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Litton Das' ton propels Bangladesh to 278 on day 1



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TRIVIA

What is the lowest attendance record for a FIFA World Cup match?

Only 300 people watched the match between Peru and Romania in 1930.

TEAM QATAR DEFEAT SAUDI ARABIA IN GCC GAMES PADEL

Team Qatar men's padel team defeated Saudi Arabia 3-0 in its opening match at the 4th GCC Games Doha 2026.

The Qatari team delivered an impressive performance under the Aspire Dome, securing three consecutive victories against Saudi Arabia.

Rashed Nawaf and Mishari Nawaf won the opening match 6-0, 6-1, while Khalid Saadoun and Issa Shanan won the doubles match 7-6, 6-4. Mohammed Saadoun and Hassan Wali completed the sweep with a 6-0, 6-0 victory in the third match.

Team Qatar aims to continue its winning streak and retain the gold medal won in the previous edition in Kuwait. Qatar is scheduled to face Kuwait tomorrow in its second match as it continues its pursuit of another gold medal and a new achievement for Qatari padel.

The padel competition is being held in a single round-robin format, with medals awarded to the top three teams at the conclusion of the tournament.



HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Olympic Council of Asia, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee, President of the Organizing Committee for the 4th Gulf Games - Doha 2026, meets with Qatar's padel player Mohammed Saadon al-Kuwari.

GCC GAMES

Qatar continues dominance as medal tally reaches 96

Qatar's al-Sunaidi and Al Maha claim gold in the mixed team 10m air rifle

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar shooting continued its impressive performances and maintained complete dominance at the GCC Games competitions, as Team Qatar's male and female shooters captured more gold medals to further strengthen the nation's tally at the Games.

The Team Qatar duo Abdullah al-Sunaidi and Al Maha al-Ali claimed gold in the mixed team 10m air rifle event after defeating Oman's Salem al-Nabi and Al Anoud al-Khalili, who secured silver, while the UAE pair Fatima al-Suwaidi and Salem al-Yamahi won bronze yesterday.

Qatar's medal tally rose to 96 following another strong performance by the host nation yesterday, with the team now boasting 36 gold, 32 silver and 28 bronze medals.

Continuing Qatar's dominance, Team Qatar stars Rashid Saleh al-Athba and Reem al-Sharshani captured gold in the mixed skeet team event, ahead of Kuwait's Saud al-Kandari and Afrah al-Mohammad, who won silver, while Bahrain secured bronze through Tamer al-Watae and Maryam al-Aasam. Team Qatar had already won nine medals on the opening day of the shooting finals, including three gold, one silver, and five bronze medals.

With the continued success at the ranges, Team Qatar's overall shooting tally rose to 11 medals, including five gold, one silver, and five bronze medals, reflecting the extensive technical and physical preparations undertaken before the start of the tournament and underlining Qatar's dominance in GCC shooting competitions.

GOLD AND BRONZE FOR QATAR IN TT MIXED DOUBLES
Qatar table tennis players won one gold and one bronze medal in the mixed doubles category on the penultimate day of the table tennis competitions at the 4th GCC Games currently taking place in Doha and continuing until May 22.

The Qatari duo Mohammed Abdulwahab and Aya Mohammed won the gold medal after defeat-



Abdullah al-Sunaidi and Al-Maha al-Ali celebrate winning the gold in the 10m rifle mixed team.

ing the UAE pair Ali al-Hawai and Noura al-Mazni 3-0 in the final.

Meanwhile, Qatar's Abdullah Abdulwahab and Mariam Ali secured the bronze medal after defeating Bahrain's Rashid Khalid Sanad and Rayan Emad 3-0 in the third-place playoff.

Part of the day's competitions was attended by Jassim bin Rashid al-Buenain, Secretary General of the Qatar Olympic Committee, Prince Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Saud, President of the Saudi Table Tennis Federation, Sheikhha Hayat bint Abdulaziz Al Khalifa, President of the Bahrain Table Tennis Federation, and Hamad Ahmed al-Hammadi, President of the Qatar Table Tennis Federation.

The competitions continue tomorrow with the third-place matches in the men's and women's singles and men's doubles categories, followed by an all-Saudi men's singles final, the women's singles final between Qatar's Aya Mohammed and Mariam Ali, and the men's doubles final featuring Qatar's Mohammed Abdulwahab and Abdullah Abdulwahab against Saudi Arabia's Ali al-Khudrawi and Abdulaziz Boushalibi.

AL-OBAIDLI WINS SNOOKER SILVER

Team Qatar player Ali al-Obaidli won the silver medal in the men's 6-red snooker singles competi-



Team Qatar player Ali al-Obaidli in action during the men's 6-red snooker singles competition at the billiards and snooker events.



The Qatari duo Mohammed Abdulwahab and Aya Mohammed won the gold medal in the mixed doubles final.

tion at the billiards and snooker events of the 4th GCC Games Doha 2026 after losing 3-4 in a highly competitive final against Kuwait's Ammar Taqi.

The billiards and snooker competitions feature ten events - five in billiards and five in snooker - while Team Qatar is represented

by Ali al-Obaidli, Muhanna al-Obaidli, Mansour al-Obaidli, Ahmed Saif, Bashar Hussein, Mishal Turki al-Ali, and Abdul Latif al-Fawal.

QATAR OPENS VOLLEYBALL CAMPAIGN WITH UAE WIN
Team Qatar volleyball team be-

SAMBA, HEMIEDA DELIVER ONE-TWO IN 400M HURDLES



Team Qatar's Abdurrahman Samba celebrates after winning the 400m hurdles final. **PICTURE: Noushad Thekkayil**

At Qatar Sports Club, Abderrahman Samba and Baseem Hemieda secured a dominant one-two finish for Qatar in the men's 400m hurdles. Samba claimed the gold medal after crossing the line in 48.85 seconds, while Hemieda followed closely to take silver in 49.28 seconds. Muath Abdalla of the UAE completed the podium in third place with a time of 58.04 seconds. Qatar continued its success on the track in the women's 400m hurdles, where Sara Ali delivered another gold-medal performance for the hosts. She finished first in 1:01.94 ahead of the UAE's Mahra Enqelya, who secured silver, while Bahrain's Oluwakemi Adekoya took bronze. In the field events, Qatar added two silver medals to its tally. Samar Mansouri finished runner-up in the women's triple jump behind Kuwait's Aisha Alkhdher. The hosts also earned silver in the mixed 4x400m relay after clocking 3:23.37, while Bahrain captured gold with a winning time of 3:21.44.

gan its GCC Games Doha 2026 campaign strongly after defeating the UAE 3-0 yesterday at Aspire Women's Sports Hall.

The set scores were 25-17, 25-13, and 25-13, with Team Qatar players displaying strong chemistry and complete control throughout the match, sending a clear message that their objective is to retain the title for a second consecutive edition.

In the other match, Bahrain defeated Oman 3-0.

The competition resumes today with two matches, beginning with UAE against Bahrain at 4:00 PM, followed by Team Qatar facing Oman at 6:30 PM.

Team Qatar aims to continue its winning run through the experience and quality of its players.

Meanwhile Team Qatar hand-

ball team moved to the top of the standings after securing a dominant 34-19 victory over Kuwait in a match where Qatar imposed complete control from the beginning, finishing the first half ahead 19-8.

The victory marked Qatar's second consecutive win after opening the tournament with a 28-20 victory over the UAE, lifting its tally to four points at the top of the standings.

Bahrain and Saudi Arabia follow with two points each, while Kuwait and the UAE remain without points. In the same round, Saudi Arabia defeated the UAE 34-21.

The six participating teams will enjoy a rest day today before competition resumes tomorrow with Kuwait facing the UAE, followed by Bahrain against Saudi Arabia.

CRICKET

Litton's rearguard ton propels hosts Bangladesh to 278

'We were getting wickets early on. Unluckily, we missed a couple of reviews'

AFP
Sylhet, Bangladesh

Litton Das struck a century to rescue Bangladesh from a top-order collapse, as the hosts posted 278 in their first innings of the second and final Test against Pakistan yesterday.

Pakistan reached 21-0 at stumps in reply with Azan Awaiz on 13 and Abdullah Fazal on 8 in Sylhet.

Batting at number six, Litton struck 16 fours and two sixes in his 159-ball 126, his sixth Test century, after Bangladesh had been reduced to 116-6 after lunch.

Pakistan, trailing 1-0 in the two-match series after a 104-run defeat in Mirpur, opted to bowl and the decision immediately paid off.

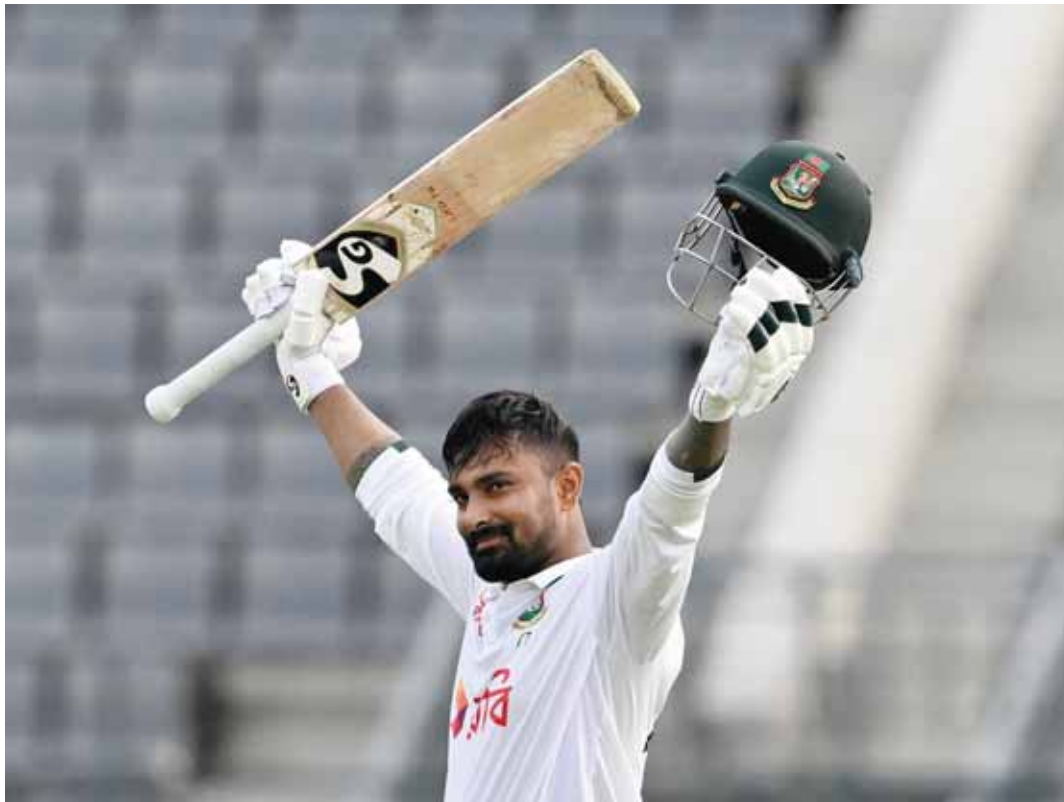
Opener Mahmudul Hasan Joy fell for a duck, edging Mohammad Abbas to second slip off the second ball of the match.

Debutant Tanzid Hasan made a bright start, striking three boundaries in a fluent 26 off 34 balls, but threw his wicket away attempting an ambitious pull shot off Abbas, who took the catch off his own bowling.

Mominul Haque was bowled for 22 by Khurram Shahzad.

Captain Najmul Hossain Shanto and Mushfiqur Rahim steadied the ship with a 43-run stand. But both fell after lunch as Bangladesh lost three wickets for 15 runs.

Shanto edged Abbas behind for 23, Mushfiqur departed lbw for 23 and Mehidy Hasan Miraz was caught at deep fine leg for four to leave the hosts 116-6.



Bangladesh's Litton Das celebrates after scoring a century during the first day of the second Test against Pakistan at the Sylhet International Cricket Stadium in Sylhet yesterday. (AFP)

Litton added 60 runs with Taijul Islam (16) off 114 balls for the seventh wicket and brought up his fifty off 93 balls.

He took just 42 balls more to reach three figures with a cover drive off Shahzad, and then hit the next ball for six.

He added 38 with Taskin Ahmed and a crucial 64 with Shoriful Islam off 73 balls for the ninth

wicket. "The most important thing in this innings is that Taijul, Taskin and Shoriful all batted well and faced a lot of balls," Litton said.

Pakistan missed two review opportunities when replays showing faint edges off Mushfiqur and Litton that went unchallenged by captain Shan Masood.

"We were getting wickets early

on. Unluckily, we missed a couple of reviews," said Shahzad.

"If we had gotten them out there, the situation would have been completely different."

BRIEF SCORES: Pakistan 21 for 0 (Awaiz 13*, Fazal 8*) **Bangladesh 278** (Litton 126, Shanto 29, Shahzad 4-81, Abbas 3-45) **by 257 runs.**

ATHLETICS

Olympic champ Lyles excited to race 'good kid' Gout over 150m

AFP
Tokyo

Olympic 100m champion Noah Lyles said yesterday that he had been energised by Gout Gout's "youthful spirit" and was looking forward to racing the Australian teen over 150m next month.

Lyles and 18-year-old sprint sensation Gout are set to go head-to-head for the first time in the Czech Republic on June 16, and the pair recently trained together in the United States.

Gout has set the athletics world alight and won the 200m at the Australian championships last month in 19.67sec, faster than Usain Bolt at the same age.

Lyles, who will run his first 100m of the season in Tokyo on Sunday, said Gout was "a really good kid".

"I'm just teaching as much as I can in two weeks," said the American.

"He absorbs a lot of information and he wants to be the best.

"He's eager and that's really good to see, and it's really fun to see that youthful spirit again."

Lyles said he was "excited" for the race over the unconventional distance, which will be run on a regular 400m track.

"I'm pretty eager," he said. "I've run really good 150s in practice, so I think it's going to be really fast."

Lyles is in Tokyo for the Golden Grand Prix, where he will race on the track where he took 100m bronze behind Jamaican pair Oblique Seville and Kishane Thompson at last year's world championships.

Lyles won 200m gold to match Usain Bolt's record of four world titles at the distance.

Lyles does not get a bye to Sunday's final and he said he wants to put on a "good show" for the fans. "We're going to have two rounds tomorrow so I'm really excited about that because the more rounds, the faster I get," he said.

"I'd say by the time I leave tomorrow, I want to have my fastest season opener."



US' Noah Lyles poses after a press conference ahead of the Golden Grand Prix Athletics 2026 in Tokyo yesterday. (AFP)

IPL

Gujarat miss out on top spot as Kolkata stay alive in IPL

AFP
Kolkata

Finn Allen smashed 93 off 35 balls as Kolkata Knight Riders beat Gujarat Titans by 29 runs yesterday to keep their IPL playoff hopes alive. It was a brilliant batting effort by the Kolkata top-order, as they notched up 247-2.

Angkrish Raghuvanshi clobbered 82 not out off 44 balls, while Cameron Green also hit 52 not out off 28 balls, as the hosts powered to the third-highest total in their history. Sunil Narine then took 2-29 in his 200th IPL game as Gujarat were restricted to 218-4. Skipper Shubman Gill's 85 was in vain, as the Titans missed a chance to go top of the table.

Gujarat remain second with 16 points from 13 games and need to win their final match against Chennai Super Kings on Thursday to confirm qualification for the playoffs.

Kolkata kept their slim chances of making the knock-outs alive and are seventh with 11 points from 12 games. They have two games remaining and need to win both and hope other results go their way. Put in to bat, Kolkata skipper Ajinkya Rahane fell cheaply but Allen survived two dropped catches to reach his fifty off 21 balls with four sixes.

Overall, Allen hit 10 sixes and put on 95 off 41 balls with Raghuvanshi for the second wicket.

After scoring 56-1 in the powerplay, Kolkata accelerated to 100 off the next 18 balls. Raghuvanshi brought up his fifty off 33 balls, also with four sixes. It was his fourth half-century this season. It was only Allen's second 50-plus score this season.

He had previously scored 100 not out off 47 balls against Delhi but fell seven short of a hundred this time, caught on the mid-wicket boundary in the 12th over.

Raghuvanshi carried on, adding 108 off 52 balls with Green, who hit four sixes. It was Kolkata's highest partnership against



KKR's Finn Allen plays a shot during the Indian Premier League match against GT at the Eden Gardens in Kolkata yesterday. (AFP)

Gujarat. Gujarat responded with a quick opening stand. Gill and Sai Sudharsan hit 42 off only 18 balls, before the latter retired hurt when he was hit on the elbow.

The skipper regained his form and added 128 off 73 balls with Jos Buttler, who scored 57.

Gill suffered from neck cramps and needed treatment. He hit seven sixes but was eventually caught on the boundary by Anukul Roy, a step away from the rope.

It was Narine's second wicket and despite having Buttler at the crease, Gujarat never really gained sufficient momentum, even with Sudharsan returning to complete his half-century. This was the first instance of six half-centuries in a single IPL game.

BRIEF SCORES: Kolkata Knight Riders 247 for 2 (Allen 93, Raghuvanshi 82*, Green 52*) **beat Gujarat Titans 218 for 4** (Gill 85, Buttler 57, Sai Sudharsan 53*, Narine 2-29) **by 29 runs.**

DIAMOND LEAGUE

Duplantis wins in Shanghai, fails to improve own record

AFP
Shanghai

Armand "Mondo" Duplantis cruised to pole vault victory in the opening Diamond League meeting of the season yesterday, but failed to improve his own world record.

There was a surprise in the men's 100m as Gift Leotlela of South Africa pipped Ferdinand Omanyala and Kenneth Bednarek in a photo finish to win a Diamond League event for the first time.

High-quality women's 200m and 100m hurdles were won by Jamaica's Shericka Jackson and Olympic champion Masai Russell respectively, but Karsten Warholm was shocked in the 300m hurdles.

Duplantis already had victory sewn up in the pole vault after just two jumps before he eased to a new Shanghai meeting record in 6.12m. The Swede, who has not lost a competition since 2023, then raised the bar to a world record 6.32m but failed with all three attempts to beat his old mark. Duplantis told AFP he felt the record had been possible. "I feel really good jumping right now," said Duplantis, who has lengthened his run-up by two paces this season.

"I would say body-wise I was a little bit too busy the past few weeks. But other than that I'm happy with the way I performed."

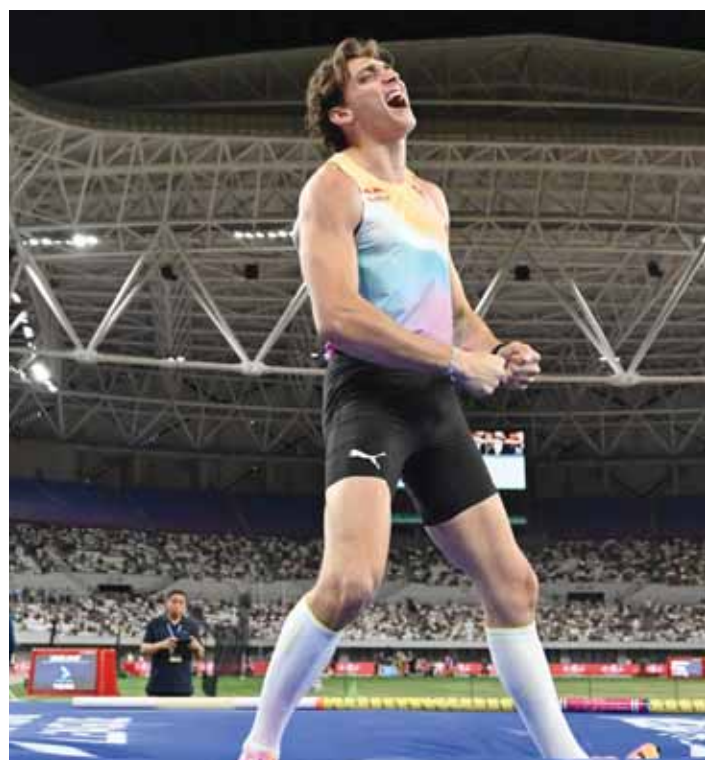
Norway's Warholm clocked two world bests in the little-raced 300m hurdles last season but was stunned by 0.04sec by Brazil's Alison Dos Santos (33.01).

"I'm a little bit mad that I didn't win," said Warholm.

"I think he was really starting to get tired and I thought maybe I had him there. This is how competing should be, you should never know the outcome."

Leotlela said his men's 100m victory in 9.97sec had been the perfect start to his outdoor year.

"I think tonight sets the tone for the rest of the season," he said. "I'm very happy, excited for what's to come."



Sweden's Armand Duplantis reacts between jumps as he competes in the pole vault event during the Shanghai/Keqiao Diamond League meeting in Keqiao in China yesterday. (AFP)

American Bednarek was just 100th of a second behind Leotlela in third, given the same 9.98sec time as Kenya's Omanyala.

"I feel pretty good," said Bednarek, the 200m silver medalist at the Paris 2024 Olympics.

"I didn't execute what I wanted to in the first half of the race but I'm happy with the results."

Jamaica's Jackson crossed the line in the 200m in 22.07 to beat Shaunae Miller-Uibo of the Bahamas (22.26), who was running her first Diamond League race for three years, with American Anavia Battle third in 22.40. "This year, I just want to stay healthy," said Jackson. "Next season's a world championship year, so I just want to stay as healthy as possible."

Former world 100m world champion Sha'Carri Richardson of the United States could only finish fourth in 20.42 and world

silver medalist Amy Hunt of Great Britain was fifth. Jessica Schilder recorded the performance of the night as she propelled the shot to a Diamond League record and became the first woman to exceed 21 metres since 1999.

The Dutchwoman launched her huge 21.09m effort in the fifth round to relegate two-time world champion Chase Jackson (20.46) to second place. "I can't comprehend. It is such a huge thing, it is crazy," Schilder said of breaking the 21-metre barrier. In the women's 100m hurdles, the American Russell's superb 12.25 was good enough to beat Bahamian world indoor champion Devynne Charlton (12.38), with world record holder Tobi Amusan of Nigeria third in 12.41.

Mark English's late burst snatched a dramatic men's 800m with a meeting record of 1:43.85.

MOTOGP

Alex wins Catalan Grand Prix sprint by a whisker

Reuters
Barcelona

Gresini Racing's Alex Marquez banished the ghosts of last year's home heart-break to win the Catalan Grand Prix sprint by a whisker yesterday, edging KTM's Pedro Acosta by 0.041 seconds in the closest sprint finish in MotoGP history.

Marquez's redemption arc played out perfectly at the Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya, where he crashed out of a commanding lead in last year's sprint, allowing brother Marc to take the chequered flag. This time, however, Alex Marquez held his nerve in a nail-biting duel with pole sitter Acosta to claim his first sprint victory of the season.

"I was trying to concentrate on myself, trying to be really on the pace," Marquez said.

"I struggled a little bit with the front tyre in the end, maybe I pushed a little bit too much in the beginning.

"So I need to improve for to-

morrow in the management of the front tyre. But in the end, a victory today is also important."

At the start, Acosta shot into the lead and defended his position well while LCR Honda's Johann Zarco, who has never finished on the podium in a sprint, carved his way through to move up from fourth to second.

But Marquez was the early pace-setter, finding his way past veteran Zarco before using his compatriot Acosta's slipstream to seize the lead on lap four.

Jorge Martin's bid to seize the championship lead ended in the gravel after a costly mistake when the Aprilia rider crashed out at turn 10 - his fourth fall of the weekend - with marshals urging the desperate Spaniard not to re-join the sprint.

Acosta appeared to be fading as even Trackhouse's Raul Fernandez swept past the 21-year-old KTM rider, leaving him scrambling to defend the final podium spot against a charging Di Giannantonio. But the youngster found a second wind with four laps remaining, reclaiming second from

Fernandez. Two laps later, Di Giannantonio moved up to third to put two Ducati bikes in podium places but he rued the fact that he did not have enough laps to fight for the win.

"I'm so happy about my race, about my comeback. We've done the job that we have to do but I'm a bit pissed because I did a mistake in qualifying," he said.

"I started from second row, so it makes everything a little more difficult. I had the pace at the end, it was really fast. I was trying to catch the front group without making mistakes."

But he kept a safe distance behind Marquez and Acosta as the two Spaniards battled it out for the lead until the finish line.

"We know that, at the moment, we are not in the level of Ducati," Acosta said.

"We were, at the end of the race, finally battling with them. For this we have to be happy."

Championship leader Marco Bezzecchi finished ninth to take only one point while Martin now sits two points behind his Aprilia teammate going into today's race.



Team Gresini Racing MotoGP's Alex Marquez celebrates winning the sprint at the Catalunya MotoGP Grand Prix at the Catalunya racetrack in Montmelo, near Barcelona, yesterday. (AFP)

TENNIS

Svitolina fights off Gauff to win third Italian Open title

SINNER COMPLETES MEDVEDEV WIN AND PASSAGE INTO FINAL

AFP
Rome

Elina Svitolina won the Italian Open yesterday after beating Coco Gauff 6-4, 6-7 (3/7), 6-2 to claim her third Rome title, while Jannik Sinner set a date with Casper Ruud in the men's final.

Ukraine's Svitolina hadn't claimed a WTA 1000 title since her last victory at the Foro Italico eight years ago but prevailed over the ever-erratic Gauff. The seventh seed was unspectacular but solid all tournament and her reliable style allowed her to claim her 20th tournament triumph.

American star Gauff, a two-time Grand Slam champion, was aiming to become the first American to win in the Italian capital since Serena Williams in 2016.

Gauff had been strong favourite to go one better here than last year, when she was beaten by Jasmine Paolini, but the problems with her serve which have so long dogged her game began to resurface on centre court. Her serve was broken three times by Svitolina on her way to losing the first set, thanks in part to four double-faults, two of which came in the game which allowed her opponent to move ahead in the match.

At 5-4 down she hit a bizarre second serve which flew into the wrong side of the court, before gifting Svitolina the advantage by another double-fault at set point. A livid Gauff then smacked herself on the head with her own racket before storming down the tunnel, emerging shortly afterwards to have a heated discussion with her coach Jean-Christophe Faurel.

That talking to seemed to turn things around as Gauff got a handle on her serve in a hard-fought second set which featured some fun rallies, particularly as she won the tie-break. But two more breaks



Ukraine's Elina Svitolina poses with the trophy after winning the Italian Open in Rome yesterday. (AFP)

of serve cost Gauff her first tournament win of the season with her French Open title defence starting next weekend.

Sinner in title showdown

Sinner finished off Daniil Medvedev in yesterday's closing chapter of an enthralling last-four clash, which was paused overnight due to rain in Rome.

The world number one could claim a record-extending sixth consecutive Masters 1000 title on Sunday thanks to a 6-2, 5-7, 6-4 win which had almost everything over the course of its two-and-a-half hours.

Sinner had to have treatment on his right thigh and even vomited during Friday night's leg of the semi-final as Medvedev gave

the Italian by far his toughest test of the tournament. But he looked in much better spirits before the restart as he joked and played football with his coaching team during his warm-up in the bowels of the centre court arena, just as warm spring sunshine started to shine after a few days of volatile weather.

"I think it's normal that not every day we feel 100 percent," Sinner told reporters. "I tried to play with the best possible energy I have. Yesterday brought me to a point where I was up today. Today I'm very happy that I finished it."

The match was scheduled to restart at 3.00pm local time (1300GMT) but was again delayed by an hour both due to more rain and the men's doubles semi-final,

won by Sinner's compatriots Simone Bolelli and Andrea Pavasori. A 4-2 lead in the third set for Sinner when play was stopped was too much for Medvedev to overcome, and the 24-year-old sealed his 33rd straight win in Masters 1000 tournaments.

Ruud gets a chance for revenge for a brutal hammering against Sinner here last year after dismantling Luciano Darderi 6-1, 6-1 on Saturday, another match interrupted by heavy rain. The Norwegian, who will be back in the top 20 of the world rankings on Monday, has not won a single set in any of his four matches with Sinner and was destroyed 6-0, 6-1 in the 2025 last eight in one of the most one-sided matches ever seen at the Foro Italico.

CYCLING

Narvaez doubles up as Team UAE re jig Giro d'Italia aims

AFP
Fermo, Italy

Ecuatorian Jhonatan Narvaez powered away from his breakaway rivals to win stage eight of the Giro d'Italia yesterday for his second victory and injury-decimated Team UAE's third so far.

Adam Yates, Jay Vine and Marc Soler have all been forced out of the Giro after a gruesome stage three pile up in Bulgaria, but the super-team from the Emirates has refocused impressively.

A rolling 156km stage starting from Chieti on the Adriatic seemed to favour a breakaway win.

Narvaez, who had already won stage four in a sprint, was part of a breakaway midway through the day after an original escape had been reeled in. At the end he opened a 32 second gap at the line on Norway's Andreas Leknessund of Uno-X Mobility, with another UAE man Mikkel Bjerg third.

"He was the man of the day," Narvaez said of Bjerg.

"It was a full headwind over

60km and it was so hard for me. We had agreed he would lead me though and I would take the climb."

Pink jersey Afonso Eulalio, who grabbed a sizeable lead on Friday on the formidable Blockhaus climb, finishing 13 seconds ahead of Jonas Vingegaard and Felix Gall.

Race favourite Vingegaard ignited his own Giro title bid on Friday on the formidable Blockhaus climb, finishing 13 seconds clear of Gall, while former Giro winner Red Bull's Jai Hindley was a further 49 seconds back in third to remain in the chase.

On Saturday, Hindley attacked on a climb to the line but crossed the summit with Vingegaard on his wheel a slender 2sec ahead of the peloton.

Sunday's stage nine also starts on the Adriatic and finishes with a steep climb over the final three kilometres where Eulalio will again be tested by the big guns.

Monday is a day off and Tuesday sees what promises to be a decisive 42km individual time trial along Italy's west coast.

Some 15 riders have pulled out so far by comparison with 25 who never made it as far as Rome in 2025.



UAE Team Emirates - XRG Ecuadorian rider Jhonatan Narvaez sprints to win the 8th stage of the Giro d'Italia between Chieti and Fermo, Italy, yesterday. (AFP)

ALONSO SET FOR APPOINTMENT AS CHELSEA MANAGER: REPORTS

Xabi Alonso is set to be named as Chelsea's new manager, just four months after being sacked by Real Madrid, according to various media reports yesterday.

The Spaniard has reached an agreement in principle with the Premier League club and could be appointed before their match against Tottenham on Tuesday, reported Britain's Press Association. Chelsea were not expected to name a permanent successor to Liam Rosenior, who lost his job last month, before the end of the season. But signing Alonso would be a huge coup for the Blues,

who have endured a miserable campaign and lost Saturday's FA Cup final 1-0 to Manchester City. Alonso led Bayer Leverkusen to their maiden Bundesliga title with a remarkable unbeaten campaign in 2023/24.

But the 44-year-old's stay with Madrid proved short-lived as he lasted just seven months at the Santiago Bernabeu before being replaced by Alvaro Arbeloa. Alonso, who played in England for Liverpool, would be the fifth permanent Chelsea manager since owners BlueCo bought the club in 2022, after Graham Potter, Mauri-

cio Pochettino, Enzo Maresca and Rosenior. Chelsea sit ninth in the Premier League table and are unlikely to qualify for European football next season, with just two matches remaining this campaign.

Santander return to La Liga after 14 years

Racing Santander ensured a return to La Liga next season when they beat Valladolid 4-1 at their Sardinero ground yesterday. With two games to play, Santander, one of the founders of the Spanish league, lead the

second division by seven points and are assured of finishing in one of the two automatic promotion places. Deportivo La Coruna, playing on Monday, could still beat Santander to the title but third-placed Almeria, who conceded two goals in the last 12 minutes to lose 2-1 at home to Las Palmas, cannot catch up. Santander last played in La Liga in 2011-12, when they finished bottom of the table. They slid into the third tier at the end of the following season. Last season they finished fifth in Liga 2 but were eliminated in the playoff semi-finals.

Celtic win Scottish Premiership

Celtic snatched the Scottish Premiership title from Hearts in dramatic fashion as two late goals earned a 3-1 win yesterday and a 14th title in 15 years. Needing a win to usurp the Jambos at the top of the table, Celtic came from behind to deny Hearts a first title in 66 years. The Jambos came within minutes of ending the stranglehold on the Scottish game exerted by Rangers and Celtic, which now extends to 41 years. Derek McInnes' men had led when Lawrence Shankland headed home a corner in the 43rd minute. Celtic rallied to level before the break with an Arne Engels penalty in stoppage time. Hearts resisted during an incredibly tense second half until three minutes from time when Daizen Maeda bundled in. The goal was initially ruled offside but a VAR review reversed that call. Callum Osmand was then able to walk the ball in to the net with the final kick of the game after Hearts goalkeeper Alexander Schwolow came forward in the hunt for an equaliser. Celtic fans spilled onto the pitch in celebration, but it was devastation for Hearts, who have once again fallen at the final hurdle. A 2-0 defeat on the final day to Kilmarnock in 1965 saw them lose the league on goal average.

MOTORSPORT

Relentless al-Attiyah storms to 18th victory at the Jordan Rally

Agencies
Dead Sea, Jordan

Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah and Candido Carrera cruised to a comfortable victory at the Jordan Rally yesterday.

The Autotek Motorsport Skoda Fabia RS driver won each of the dozen special stages in the Dead Sea and Jordan Valley areas to repeat a clean sweep of stage wins that he last achieved in 2016. On that occasion, 19 speed test wins earned the 20-time FIA Middle East Rally Championship (MERC) victory by 18 minutes.

The winning margin this time on his record-breaking 18th victory in Jordan was 3min 53.7sec and it moved him into a slender championship lead.

The Qatari now has 92 MERC career rally wins, with Carrera picking up win number seven in

his second season with al-Attiyah. That puts the Spaniard on seven MERC wins, equal with rally organizer and former co-driver Khaled Zakaria in the MERC's history books.

After breaking Abdullah al-Rawahi's stage record for the Baptism stage on Friday, al-Attiyah beat his own record in Suwayma by three seconds on Saturday morning.

Following his dominant performance, he said: "Absolutely, it was a good weekend. I was really surprised. We did the same stages as last year and we were even faster. It means that our set-up is really good. We worked very hard this weekend to get the maximum points. It's nice to win all 12 stages. There was pressure there but we need to enjoy this victory."

Oman's Abdullah Al Rawahi and Ata Al Hmoud were never troubled for the runner-up spot in their Oman Rally Team Skoda Fabia



Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah and Candido Carrera celebrate their victory at the Jordan Rally yesterday.

RS. The decision to run medium compound tyres for the first three stages on Friday was a mistake and al-Rawahi did pick up a puncture on the first pass through Rawda on Saturday.

Otherwise, he shadowed al-Attiyah from the start to pick up valuable points for second place.

Saudi Arabia's Hamza Bakhshab is in the middle of a first full season of MERC rallies in a

Toyota GR Yaris Rally2 supported by Jameel Motorsport.

He and Irish co-driver Lorcan Moore overcame a five-minute time loss with a double puncture on stage nine to round off the podium places and remain firmly in contention for a title challenge.

Saudi Arabia's Bassel Abu Hamdan got to grips with his Volkswagen Polo as the event progressed and looked set to finish fourth overall with Firas Elias until the final Power Stage at Rawda.

Shaker Jweihan's target of a third successive haul of maximum MERC2 points ended after the eighth stage. Comfortably ahead of all his class rivals, the Jordanian had been embroiled in a battle with Abu Hamdan for fourth overall with Mustafa Juma in a Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution X.

But he retired before the first pass through Rawda after the pair had traded positions on the first two speed tests.

Nasser Khalifa Al Atya and Ziad Chehab overcame an opening day fraught with brake issues and settled into a better pace over the final day in a Motortune Ford Fiesta. As rivals hit trouble, the current MERC Master Driver front-runner kept going and was rewarded with eighth overall.

The first pass through Rawda turned the Rally4 battle on its head. Mohammed al-Marri suffered terminal mechanical problems and retired from seventh position, his demise handing the Rally4 advantage to Qatari teammate Rashid al-Muhammadi, albeit briefly. He too hit trouble on the demanding stage and both QMMF-entered Peugeot 208 drivers were sidelined. Al-Muhammadi had already lost seven minutes on an earlier special and dropped to the foot of the rankings.

Action resumes in the regional rally series in Lebanon on September 11th-13th.

FOOTBALL

Semenyo's magic moment fires City to FA Cup win

'This trophy is really, really cool, really special for the tradition'

AFP
London

Antoine Semenyo produced one of the great FA Cup final goals with an audacious back-flick that sealed Manchester City's 1-0 win against Chelsea at Wembley yesterday.

Semenyo illuminated a largely scrappy final late in the second half as he improvised a sublime finish to caress Erling Haaland's cross into the net.

The Ghana winger's moment of magic was enough to clinch City's eighth FA Cup triumph and their second piece of silverware this season after the League Cup final win over Arsenal in March.

Semenyo joins Ricky Villa, Michael Owen, Roberto Di Matteo and Steven Gerrard among the ranks of iconic FA Cup final goal-scorers.

Ironically, the 26-year-old - an inspired signing from Bournemouth in the January window - was born just a stone's throw from Chelsea's Stamford Bridge home in west London.

The third FA Cup success of Guardiola's reign ended City's run of two successive defeats in the final against Crystal Palace and Manchester United.

"This trophy is really, really cool, really special for the tradition," said Guardiola. "And after two defeats, back to Manchester is nice."

Guardiola, who also lifted the trophy in 2023 and 2019, has now won 20 trophies in his glittering decade as City manager.

His attention will turn back to City's slender hopes of making it 21 pieces of silverware with a miracle in the Premier League title race. City, on a 21-game unbeaten domestic run, will be five points behind leaders Arsenal if the Gunners beat relegated Burnley at home on Monday.



Manchester City's players and staff celebrate with the trophy after winning the FA Cup in London yesterday. (AFP)

Guardiola's men can close the gap back to two points with a victory at Bournemouth in their penultimate match of the season on Tuesday. But Arsenal would still guarantee their first English title since 2004 by winning at Palace on May 24.

Ahead of his 24th trip to Wembley with City, Guardiola joked that he was "so disappointed" he has not had a stand named after him at the home of English football. Whether he will be back with City remain a matter of conjecture. Uncertainty has swirled around Guardiola's future all season and, with just one year left on his contract, the 55-year-old is yet to give an indication if he plans to stay or go at the end of this term.

If it is about to be the end of an era, Semenyo ensured Guardiola will leave with at least one more golden memory. For Chelsea, the loss was the latest blow

in another turbulent campaign. Without a win in their last seven league games, they are languishing in ninth place with virtually no chance of qualifying for next season's Champions League.

Under interim boss Calum McFarlane, they produced a battling but ultimately impotent display that underlined why frustrated fans protested against owners BlueCo before kick-off and chanted "we want our Chelsea back".

With Chelsea content to sit deep in their five-man defence, City dominated possession for long periods of the first half, but couldn't make the breakthrough.

It was a cagey and often flat occasion, in keeping with two teams who have underachieved this season. Haaland fired wide from an acute angle after stealing possession on the edge of the Chelsea area. Haaland threatened to prise open Chelsea's well-drilled

rearguard late in the first half, surging onto Marc Guehi's pass for a stinging strike that Robert Sanchez saved at his near post.

Relying on only occasional counter-attacks, Chelsea felt aggrieved just before the interval when their penalty claim was rejected after Joao Pedro was bundled over by Abdulkodir Khusanov.

Semenyo should have broken the deadlock immediately after the break, heading over from six yards after climbing to meet Nico O'Reilly's cross. Moises Caicedo's header was nodded off the line by Rodri after City keeper James Trafford fumbled a corner.

But City finally delivered the knockout blow in the 72nd minute.

Haaland made a clever run down the right-hand side of the Chelsea area and cut the ball back to Semenyo, who deftly back-heeled his supreme finish into the far corner from close range.

FOCUS

Kane hits hat-trick, St Pauli relegated from Bundesliga

AFP
Berlin

Forward Harry Kane scored a hat-trick as Bayern Munich celebrated their 35th German title on a gripping final day of the Bundesliga season yesterday with a 5-1 win over Cologne.

Stuttgart secured Champions League qualification and St. Pauli and Heidenheim were relegated elsewhere on an action-packed final matchday.

England's Kane scored an elegant volley and a direct free-kick in the first half before rounding off his fourth hat-trick of the season, ending as the league's top scorer with 36 goals.

Said El Mala scored a superb solo goal for Cologne, but efforts from Kane, Tom Bischof and Nicolas Jackson saw Bayern run away with victory.

At the other end of the table, Wolfsburg won a dramatic, three-way fight with St. Pauli and Heidenheim to avoid automatic relegation.

The bottom three all began the day on equal points, but Wolfsburg's pulse-racing 3-1 win over St. Pauli meant they secured the all-important relegation play-off place in 16th.

St. Pauli goalkeeper Nikola Vasilj kept Wolfsburg at bay with some smart saves in the first half before Konstantinos Koulierakis headed the visitors in front from a corner.

Half-time substitute Abdoulie Ceesay gave St. Pauli hope with a header on 57 minutes, but tempers flared after Wolfsburg restored the lead in controversial circumstances.

Vasilj claimed he had been pushed after deflecting the ball into his own net at a corner, but the goal was given after a nail-biting VAR check.

Christian Eriksen missed a penalty for Wolfsburg 15 minutes from time, but Dezan Pejcinovic sealed St. Pauli's fate with a cool finish shortly afterwards.

"This is the worst feeling that there is in football, especially because we have seen in the last few weeks how much the club means to everyone," St. Pauli's Hauke Wahl told Sky.

Wolfsburg will play one of Hannover, Elversberg or Paderborn in the play-off later this month, while St. Pauli return to

the second tier after two years in the Bundesliga. Heidenheim's three-year spell in the top flight also came to an end after their hopes of a dramatic last-day escape were dashed by a 2-0 defeat to Mainz. Philipp Tietz headed Mainz in front early on before setting up Nadiem Amiri for the visitors' second just before half-time. "It's not often that you get relegated and the fans keep singing and waving their flags after full-time," said Heidenheim coach Frank Schmidt.

I sometimes wish our society would stand together in hard times in the same way as our club does," he added.

Stuttgart secured Champions League qualification with a 2-2 draw at Eintracht Frankfurt.

Goals from Chema and Nikolas Nartey put Stuttgart in control in the first half, before Jonathan Burkardt rescued an inconsequential point with two late penalties for Frankfurt.

The draw kept Stuttgart above Hoffenheim and Bayer Leverkusen, who secured Europa League qualification despite dropping points on Saturday. Leverkusen were held 1-1 at home to Hamburg, Jarrell Quansah equalising late on after Fabio Vieira's superb second-half strike for the visitors.

Hoffenheim slumped to a bitter 4-0 defeat away to Borussia Moenchengladbach.

Hugo Bolin and Haris Tabakovic gave Gladbach a 2-0 lead at half time, before Kevin Diks and Robin Hack poured on more misery with two late goals.

Meanwhile, Freiburg secured seventh place and European qualification with a 4-1 win over RB Leipzig. The Europa League finalists caught Leipzig cold with two quickfire goals from Niklas Beste and Igor Matanovic in the first half.

Forzan Ouedraogo pulled one back soon after, but Freiburg marched on with goals from Matthias Ginter and Derr Scherhant after the break.

Freiburg will either play in the Conference League or the Champions League next season, depending on whether they beat Aston Villa in the Europa League final later this month.

Elsewhere, Serhou Guirassy and Yan Couto fired Borussia Dortmund to a 2-0 win over Werder Bremen, while Union Berlin beat Augsburg 4-0.

QATAR TO FACE SUDAN IN DOHA FRIENDLY

Qatar will continue their preparations for the FIFA World Cup 2026 with a friendly against Sudan on Thursday at 6:30pm as part of their ongoing training camp in Doha, the Qatar Football Association (QFA) announced yesterday.

The match is a key part of Al An-nabi's build-up to football's global showpiece, with Qatar's provisional squad currently training under head coach Julen Lopetegui before departing for North America later this month.

Lopetegui recently named a 34-man preliminary squad, blending youth with experience as the two-time Asian champions step up preparations for the World Cup, which will be held across the United States, Canada and Mexico from June 11 to July 19. The squad includes 19-year-old Tahsin Mohammed Jamshid,

the youngest member of the group, alongside veteran forward Sebastian Soria, 42, while star names Akram Afif, Hassan Al Haydos and fit-again striker Almoez Ali are also among the attacking options.

Qatar SC defender Niall Mason joins experienced campaigners Lucas Mendes and Pedro Miguel in defence, while Meshaal Barsham, Mahmoud Abunada, Salah Zakaria and Shehab Ellethy make up the goalkeeping department.

Qatar will intensify preparations with further warm-up matches against the Republic of Ireland on May 28 and El Salvador in Los Angeles on June 6 before opening their World Cup campaign against Switzerland on June 13. Lopetegui has stressed the importance of reaching the tournament in peak physical and mental condition.



Qatar players during a team training session in Doha yesterday.



Bayern Munich's Harry Kane raises the Bundesliga trophy after winning the match against Cologne in Munich yesterday. (AFP)