

To subscribe  
**GULF TIMES**  
Newspaper  
Please call  
**444 666 35**



CRICKET | Page 2

Bowlers, Samson keep Chennai afloat in IPL playoff race



TENNIS | Page 3

Sabalenka ready to boycott French Open over prize money

To advertise here,  
PLEASE CALL  
**444 666 21**

Wednesday, May 6, 2026  
Dhul-Qi'dah 19, 1447 AH

**GULF TIMES**

**SPORT**



FOOTBALL

Saka ends Arsenal's 20-year wait to reach Champions League final

Page 4

## Sheikh Joaan attends final day of Schools Olympic Programme

**Doha:** HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), attended the final day of the boys' competitions at the 19th edition of the Schools Olympic Programme, held at Aspire Dome.

The final day was also attended by Sheikh Suhail bin Butti al-Maktoum, President of the UAE School and University Sports Federation; Sheikh Dr. Saqer bin Salman al-Khalifa, President of the Bahrain School and Collegiate Athletic Association; Hamad Abdullah al-Hamad, President of the Kuwait School Sports & Higher Education Federation; and Hasnae El Ayoubi, Executive Director of the International School Sport Federation.

From the Qatari side, the event was attended by Dr. Thani bin Abdulrahman al-Kuwari, Second Vice President of the QOC; Jassim bin Rashid Al Buenain, Secretary General of the QOC; Dr. Ahmad Abdulla al-Buenain, Chief Executive Officer of the Doha 2030 Asian Games Organising Committee and the Director General of the Organising Committee of the FIBA Basketball World Cup Qatar 2027; Abdulla al-Nuaimi, Acting Chief Executive Officer of Aspire Zone Foundation and Abdulrahman al-Muftah,



Executive Director of the School Olympic Program, along with a number of presidents of national sports federations.

This year's edition witnessed wide participation, with approximately 25,000 students from public and private schools competing across 21 sports, including football, basketball,

volleyball, gymnastics, swimming, padel, fencing, table tennis, athletics, wrestling, taekwondo, shooting, karate, judo, boccia, chess, cricket, weightlifting, esports, rowing and the Mini Basketball World Cup.

The Schools Olympic Programme was established in response to an initiative



by His Highness Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani, with the Qatar Olympic Committee organising the programme in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, the Qatar School Sport Federation, and the Qatar Paralympic Committee.

The Schools Olympic Programme was

first launched in the 2007-2008 season as a national initiative under the slogan "Sport and Health," forming part of the legacy of the Doha 2006 Asian Games. The program aims to promote sports culture in schools, identify and develop young talent, and encourage healthy lifestyles among students.

### AMIR CUP

# Sadd cruise past Duhail to set up final against Gharafa

Sadd reach 30th Amir Cup final, eye record-extending 19th title in the final against holders Gharafa



Al Sadd captain Hassan al-Haydos (left) celebrates with star striker Akram Afif after scoring against Al Duhail during the Amir Cup semi-final at the Ahmed Bin Ali Stadium. **PICTURES:** Noushad Thekkayil

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

**A**l Sadd stormed into the Amir Cup final with an emphatic 4-1 victory over Al Duhail in a high-intensity semi-final clash at Ahmed Bin Ali Stadium last night.

Goals from Akram Afif and Rafa Mujica handed Al Sadd a comfortable two-goal lead at the break, putting the Qatar Stars League champions firmly in control of proceedings. Al Duhail responded early in the second half through Boubakary Soumare to cut the deficit, briefly raising hopes of a comeback. However, Al Sadd quickly reasserted their dominance. Captain Hassan al-Haydos, introduced from the bench, delivered a decisive blow with the third goal to kill off the contest, before Afif added his second and Al Sadd's fourth deep into stoppage time.

Al Sadd produced a commanding attacking display throughout, controlling

the tempo in what was the seventh Amir Cup semi-final meeting between the two fierce rivals.

The victory sends Al Sadd into their 30th Amir Cup final, and will look to extend their record as the competition's most successful club with 19 titles. They will now face Al Gharafa in the final of the 54th edition after the latter advanced past Al Wakrah.

For Al Duhail, the defeat capped a disappointing campaign, as they ended the season without silverware despite their late push to salvage it.

Al Sadd captain al-Haydos expressed his delight after the win, describing the performance as fully deserved. "I am happy with the victory and to reach the final of this prestigious tournament," he said. "It was not an easy match, but we delivered a strong performance and achieved what was required."

He added: "The Amir Cup is the most valuable competition for us, and we always aim to reach the final and compete for the

title. I am pleased to have scored, and we hope to continue with the same spirit in the final against Al Gharafa."

Defender Boualem Khoukhi echoed those sentiments, praising the team's preparation and focus. "It was a difficult match against a strong side like Al Duhail," Khoukhi said. "Our preparation made the difference. The final will be a different challenge, and I see it as evenly balanced, especially against a team of Al Gharafa's quality."

Earlier, holders Al Gharafa booked their place in the final after edging Al Wakrah 3-2 on penalties following a goalless draw at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium.

Both sides created chances in a tightly contested first half but failed to break the deadlock. Al Wakrah thought they had taken the lead in the second half through Amin Zahzouh, only for the goal to be ruled out after a foul by Issa al-Aidouni on Ferjani Sassi in the build-up.

With neither side able to find a winner in regulation or extra time, the tie was de-



Al Gharafa's goalkeeper Khalifa Abubakar (centre), who was named man of the match, celebrates with his team-mates after the penalty shootout win over Al Wakrah at Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium yesterday.



Al Sadd and Al Duhail players battle for the ball.

ecided from the spot, where Al Gharafa held their nerve to prevail with goalkeeper Khalifa Abubakar emerging as the hero.

Defender Ayoub al-Alawi admitted the victory had been hard-earned against a resilient opponent. "It was a difficult match against a stubborn Al Wakrah side that pushed us all the way," he said.

"We are happy to reach the final and thankful to the technical and administrative staff for their support."

Al-Alawi added that Al Gharafa, known as Cheethas, are determined to retain the title. "After reaching the final of this prestigious competition, our goal is to win the trophy again," he said.

SNOOKER

# Wu second-youngest Crucible champion



China's Wu Yize celebrates with the trophy and fans after winning his final match against England's Shaun Murphy at the World Snooker Championship in The Crucible Theatre, Sheffield, Britain, on Monday. (Reuters)

Reuters  
Sheffield

**W**u Yize became the second-youngest winner of the Snooker World Championship when the 22-year-old beat Briton Shaun Murphy 18-17 in a deciding frame thriller on Monday.

The Chinese player edged a tight battle against former champion Murphy, who recovered from going behind overnight to keep the battle going long into Monday evening.

Wu is the second youngest to claim the title after Stephen Hendry, who won his first world title aged 21 in 1990.

He also became China's second world champion after compatriot Zhao Xintong triumphed at the Crucible last year.

Zhao was beaten in the quarter-finals by the "Magician" Murphy, who won his first world championship in 2005, when Wu was not even two years old.

However, Wu, who was constantly serenaded with chants of "Wuuuu" from the Crucible crowd, showed remarkable composure in a final packed with momentum

swings, with the players level at 14-14, 15-15 and 16-16 during a tense evening session, to win in the city he moved to when he was 16 to enhance his snooker career.

The match went all the way to a deciding frame, where Wu seized control after a cagey start and produced a decisive break of 85 to seal victory.

"Very proud. It's been an excellent couple of weeks for me and my team. I have had a wonderful time in Sheffield, an amazing time. We have had some laughs, and gee, did we come close. We were very, very close," Murphy told *BBC Two*.

"I'd like to be the first to congratulate Wu Yize and his family, and everyone around him for being a wonderful world champion. I hate being right, I said sometime earlier in the season... that he would be world champion one day. It's just a real shame that it was today," he added.

In addition to hoisting the trophy, which dates back to 1926, Wu will also collect £500,000 (\$676,400) in prize money and will rise up into the top 10 in the world rankings.

"You hear the stories about Wu Yize coming over here with his family, living in a room without any windows, and I think some

British players could take a leaf out of their book and thinking, that if they think they're working hard, they're probably not," said Murphy.

"But talent does nothing without hard work and you must give all the players from China absolute credit for the amount of graft and hard work they put in."

Chinese players won seven of this year's 18 ranking tournaments and February's World Grand Prix in Hong Kong was the first time where all four semi-finalists at such a high-level event were from China.

Wu has now moved up to fourth in the end-of-season rankings - one place behind Zhao - and they are also two out of 23 Chinese players who finished the campaign in the world's top 100.

"You can see with the investment that the Chinese government have made into snooker in the last 10, 15 years the fruits of it now - Xintong last year, Wu this year - it's great for snooker out in China and it would be great to see that kind of investment here," said Murphy.

"It's about your time and Wu Yize's time was this week. I have nothing but admiration for him and his style of play and the way he goes about it."

CRICKET

# Bowlers, Samson keep CSK afloat in playoff race

INDIA'S WORLD CUP HERO SANJU SAMSON HITS UNBEATEN 87

AFP  
New Delhi

**D**isciplined bowling and an unbeaten 87 by opener Sanju Samson helped Chennai Super Kings stay in the hunt for the IPL playoffs with an eight-wicket win over Delhi Capitals yesterday.

Batting first on a tough pitch backfired for hosts Delhi, who slipped to 69-5 before posting 155-7 at the Arun Jaitley Stadium.

Five-time champions Chennai lost two early wickets in the chase, but Samson paced his 52-ball knock to perfection as his team chased down the target with 15 balls to spare.

Samson, a wicketkeeper-batter, put on an unbeaten 114-run stand with Kartik Sharma, who made 41, as the two ensured a fifth win for Chennai in 10 matches to be sixth in the 10-team table.

Delhi's chances of making the playoffs took a hit as they went down to their sixth defeat.

The top four teams at the end of the league stage will qualify for the playoffs.

In-form Samson, who has hit two centuries in the season, reached his fifty in 32 balls and finished with seven fours and six sixes. He has scored 402 runs in 10 matches this edition and is fifth in the batting chart led by Delhi's KL Rahul (445).

Samson came into this edition of the IPL on the back of three half-centuries in the last three



Chennai Super Kings' Sanju Samson in action against Delhi Capitals in New Delhi. (Reuters)

matches of India's T20 World Cup triumph on home soil in March.

Delhi's South Africa pace bowler Lungi Ngidi returned after missing the previous two matches with concussion. Ngidi claimed 1-30, dismissing skipper Ruturaj Gaikwad, for six, with a pacy delivery. But it was the Chennai bowlers who exploited the surface. Afghanistan's Noor Ahmad stood out with figures of 2-22 and was ably supported by fellow spinner Akeal Hosein (1-19).

Fast bowlers Mukesh Choudhary, Gurjapneet Singh and England's Jamie Overton claimed one wicket each as they bowled good lengths to restrict the opposition.

South Africa's Tristan Stubbs made 38 and impact substitute Sameer Rizvi struck an unbeaten 40 off 24 balls to hit back after Delhi lost half their side in the 11th over. Stubbs and Rizvi, who struck four sixes, put on 65 runs for the sixth wicket but the effort was not enough to test Chennai's

batting. One of the most successful franchises in the T20 tournament, Chennai are still waiting for the return of veteran MS Dhoni, who is recovering from an injury and is yet to play a game in this edition.

**BRIEF SCORES**  
**Chennai Super Kings 159 for 2** (Samson 87\*, Kartik 41\*) **beat Delhi Capitals 155 for 7** (Rizvi 40, Noor 2-33, Hosein 1-19) **by eight wickets**

SPOTLIGHT

# World body in dark over allegations against China badminton chief

AFP  
Hong Kong

**B**adminton's world governing body said yesterday it has not heard from the head of the sport in China and is monitoring his situation after the country's anti-corruption body said he was under investigation.

Two-time Olympic gold medalist Zhang Jun, president of the Chinese Badminton Association (CBA), was last week accused of suspected "serious violations of discipline and law".

The phrase is commonly used in China when referring to corruption. There are no details of the allegations against the 48-year-old, but state media said part of the probe "concerns Zhang's work at the CBA".

China is the preeminent force in world badminton and Zhang, who won Olympic gold in mixed doubles at the Sydney 2000 and Athens 2004 Games, is a well-known figure.

He is on the Badminton World Federation's council which over-

sees the sport and is on several of the governing body's committees and commissions.

"We're aware of that (allegations of wrongdoing) but we're not aware about practically anything else," BWF secretary general Thomas Lund told AFP.

"We've tried obviously to get more information but there's no real deep information available, at least from a validated source."

Lund said that Zhang remains a council member but his other roles, such as chair of the events committee, have been "temporarily reassigned".

He added: "We're just monitoring until we get more information on what will happen."

There has been no "direct contact" with Zhang, he said.

Zhang joined the national team's coaching staff after he retired in 2007, before becoming the CBA's head in 2019.

Rumours had swirled when Zhang was not seen recently, with the hashtag "Badminton Association Chairman Zhang Jun Missing" garnering more than 55 million views on the Twitter-like Weibo.

FOCUS

# London Marathon draws record 1.33mn entries for 2027

Reuters  
London

**A** record 1.33 million people have entered the public ballot for the 2027 London Marathon taking place on April 25, surpassing the previous record set in this year's race, event organisers said on Tuesday.

A total of 1,338,544 people from around the world have applied compared to 1,133,813 last year, an 18% increase.

"This astonishing total of applicants firmly establishes London as the world's most sought-after marathon," said Hugh Brasher, chief executive of London Marathon Events, in a statement.

"Nothing else comes close. Our mission is to inspire people of every age and ability to get active, and these extraordinary numbers show the massive draw and power of the London Marathon."

Ballot results will be announced in July, with places in the race on April 25 decided by a random draw. Organisers are still looking at the possibility of holding the race over two days, Saturday and Sunday.

The 2026 London Marathon broke the record for the largest number of finishers after 59,830 runners crossed the line. Kenya's Sabastian Sawe shattered the world record in under two hours and Ethiopia's Tigst Assefa defended her title by breaking her own women-only world record.

## PANT NOT FEELING THE PRICE TAG PRESSURE IN IPL, SAYS LUCKNOW COACH LANGER

**LUCKNOW:** Lucknow Super Giants captain Rishabh Pant's uneven form mirrors his team's broader struggles in the Indian Premier League (IPL), but head coach Justin Langer says the player is not weighed down by his hefty price tag.

Lucknow secured the stumper-batsman for an eye-watering \$3.21mn in 2024 and retained him for the current season, which has unfolded poorly.

Monday's six-wicket defeat to Mumbai Indians marked Lucknow's sixth consecutive loss, leaving them anchored to the bottom of the 10-team league and with playoff hopes in disarray.

"I don't think money has to do anything with it," Langer, an Australian, told reporters.

"Leadership is a tough position ... he's carrying a lot of pressure for the team, and he does it, like all of us, with a smile on our face, 98% of the time.

"It's the 2% that's hard, to be honest. But he's chipping away, he's working hard, and he's had a match-winning game earlier in the season. I love it when we see him smiling and playing that swashbuckling style of play."

Pant's 204 runs from nine innings with a strike rate of 128.30 is underwhelming for a batter of his stature.

Langer said Pant, who moved down to number four to accommodate Nicholas Pooran at number three against Mumbai, was not far from regaining his touch.

"He selflessly moved down the order...to let Nicky P back. Rishy's not far off (from a big score)," Langer said.

"He's great. As a captain in the IPL, as a coach, you keep fronting up, don't you?"



Lucknow Super Giants' Rishabh Pant in action against Mumbai Indians at Wankhede Stadium in Mumbai. (Reuters)

"That's all you can do. And you'll keep fronting up, and hopefully, he'll help us get some wins over the next few games." Against Mumbai, Lucknow racked up 228-5 but still could not defend the total.

"The way we started, we should have definitely got more runs," Pant said after the match, adding they were "short by 10-15 runs".

"The way we started we had an edge over them."

## Pakistan prep up for BD Tests



Pakistan batsman Saud Shakeel during a team training session in Dhaka yesterday. Pakistan, captained by Shan Masood, will play two Tests against hosts Bangladesh in the coming days.

TENNIS

# Sabalenka ready to boycott Grand Slams over prize money

'I feel like definitely we deserve to be paid more percentage'

Reuters  
Rome

**W**orld number one Aryna Sabalenka said yesterday she was ready to boycott the Grand Slam tournaments in order to have a greater share of the prize money.

"I feel like the show is on us. Without us there wouldn't be a tournament and there wouldn't be that entertainment," the four-time Grand Slam winner told a press conference at the Italian Open.

"I feel like definitely we deserve to be paid more percentage. I think at some point we will boycott. I feel like that's going to be the only way to fight for our rights.

"We girls can easily get together and go for this because some of the things I feel like it's really unfair to the players. I think at some point it's going to get to this."

Last year almost all the leading players signed two letters to the four Grand Slam bosses demanding an increase in prize money, payments into a player welfare fund to improve retirement and maternity benefits, as well as involvement in decisions that affected them.

The letters set a target of a 22-percent share in tournament revenue, which would bring the majors in line with the nine combined 1000-level events run by the ATP men's tour and the women's WTA tour.

However Poland's Iga Swiatek, a four-time French Open singles champion, believes boycotting tournaments "is a bit extreme".

"I think the most important thing honestly is to have proper communication and discussions with the governing bodies so we



have some space to talk and maybe negotiate," said Swiatek, who has also won Wimbledon and the US Open.

"Hopefully before Roland Garros there's going to be an opportunity to have these type of meetings and we'll see how they go."

On Monday, players said in a statement that an announcement by the French Open last month of a 9.5-percent prize money rise was not good enough.

It said that last year Roland Garros generated 395mn euros (\$463 mn), a 14-percent increase.

However the total purse went up by just 5.4 percent, reducing player share of revenue to 14.3 percent.

It estimated that this year's revenues would pass 400mn euros, leaving the player cut still below 15 percent.

## GAUFF SAYS PLAYERS MUST FORM UNION

World number four Gauff said she could "100% see" players boycotting a Grand Slam if they took the decision together as one.

"It's not about me. It's about the future of our sport and also the current players who aren't getting as much benefits, maybe, as even some of the top players are getting when it comes to sponsorship and things like that," Gauff said.

"We're making money off court. When you look at the (players ranked) 50 to 100, 50 to 200, how much money each Slam makes, it's kind of unfortunate where the 200 best tennis players are living paycheck to paycheck."

Gauff also suggested the players must form a union, highlighting how the WNBA basketball players'

union reached a tentative agreement on a collective bargaining deal earlier this year after nearly 17 months of negotiations. "Just taking what the WNBA accomplished. They also have a union, so I think that helps," she added.

"From the things I've seen with other sports, usually to make massive progress and things like this, it takes a union."

Sabalenka said the players deserved more prize money.

"When you see the number and you see the amount the players are receiving... I feel like the show is on us. I feel like without us there wouldn't be a tournament and there wouldn't be that entertainment," Sabalenka added.

"I feel like definitely we deserve to be paid more percentage. What can I say?"

FOCUS

## USGA CEO would be 'surprised' if Woods plays US Open

Reuters  
Los Angeles

**T**iger Woods is not expected to compete at next month's US Open or the US Senior Open in July, USGA CEO Mike Whan told *Sports Illustrated* in a report released.

"I'd be super surprised," Whan said in response to whether he thought Woods would play at the US Open this year. "It would be wonderful for the event, and if he was ready, it would be wonderful for him."

The 50-year-old Woods entered rehab - reportedly a 90-day inpatient residential treatment program in Switzerland - following a car crash on March 27 near his home at Jupiter Island, Florida. He was arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence and refusing to take a urine test near his home in Florida after his Land Rover clipped the back of a truck and rolled over onto its side. He was not injured and pleaded not guilty to the charges.

Authorities alleged that Woods was impaired by medication and not alcohol. At the time of his arrest, he had two hydrocone pills in his pocket, according to law enforcement authorities.

"Obviously what he's going through is much bigger than golf," Whan told *SI*. "He's proven before that when he puts his mind to something, he's going to be great at it. I'm sure he has a lot of years to play USGA championships. I don't think he's going to play in any 2026 USGA championship. If he ends up playing in USGA championships, great. But when I think of Tiger, my friend, that's not

really what's important to me right now."

Woods hasn't played on the PGA Tour since The Open Championship in 2024, where he missed the cut, because of injury. He ruptured his left Achilles tendon in the spring of 2025 and underwent lumbar disk replacement surgery in October. A single-car rollover crash in February of 2021 in the Los Angeles area caused significant leg injuries.

Just hours before the March crash, USGA confirmed that Woods had registered for this year's US Senior Open, scheduled from July 2-5 at the Scioto Country Club in Columbus, Ohio. It served as an indication he was close to returning from his recent setbacks.

However, in a statement issued March 31, Woods said he was prioritizing his health over golf.

"I know and understand the seriousness of the situation I find myself in today," Woods' statement read. "I am stepping away for a period of time to seek treatment and focus on my health. This is necessary in order for me to prioritize my well-being and work toward lasting recovery."

"I'm committed to taking the time needed to return in a healthier, stronger and more focused place, both personally and professionally. I appreciate your understanding and support, and ask for privacy for my family, loved ones and myself at this time."

Woods is not currently eligible for the 2026 US Open and would need an exemption to play in the major tournament, which starts June 18 at Shinnecock Hills Golf Club in Southampton, New York.



## DJOKOVIC DELIGHTS FANS IN ROME



Serbia's Novak Djokovic meets fans during an exhibition match on a temporary clay tennis court at Piazza del Popolo in Rome, on the sidelines of the Italian Open yesterday. (AFP)

GOLF

## Rahm eligible for Ryder Cup after agreeing deal with DP World Tour



Golfer Jon Rahm poses with Williams driver Carlos Sainz and tennis legend Rafael Nadal on Sunday at the Williams garage prior to the F1 Grand Prix of Miami at Miami International Autodrome in Miami on Sunday. (AFP)

Reuters  
London

**S**pain's Jon Rahm will be eligible for Europe in next year's Ryder Cup after reaching an agreement to pay fines and play events on the DP World Tour this season.

The twice major champion's participation in Ireland was in jeopardy after he was not included in a group of eight LIV Golf players given conditional release by the DP World Tour in February.

"The DP World Tour and Jon Rahm have come to an agreement on conditional releases to play in conflicting tournaments on LIV Golf during the remainder of its 2026 season," a DP World Tour spokesperson said.

"This involves payment of all outstanding fines accrued from 2024 to date, along with participation in agreed DP World Tour

tournaments (outside the Majors) in the remainder of the 2026 season."

Rahm had accused the DP World Tour in March of "extorting players" after refusing to agree a deal allowing LIV Golf players to compete in tournaments on both Tours. The settlement required Rahm to pay outstanding fines of reportedly around 2.5mn pounds (\$3.33mn) for playing LIV events without permission, withdraw all pending appeals and commit to playing stipulated DP World Tour tournaments.

Yesterday the former world number one said there was no longer a stand-off between himself and the DP World Tour.

"We were able to reach an agreement. There was some concessions on both sides. I offered some; they extended an olive branch. Obviously we've reached an agreement. That will not be a stress anymore," he told report-

ers ahead of the LIV Golf event in Washington D.C., this week.

"The Ryder Cup is still really, really far away, but I'm happy that hopefully I won't have to think about any worries or any predicaments come to Adare Manor then or hopefully ever. I want to support the DP World Tour. There's a lot of events I want to play."

Tyrrell Hatton, Laurie Canter, Thomas Detry, Tom McKibbin, Adrian Meronk, Victor Perez, David Puig and Elvis Smylie were all previously given dispensation to play on both Tours after reaching individual agreements with the DP World Tour.

Rahm will now be eligible to earn Race to Dubai ranking points at next week's PGA Championship and at subsequent Race to Dubai counting events he participates in during the 2026 season.

The 2027 Ryder Cup will be held at Adare Manor from September 17-19.

FOCUS

## Mickelson out of LIV Virginia, listed in PGA Championship field

Reuters  
Newtown Square, United States.

**A**lthough Phil Mickelson will miss this week's LIV Golf Virginia tournament, the six-time major winner is listed in the field for next week's PGA Championship.

The PGA of America released its 154-golfer field for the May 14-17 PGA Championship on Tuesday, and Mickelson is expected to tee it up at Aronimink Golf Club in Newtown Square, Pa. As a two-time tournament winner, he has a lifetime exemption into the PGA Championship.

Mickelson, 55, has only participated in one event on the 2026 LIV Golf schedule due to a family health matter.

He finished T48 at LIV Golf South Africa in March before

missing last month's Masters, where he is a three-time champion. Scott Vincent will replace the HyFlyers GC captain for this week's LIV Golf tournament at Trump National Golf Club in Washington, D.C.

### Lee among 6 LPGA players added to WTGL roster

Six more LPGA Tour players committed to participating in the inaugural WTGL season yesterday, including three-time major winner Minjee Lee.

In addition to Lee, an 11-time winner on the LPGA Tour from Australia, the newly announced participants in the tech-infused indoor golf league are Danielle Kang, Megan Khang, Andrea Lee, Celine Boutier of France and Albane Valenzuela of Switzerland. Play is expected to begin later this year at SoFi Center in Palm Beach Gardens, Fla.

WTGL has received 14 commitments from players, including five currently in the top 10 of the Rolex Women's World Golf Rankings: No. 2 Jeeno Thitikul, No. 4 Charley Hull, No. 7 Lee, No. 9 Lydia Ko and No. 10 Lottie Woad.

"WTGL continues to build momentum as a global platform for LPGA stars and women's team golf," said Pete Jung, chief marketing officer of TMRW Sports. "With today's brand reveal and 14 LPGA Tour players now committed - including major champions, Olympians and Solheim Cup players from around the world - this milestone underscores the excitement we're seeing from players, team ownership groups and potential partners as we prepare for WTGL's inaugural season."

World No. 1 Nelly Korda has not committed to the league.

## CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

## PSG 'not here to defend' against Bayern, says Enrique

AFP  
Munich

Paris Saint-Germain coach Luis Enrique said his side's one-goal first leg lead meant "nothing" ahead of Wednesday's second Champions League semi-final at Bayern Munich.

Defending champions PSG won 5-4 in an astonishing opening leg, having conceded first and at one point held a 5-2 advantage.

The match was the highest scoring Champions League semi-final in history and Luis Enrique expected more of the same today.

"It's nothing," the Spaniard said of PSG's narrow lead. "It's just one goal. We are ready. We know Bayern Munich can get back into the match and we can also score goals.

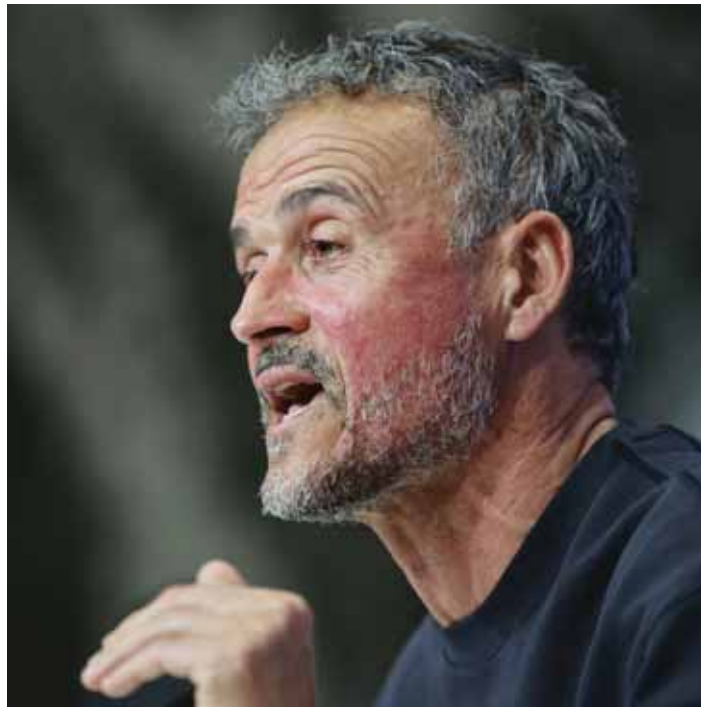
"And we are certainly not here to defend. We're trying to win the game."

PSG are competing in their fifth semi-final in the past seven seasons - and the third straight under Luis Enrique. The coach said Bayern were the "strongest team we have faced" this season, but promised the French giants would be "loyal to who we are".

"I can't say Wednesday will be different based on what we saw in the first leg. I don't think either team will just accept that the other is better," said the Spaniard.

"Our mentality is to win every game. We don't need to play for a particular result because we have to win."

Luis Enrique called the opening match the best he had been involved in as a coach, but admitted he had little fun on the sidelines.



PSG head coach Luis Enrique addresses a press conference in Munich yesterday, on the eve of the Champions League second-leg semi-final match against Bayern Munich. (AFP)

"As a top-level coach, it was very difficult to enjoy," he added.

PSG midfielder Warren Zaire-Emery said the players had as much fun as the supporters in the opening leg in Paris and expected "the same thing" in Munich.

"It was a crazy game for us. We play football to be involved in these sorts of games. It was one of the best matches the Champions League has seen," the French player said.

"The intensity, the commitment, the goals, it was simply exceptional. And we're expecting

the same thing on Wednesday."

PSG return to Munich's Allianz Arena, where they won last year's final, for the first time.

Luis Enrique, who has fond memories of the stadium after eliminating Bayern on the way to winning the 2015 Champions League title with Barcelona, said returning to Munich reminded him of what PSG had achieved.

"Coming back here will always be a real pleasure because we remember what we achieved last year."

## Kompany channels 'inner tranquility' before Paris Saint-Germain showdown

Bayern Munich coach Vincent Kompany said he was in a state of "total calm" before today's Champions League semi-final second leg against holders Paris Saint-Germain.

Bayern lost 5-4 in last week's wild first leg in Paris in one of the greatest games in recent memory. A day ahead of the biggest match of his managerial career, Kompany told reporters yesterday he was not overawed.

"It's actually a state of total calm -- an inner tranquility," Kompany said in Munich. "I try not to let the emotions and atmosphere of the game come into play too early," he added.

The 40-year-old said he was fully focused on preparation for the match and deciding what to tell his players before the encounter.

"The time leading up to it is largely about preparation and routine - perhaps quietly searching for just the right words or phrases to use tomorrow," he said.

"I am still searching, even now; I have a rough idea of what that 'right phrase' might be for the team - the one that can influence that crucial one percent, helping us find that little extra edge," he added.

Despite a spectacular game in the French capital, the former Belgium and Manchester City central defender faced criticism because his team let in five goals.

Kompany was asked whether he would emulate his former City manager Pep Guardiola who with Bayern was accused by German media of tinkering with his defence before a big European loss in 2014.

"The players need to be reinforced in what they've already been doing well all season long. And that, in terms of the details, they perhaps need to be given something that could prove decisive in these kinds of matches," he said.

"I also played under Pep. It's simply not true that he changes everything in big games. "That's just media nonsense. When you lose, you always have something to explain.

"When you win, you're always right," he added.

Kompany said he felt a different kind of atmosphere in Munich in the lead-up to the match after his side were crowned Bundesliga champions last month.

"Here we stand, having already experienced so many incredible moments and I believe that is precisely why the fans, too, believe that this team can pull it off," he said.

"Together, we simply want to make this moment truly unforgettable."

Bayern defender Jonathan Tah said the first leg may not have seemed like a defensive masterclass, but he enjoyed it as much as the fans.

"It was definitely a bit of a weird feeling," Tah said. "You obviously have that feeling: 'crap, we conceded five goals'."

"I think the most important thing for me in moments like this is never to forget why I started playing football in the first place. And that was for the fun of it, and out of passion.

"That's why I'm looking forward to this game."



Bayern Munich's coach Vincent Kompany addresses a press conference in Munich yesterday. (AFP)

## FOCUS

## Arsenal beat Atletico to end Champions League final drought

Arteta's side settled the semi-final second leg with Saka's strike in first half



Arsenal's Bukayo Saka scores the goal during the Champions League second-leg semi-final match against Atletico Madrid in London yesterday. (AFP)

AFP  
London

Arsenal reached the Champions League final for the first time in 20 years as Bukayo Saka sealed a 1-0 win against Atletico Madrid yesterday.

Mikel Arteta's side settled the semi-final second leg with Saka's strike late in the first half at an ecstatic Emirates Stadium.

The Gunners, who drew 1-1 in the first leg in Madrid last week, held firm after Saka's goal to go through 2-1 on aggregate.

Arsenal will face Paris Saint-Germain or Bayern Munich in the final in Budapest on May 30.

Holders PSG, who beat Arsenal in the semi-finals last year, have a 5-4 lead ahead of the second leg in Munich today.

It was a cathartic night for Arsenal, who are back in the Champions League final for the first time since losing 2-1 to Barcelona in their only previous appearance in the showpiece in 2006.

Arsenal have never won the Champions League, with their two

major European trophies coming in the 1994 Cup Winners' Cup and the 1970 Inter-Cities Fairs Cup.

Their last continental final ended in a 4-1 defeat against Chelsea in the 2019 Europa League. It is shaping up to be Arsenal's greatest ever season as they chase a Premier League and Champions League double.

Even Arsene Wenger's 'Invincibles' - who won the club's last English title in an unbeaten top-flight campaign in 2004 - might have to bow to the current generation if they finish the job.

Fittingly, it was Saka - the homegrown symbol of the Arteta era - who proved Arsenal's match-winner. Now just four games from immortality, Premier League leaders Arsenal were given a huge boost in the title race when second-placed Manchester City drew at Everton on Monday.

The Gunners will be crowned champions if they win their last three games against West Ham, Burnley and Crystal Palace.

Once the title is decided, Arsenal will head to Hungary with a maiden Champions League crown in their sights. Arsenal endured

jibes about their perceived lack of mental strength after a run of four defeats in six games in all competitions sparked painful memories of previous failures to end their six-year wait for silverware.

But the 'nearly-men' and 'serial choker' labels applied only weeks ago are on the verge of being banished forever. Thousands of Arsenal supporters massed outside the stadium before kick-off to greet their team with flares and flags, a vociferous display of affection underlining Arsenal's desperation to make history.

It was the kind of evening in north London, when nothing was beyond the realm of possibility as Arsenal moved closer to casting off the shackles of two decades of underachievement.

After some tense performances during the Premier League run-in, Saturday's 3-0 rout of Fulham had showed Arsenal at their flowing best in a riposte to the critics who claim they only win ugly. This was a more prosaic display but no one with an affinity to Arsenal was bothered in the slightest.

Arsenal were nearly caught on the counter in a frenetic start

when Julian Alvarez shot just wide before Giuliano Simeone's close-range effort deflected past the post. But Arsenal recovered from those anxious moments to deliver a dominant spell that brought their 44th minute goal.

Viktor Gyokeres' clever run unhinging the Atletico defence and his cross reached Leandro Trossard inside the area. Trossard wriggled into just enough space for a low drive that Jan Oblak weakly pushed out to Saka, who reacted quicker than his flat-footed markers to slot home from four yards.

Arteta jubilantly punched the air as all around him the Emirates erupted into a rolling red sea of celebration.

Atletico tried to ruin the party in the second half, but Gabriel Magalhaes made a last-ditch tackle on Simeone to avert a certain goal before David Raya repelled Antoine Griezmann's blast.

Arteta recently revealed he visualised Arsenal conquering the Champions League even in the difficult early days of his reign.

The Spaniard now is just one win away from seeing that day-dream become a glorious reality.

## QFA scrapes Second Division League and Olympic League

The Qatar Football Association (QFA) yesterday approved a major revamp of the domestic football structure, scrapping the Second Division League and Olympic League and introducing a new competition - Qatar Stars League 2 (QSL 2) - from the 2026-2027 season.

In a statement, the QFA Executive Committee confirmed the "cancellation of the Olympic League competition and the Second Division League competition for the upcoming 2026-2027 sports season."

The newly-formed QSL 2 will feature Second Division clubs, the Qatar U-23 national team and selected 'B' teams from top-flight sides, subject to meeting participation criteria.

The federation said the league "includes the teams of the second division clubs, the under-23 national team, and the (B) team of some first division clubs that meet the conditions and criteria for participation... based on coordination meetings with the clubs."

The move is aimed at strengthening the player development pathway and increasing competitiveness.

Separately, the QFA outlined revised foreign player regulations for the top tier, the Qatar Stars League. Each First Division club will be allowed "a maximum of five foreign professional players + at least two talented players within the list of 11 players on the field at any time during the match."

For the second tier under the new structure, clubs can field up to eight foreign professionals in a matchday XI.

## SPOTLIGHT

## Mbappe faces backlash over Sardinia trip

AFP  
Madrid

Sidelined with a hamstring injury, Real Madrid striker Kylian Mbappe has sparked anger among a section of the club's supporters after a holiday in Sardinia, triggering a fresh media storm ahead of Sunday's Clasico against Barcelona.

For many Madrid fans, the striker's Italian getaway - during rest days granted by Real Madrid to injured players, including Mbappe, Thibaut Courtois and Arda Guler - was the final straw.

United behind a shared image showing Mbappe with a "Fuera (out)" stamp over his face - originally posted by a satirical account and reposted in the comments section of Real Madrid's official posts - some fans are openly calling for the French superstar to leave.

An online petition has also been circulating on social networks, urging Madrid fans to "make their voices heard": "If you believe change is necessary, do not remain silent: sign this petition and defend what you believe is best for the future of the club," it reads.

Fuel was added to the fire by widely shared photos of Mbappe alongside actress Ester Exposito, posted on social media as Real Madrid were preparing for a crucial La Liga match against Espanyol last weekend in an effort to delay Barcelona's title celebrations. Real Madrid won that match 2-0, and coach Alvaro Arbeloa later insisted that

"each player does what they consider appropriate in their free time" and that it was "none of my business". However, several of his comments were perceived as indirect criticism of his leading scorer.

"We didn't build Real Madrid with players who play in tuxedos, but with players who finish matches with shirts full of sweat and mud, through effort and sacrifice," he said. Madrid is "a club where, fortunately, no player has ever been, is, or ever will be bigger than Real Madrid," added Arbeloa.

Contacted by AFP, Mbappe's entourage said "part of the criticism is based on an over-interpretation of elements linked to a recovery period that is strictly supervised by the club," and bears no relation to "the reality of the commitment and daily work Kylian puts in for the team".

The France captain, accustomed to sometimes excessive scrutiny, addressed his mindset earlier this season on The Bridge, a podcast hosted by his Real Madrid and France teammate Aurelien Tchouameni.

"I've reached a point where you're going to get criticised whatever you do, so you might as well do what you want - at least then you stay true to yourself," Mbappe said. With 41 goals in 41 matches in all competitions this season, Mbappe remains by far Real Madrid's leading scorer.

He has nonetheless come under heavy criticism since returning from injury in mid-March, with some observers accusing him of an overly individualistic approach.