

To subscribe
GULF TIMES
Newspaper
Please call
444 666 35



CRICKET | Page 2

Captain Babar century powers Peshawar Zalmi into PSL final



FOOTBALL | Page 4

'Exceptional' Arsenal out to dominate at Atletico: Arteta

To advertise here.

PLEASE CALL
444 666 21

Wednesday, April 29, 2026
Dhul-Qi'dah 12, 1447 AH

GULF TIMES SPORT



TENNIS

Sinner queries schedule, surges into Madrid Open quarters

Page 3

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Holdings PSG edge Bayern in 9-goal semi-final epic

Kvaratskhelia and Dembele scored two goals each for the defending champions

AFP
Paris

Khicha Kvaratskhelia and Ousmane Dembele scored twice each as Paris Saint-Germain beat Bayern Munich 5-4 in an epic first leg of their Champions League semi-final yesterday, an extraordinary encounter becoming the highest-scoring match ever at this stage of the competition.

The first half alone was crazy, with Harry Kane giving Bayern the lead from a penalty only for Kvaratskhelia to equalise before Joao Neves headed the hosts in front at an enthralled Parc des Princes.

Michael Olise made it 2-2, but a Dembele penalty in first-half stoppage time had the reigning champions back ahead at the interval.

Kvaratskhelia, surely the standout player in this season's Champions League, and Dembele both then scored again to have PSG seemingly out of sight, only for Dayot Upamecano to pull one back before Luis Diaz made it 5-4.

An unforgettable game - perhaps better even than last season's semi-final between Inter Milan and Barcelona - leaves the tie between the continent's two best teams of the moment wonderfully poised for next Wednesday's return at the Allianz Arena, with a place in the final in Budapest on May 30 on the line.

Luis Enrique's Parisians will be returning to Munich - scene of their 5-0 win over Inter in last year's final - with the advantage, but Bayern will be confident they can overturn the narrow deficit at home.

The French champions are seeking to become just the second side in the modern Champions League era to retain the trophy, while the German champions are



Paris Saint-Germain's Ousmane Dembele celebrates with teammate Desire Doue after scoring his team's fifth goal during the Champions League semi-final first leg match against Bayern Munich at the Parc des Princes in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

hoping to reach the final for the first time since 2020, when they defeated PSG to lift the trophy for the sixth time.

Vincent Kompany's team arrived in Paris having scored 167 goals this season, led by the remarkable Kane who had netted 53 times in 45 appearances.

This tie had a lot to live up to,

after Bayern's spectacular win over Real Madrid in the quarter-finals, but it was an instant classic as both teams showcased their devastating firepower.

Bayern went ahead in the 17th minute as Willian Pachy chopped down Diaz and Kane made no mistake with the resulting penalty to make it 5-4 for the campaign.

The visitors won 2-1 here in November in the league phase thanks to a Diaz double and they were the better team early on this time.

But their front-foot approach made them vulnerable to the counter-attack, and Dembele should have equalised before the leveller came just after the mid-

way point in the first half.

Kvaratskhelia's genius on the wing has regularly been the difference for PSG recently, and he broke clear of Josip Stanic down the left before cutting inside and firing into the far corner.

A classic Kvaratskhelia goal was followed by Neves heading in Dembele's corner on 33 minutes.

The action was only just getting started, however, as French international Olise drove towards the PSG box before smashing in for 2-2 with his 20th of the season.

PSG then won a penalty at the end of the first half, when a Dembele cross struck the arm of Alphonso Davies, the Canadian making his first start in the Champions League this season after injury.

It was given by the Swiss referee after a VAR check, and Dembele beat Manuel Neuer to make it 3-2 at the interval - a lead which PSG added to after the restart, leaving Bayern stunned.

Achraf Hakimi's assist was swept in by Kvaratskhelia for 4-2 on 56 minutes, the Georgian getting his seventh goal in seven games in the knockout phase.

Bayern had not been able to reset before Dembele surprised Neuer with a low shot in off the near post to make it 5-2 with his second of the night.

But Bayern were not done, as Upamecano headed in Joshua Kimmich's free-kick for 5-3, taking Kompany's side to 170 for their season tally.

Diaz, who was sent off in the November meeting, was then played in over the top and dribbled past Marquinhos before slotting in for the night's final goal.

Kompany, watching from the stands due to suspension, would have been delighted with his team's response -- even if they were relieved to see Senny Mayulu's late strike for PSG come back off Neuer's crossbar.

Players face red cards in new anti-racism rule at World Cup

World Cup players who cover their mouths during confrontations with opponents will face a red card as part of a new initiative aimed at combating racism, world governing body FIFA said yesterday. In a statement following a meeting of the International Football Association Board (IFAB) in Vancouver, FIFA confirmed that the rule was one of two law changes that would be introduced at this year's World Cup. "At the discretion of the competition organiser, any player covering their mouth in a confrontational situation with an opponent may be sanctioned with a red card," FIFA said in a statement. The new rule follows controversy earlier this year when Benfica winger Gianluca Prestianni was accused of racially abusing Real Madrid star Vinicius Junior during a Champions League game in February. Prestianni was accused of calling Vinicius a "monkey" repeatedly while covering his mouth. Prestianni denied racially abusing Vinicius but was later banned for six matches - with three of those suspended - for "homophobic conduct".

In a separate law change to be enforced at the World Cup, FIFA said that red cards would also be introduced for players leaving the field of play in protest at a referee's decision. "At the discretion of the competition organiser, the referee may sanction with a red card any player who leaves the field of play in protest at a referee's decision," FIFA said. "This new rule will also apply to any team official who incites players to leave the field of play." FIFA said a team causing a game to be abandoned will forfeit the match. The move follows the uproar at this year's final of the Africa Cup of Nations, when Senegal's players, head coach Pape Thiaw and his staff walked off the pitch in Rabat after Morocco were awarded a penalty in added time, which forward Brahim Diaz ultimately missed. Senegal went on to win the final 1-0 in extra time, but were sensationally stripped of the title by the Confederation of African Football (CAF) in a bombshell decision issued last month.

ASIAN BEACH GAMES

Qatar's Younoussé-Tijan, handball team enter finals

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's beach volleyball stars Cherif Younoussé and Ahmed Tijan stormed into the final of the Asian Beach Games - Sanya 2026 with a dominant straight-sets victory yesterday.

The Qatari pair overpowered Thailand 2-0 (21-12, 21-14) in the semi-finals to set up a title clash against Iran, who advanced after defeating Oman in the other last-four encounter.

Reflecting on the win, Tijan highlighted the team's discipline and cohesion: "We approached the match against Thailand with strong focus from the very beginning and managed to impose our style of play. Our harmony on court made the difference. In matches like these, it's crucial to minimize errors and make the most of every opportunity."

In handball, Qatar also booked a place in the final after a hard-fought 2-0 (13-8, 20-18) victory over Bahrain. The hosts controlled the first half, taking a solid 13-8 lead, but faced a tougher challenge in the second as Bahrain fought back to level the score at 18-18 in



Qatar's Cherif Younoussé (right) and Ahmed Tijan celebrate after winning the semi-final against Thailand at the Asian Beach Games in Sanya, China, yesterday.

the closing moments.

Abdulrazzaq Murad delivered the decisive blow, scoring the winning goal less than 30 seconds

before the final whistle. Qatar will now meet Iran, who defeated Thailand, in the final.

Meanwhile, Qatar's men's 3x3

basketball team comprised of Mohammed Bashir, Dejan Janic, Abdulrahman Saad, and Othman Deng advanced to the semi-finals



Qatar handball team defeated Bahrain 2-0 in the semi-final yesterday. (Right) Qatar's 3x3 basketball team reached the semi-final after defeating Iran.

with a 20-16 win over Iran. The team dictated the pace throughout, using aggressive offense and constant pressure to build and maintain their lead. They will face China in the semi-finals, while the Philippines take on Thailand in the other matchup.



SPOTLIGHT

Babar's century powers Zalmi into PSL final

The dashing opener smashes his second ton of the tournament

Agencies
Karachi

A masterclass century from Babar Azam propelled Peshawar Zalmi into the final of the HBL PSL 2026, as they dismantled Islamabad United by 70 runs in a high-stakes Qualifier 1 at the National Stadium yesterday.

After being put in to bat by Shadab Khan, Peshawar Zalmi posted a formidable 221/7 in their allotted 20 overs.

The foundation was laid by an explosive opening partnership between Mohammad Haris and Babar.

Haris set the tone early, smashing 35 off just 16 balls, including five boundaries and two towering sixes, before falling to Shadab.

However, the night belonged to Babar. The Zalmi skipper played an innings of pure authority, reaching his century off 58 balls.

His unbeaten 103 featured 12 fours and 4 sixes, anchoring the innings while Kusal Mendis (41 off 26) provided support from the other end.

Despite a mid-innings wobble where Shadab claimed 3/42 to remove the middle order, Aaron Hardie's late cameo of 20 ensured Zalmi crossed the 220-run mark.

In response, Islamabad United's chase never truly gained momentum.

While Sameer Minhas showed spark with a brisk 44 off 23 balls, the rest of the star-studded lineup faltered against a disciplined Zalmi attack.

Devon Conway (20) and Mohsin Riaz (25) made starts but couldn't convert them as the required rate climbed steeply.

The turning point came during the middle overs when Hardie broke the back of United's batting.

Hardie finished with standout



Babar Azam of Peshawar Zalmi during his century against Islamabad United in the Qualifier 1 of Pakistan Super League in Karachi yesterday.

figures of 3/24, claiming the crucial wickets of Shadab and Haider Ali.

Complementing him was Sufiyan Muqeem, whose 2/25 stifled the scoring in the powerplay.

Islamabad United were eventually bundled out for 151 in 18.4

overs. With this dominant victory, Zalmi have become the first team to book their spot in the grand final.

United, meanwhile, will head to the second Eliminator for one final chance to keep their title hopes alive.

BRIEF SCORES
Peshawar Zalmi 221 for 7 (Babar 103, Mendis 41, Shadab 3-42) **beat Islamabad United 151** (Minhas 44, Hardie 3-24, Basit 2-19) **by 70 runs**
Today's match: Multan Sultans vs Hyderabad Kingsmen

Pitch perfect Hazlewood and Bhuvneshwar show how to restore IPL's bat-ball balance

BENGALURU: Royal Challengers Bengaluru's new-ball pair Josh Hazlewood and Bhuvneshwar Kumar offered a reminder on Monday that high-class bowling, with a hint of assistance from the surface, can restore the bat-ball balance in this year's Indian Premier League (IPL). The IPL has become a batter's paradise, with flat pitches and short boundaries contributing to sky-high scores and teams routinely chasing down 200-plus totals. The impact player rule, which allows teams to replace a bowler with a specialist batter during a match, has also contributed to what critics say is a lack of balance between bat and ball this season. On Saturday, Delhi Capitals racked up 264-2, briefly the season's highest total, and yet watched helplessly as Punjab Kings pulled off a record chase with seven balls to spare. Two days later, however, on a different, livelier surface at the same Arun Jaitley Stadium, Hazlewood and Bhuvneshwar

claimed seven wickets between them and bundled out Delhi for 75. Delhi lost six wickets inside four overs, a stark contrast to the batting carnage often seen during powerplays. Both Bengaluru seamers bowled the conventional test match length and got the ball to swing around. "Even I'm surprised the way the wicket played," Bengaluru captain Rajat Patidar said. "The way they hit those areas and got that bit of swing, that was tremendous to see. I think the swing was normal, and the good thing was we got early wickets and that's why it kept us in the driving seat." Delhi captain Axar Patel said they struggled against two world-class bowlers. "They swing the ball and have done it at every ground," he added. "If our openers or one-down batters had batted one or two more overs, it could have been a different score or a different match. Credit to them for the way they bowled."



Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Josh Hazlewood (left) celebrates after taking the wicket of Delhi Capitals' Abishek Porel during the IPL match in New Delhi on Monday. (AFP)

ANNOUNCEMENT

Sri Lanka cricket board quits at government's request: officials

AFP
Colombo

Sri Lanka's cricket board stepped down yesterday after the government asked the sporting body's executive committee to make way for a new administration, officials confirmed.

Sri Lanka Cricket is the country's richest sporting body but it has been plagued by allegations of corruption and mismanagement for years.

A board official said that its president, Shammi Silva, convened a special meeting to announce his resignation, with 11 months remaining in his fourth two-year term.

"The committee resigned to make way for an interim management team headed by a former

investment banker, who is also an opposition politician," the official told AFP, asking not to be named.

A government official said Sri Lanka's President Anura Kumara Dissanayake had met with Silva over the weekend to discuss the future of the board under a new management.

Sri Lanka made an early exit from the T20 World Cup, which it co-hosted with India in February-March.

The International Cricket Council (ICC), the sport's world governing body, suspended Sri Lanka's membership in November 2023, citing political interference in the running of the national board.

That suspension had been lifted at the end of January 2024, and Silva's committee was restored. He subsequently won a fourth term uncontested as president.

INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Sooryavanshi and Ferreira hand Punjab their first loss



Rajasthan Royals' Vaibhav Sooryavanshi plays a shot during the IPL match against Punjab Kings on the outskirts of Chandigarh yesterday. (AFP)



Royals' Donovan Ferreira plays a shot against Punjab Kings. (AFP)

AFP
India

Fifteen-year-old Vaibhav Sooryavanshi became the leading run-getter in this IPL season with a cracking 43 yesterday that helped Rajasthan Royals beat Punjab Kings by six wickets in a high-scoring contest.

The teenage Indian batsman kept up his blazing T20 form with his 16-ball knock that lay the foundation for Rajasthan's chase of 223 as they reached home with four balls to spare in Punjab's home Chandigarh.

Sooryavanshi's opening partner Yashasvi Jaiswal hit 51 before South African Donovan Ferreira smacked an unbeaten 52 to complete the win and inflict a first defeat of the season on table toppers Punjab. "I really enjoyed batting with him and he's playing amazing," said Jaiswal. "I'm always happy seeing from the other end, the way he's hitting the ball."

The left-handed Sooryavanshi began with a bang as he hit Arshdeep Singh for a six and

two fours before going after Lockie Ferguson for a couple of hits over the fence.

Sooryavanshi fell to Arshdeep after he mistimed a hit to be caught at mid-off. He reached 400 runs in nine outings this edition to take top spot in the batting chart.

Sunrisers Hyderabad opener Abhishek Sharma slipped to second with 380 runs but he has played a match fewer than Sooryavanshi.

The boy wonder is now the fastest to 400 runs in a single IPL season, getting there in 167 balls to beat the previous record by Andre Russell from 2019 by 21 balls. Sooryavanshi has been in phenomenal form as he cracked a 36-ball century on Saturday against Hyderabad to become the youngest and fastest to score 1,000 T20 runs.

In his latest knock Sooryavanshi hit some jaw-dropping shots including a flick off Ferguson for a six over deep mid-wicket.

Jaiswal kept up pace in his 27-ball knock after Sooryavanshi departed and despite disciplined bowling by Punjab in the middle overs, Rajasthan remained on course.

An unbeaten 77-run stand between Ferreira, who was named player of the match, and impact substitute Shubham Dubey, who hit 31, steered the team home.

"This is the format where I feel that a lot of players have changed their game and when they come in, they go bang from ball one," said Punjab skipper Shreyas Iyer.

"So it's an arduous task for bowlers to come with a certain plan. But at the end of the day, I feel it's all about execution. And today it just wasn't our day."

Earlier Punjab's Australian batter Marcus Stoinis hammered an unbeaten 22-ball 62 to guide the team to 222-4 after being invited to bat first.

But the batting blitz was not enough as Punjab - coached by Ricky Ponting - suffered their first defeat in eight matches this season.

BRIEF SCORES
Rajasthan Royals 228 for 4 (Ferreira 52*, Jaiswal 51, Chahal 3-36) **beat Punjab Kings 222 for 4** (Stoinis 62*, Prabhshimran 59, Punja 2-41) **by six wickets**

FOCUS

Sciver-Brunt aiming to end title drought at WC

Reuters
London

England have underachieved since winning the 2017 Women's World Cup and they are determined to put that right when they host the Twenty20 edition on home soil in June, captain Nat Sciver-Brunt said.

The 33-year-old replaced Heather Knight as all-formats captain in April last year and the T20 World Cup will be her second major International Cricket Council (ICC) event as captain and her first at home.

Sciver-Brunt led the team at the 50-overs World Cup last year in India and Sri Lanka, where they

were knocked out in the semi-finals by South Africa. "We would have liked to have won a lot more than we have done and we'd obviously like that to change this summer," she told *BBC Sport*. "A win could change what women's cricket looks like in this country. Just the carrot of that is enough to motivate anyone really. It certainly could change what this team is about. "We didn't really do it after 2017, but being a consistently good team is something that everyone tries to do. I'm hoping we can be a consistently good team and we'd love to start off with a T20 World Cup win."

England are drawn in Group B alongside defending champions New Zealand, West Indies, Sri Lanka, Ireland and Scotland.

TENNIS

Sinner slams scheduling ahead of Jodar showdown

THE WORLD NUMBER ONE QUESTIONS CHANGE IN FIXTURE AFTER MATCH KICKED OFF AT 11:00AM



Spain's Rafael Jodar returns the ball to Czech Republic's Vit Kopriva during their Madrid Open match in Madrid yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Madrid

Jannik Sinner suggested the Madrid Open organisers should reconsider their tournament scheduling to avoid late-night finishes like the one Rafael Jodar experienced in the third round yesterday.

In a rare 11:00 am start yesterday, Sinner moved past British 19th seed Cameron Norrie 6-2, 7-5 to reach the quarter-finals.

He explained he was put on first on Manolo Santana Stadium so that Jodar, his potential next opponent, would be scheduled in

the afternoon to give the Spaniard time to recover from his three-set win over Joao Fonseca that ended at 1:00 am on Monday morning.

"It's quite unusual for me," Sinner told Tennis TV about his early kick-off.

"I don't know the last time I played at 11. But for me it doesn't matter what time. I try to do my best. There was a question if it would be me or Jodar to play at 4. But I think it's right he plays at 4, because he finished very, very late.

"But at the same time, I feel like we need to make some adjustments to the scheduling of the day. Two matches (starting) from 8pm is very late.



Italy's Jannik Sinner returns the ball to Britain's Cameron Norrie during their Madrid Open match in Madrid yesterday. (AFP)

"Even though you have one day in between. But still it's very, very late. You finish at 1:30am, and you need to eat, you need to have treatment, so it's very late. But we try to adapt ourselves, our bodies, our minds, so from my side it was a good performance today."

In his first-ever meeting with Norrie, Sinner won 81 percent of his first-serve points, and 63 percent of the points behind his second delivery on his way to notching a 25th consecutive victory at the Masters 1000 level.

Sinner, who is bidding to reach the semi-finals for the first time in the Spanish capital, will next face 19-year-old Jodar in what will be a highly-anticipated last-eight showdown. The Italian world number one is just the second man

in series history to win his first 20 Masters 1000 matches of the season, joining Novak Djokovic, who achieved that feat twice, in 2011 and 2015.

Later in the day, Jodar's dream run on home soil continued with a convincing 7-5, 6-0 thumping of world number 66 Vit Kopriva. The Madrid-born wildcard advanced to the biggest quarter-final of his young career, and improved to 12-1 on clay so far this season.

"I'm super happy with my level today and with my level this in this tournament," Jodar said, who once again had Real Madrid footballer Jude Bellingham supporting him from the stands. "It's always special to play at home in front of many people that you know and they come to support you."

Ruud edges out Tsitsipas

Casper Ruud fought back from the brink to keep his title defence alive with a 6-7 (4/7), 7-6 (7/2), 7-6 (7/3) victory over former finalist Stefanos Tsitsipas.

In a high-quality three-hour contest, Tsitsipas led 5-3 in the decider, holding two match points, and served for the victory at 5-4, but Ruud, who was 0/11 in break points up until then, found a way to take down the Greek's serve and went on to clinch the tie-break.

"I was on the brink of being on the way home already, so just really happy and proud the way I fought back," said the Norwegian 12th seed.

Last week's Barcelona champion Arthur Fils advanced to the quarter-finals at the Caja Magica with

a 6-3, 6-4 win over Argentine 25th seed Tomas Martin Etcheverry.

Fils has made the quarter-finals in six of the seven tournaments he has contested so far in 2026.

The Frenchman will take on Jiri Lehecka, who beat sixth-seeded Italian Lorenzo Musetti 6-3, 6-3, for a place in the last four.

In WTA action, ninth-seeded Mirra Andreeva gave herself an early birthday gift, defeating Canadian Leylah Fernandez 7-6(7/1), 6-3 to reach her first Madrid semi-final.

The Russian teenager, who turns 19 on Wednesday, awaits defending champion Aryna Sabalenka or American Hailey Baptiste,

A recent champion in Linz, Andreeva improved her clay-court record to 11-1 this season.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Felix, 40, says she plans comeback with eyes on the 2028 LA Olympics

AFP
Los Angeles, United States

Alyson Felix, the most decorated woman in Olympic athletics history with 11 medals, says she is planning a comeback at age 40 with her eyes on the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.

Felix told *Time* magazine in a story published online on Monday that she is preparing for what she hopes will be a sixth Olympics in her hometown when she will be 42.

"This is a once-in-a-lifetime homecoming," Felix said of her Olympic dream. "And it is the only thing powerful enough to pull me back."

Felix is the most decorated American Olympian in athletics.

She captured her only solo gold in the 200 meters at London in 2012, added gold in the 4x400 relay in 2008 in Beijing, 2012 in London, 2016 in Rio de Janeiro and 2021 in Tokyo and won 4x100 titles in 2012 and 2016.

She took 200m silver in 2004 and 2008, 400 silver in 2016 and 400 bronze at Tokyo.

Felix has championed women



returning to competition after having children. She gave birth to a daughter in 2018 and a son in 2024.

Felix attended the 2024 Paris Olympics as a spectator and found she yearned for her competitive days.

"It was definitely mixed emotions," Felix told the magazine. "There were moments where I was like, 'Oh, this is so great. It's so exciting to be in the stands and on the other side!'"

"And then there were moments where I was, 'You know, I miss this feeling!'"

Felix also won a record 20 medals at the World Championships, the most for any woman or man,

including 14 titles. She won the 200 crown in 2005, 2007 and 2009 and the 400 in 2015 as well as three 4x100 relay titles, a 4x400 mixed relay crown in 2019 and six women's 4x400 relay golds, including at what was her farewell meet, the 2022 worlds in Eugene, Oregon.

Felix, a member of the athletes commission for the 2028 LA Olympic organizing committee, said she is realistic about her quest.

"I know, at 40, I am not at my peak. I have no illusions about that," Felix said.

"I'm very clear in what it is and what I want to see. And so I hope it's seen that way."

Getting support from a home crowd is part of her goal.

"When I was competing, you just heard this roar for host-country athletes at the Olympics," Felix said. "I would love to experience that."

Simply making the attempt to compete at the LA Games is a victory of its own for Felix.

"I would probably be upset at myself if I just didn't give it a try," Felix said. "However it turns out, I'll still be there with my kids, hanging out and cheering everybody on!"

Godon wins Romandie prologue, Pogacar fifth



INEOS Grenadiers' Dorian Godon throws flowers on the podium after winning the prologue of the Tour de Romandie UCI WorldTour cycling race in Villars-sur-Glâne yesterday. (AFP)

VILLARS-SUR-GLÂNE, SWITZERLAND: French champion Dorian Godon took a surprise victory in the Tour de Romandie opening prologue yesterday as world champion Tadej Pogacar could finish only fifth.

Godon's three previous individual victories this year had all come in sprint finishes but he covered the 3.2km course around Villars-sur-Glâne in 3min 35sec to finish six seconds clear of Portugal's Ivo Oliveira and Swede Jakob Soderqvist in second and third respectively.

Pogacar, who two days ago won the 260km-long Liege-Bastogne-Liege one-day race for the fourth time, was a further second back in fifth, just behind Swiss champion Mauro Schmid.

It is four-time Tour de France winner Pogacar's first stage race of the year having previously taken part in just five one-day races - winning four of them. He is the overwhelming favourite to win the Ro-

mandie tour in Switzerland this week in what is his first participation at the event. It is one of the few major week-long stage races that he is yet to win in his career, along with June's Tour de Suisse, which he will take part in for the first time before bidding for a record-equalling fifth Tour de France in July. Pogacar gained time on his main rivals for the overall victory in Romandie as Slovenian compatriot Primož Roglic, a two-time former winner, was eighth, eight seconds off Godon.

Roglic's Red Bull-Bora Hansgrohe team-mate Florian Lipowitz was 10th, another two seconds further back, with Frenchman Lenny Martinez 25th at 17sec.

Today's first full stage is a 171km ride around Martigny, where the tough 8.9km-long Ovronnaz climb with an average gradient of 9.8 percent in the final 40km will provide Pogacar a first chance to distance his rivals.

GOLF

Saudi-backed LIV Golf postpones June event set for New Orleans: reports

AFP
Washington, United States

LIV Golf's scheduled June event in Louisiana has been postponed, according to multiple reports yesterday, as the Saudi-backed series seeks new investment.

The Athletic and WDSU television in New Orleans reported that the New Orleans tournament, a new event set for June 25-28 at City Park's Bayou Oaks, will not be played as planned.

LIV Golf chief executive officer Scott O'Neil and Susan Bourgeois, secretary of Louisiana economic development, spoke

days after Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF) indicated it sought to drop financing for LIV, now in its fifth season, *The Athletic* reported.

Bourgeois and O'Neil spoke last Friday and agreed to postpone the tournament due to LIV's business model changes, with an official announcement expected today.

The Louisiana tournament remained on LIV Golf's website schedule for June on Monday evening. *The Athletic* reported the sides hoped to talk about a re-envisioned event this fall, although LIV's final event for the 2026 campaign is set for August.

WDSU reported the state of Louisiana would postpone the event until LIV could find other funding sources and restructure.

City Park, owned by the state of Louisiana, received \$2mn in state funding for upgrades to host the event and the state also set aside \$3mn as a hosting fee to lure the event with hopes for \$70mn in economic impact for the area, the television station reported. The state would be refunded \$1mn already paid to LIV and provide no additional money, WDSU reported.

The Athletic said \$1.2mn would be returned to the state with the renovation money treated as an acceptable improvement to a state asset. The move raises concerns about what could be the final months for LIV as O'Neil seeks money after this year's potential PIF funding stoppage. LIV arrived in 2022 and lured top PGA Tour tal-

ent with big contracts, Spain's Jon Rahm winning the past two season crowns. But the series has struggled for global attention and some players, such as Brooks Koepka and Patrick Reed, have jumped back to the PGA Tour or are in the process of doing so.

LIV Golf's next scheduled event is at Trump National Golf Club in suburban Washington on May 7-10.

Women's Open prize money increased to \$10mn for 50th anniversary edition

The women's British Open is celebrating its 50th anniversary with a record-breaking \$10mn prize fund for the major at Royal Lytham & St Annes this year, the

R&A announced yesterday. The winner of the championship will pocket \$1.5mn, compared with the \$673 Jenny Lee Smith earned for claiming the inaugural title in 1976.

"This is the sixth consecutive year that the AIG Women's Open prize fund has been increased," said Mark Darbon, chief executive of The R&A.

"These consistent and sustainable investments in the prize fund clearly demonstrate The R&A and AIG's commitment to elevating the Championship on the global stage." Japan's Miyu Yamashita won last year's Women's Open by two shots at Royal Porthcawl to win her first major title and pocket \$1.46mn.

CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

'Exceptional' Arsenal out to dominate at Atletico: Arteta

'We're going to grab it with both hands. You're going to see a team that wants to be dominant'



Arsenal's Martin Odegaard (left) and Viktor Gyokeres with manager Mikel Arteta (right) during a training session yesterday, on the eve of the Champions League semi-final, first-leg, match against Atletico Madrid, in London. (Reuters)

AFP
Madrid

Arsenal coach Mikel Arteta defended his "exceptional" side against criticism yesterday and backed them to prove their quality in the Champions League semi-final clash against Atletico Madrid.

The Premier League leaders scraped a 1-0 win over Newcastle on Saturday after a run of three matches without victory. Arsenal have struggled to play with fluidity in attack and Arteta agreed his team could improve in that regard, but said reaching the final four was evidence enough of their quality.

"We have to do better... (and) we want to improve in every department," Arteta told reporters yesterday.

"But at the same time, to be where we are sitting here tonight, we have to be exceptional, one of the top four teams in Europe to be here. So imagine how difficult that is."

Arteta said his team's morale was boosted by beating Newcastle to provisionally move ahead of Manchester City in the English title race and backed them to dominate against Diego Simeone's side in the Spanish capital.

"After that win, a massive win for us against Newcastle, you could sense straight away the energy, the confidence coming into this game," continued Arteta.

"It's a massive privilege to be here again, two years in a row, in the semi-finals of the Champions League, representing our club and it's quite an opportunity.

"We're going to grab it with both hands. You're going to see a team that wants to be dominant, that wants to win it, that wants to start to decide the tie tomorrow."

Arsenal have never won the competition, finishing runners-up in 2006, and 20 years on are looking to return to the final.

"These are the stages we want to be in, and we have earned it through incredible work, passion and quality in the last nine

months," said Arteta. "Now is the moment to make a statement and show how good we are, how much we want it, and make it happen.

"It's clear, the opportunity is in front of us, and we have to attack it."

The coach confirmed Kai Havertz and Jurrien Timber will not be fit to play but said Eberechi Eze and Riccardo Calafiori were ready. Severe storms are forecast in Madrid today but Arteta brushed off their potential impact on the first leg.

"Imagine the amount of games that we have played in different scenarios, different contexts, against different opponents," he said. "We'll adapt to the conditions tomorrow in the best way possible to be ourselves and win the game."

Arsenal midfielder Martin Odegaard said matches like these were the kind he dreamt about playing as a child. "How can you not enjoy it? We're playing in the toughest and most competitive league in the world," said the Norwegian.

"We're at the top, fighting for the title, we're in the semi-final in the Champions League.

"It's hard to understand how you can not enjoy that. That's what we've been dreaming about our whole life, since I was a kid."

Odegaard admitted Arsenal would have to live with the near misses of seasons past, including last season's semi-final defeat by Paris Saint-Germain, until they are able to go one better.

The Gunners have finished as runners-up in the Premier League in each of the last three seasons.

"It's always going to be there until we win it and that's something you have to live with," admitted the playmaker. "We need to take all those experiences and the lessons and use it in a good way. I think that's a part of football.

"It's part of the journey and we have to live in the moment. At the moment we're doing really well, we're in an amazing position in the league, in the Champions League, and that's what we have to focus on."

Simeone shrugs off talk of Champions League burden ahead of Arsenal semi

Atletico Madrid coach Diego Simeone has dismissed talk of added pressure in trying to win their first Champions League crown, insisting it was a responsibility rather than a burden as they prepare to host Arsenal in today's semi-final first leg. Atletico have reached three European Cup finals in their history - two during Simeone's near 15-year tenure - but have never lifted the continent's top prize. They are the only team to lose three finals without having won the competition. This season has offered little domestic comfort, with the club fourth in La Liga, 25 points behind leaders Barcelona and effectively out of the title race since January. Defeat on penalties to Real Sociedad in the Copa del Rey final less than two weeks ago has left the Champions League as Atletico's sole remaining shot at silverware this season and they could be heading for five trophyless seasons in a row.

Yet Simeone was in no mood to look back at past failures after defeats by Bayern Munich (1974) and Real Madrid (2014, 2016) in the final of Europe's elite club competition. "There's no pressure, there's a sense of responsibility, and there's a special sense of anticipation," he told a press conference yesterday. "At the end of the day, it's a football match and the players are the ones who decide the outcome. We have to prepare well.

We want to play the game we've envisaged and take the match to a stage where we can cause Arsenal problems."

Asked whether the competition owed Atletico something after three final defeats, Simeone said: "We're all human. If you ask us, everyone has a different opinion. But a competition doesn't owe anyone anything.

"Things have to be earned and achieved. You have to work hard, go out and get them and hope Lady Luck is on your side."

The Argentine pointed to Atletico's approach in recent knockout ties as their greatest asset.

"What we've been doing in the knockout stages, whether in the (Spanish) Cup or the Champions League ... Playing with intensity, with our style of play, with our attacking initiative. That's how we'll go about it," he said.

For a club chasing a first Champions League crown, there is a temptation to dream but Simeone prefers deeds to daydreams.

"Dreaming is all well and good, but reality is what happens on the ground. Reality is what we do and what God wills. That's how we behave," he said.

"We're in another semi-final. It's extraordinary to reach it for the fourth time in 14 years. It's incredible.

"That faith, that excitement, that infectious spirit will do us a world of good. We're facing a tough match but we're going there full of hope."



Atletico Madrid's coach Diego Simeone controls the ball during a training session in Madrid yesterday. (AFP)

Carrick hails Casemiro, Fernandes after vital Man United win

Michael Carrick saluted Casemiro and Bruno Fernandes after Manchester United's midfield stars inspired the 2-1 win over Brentford that moved them closer to Champions League qualification. Casemiro headed United in front in the early stages at Old Trafford after Fernandes's corner was nodded on by Harry Maguire.

Fernandes helped United double their lead just before half-time with a surging run and pin-point pass to Benjamin Sesko, who fired home in clinical style. Carrick's side survived Mathias Jensen's late strike to secure a second successive victory, cementing their grip on third place in the Premier League. Brazilian veteran Casemiro, who is set to leave when his contract expires at the end of the season, now has four goals in his last six games, underlining his enduring value to United. Fernandes is even more important, the United captain making his 19th assist of the campaign to move within one of the single-season Premier League record currently held by Thierry Henry and Kevin De Bruyne. Carrick knows the value of his midfield pair and the United interim boss said: "Casemiro has scored some big goals for us. Bruno and Casemiro have a good relationship. "We have scored nearly every game and Bruno is a big part of that. He could have maybe had one more assist and scored himself."

When Carrick took over until the end of the season, United were languishing in sixth place, with a Champions League berth far from assured. But the former United midfielder has impressively steadied the ship following the turbulent reign of Ruben Amorim.

United now need just two points from their last four games to seal their place in Europe's elite club competition for the first time since 2023-24. "It wasn't a given, at certain stages we weren't favourites. Now we are in a good position and want to finish as high in the league as we want to keep pushing for that," Carrick said.

"I thought the spirit, effort and togetherness of the players was fantastic. It's the time of year when it's a result business and we needed to take points. It's a tough finish in a tough league. To get the amount of wins we have, we are delighted with

that. Today was all about the three points for us. We have an important game coming up against Liverpool and we can look forward to that."

Militao set to miss World Cup after surgery

Real Madrid's Brazilian defender Eder Militao is set to miss the World Cup after undergoing surgery on a hamstring injury yesterday.

"Our player Eder Militao underwent successful surgery today for a rupture of the proximal tendon of the biceps femoris in his left leg," Real Madrid said in a statement, without specifying how long the defender will be sidelined.

Operated on at a clinic in Finland under the supervision of the club's medical staff, the 28-year-old is expected to miss at least five months, according to the Spanish and Brazilian press. Militao is therefore expected to be unavailable to play for record five-time World Cup winners Brazil this summer in the United States, Canada and Mexico. The Real Madrid defender sustained the injury last week during a La Liga win over Alaves. Militao has had terrible luck with injuries over the past few years since joining Madrid from Porto in 2019, including two lengthy absences for cruciate ligament ruptures.

Algeria's goalkeeper Zidane doubt for World Cup after jaw fracture

Algeria goalkeeper Luca Zidane is a doubt for the World Cup after suffering a jaw and chin fracture while playing for his club Granada in Spain's second tier. The son of former France great Zinedine Zidane was taken off with a concussion after colliding with an opponent during his team's 4-2 home defeat by Almeria on Sunday. The 27-year-old is expected to miss the rest of the season and could be out for even longer if he needs surgery.

"The player, in consultation with the club's medical staff, will decide in the coming hours on the course of treatment to be followed," said the club in a statement late Monday.

Luca Zidane is Algeria's first-choice goalkeeper and their back-up options Anthony Mandrea and Melvin Mastil are also currently out injured. Algeria's World Cup campaign begins on June 16 against reigning champions Argentina.

SPOTLIGHT

Stones announces City exit

AFP
London

John Stones said he had lived "all my dreams out" as he announced yesterday he would be leaving Manchester City at the end of the season after 10 trophy-laden years at the Etihad.

The defender, 31, joined City from Everton in 2016, becoming manager Pep Guardiola's second signing, and has made 293 appearances to date, scoring 19 goals.

The England international has won six Premier League titles and the Champions League among multiple trophies and there may be more silverware to come this season, with City chasing a domestic treble.

Guardiola's men, who have already won the League Cup, are battling with Arsenal for the Premier League title and will face Chelsea in next month's FA Cup final. "It has been my home for the past 10 years and it will be my home for the rest of my life," Stones said in an emotional social media post.

"It's been a rollercoaster in many ways.



Manchester City's John Stones holds the Premier League trophy following their match against West Ham United in Manchester on May 19, 2024. (AFP)

"I came as a kid and I'm now leaving as a man - becoming a father, a husband and, on the pitch, a very fulfilled player I suppose in living all my dreams out and lifting all the things that I came here to achieve. At the start of my career here I never would have thought I would be in this position. Firstly, to achieve everything but to have the love, the bond with everyone. Every dream has been smashed out of the park."

The centre-back joined City for £47.5m (\$64mn), a fee that made him the world's second-most

expensive defender at the time. Stones, whose contract expires at the end of the season, hailed City boss Guardiola as the best manager in the world.

"I don't think it would have been anywhere near as successful... if it wasn't for him," he said.

"I'm so grateful that I've been able to spend so long with him, win everything with him and share and have so many incredible moments together," he added. "I feel lucky and grateful for what he's done."

Stones, expected to be in England's World Cup squad, is the second long-serving player at City to announce his impending departure after club captain Bernardo Silva. Injuries have restricted Stones to just 16 appearances in all competitions this season.

City paid tribute to the player on their website, saying: "The 31-year-old's huge contribution across the most sustained and successful era in the club's history stands without question.

"Now the club and all of our supporters will take the time to deliver a fitting tribute and farewell to a superb servant of Manchester City at the end of the season."

QSL 2026-2027 SEASON TO START ON AUGUST 20

The Qatar Stars League (QSL) yesterday announced that the 2026-2027 season of the top flight will kick off on August 20. The QSL will release the match schedule and venue details at a later date. Al Sadd defeated Al Shamal 3-2 in the final-day decider on Monday to claim their third consecutive title. Al Rayyan

and Al Gharafa finished third and fourth respectively. Lusail SC, winners of the Second Division League, will make their QSL debut, replacing relegated Umm Salal SC. Meanwhile, Al Shahania SC will face Al Kharaitiyat SC, the Second Division runners-up, in a playoff to retain their top-flight status.