

To subscribe
GULF TIMES
Newspaper
Please call
444 666 35



CRICKET | Page 2

Kohli makes Gujarat pay as Bengaluru cruise to IPL win



PREMIER LEAGUE | Page 4

De Zerbi demands Spurs improve as relegation fears mount

To advertise here,
PLEASE CALL
444 666 21

Saturday, April 25, 2026
Dhul-Qi'dah 8, 1447 AH

GULF TIMES SPORT

TENNIS
Alcaraz's French Open three-peat dreams dashed as wrist injury forces withdrawal
Page 3

ASIAN BEACH GAMES

Qatar's beach volleyball teams cruise into last 16

Handball team beat Jordan to register fifth consecutive victory

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Both Qatari men's beach volleyball teams have qualified for the Round of 16 at the Asian Beach Games - Sanya in China after securing two more victories yesterday in the preliminary stage.

The first team, comprising Cherif Younouss and Ahmed Tijan, defeated Uzbekistan 2-0 (21-14, 21-9), while the second team of Mohamed Ehab and Moussa al-Khair maintained their winning run with a 2-0 victory over Macau (21-10, 21-5). Both teams will play their final group matches today to determine the top spot in their respective groups and confirm their Round of 16 opponents, with the knockout matches scheduled for tomorrow. The first team will face Iran, while the second team take on hosts China.

Meanwhile, Qatar's women's teams suffered defeats in their opening matches. Malak Hashim and Nelly Shalabi lost to South Korea 0-2, while Haya Abu Issa and Laila Mohammed went down to Sri Lanka by the same scoreline.

Qatar have previously enjoyed success in beach volleyball at the Asian Beach Games, winning bronze at the 2014 Phuket edition before claiming both gold and silver medals at the 2016 Da Nang Games, highlighting the steady progress of the sport in the country.

BEACH HANDBALL TEAM BEAT JORDAN
Qatar's beach handball team strengthened their position at the top of the group with a 2-0 victory over Jordan (22-18, 18-16) in their fifth match of the group stage. The win lifted Qatar to 10 points from five consecutive victories, underlining their consistent form and strong start to the competition. Qatar conclude their group-stage campaign against Thailand tomorrow before facing the Maldives on Monday, aiming to maintain their lead and



Qatar's beach volleyball pair Cherif Younouss and Ahmed Tijan celebrate after their win over Uzbekistan at the Asian Beach Games in Sanya, China.

secure qualification for the semi-finals.

3X3 BASKETBALL TEAMS BEGIN CAMPAIGN TODAY

Qatar's men's 3x3 basketball team open their campaign today against Bahrain before facing Kazakhstan later in the day. The women's team also begin their participation with a challenging match against China, one of the tournament favourites, before taking on Kazakhstan on Monday in their second group match.

The men's squad includes Mohammed Bashir, Dejan Janic, Nadem Muslic and Osman Deng, while the women's team features Sama Jasser, Tan ia Al-Tawil, Mona Al-Sayed and Alaa Suleiman.

In jiu-jitsu, Ahmed al-Qardaghi exited the competition after losing to Jordan's Alaa Aldin al-Khazai in the Round of 16 of the 77kg category.

CHINA LEAD MEDAL STANDINGS

China continue to top the medal table at the Asian Beach Games - Sanya 2026 with a total of seven medals - four gold, two silver and one bronze. The United Arab Emirates are second with four medals - two gold, one silver and one bronze - while the Philippines sit third with three medals - two gold and one bronze. Vietnam follow in fourth place with one gold and one silver, while the Republic of Korea are fifth with two silver medals.



In jiu-jitsu, Ahmed al-Qardaghi exited the competition after losing to Jordan's Alaa Aldin al-Khazai in the Round of 16.



Qatar's beach handball team strengthened their position at the top of the group with a 2-0 victory over Jordan.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Arsenal haven't given up on title despite blowing lead: Arteta

AFP
London

Mikel Arteta insists spluttering Arsenal still believe they can win the Premier League title despite surrendering first place to Manchester City.

Arteta's side were knocked out of pole position by City's 1-0 win at Burnley on Wednesday. The Gunners, level on points with City but behind them on goals scored, can reclaim top spot by avoiding defeat against Newcastle at the Emirates Stadium today.

Less than two weeks ago, Arsenal were firm favourites to win the title for the first time since 2004 after building a nine-point lead over City. Damaging losses against Bournemouth and City have taken the destiny of the title out of their hands.

The north Londoners blew substantial leads in 2023 and 2024 title races, allowing City to pip them to the trophy. Yet Arteta is adamant Arsenal have not lost heart and expects them to bounce back from last Sunday's 2-1 loss at City when they host Newcastle this weekend.

"Win tomorrow, game one win and then we'll be much closer. I have belief in our players and our people and what we want to achieve," he told reporters. "The energy raised and the belief raised. The clarity in what we have to do it cannot be better. Five games to go. Tomorrow game one, all in, let's go for it. Two big competitions to play for and everything to play for. If somebody had told us at the beginning of the season we would have taken it. We are so excited."

Arteta, whose team travel to Atletico Madrid for the Champions League semi-final first-leg on

Wednesday, is set to be boosted by Bukayo Saka and Riccardo Calafiori's returns from injury against Newcastle. England winger Saka has missed the last five matches with an Achilles problem, while Italy defender Calafiori has been sidelined with a knock for three games.

"Bukayo probably is going to be in the squad, so good news," Arteta said. "We've given him some time. There was a moment where he was struggling to sustain his performances because he wasn't comfortable at all. We've done that, he had the right treatment, the right space and had some time for himself too. It's now the most important time of the season and he's back with us."

City's 1-0 win at Burnley on Wednesday took them to the top of the league for the first time since August 2025. Pep Guardiola's men are hitting peak form at just the right time, while Arsenal have stumbled with only one win from their last six matches in all competitions. With City in FA Cup semi-final action against Southampton today, Arsenal will play twice in the league before the leaders are next in top-flight action.

Arteta has experience of title success by the slenderest of margins, winning the Scottish Premiership with Rangers on goal difference in 2003 thanks to a penalty he scored in the closing seconds on the last day of the season.

"I took the penalty and we won the league by one goal difference. It doesn't get better than that. One of the best feelings I had in my career. When you win it, it is even more special," Arteta said. "We are just talking about a lot of possibilities. Those five games start tomorrow. Everything you have, you have to put it on the table, and you have to make it happen."



Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta speaks to midfielder Eberechi Eze during a training session in London yesterday.

FOOTBALL

Injured Spain star Yamal will come back stronger at World Cup: Flick



Barcelona's forward Lamine Yamal was ruled out for the rest of the season with a hamstring injury which he suffered on Wednesday against Celta Vigo. (AFP)

AFP
Barcelona

Barcelona coach Hansi Flick said that injured teenage star Lamine Yamal would return to action at the World Cup this summer with Spain, even "stronger" than he is now.

The 18-year-old was ruled out for the rest of the season with a hamstring injury which he suffered on Wednesday as Barcelona beat Celta Vigo in La Liga. Yamal won and converted a penalty to help his side stay nine points

clear of Real Madrid at the top of the table, but immediately went down injured and was substituted.

"It's not easy this situation for us, but also for him," Flick told reporters. "He knows it was his first muscle injury. What I can feel is that he is very focussed. He has the motivation - he is out for us, but I think for the World Cup he will be there and he will be stronger, (he will) come back stronger than now."

Yamal, who finished second in the Ballon d'Or vote last year and helped Spain triumph at Euro 2024, has been a key figure

in Barcelona's attempt to defend their La Liga title. Flick said that Yamal may have been hurt by the foul which brought him down for the penalty, but that he did not realise the situation he was in as he had not suffered such an injury before.

"He felt something after the foul, but I think it was not so much. And he decided to kick the penalty and after that it's maybe more," said Flick. "He never had a muscle injury before, so it's also part of learning about the signal the body gives you. It's not so easy because he is really young, but at the end it's an experience.

And this is what he has to learn."

Yamal has scored 24 goals and provided 18 assists this season for Barca across all competitions and has nine goals in his last 12 league matches. "I really appreciate a lot the last weeks. He was on an unbelievable level. He's more mature than 18," added Flick.

"He's clever, he's smart and he knows what he wants. Of course, now this injury affects him also... but then you have to focus on what's going on in the process to come back, to get fitter and fitter and better and better."

Barcelona visit Getafe today while Madrid travel to Real Betis.

CRICKET

Kohli blitz makes Gujarat pay as Bengaluru win

Kohli put down by Washington Sundar off the first ball he faced

AFP
Bengaluru, India

Virat Kohli punished Gujarat Titans for dropping him on nought with a blistering half-century as Royal Challengers Bengaluru breezed to a five-wicket victory in the Indian Premier League yesterday.

Left-handed opener Sai Sudharsan's third IPL hundred was the cornerstone of Gujarat's 205-3 on being put in by Rajat Patidar at the Chinnaswamy Stadium.

But Kohli (81) and Devdutt Padikkal (55) tore into the bowling during a rollicking 115-run second-wicket stand to delight a full house in Bengaluru's final league match of the season at this venue.

Kohli was put down by Washington Sundar at mid-wicket off the first ball he faced from Mohammed Siraj, in the first over of the chase, and made Gujarat pay for their largesse with a thrilling exhibition of stroke-making.

Bengaluru lost Englishman Jacob Bethell, playing his first game of the season in place of injured compatriot Phil Salt, in the third over.

That was the cue for Kohli and Padikkal to put on a delightful exhibition of stroke-making, marked by timing and silken grace rather than raw power.

Rangy left-hander Padikkal did the early running with a stunning array of sixes as he used his long levers to great effect, with Kohli only marginally behind.

Padikkal was the first to his half-century, off 20 deliveries,



Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Virat Kohli in action during the IPL match against Gujarat Titans in Bengaluru, India, yesterday. (Reuters)

while Kohli took 30 balls to reach the landmark before the former was bowled by Afghanistan leg-spinner Rashid Khan. Kohli continued to make merry, going past Abhishek Sharma to become the tournament's leading scorer (328) and seize the Orange Cap.

His dismissal, bowled off the inside-edge by West Indian Jason Holder, sparked a mini collapse before Australian Tim David and Krunal Pandya got the job done with little fuss.

Gujarat's innings was dominated by the punchy Sudharsan, who hogged the bowling in the early stages with skipper Shubman Gill facing just three balls in the first five overs. Clearly the dominant partner in an opening alliance of 128, Sudharsan shrugged off a modest start to the tournament with boundaries galore.

The base was set for a total in the region of 220 but Bengaluru surged back towards the end through their experienced seam-

ers Bhuvneshwar Kumar and Australian Josh Hazlewood, and the impressive Rasikh Salam. They needed two sixes from Holder in the final over, off Pandya, to sneak past 200, which was competitive but far from adequate.

BRIEF SCORES
Royal Challengers Bengaluru 206 for 5 (Kohli 81, Padikkal 55, Rashid 2-49) **beat Gujarat Titans 205 for 3** (Sai Sudharsan 100, Gill 32, Bhuvneshwar 1-31) **by 5 wickets**

Delight for Gleeson as United crush Kingsmen



Islamabad United's Richard Gleeson celebrates after taking a wicket against Hyderabad Kingsmen during their PSL match in Lahore yesterday. Gleeson took 3 for 9 as United beat Kingsmen by 8 wickets. Batting first, Kingsmen were bowled out for 80 in 15.5 overs. United finished with 83 for 2 in 6.4 overs.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Bracewell given 2-year ban for cocaine use

AFP
London

Former New Zealand and Essex all-rounder Doug Bracewell has been given a two-year suspension after testing positive for cocaine during an English County Championship match last year.

Bracewell's positive test came on September 25, 2025 while he was playing for Essex against Somerset at Chelmsford.

The 35-year-old admitted using cocaine after the first day of the fixture and in the early hours of the morning prior to the second day's play.

After being notified of the posi-

tive test, Bracewell retired from cricket on December 28.

Despite his retirement, Bracewell, who had signed for Essex for the final three Championship matches of last season, was still issued with the two-year ban by the Cricket Regulator.

He previously served a one-month ban in 2024 after testing positive for cocaine during New Zealand's 'Super Smash' Twenty20 event.

The two-year suspension is backdated to November 24, 2025, the date of his provisional ban, and will run until November 23, 2027.

Bracewell, who played in 69 matches for New Zealand across all formats, has accepted the ban and Essex will not face punishment.

COMMENT

I definitely go with a very open mindset, says World Cup hero Samson

Reuters
Bengaluru

While some batters arrive at away grounds determined to play a certain way regardless of the pitch, Chennai Super Kings' Sanju Samson says his red-hot form in the Indian Premier League is a product of adaptability and an open mind.

After single-digit scores in his first three IPL knocks, Samson smashed his second hundred of the season against Mumbai Indians on Thursday, his unbeaten 101 off 54 balls setting up Chennai's 103-run victory over the five-time champions.

With 293 runs from seven innings, Samson is now third in the leading scorers' list this season

behind RCB's Virat Kohli (328) and Sunrisers Hyderabad duo Abhishek Sharma (323) and Heinrich Klaasen (320).

Samson said it was not a typical Wankhede pitch and he had to adjust his game as the ball did not come nicely onto the bat.

"I think the game tells you what to do," he added.

"I think you don't have to come with a preconceived mindset, or you don't have to be premeditating - this is how I play or this is what I want to do.

"You can definitely say that this is the way I play... It is my responsibility to understand the game situation, what the team demands, and then plan my game around it.

"I definitely go with a very open mindset."

The 31-year-old, who was player of the tournament when India de-

fended their T20 World Cup title earlier this year, also relished handing Mumbai their biggest defeat in the IPL in front of their own fans at the Wankhede Stadium.

"It really feels great to score a century in Wankhede against MI," Samson said after the win, which helped Chennai climb to fifth place in the 10-team league.

Bumrah approached Samson for a warm embrace, while Hardik Pandya followed with a laughing high-five; one by one, every Mumbai Indian paused to pay their respects. While the sea of yellow had gathered primarily for MS Dhoni, they found a kindred spirit in Samson. In his composed, heavy-hitting performance, they saw a reflection of their own captain's self-effacing brilliance—a new entertainer they hope to cheer for in the seasons ahead.



GOLF

Korda fires 65 to grab LPGA Chevron lead

AFP
Houston

Second-ranked Nelly Korda fired a bogey-free seven-under par 65 to seize a two-stroke lead after Thursday's opening round of the LPGA Chevron Championship, the year's first major women's event.

The 27-year-old American, seeking her second Chevron title in three seasons and her second victory of the year, birdied two of her last three holes at Houston's Memorial Park.

"The wind was picking up here and there," Korda said. "Through the trees it was definitely gusting so I had to lock in on a couple of yardages here and there.

"Overall, I just felt really good, though, out there."

Thailand's Patty Tavatanakit and South Korea's Lee So-mi shared second on 67.

China's Liu Yan, Japan's Yuri Yoshida, France's Pauline Roussin-Bouchard and 20-year-old American amateur Farah O'Keefe shared fourth on 68.



Nelly Korda of the United States looks on from the eighth hole during the first round of The Chevron Championship 2026 at Memorial Park Golf Course in Houston, Texas. (AFP)

Korda, the 2024 Chevron champion, won the season-opening Tournament of Champions and has three runner-up LPGA finishes since.

After firing her second-lowest opening round in a major since the 2022 Evian Championship, Korda said she had learned a key lesson about the course, a first-time host of the event.

"I would say miss in the correct spots," Korda said. "It's all about

the second shot in on this golf course. The rough isn't too high so if you don't hit your driver too great, it's OK, but it's still about placement going into the greens."

After birdies at the 12th and par-five 16th on her front nine, Korda birdied the first three holes after the turn, hitting a five-foot putt at one, a 6-iron to six feet and made putt at the par-three second then sinking an eight-foot putt at the 12th to grab a share of

the lead. A six-foot birdie putt at the par-three seventh lifted Korda into the solo lead and she sank a five-foot birdie putt at the par-five eighth to stretch her lead before a closing par.

It was Korda's first bogey-free round since the second round of the 2024 Women's British Open.

Patty, a 26-year-old from Bangkok, won her first LPGA title and only major triumph at this event in 2021 when it was known as the ANA Inspiration and played in California.

Her bogey-free start included birdies at the par-five first, third and eighth holes as well as the par-three 15th and par-four 17th.

"I feel like I was just out there enjoying the moment," Patty said after the first round.

"It wasn't perfect. I wish I would have hit my driver a little bit better. "I was able to scramble around and save some good pars. It's still not like where I want it to be. At the same time I'm not out there to chase perfection. My job is to get the ball inside the hole as fast as I can and I feel like did that really well."

REPORT: FURYK TO CAPTAIN 2027 US RYDER CUP TEAM

NEW YORK: Jim Furyk will captain the United States Ryder Cup team at Adare Manor in Ireland in 2027, a PGA of America source confirmed yesterday to *Golf Digest*.

This will be the second Ryder Cup captaincy for Furyk, 55. Tiger Woods was believed to be the frontrunner for the role, but he pulled out of consideration after his arrest on DUI charges last month and his subsequent decision to go to Europe for an inpatient rehabilitation program. Furyk served as captain at the 2018 Ryder Cup at Le Golf National in France.

Team Europe routed the Americans 17 1/2-10 1/2, and there were reports of infighting and at least one player, Patrick Reed, complaining about the pairings. Since then, Furyk captained the 2024 US Presidents Cup team, which handed the International Team an 18 1/2-11 1/2 loss at Royal Montreal Golf Club.

As a player, he was part of nine Ryder Cup teams, victorious on American soil in 1999 and 2008. He also appeared in seven Presidents Cups as a player and was a 17-time winner on the PGA Tour,

including the 2003 US Open. The US has not won a Ryder Cup in Europe since captain Tom Watson's team won 15-13 at The Belfry in England in 1993.

The players on that team included rookie Davis Love III, Fred Couples, Payne Stewart, Lanny Wadkins and 51-year-old Raymond Floyd.

Furyk succeeds Keegan Bradley as captain. Bradley had expressed an interest in taking another shot at the Europeans and captain Luke Donald, who will lead the team for the third time in 2027.

Furyk, it may be recalled, was the official vice-captain for the 2025 team.

Team Europe has won the past two Ryder Cup competitions. In 2025, the Americans fell behind on the first two days and mounted a furious comeback attempt on Sunday but fell short, losing 15-13 at Bethpage Black.

In 2023, the Europeans defeated the Zach Johnson-led US squad 16 1/2-11 1/2 at Marco Simone Golf & Country Club near Rome.

The next Ryder Cup is scheduled to be held September 17-19, 2027.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Alcaraz to miss French Open with injury

AFP
Madrid

Reigning two-time French Open champion Carlos Alcaraz said yesterday he will not play at this year's tournament as he recovers from a wrist injury.

The Spaniard said the call to shut down his clay season was made after he received the results of tests on his right wrist, also ruling him out of the Italian Open.

"We have decided that the most prudent thing to do is to be cautious and not participate in Rome or Roland Garros," Alcaraz said on social media.

"This is a difficult time for me, but I'm sure we will come out of it stronger," Alcaraz added, saying that he and his team would monitor his recovery before deciding when and where he would return.

Alcaraz sustained the injury during the first round of the Barcelona Open last week, where he beat Otto Virtanen but subsequently pulled out of the tournament.

The 22-year-old announced his

withdrawal from the Madrid Masters on April 17, increasing concerns over whether he would be able to appear at the French Open.

Alcaraz became the youngest man to complete the career Grand Slam in January with his triumph at the Australian Open. He holds a 22-3 record this season and also won a title in Doha.

Ranked second in the world, Alcaraz lost top spot following his defeat by Jannik Sinner in the Monte Carlo Masters final on April 12.

The seven-time Grand Slam winner triumphed at Roland Garros in 2024 and 2025. He saved three championship points against Sinner last year in the longest French Open final in history.

The Italian, who has never won the French Open, may be able to capitalise on Alcaraz's absence. This year's tournament runs from May 24 to June 7.

"It's sad news for all of us, me being a competitor you want to play against the best players in the world and he's definitely the best player on this surface," said Sinner, after winning a second round

match at the Madrid Open yesterday.

"Being that young like he is and like I am, we need to look at our bodies first before worse things (happen)."

Sinner said he hoped Alcaraz would be back playing by the time the year's third Grand Slam, at Wimbledon, arrives.

"It is very sad news, I was not expecting it but he and his team know very well (what they are doing)," continued the 24-year-old. "Hopefully he can be back for Wimbledon and we all hope for great battles in the future."

GREAT BATTLES LOOM

Alcaraz admitted earlier this week that if it was better for his long-term career not to play in Paris then he would take that decision.

"I'd rather come back maybe a bit later, but in great shape, than come back quickly and risk making this injury worse," he explained on Monday.

"I have a long career ahead of me, so I'm not afraid to miss what I have to miss in order to recover as well as possible."



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz plays a forehand return to Italy's Jannik Sinner during their singles final match on day 15 of the French Open on Court Philippe-Chatrier at the Roland-Garros Complex in Paris on June 8, 2025. Two-time reigning French Open champion Alcaraz said yesterday he will not play at this year's tournament as he recovers from a wrist injury. (AFP)

"I hope it's nothing serious, but I need to fully recover if I don't want this to cause me problems in the future."

It will be just the second Grand Slam that Alcaraz has missed since making his main draw debut at the 2021 Australian Open.

The hugely popular Spaniard withdrew from the 2023 edition in Melbourne with a hamstring injury.

TENNIS

In-form Sinner overcomes Bonzi in record hunt

The world number one is eyeing his fifth consecutive Masters title

AFP
Madrid

Jannik Sinner took a first step towards a potential record fifth consecutive Masters 1000 title with a 6-7 (6/8), 6-1, 6-4 victory over Benjamin Bonzi in the Madrid Open second round yesterday.

The Italian world number one is looking to beat the record of four consecutive triumphs held by all-time greats Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal this week in the Spanish capital.

Sinner dropped only one set on the way to trophies in Paris, Indian Wells, Miami and Monte Carlo, but Bonzi battled brilliantly to claim the first at the Manolo Santana stadium.

The Frenchman survived five break points to reach a tie-break, where he also saved set point before edging ahead.

However Sinner stepped up a gear in the second set, securing breaks in the fourth and sixth games, and another in the third on his way to the third round.

"It was a tough match, I had some chances early on and I couldn't use them, but this is tennis," said four-time Grand Slam winner Sinner.

"It's not bad to start the tournament like this, two and a half hours on court, it gives me good feedback where we need to improve for the next round."

"Of course, we need to improve, but I'm also happy, when you're not playing your best tennis and win, it's still a good result."

With Sinner's biggest rival Carlos Alcaraz injured and unable to compete either this week or in the upcoming French Open, the



Italy's Jannik Sinner celebrates after winning his Madrid Open second round singles match against France's Benjamin Bonzi at the Caja Magica in Madrid, yesterday. (AFP)

Italian is overwhelming favourite for every competition he enters in the weeks ahead.

Earlier, Croatian qualifier Dino Prizmic sent world number six Ben Shelton crashing out with a 6-4, 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (7/5) victory.

Promising 20-year-old Prizmic, ranked 87th, secured his first ever win over a top-10 player in a three-hour battle in the Spanish capital.

American Shelton triumphed at the Munich Open on Sunday on clay but was unable to force a single break point on Prizmic's serve.

Italian Lorenzo Musetti, ranked ninth, defeated Hubert Hurkacz 6-4, 7-6 (7/4).

'I BASICALLY SURVIVED'

Women's number two Elena Rybakina scraped into the Madrid Open third round with a 4-6, 6-3, 7-5 win over Gabriela Ruse.

Kazakhstan's Rybakina, who won the Australian Open in January and triumphed at Stuttgart last week, struggled in the first set, making 24 unforced errors to just eight winners.

After claiming a topsy-turvy second set, she came back from a break down in the third and sealed the victory on her third match point.

Rybakina will meet Zheng Qinwen, who produced a similarly battling performance to overcome

Sofia Kenin, in the third round.

"Today, I basically survived," said Rybakina after her hard-fought victory.

"It wasn't the greatest performance but Gabriela, she played very well. She was playing very deep and aggressive, so it was very difficult."

"My serve was not really helping me today... but I'm really happy that I managed to win, and I hope I can bring better tennis next round."

Last year's runner-up and the third seed Coco Gauff made light work of Leolia Jeanjean with a 6-3, 6-0 victory at the Arantxa Sanchez stadium.

SPOTLIGHT

Alex Marquez quickest in Spanish practice



Team Gresini Racing MotoGP's Alex Marquez rides during a practice session of the Spanish Grand Prix at the Jerez racetrack in Jerez de la Frontera, yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Jerez de la Frontera, Spain

Alex Marquez was fastest in Spanish MotoGP practice yesterday in Jerez on his Gresini with a sizeable 0.333s advantage over second-quickest Fabio Di Giannantonio.

Championship leader Aprilia rider Marco Bezzecchi was third fastest ahead of Ducati's Marc Marquez in the south-west of Spain.

Alex Marquez, defending world champion Marc's younger brother, secured his first MotoGP victory in Jerez last year and impressed again

in Andalucia despite a tough start to the season. His time of 1min 35.704s was less than a tenth of a second behind the all-time record at Jerez. Despite crashes Pecco Bagnaia and Jorge Martin secured top 10 finishes to go straight to the second qualifying session today.

Double MotoGP world champion Bagnaia slid off his factory Ducati at turn one on his first lap, while Martin, second overall, had a fall on the final corner halfway through the afternoon session.

Pedro Acosta, third overall, must go through Q1 for the first time this season, down in 15th on his KTM, along with his team-mate Brad Binder one position behind.

Raptors down Cavaliers



Scottie Barnes (right) of the Toronto Raptors dribbles against Evan Mobley of the Cleveland Cavaliers during the second half of Game Three of the Eastern Conference First Round NBA Playoffs at Scotiabank Arena in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The Raptors won the match 126-104. Cavaliers lead 2-1. (AFP)

TURKEY RETURNS BUT F1 CALENDAR WILL NOT GO BEYOND 24 RACES

LONDON: The return of the Turkish Grand Prix from next year, announced yesterday, will go down well with fans and drivers while a rotation of some European races will ensure the Formula One calendar stays at 24 rounds.

Formula One chief executive Stefano Domenicali has made clear the championship is at its limit but the Dutch Grand Prix is dropping off after this season while Belgium and Barcelona will be alternating over the next five years - the length of the Turkish contract.

Madrid, due to debut later this year, is the most recent addition but Portugal's Portimao circuit also has a two-year deal that starts in 2027.

Adding Portugal and Turkey next year would take the calendar to 25 rounds, but the Barcelona-Belgium rotation brings it back down with the Spanish circuit absent

next year before returning in 2028 when Spa drops off. The switch between the two then continues in 2029, 2030, and 2031. As it stands, with the addition of Turkey, there are now 24 circuits with contracts for 2027.

AUSTRIA AND MIAMI HAVE THE LONGEST CONTRACTS

Italy, Hungary, Britain, Madrid, Monaco and Austria all have contracts through until at least 2031 with some far longer - Silverstone to 2034, Madrid and Monaco to 2035 and Austria's Red Bull Ring until 2041 - the same as Miami. Further afield, Mexico City has a contract to 2028, as does Singapore. Japan is secure until 2029 and Azerbaijan until 2030. Abu Dhabi, China, Brazil and Saudi Arabia also run to 2030 but all either contribute significantly to the sport's balance sheet in

hosting fees or are important for commercial growth and global representation. Sao Paulo's Interlagos circuit is still the sole South American race while China is a key market for the Liberty Media-owned sport.

Having competition for slots is always good for business, and also provides alternatives if regions, such as the Middle East with four rounds, become out of bounds due to conflict such as the Iran war. Turkey slots in with a circuit next to a 'destination city', a cultural and geographical gateway between Europe and Asia that might equally be a candidate to rotate eventually with Azerbaijan's Baku, further to the east but also looking west with the first race there in 2016 billed as the European Grand Prix. Returning to Africa for the first time since 1993 remains a long-term desire for

Formula One while another race in South America, most likely Argentina, has long been mooted as has a second round in China.

India recently made headlines after the country's sports minister suggested a return to the Buddh International Circuit near New Delhi could be on the cards. While that timeframe was swiftly dismissed, Formula One did recognise India as a "market of interest" even if any agreement remained some way off.

AUDI F1 APPOINT MCNISH AS RACING DIRECTOR FROM MIAMI GP

Triple Le Mans 24 Hours winner and former Grand Prix racer Allan McNish has been appointed Racing Director of the Audi Formula One team, they announced yesterday. The Scot will be responsible for coordi-

nating all trackside operations from next week's Miami Grand Prix, the team said in a statement, and reports directly to principal Mattia Binotto.

McNish has been part of the Audi F1 project from the start and was also previously principal of the Audi Sport ABT Schaeffler Formula E team. He fills a vacancy left by Jonathan Wheatley, whose departure was announced last month.

"Allan brings an exceptional combination of racing experience, technical understanding and leadership to this role," said Binotto. "He has been a central part of the motorsport structure of Audi for many years and, in his roles within Audi Revolut F1 Team since its start, has played a key role in shaping our preparation for Formula One, not least with his work around technical partnerships."

EQUESTRIAN

Al-Rashed claims Gold Tour title in Hathab round 11

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The 11th round of the Qatar Equestrian Tour - Longines Hathab was held at the Qatar Equestrian Federation's main arena, featuring strong competition across multiple categories.

In the Gold Tour 140cm class, Kuwait's Fawaz al-Rashed riding Gaia des Forets claimed first place with a clear round in 64.75 seconds. France's Jean-Francois Rondoux on Flower du Rouet finished second in 65.73 seconds, while Qatar's Salman Mohammed al-Emadi secured third place aboard Candlelight O in 65.85 seconds.

In the Gold Tour team competition, Team Wathnan took first place with a combined time of 134.98 seconds, followed by Team Al Shaqab in second place with a time of 144.65 seconds. The winners of the Gold Tour were crowned by Mohammed Saleh al-Marri, Head of the Facilities and Logistics Committee for the championship.

In the Open Tour 110cm class, Saudi Arabia's Khaled al-Hadi riding DSP Cessy secured first place with a double clear round in 30.42 seconds. Qatar's Sultan Salem al-Naemi on Cethys de Vernay finished second in 30.45 seconds, while Abdulla Tamim al-Thani claimed third place aboard Let It Be des Hurlevents in 31.07 seconds.

In the Junior category, Abdullah bin Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani took first place, followed by Sultan Jassim al-Su-



Kuwait's Fawaz al-Rashed riding Gaia des Forets claimed first place in the Gold Tour with a clear round in 64.75 seconds at Hathab yesterday.

waidi in second on Cat Blue, while Abdullah Ahmed al-Musafiri finished third riding Celia. The winners were crowned by Abdullah Ali al-Qashouti, Head of the Media and Live Broadcasting Committee for Longines Hathab.

The Future Riders 70cm class was won by Alya Ahmad al-Khater riding Vahine de Curaine with a clear round in 16.64 seconds. Hissa Ali al-Jaber finished second aboard Violet Van Het Koetshuis in 18.22 seconds, while Salman Faisal al-Marri secured third place riding Friedrichshof Dark Dream in 18.24 seconds.

The Future Riders winners were crowned by Ahmed al-Badawi, Head of the Judging

Committee for the tournament.

The eleventh round concludes today with the Diamond Tour competition at a height of 150cm, alongside the Bronze Tour for individual and team categories at 120cm, and the Future Riders class at 90cm. The final day will also feature dressage competitions at the federation's indoor arena, with the first rounds scheduled to begin at 9am.

The Longines Hathab Qatar Equestrian Tour comprises 14 rounds staged at the Qatar Equestrian Federation arenas and the Longines grounds at Al Shaqab, and remains one of the country's leading domestic equestrian championships.



Future Riders 70cm class was won by Alya Ahmad al-Khater riding Vahine de Curaine.



Abdullah Ali al-Qashouti, Head of the Media and Live Broadcasting Committee for Longines Hathab, with the podium winners of Open Class.

FOOTBALL

Spurs survival fight takes them to Wolves

De Zerbi feels his team will only avoid the drop if they are able to cope with pressure

AFP
London

Roberto De Zerbi has warned his "suffering" Tottenham stars to show a stronger mentality in the fight to avoid relegation from the Premier League. De Zerbi's side are two points from safety with just five games left to stave off the humiliation of playing in the second tier for the first time since 1977-78.

The north London club conceded a stoppage-time equaliser in a 2-2 draw against Brighton last weekend, leaving them third-from-bottom of the table and extending their winless run in the league to 15 matches.

They head to Molineux today knowing that a victory over the division's bottom club, combined with a defeat or draw for fourth-from-bottom West Ham against Everton, would lift them back out of the relegation zone. De Zerbi believes that Tottenham will only avoid the drop if they are able to cope with the mounting pressure of the tense struggle for survival.

"We are suffering, they are suffering because it is not easy to play in Tottenham in this condition of the table, but I said they have to be stronger," De Zerbi said. "We have to live every part of the day waiting



Roberto De Zerbi's Tottenham Hotspur are two points from safety with just five games left to stave off the humiliation of playing in the second tier for the first time since 1977-78.

for a win and preparing for a win because I think with a win we can change this part of the season."

Injury-plagued Tottenham haven't won a league game in 2026 and their fitness problems show no sign of improving. De Zerbi

this week lost left-back Destiny Udogie to a muscle problem and Guglielmo Vicario is still not available after hernia surgery, which means Antonin Kinsky will deputise in goal again.

James Maddison, who has not played this season, was an unused substitute against Brighton and even though he is set to travel to Wolverhampton, the playmaker does not appear ready to feature.

De Zerbi, who is Tottenham's third manager this season after the sackings of Thomas Frank and Igor Tudor, acknowledged the danger of facing a Wolves team uninhibited by battling against relegation. But he believes that Tottenham's players remain determined to beat the drop despite criticism of their limp performances for much of the season.

"It's a tough game because they (Wolves) have nothing to lose. It's an important game for us, for sure, but we have to be able to play with not too much pressure," the Italian said. "Sometimes when one team is losing too many games, the rumours are not nice," he said, adding that some people question the seriousness of the players. It is not like this in this case. I found good players, good guys, serious players and they follow me. They believe in my words because I am able to recognise the eyes of the players."

Man City will not risk Rodri in FA Cup semi-final: Guardiola

London: Rodri will not be risked in Manchester City's FA Cup semi-final against Southampton this weekend even though he is recovering from a groin injury, manager Pep Guardiola said.

The Spanish midfielder came off late in last weekend's crucial 2-1 win over Arsenal and he missed the midweek victory over Burnley, which took City top of the Premier League.

With the club chasing a seventh Premier League title in nine seasons, Guardiola is unwilling to take a chance on the 2024 Ballon d'Or winner at Wembley. The groin issue is the latest in a series of setbacks for the 29-year-old Rodri since he suffered a serious knee injury early last season and the focus is on proving his fitness for the league trip to Everton on May 4.

Guardiola said the midfielder was "better" but was unsure if he would face Everton. "Hopefully, but we don't want to take a risk because if he's injured, we're losing him for the next three games, that's why it's so important," he said.

The Blues will face a resurgent Southampton who are unbeaten since January and are pushing for a return to the Premier League. Guardiola said that his players would not underestimate the Championship side as City attempt to reach a fourth straight final. "They have knocked out Fulham and Arsenal so (their form) speaks for itself," he said. "They are in a good rhythm but this is a real opportunity to get to the final."

UEFA BANS PRESTIANNI FOR SIX GAMES FOR DISCRIMINATORY CONDUCT

UEFA banned Benfica winger Gianluca Prestianni for six matches after a controversial incident in their Champions League clash against Real Madrid in February. The European football governing body said that they had taken the decision to ban the Argentine "for discriminatory conduct", with three of those matches suspended for a two-year probationary period.

UEFA said that Prestianni, 20, had already served one of those matches in the second leg of the Champions League play-off against Madrid.

The winger was provisionally banned for that game after Madrid star Vinicius Junior accused him of racism when they clashed in the first leg on February 17, which Prestianni denied.

CHELSEA'S ESTEVAO OUT FOR SEASON, WORLD CUP IN DOUBT

Brazilian winger Estevao is out for the rest of the English season, with his participation in the World Cup in doubt, Chelsea interim boss Calum McFarlane said. The 19-year-old suffered a hamstring injury in last week's 1-0 defeat by Manchester United. McFarlane, back in charge at Stamford Bridge after this week's sacking of Liam Rosenior, delivered the bleak news about Estevao ahead of his side's FA Cup semi-final against Leeds.

PSG's Enrique 'couldn't care less' about World Cup

Poissy, France: Paris Saint-Germain coach Luis Enrique has no intention of easing up on his players ahead of the World Cup as his Ligue 1 leaders look to defend their Champions League crown.

The French champions play Bayern Munich in their Champions League semi-final first leg match next week with the Spanish coach managing a squad which has been beset by injuries this season.

Spanish midfielder Fabian Ruiz made his comeback from three months out injured with a substitute appearance in Sunday's shock 2-1 defeat at home to Lyon.

But Portuguese playmaker Vitorinha is unavailable for today's trip to Angers. PSG played in the Club World Cup in the summer, reaching the final, meaning their players had only a short break before the season began and have played a lot of football in the last 18 months to two years.

When asked about whether he would manage his players with an eye on the World Cup, which begins in June, Luis Enrique was dismissive. "I'm the Paris Saint-Germain coach, as for the rest, I couldn't care less," said the 55-year-old, who coached Spain at the 2022 World Cup finals.

"I'm not interested in that. What I have to manage is the situation at Paris Saint-Germain. Everything else is very clear." Vitorinha is suffering from a swollen heel, which forced him off against Lyon.

Luis Enrique said that Vitorinha's heel was improving but that he was still training on his own. Meanwhile, left-back Nuno Mendes has recovered from a thigh problem and is part of the squad to face Angers.

SERIE A

Ranieri leaves advisory role at Roma following fallout with Gasperini

Reuters
Rome

Claudio Ranieri has left his senior advisor role at AS Roma, the Serie A club said, a decision which comes in the wake of a fallout with manager Gian Piero Gasperini.

Two weeks ago before Roma's win over Pisa, Ranieri gave a pre-match interview where he responded to Gasperini's criticism of the club's transfer business, saying that no player was signed without the manager's approval.

"In the summer we contacted five or six coaches, three of them then didn't come, and in the end the club made the decision," Ranieri also said.

Gasperini responded a week later ahead of a game against his previous club Atalanta, saying Ranieri's words were an incredible surprise and that he had been thrown into a media storm not of his making. "As we look to the future, our direction is clear. The club is strong, with solid leadership and a defined vision," a Roma statement said. "AS Roma will always come first."

Before the Atalanta game, Gasperini was given a warm welcome by the Roma fans, while the Curva Sud made clear they wanted the focus to return to what happened on the pitch. "Enough. Roma comes before everything and everyone" read one banner while another asked 'Si-



lent ownership, talkative management. Who is thinking about the good of our Roma?"

Ranieri began his playing career at Roma and later went on to have three spells as manager of the club, with the 74-year-old coming out of retirement to take charge last season with the club in the bottom half of the table.

He led Roma to a fifth-placed finish, missing out on Champions League football by one point, before accepting the advisory role, but this would appear to be Ranieri's final farewell to the club closest to his heart.

"The club would like to thank Claudio for his significant contributions to Roma," the statement said. "He led the

team through a very challenging time and we will always be grateful for his efforts."

Ranieri's almost 40-year managerial career has taken him to the likes of Fiorentina, Atletico Madrid, Chelsea, Juventus and Inter Milan among many others, but his greatest triumph came with a fairytale Premier League title win at Leicester City a decade ago.

Ranieri turned down the chance to manage Italy's national team when offered the job in June after the sacking of Luciano Spalletti to focus on his new role at Roma. With the position vacant once more following the departure of Gennaro Gattuso, another return from retirement for Ranieri cannot be ruled out.