arsenal got the former Juventus boss off to a bad

start and worse was to come in further losses to Fulham, Crystal Palace and Forest. Spurs won the Europa League last year under Ange Postecoglou to end a 17-year trophy drought but the Australian was sacked following a 17th-place finish in the Premier League.

Frank arrived at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium with an impressive track record at Brentford and the club started the season with just one defeat in their first seven league games.

But they lost their way and club bosses axed the Dane under fan pressure following a run of just two wins in 17 league games.

With the fates of Burnley and Wolves almost certainly sealed, Spurs are battling for survival along with West Ham, currently in the relegation zone, Forest and Leeds.

Relegation to the second-tier Championship would be a seismic event in English football.

Ter Stegen's World Cup chances very slim: Nagelsmann

Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann said yesterday that goalkeeper Marc-Andre Ter Stegen was unlikely to go to the World Cup this summer as he continues his return from injury.

The 33-year-old Barcelona goalkeeper, who is on loan at Girona, underwent surgery on a torn hamstring in February, the latest in a series of injury setbacks.

Talking to reporters ahead of Monday's friendly against Ghana in Stuttgart, Nagelsmann revealed he had spoken with Ter

Stegen this week. The coach said the goalkeeper was unlikely to make the World Cup squad.

"The chance is very, very, very slim, because you have to consider the overall situation," said Nagelsmann.

"He didn't play for a year and then got injured. He's been out for a year, so to speak, and played very little.

"He should give it his all in his rehab... But he's not 21 anymore. He's got a few games under his belt.

"I'm keeping my fingers crossed for him, but we all have to be patient."

The long-time back-up to Manuel Neuer took over as Germany's number one when the 2014 World Cup winner retired after Euro 2024.

Nagelsmann said as recently as February that Ter Stegen was Germany's leading goalkeeping candidate for the World Cup. Hoffenheim's Oliver Baumann started the 4-3 friendly win away to Switzerland on Friday.

FOCUS

US lose 5-2 to Belgium in rude awakening for World Cup hosts

AFP

Atlanta

The United States were routed 5-2 by Belgium on Saturday in a humbling defeat for Mauricio Pochettino's team as they prepare to co-host this summer's World Cup.

The thrashing comes as a brutal reality check for the Americans, who have high hopes of a deep run in the upcoming tournament but were found severely lacking once again when facing top European opposition.

Just 75 days before the World Cup kicks off, the Americans took an early lead against the world's ninth-ranked team, with Weston McKennie slotting in to the delight of a packed 67,000 Atlanta crowd.

But any hopes of a statement victory were dashed as the Belgians swiftly came to life, with a deluge of goals from Zeno Debast, Amadou Onana, and Charles De Ketelaere, and a brace from substitute Dodi Lukebakio.

Patrick Agyemang grabbed a late consolation for the US, who play Portugal in another high-profile friendly Tuesday before Pochettino announces his final squad in May. Long seen as minnows at the international level of soccer, the US hired former Tottenham and Paris Saint Germain coach Pochettino to oversee an increasingly star-studded roster including AC Milan's Christian Pulisic and Juventus midfielder McKennie.

The US will play all of its games at the World Cup on home soil, further raising expectations.



Belgium's Dodi Lukebakio (right) celebrates with Jeremy Doku after scoring a goal against the USA during their friendly at Mercedes-Benz Stadium in Atlanta. PICTURE: Dale Zanine-Imagn Images

But fans shelling out to support the home team will expect to see far more than they witnessed on Saturday. In a fairly even opening half hour, Belgium's veteran midfielder Kevin De Bruyne pulled the strings in midfield, and Manchester City winger Jeremy Doku threatened down the left flank, but the US enjoyed the better of the chances.

McKennie received the ball unmarked on the edge of the six yard box from a corner but his shot was brilliantly saved by Manchester United's Senne Lammens, who is aiming to supplant the injured Thibaut Courtois in Belgium's goal. But McKennie made no mistake as another corner, delivered by Antonee Robinson, found him near the back post, where he tucked the ball into the net.

The goal seemed to spark Belgium into life. The Red Devils could have had several goals in the first half's final few min-

utes, but settled for a wonderful strike from outside the box by Zeno Debast. It was the Sporting Lisbon defender's first international goal. After halftime, the floodgates opened. An increasingly dangerous Doku ran down the wing and passed into the box, with the ball scrambled to Onana, who calmly side-footed it home.

Six minutes later, US keeper Matt Turner - hoping to win his place back from Matt Freese - thought he had made a tremendous double save, but the referee spotted that Thomas Meunier's header had brushed captain Tim Ream's arm. A lengthy VAR check failed to convince the official to overturn his decision, and De Ketelaere slotted in the penalty. The afternoon went from bad to worse, as Belgium made a raft of substitutes on the hour mark, and one of those - Lukebakio - curled in a sumptuous shot under little pressure.

Motsepe to 'respect' CAS decision on AFCON final row

The Confederation of African Football (CAF) president Patrice Motsepe said yesterday he will "respect" the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) decision on Senegal's appeal against being stripped of its Africa Cup of Nations title. "I will respect and implement the CAS decision. My personal opinion regarding the matter is irrelevant," Motsepe told a press conference in Cairo after a meeting of CAF executives. The Senegal appeal came after the CAF appeals body overturned a 1-0 win by Senegal over hosts Morocco in the Cup of Nations final last month. Many Senegalese players, head coach Pape Thiaw and his staff walked off the pitch in Rabat after Morocco were awarded an

added-time penalty. After they returned, Brahim Diaz missed the penalty. Pape Gueye scored in extra time to win the title decider. A CAF disciplinary committee later fined various figures from both teams, but did not alter the result. Morocco then appealed and were awarded a 3-0 victory. Motsepe stressed that the appeal board consists of independent judges and lawyers.

When Senegal played Peru in a 2026 World Cup warm-up in Paris on Saturday, they paraded the Cup of Nations trophy. Senegal then played in shirts with two stars - one for their first Cup of Nations triumph in 2022 and the other for their disputed February victory.