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GULF TIMES SPORT

PREVIEW

No tears as Deschamps prepares for his final France match

Les Bleus will face England in Miami today after the Three Lions lost to defending champions Argentina



France's head coach Didier Deschamps during a press conference ahead of the World Cup third-place match against England at the Miami Stadium yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Miami

Didier Deschamps said yesterday that no tears will be shed as he prepares to take charge of his final France match in the World Cup third-place play-off against England. The 57-year-old coach has enjoyed a successful reign, winning the World Cup in 2018 and reaching the final in Qatar four years ago, having also won it as a player in 1998. His talented team were favourites to win a third World Cup for France at the 2026 tournament but lost 2-0 to European champions Spain in the semi-finals. That means Les Bleus will face England in Miami today after the Three Lions lost to defending champions Argentina. "I know that the final curtain falls tomorrow," Deschamps said at his pre-match press conference yesterday. "No one here is going to cry, but I know I'll miss the French team. For 15 years (he was appointed in 2012), I had the privilege of experiencing moments that were magical, and others that were difficult. "But life goes on. I'm a positive person, and I know things will be good, too. It's the best thing that ever happened to me. "It took up 25 years of my life and left a

lasting mark. Unforgettable memories remain. But the most important thing is always what lies ahead." Deschamps, who was captain when France won the World Cup on home soil in 1998, said his team were not playing the match they wanted to be in for his final game in charge. "We are disappointed because we had a lot of ambition for this competition," he said. "We must accept the loss, and we now have this game around the corner, and then we will go on holiday - we all need it." Deschamps said he had a duty to take the third-place playoff seriously, as it was not a friendly. "The players, the staff and I have the duty to give it all and reach this last objective, less important than winning a final, but we are here," he said. "The English team doesn't want to play, and neither do we, but there is an objective, there is a game to play." Deschamps and his players were still digesting their semi-final loss and the coach said he would be making changes to his lineup with some players unavailable and some injured. He did not confirm their top scorer and captain Kylian Mbappe would start. "He is available, that's what I will say," said Deschamps. Mbappe is joint top scorer of the tournament on eight goals, along

with Argentina's Messi. France centre back Ibrahima Konate said despite the "bitter pill" of their semi-final loss, the players were eager to give Deschamps a successful farewell. "None of us wanted to play for this third place but we have no choice," Konate said. "We want to pay back our coach," he said. "He did so much for the France team. We must be grateful to him for that and we need to do everything we can to win this game... to get this chocolate medal, this bronze medal." Yet while it will be scant consolation, the game might well prove pivotal for the World Cup's Golden Boot race. France captain Mbappe is joint top scorer for the tournament alongside Argentina skipper Lionel Messi on eight goals, and will be looking to add to his tally against an unsettled English defence. England's Harry Kane and Jude Bellingham - who are on six goals apiece - could also enter the running with a big performance at the Hard Rock Stadium. For England's all-time record goal-scorer Kane, the game may also mark the final World Cup appearance of his career. The Bayern Munich forward turns 33 this month and it is questionable whether he will be around for the 2030 finals. Kane declined to speculate on his international future following Wednesday's defeat. "It's too early to talk about that," Kane told reporters. "I'm taking it year by year and the national team is my pride and joy. It's what I love to do more than anything... I never want to put a limit on these things." The match is also

an opportunity for Mbappe to move into top spot in the all-time World Cup scoring charts. The Real Madrid striker is currently on 20 goals, one behind Messi on 21. Much may depend on the strength of the lineups fielded by both teams. Tuchel is expected to rotate his starting side heavily after what has been a gruelling campaign. Much may depend on the strength of the lineups fielded by both teams. Tuchel is expected to rotate his starting side heavily after what has been a gruelling campaign. An energy-sapping last-16 trip to the thin air of Mexico City and the Estadio Azteca was followed by a brutally hot quarter-final win over Norway in Miami before the shattering defeat to Argentina. Tuchel is likely to give game time to players who have been on the fringes throughout the campaign, most likely meaning a World Cup debut for Manchester United's Kobbie Mainoo and possibly a start for Kane's understudy as striker, Ollie Watkins. Deschamps may be tempted to field veteran midfielder N'Golo Kante, one of the heroes of Les Bleus' 2018 World Cup win, who has not seen a minute of action in the United States.



England's Harry Kane during training yesterday. (Reuters)

World Cup winners to receive US-style championship rings

The winners of the World Cup final between Spain and Argentina tomorrow will receive championship rings in addition to the trophy and gold medals, FIFA said, the latest sign of the governing body's push to Americanise its flagship tournament. FIFA said 30 bespoke rings would be presented to the winning team following the final at New York New Jersey Stadium, with the captain and head coach initially receiving temporary versions immediately after the match. The rings will then be customised to reflect the identity of the winning team and individually fitted before being presented at a later date. One side will feature the World Cup trophy, while the other will carry details specific to the champions. The players' rings will form part of a limited edition of 2,026 individually numbered pieces, with the remaining 1,996 made available for sale to fans worldwide as officially licensed products. Championship rings are a long-standing tradition in major North American sports, including the NFL, NBA, Major League Baseball and NHL, but have not previously been awarded at a FIFA competition. Their introduction caps a tournament in which FIFA has shown increasing willingness to reshape the presentation, and at times even the rhythm, of soccer in the image of American sport. Sunday's final will also feature a major halftime entertainment show, a concept more readily associated with the Super Bowl than the World Cup, while mandatory hydration breaks throughout the tournament have effectively divided matches into quarters. The three-minute pauses around the 22nd and 67th minutes have been applied regardless of whether conditions made them strictly necessary, with FIFA defending the policy on player-welfare grounds amid the heat and humidity of the North American summer. But the blanket use of the breaks has drawn criticism from players, coaches and fans who argue they disrupt the flow of matches, give teams additional opportunities to regroup and hand coaches what amount to two extra tactical timeouts. They have also created mid-half commercial windows, even though FIFA has rejected suggestions the breaks were introduced with advertising in mind.

Final tickets soar above \$7,500

Tickets for the 2026 World Cup final continue to rise leading up to Sunday's match between Argentina and Spain at New York New Jersey Stadium. After the get-in price dropped as low as \$6,636 on Monday, the three-day average rebounded to \$7,612 by Friday morning, according to ticket-tracking service TicketData.com. The three-day average is now up 10%. By comparison, the get-in price for Argentina's semifinal victory over England settled at \$3,177 by kickoff, while France's win over Spain commanded less than half that at \$1,315. The get-in price for Saturday's third-place match between France and England in Miami is \$653, having plummeted 61% over the past three days. Sunday's final will kick off at 3 p.m. ET in East Rutherford, N.J., between a pair of global powerhouses. It will conclude the largest World Cup in history, with the White House confirming that President Donald Trump will attend.

COMMENT

Tackling Messi 'huge challenge' for Spain: Merino

AFP
East Hanover, United States

Spanish super-sub Mikel Merino said Friday that neutralising the threat of Lionel Messi will be a "huge challenge" as La Roja prepare for their World Cup final showdown against Argentina. Argentina skipper Messi, 39, has been pivotal in dragging the defending champions into Sunday's final in East Rutherford, orchestrating a 2-1 semi-final victory over England with two assists. Messi, the tournament's joint top-scorer with eight goals, also inspired a dramatic comeback against Egypt in the last 16, when Argentina fought back from 2-0 down with 11 minutes remaining to win 3-2. "It's a huge challenge, an incredible motivation for me and the

whole team," Merino said of facing Messi. "Being able to play against a side like Argentina, which has already won this trophy, makes the match even more significant, and I'm very happy to be experiencing this moment," Merino told reporters at Spain's training base in East Hanover, New Jersey. Arsenal ace Merino has played a decisive role in Spain's road to the final, coming off the substitutes bench to score late winners in a last-16 defeat of Portugal and a quarter-final victory over Belgium. "I have incredible confidence in myself and my abilities, and every time I step onto the pitch, I believe I can make an impact for the team," Merino stated. "But honestly, it doesn't matter who the hero is; the important thing is that the team wins in the end. "When you win a title, it belongs to everyone, not just the

starting eleven," he added. Merino meanwhile enthused about the "impressive" talent of 19-year-old Lamine Yamal, who will face Messi for the first time in a clash representing the past and the future of FC Barcelona. Merino, 30, predicted that the final would be "an intense match" and that the referee would need to "control the intensity and frequency of challenges and fouls." "The faster the ball moves between us, the less time the opposition has to commit a foul," he noted. The midfielder, who said he did not have "very clear memories" of Spain's first World Cup title in 2010, recalled the admiration of that trailblazing side. "Being able to represent our country today and be those same players for new generations - for the children watching us - is something magical," he said.



Spain's midfielder Mikel Merino addresses a press conference ahead of the World Cup final against Argentina at Melanie Lane Training Grounds in East Hanover yesterday. (AFP)

OBITUARY

Sobers, cricket’s greatest all-rounder, dies at age 89

In 1975, he was knighted for services to cricket by Queen Elizabeth II in an open-air ceremony

Reuters
London

Cricket’s greatest all-rounder Garry Sobers has died aged 89, West Indies Cricket announced yesterday. No cause was given.

“A great innings has come to an end. In our hearts, now and forever, Sir Garfield Sobers,” West Indies Cricket posted on X above a photograph of him titled ‘Legend. Icon. Hero.’

Sobers was born with two extra fingers - one on each hand. He removed them himself as a boy, using catgut and a sharp knife.

Sobers would go on to become the most complete cricketer to play the game. A graceful and destructive left-handed batsman, a left-arm bowler equally skilled at delivering pace and spin, and a brilliant fielder in any position, Sobers was named one of the five leading cricketers of the 20th century by the sport’s *Wisden Almanack*.

He came second only to prolific Australian batsman Don Bradman, who himself said of the player in 1988: “I’ve got no hesitation at all in saying that Garry Sobers is the greatest all-round cricketer I ever saw.” Reflecting on his achievements, Sobers often played down the importance of his natural talent. “People call me a genius. I don’t know much about geniuses,” he said late in his life. “But I do believe that what I achieved was not just because of the ability that I was born with but also because I worked hard.”

‘LILLIPUTIAN CRICKET’
Garfield St Aubrun Sobers was born in St Michael, Barbados, on July 28, 1936, the fifth of six children of Shamont and Thelma Sobers.

His father, a seaman working in the Canadian merchant navy, died when German forces sank the boat on which he was serving. Garfield was five years old. His moth-



West Indian cricket legend Sir Garfield Sobers addresses a press conference in Colombo on October 21, 2015. (AFP)

er rose to the task of raising the children by herself. “She did whatever she had to do and looked after us tremendously well,” Sobers wrote in his autobiography.

“We went to school, we were clean, we had shoes on our feet and food in our bellies.”

Sobers excelled at many sports, including soccer and basketball, but cricket was his passion. His first memories of the sport were of playing in the road or on the beach, aged eight.

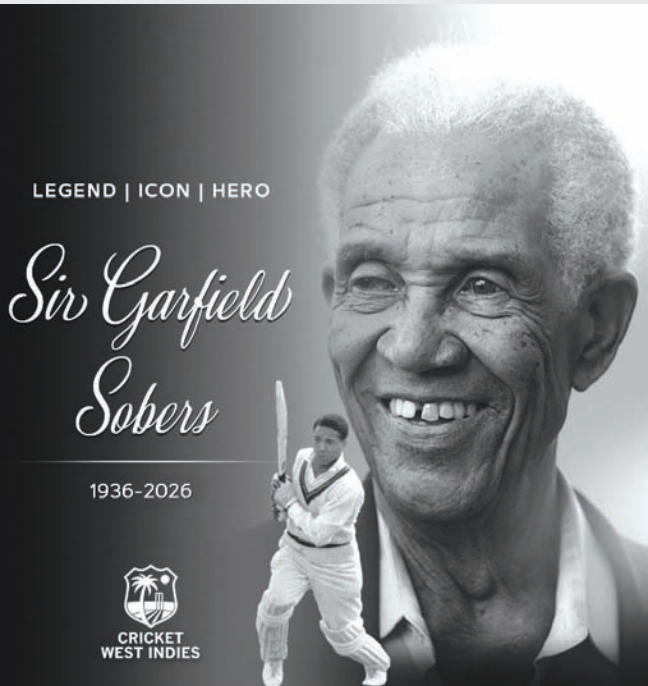
At first he played “Lilliputian cricket,” which required little space and a wicket less than half the normal size. The ball would be fashioned from a lump of tar, the bat from a piece of fence. If the sun melted the tar ball, a rock wrapped in cloth would serve as a replacement. When the West Indies team toured India in 1948, and Eng-

land two years later, Sobers listened in awe to the radio commentaries.

“To a young boy from a humble background, this was something magical,” he recalled in his autobiography. “It was a wondrous thing to think that if I could develop my skills enough, I might have that same opportunity.”

Sobers made his first-class debut for Barbados at 16. He played his first Test for West Indies in 1954. At 21, he scored his maiden hundred against Pakistan, finishing on 365 not out, then the highest individual Test innings. He remains the youngest Test triple-centurion.

‘HE’S DONE IT’
Sobers took over as West Indies captain in 1965, before joining English County Nottinghamshire. He was batting for them in



“It was an occasion where we were looking for quick runs. The idea was to try and get as many runs as possible. Records must not be the focus and that’s the most important thing,” he added. “It mustn’t come at the cost of the team.” In 383 first-class matches, Sobers made more than 28,000 runs and took more than 1,000 wickets.

‘I WASN’T BOTHERED’
In 1970, he played cricket in apartheid Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), generating an international backlash. Sobers was particularly condemned in the Caribbean, where calls grew for him to be sacked as West Indies captain. “I had not realised the deep feelings of the West Indian people in this issue of Rhodesia,” he reacted in a letter to the West Indies Cricket Board. “If I had known or thought of these matters, I would never have gone to Rhodesia.” Sobers retained the captaincy.

He received several invitations to play in apartheid South Africa but refused them all, he wrote in his memoir. In 1991, as the country’s system of racial segregation ended, he briefly met Nelson Mandela, who named him and Bradman as his favourite cricketers.

Sobers called Mandela “a truly great man.” He went on to denounce the discrimination that he and other Black players had endured in Barbados as well as in England. In 1975, he was knighted for his services to cricket by Queen Elizabeth II in an open-air ceremony in Bridgetown, Barbados, that reportedly drew 50,000 spectators. He was named as one of the 10 official National Heroes of Barbados in 1998. The Sir Garfield Sobers Sports Complex was built there as a venue for major sporting and cultural events. “There are those who claim I was destined to do well in life because I arrived in this world with two extra fingers, as though there was something mystic about it,” Sobers recalled. “I wasn’t bothered. They didn’t inhibit me in any way at all.”

Tributes pour in for great Sobers

Tributes poured in yesterday following the death of Garry Sobers, widely regarded as one of the greatest all-rounders in cricket, at the age of 89.

Sobers represented the West Indies in 93 tests between 1954 and 1974, earning a reputation for his aggressive batting, versatility with both pace and spin bowling, and outstanding fielding.

“A great innings has come to an end. In our hearts, now and forever, Sir Garfield Sobers,” Cricket West Indies wrote.

Cricket West Indies President Dr. The Hon. Kishore Shallow also expressed his condolences.

“Sir Garfield Sobers has completed his final innings, but his legacy will forever endure in the hearts of our region, and the story of the cricketing world,” he wrote in a statement shared by Cricket West Indies.

“On behalf of Cricket West Indies, I offer our heartfelt condolences to his family, the Government and people of Barbados and all those across the world who mourn his passing.”

Former England batsman Geoffrey Boycott described Sobers as a once-in-a-generation talent.



Clive Lloyd (right) speaks with Sir Garfield Sobers during a West Indies practice session at the P. Sara Oval Cricket Stadium in Colombo on October 21, 2015. (AFP)

“He was a superstar and such an easy-natured guy. I never heard him complain or bad mouth other players. He had a good heart. He was generous with his time and advice,” Boycott wrote in a column for *The Telegraph*.

“But the most important thing is what he left behind. Anyone who saw him in his pomp will have wonderful memories of a great batsman, the greatest all-rounder, an

icon, a once-in-your-lifetime, exceptional cricketer.”

Cricket boards around the world also paid tribute to the Barbadian.

“One of the greatest cricketers to have ever graced the game, Sir Garfield Sobers, has sadly passed away. Our thoughts are with his family, friends and Cricket West Indies as we say goodbye to an ICC Hall of Famer,” the International Cricket Council wrote on X.

“One of the greatest to ever play the game. Forever in our hearts, Sir Garfield Sobers,” England Cricket said on X.

“The BCCI mourns the passing of Sir Garfield Sobers, a true icon of the game and one of cricket’s greatest-ever all-rounders,” the Board of Control for Cricket in India posted.

At county level, Sobers enjoyed a distinguished career with Nottinghamshire, scoring 7,041 runs, including 18 centuries, and taking 281 wickets.

“Cricket’s greatest-ever all-rounder, and an iconic figure in Nottinghamshire history. We are extremely saddened to hear of the passing of Sir Garfield Sobers,” the county said on X.

WHO SAID WHAT

LONDON: Tributes from across the cricket world poured in after the death of legendary West Indies all-rounder Garry Sobers yesterday at the age of 89. Sobers is regarded as one of the greatest players in cricket history. AFP Sport looks at the lavish praise bestowed on Sobers:

“Anyone who saw him in his pomp will have wonderful memories of a great batsman, the greatest all-rounder, an icon, a once-in-your-lifetime, exceptional cricketer. And, even more important, a lovely man.”
— **FORMER ENGLAND BATSMAN GEOFFREY BOYCOTT**

“A son of Barbados whose extraordinary journey became part of the story of our region and whose brilliance carried the name of the West Indies with distinction across the world.”
— **KISHORE SHALLOW, PRESIDENT OF CRICKET WEST INDIES**

“A true giant of the game whose extraordinary skill, grace and sportsmanship inspired generations of cricketers around the world. His legacy will forever remain a part of cricket’s rich history.”

— **FORMER INDIA BATSMAN VVS LAXMAN**

“Never had the chance to watch Sir Garry Sobers play, but grew up hearing his greatness from my father. A legend across generations.”

— **INDIA’S TEENAGE BATSMAN VAIBHAV SOORYAVANSHI.**

“We are extremely saddened to hear of the passing of Sir Garfield Sobers. Cricket’s greatest-ever all-rounder and an iconic figure in Nottinghamshire history.”

— **SOBERS’S ENGLISH COUNTY NOTTINGHAMSHIRE**

“One of the greatest to ever play the game. Forever in our hearts, Sir Garfield Sobers.”
— **ENGLAND CRICKET.**

SPOTLIGHT

Sri Lanka T20 team co-owner to be held in prison over match-fixing

Reuters
Colombo

A Sri Lankan court ordered yesterday that the Indian co-owner of a Lanka Premier League (LPL) team, charged with attempting to bribe five players for match-fixing, be held in prison till the end of the month.

Manjot Kalra was arrested at a hotel in the capital, Colombo as he was allegedly “about to pay” a player 9.5mn rupees (\$28,700), inspector Supun Vidanage of the Sports Investigation Unit said.

Four other Sri Lankan players were also approached by Kalra 10 days before his arrest Vidanage added.

An accomplice of Kalra will also remain in police custody until the end of the month pending further investigation.

Sri Lanka Cricket, the governing body of the sport on the island, said the domestic T20 tournament would go ahead as

planned yesterday night in the capital. The opening match of the tournament, now in its sixth edition, is between the Jaffna and Galle teams. Kalra is a co-owner of the Jaffna team.

“Sri Lanka Cricket reiterates its unwavering commitment to protecting the integrity of the tournament and will not tolerate any form of corruption, misconduct or foul play by any stakeholder associated with the league,” Sri Lanka Cricket said in a statement.

Previous LPL tournaments have also been marred with allegations of corruption.

Bangladesh-born Tamim Rahman, owner of Dambulla Thunders, admitted in January to attempting to influence a player and organise match fixing.

Rahman was handed a four-year jail term and suspended for five years.

He was also fined 24 million rupees.

The conviction was in line with a strict 2019 law aimed at preventing corruption in sport in Sri Lanka.

INDIA BACK ROHIT AMID RETIREMENT SPECULATION

India team management has thrown its weight behind struggling opener Rohit Sharma amid speculation back home that tomorrow’s third one-day international against England at Lord’s could be his last.

The 39-year-old managed a laboured 26 off 47 balls on Thursday as England won the second match in Cardiff to level the three-match series.

Rohit has now gone 11 ODIs without a hundred and his poor run of form raises questions about his place for next year’s World Cup, which South Africa will host along with Zimbabwe and Namibia. *The Indian Express* newspaper said the 39-year-old former India captain has been informed that the selectors have decided to “move on”.

Batting coach Sitanshu Kotak, however, said white-ball stalwart Rohit was “too good” a player to feel any pressure. “Yes, he didn’t get runs, but I don’t think that makes any difference,” Kotak told reporters after Thursday’s loss.

BOTTOMLINE

Pakistan’s Nawaz gets banned for 3 months over doping misconduct

AFP
Karachi

Pakistani spinner **Mohammad Nawaz** has been banned for three months over a doping violation, the International Cricket Council said yesterday, backdating the punishment from May this year.

The ICC said Nawaz tested positive during the men’s T20 World Cup in Sri Lanka on February 7.

“Nawaz had tested positive for a Substance of Abuse (Carboxy-THC) under the ICC Anti-Doping Code following a doping test carried out after Pakistan’s match against the Netherlands in Colombo,” the ICC said.

The ICC said Nawaz accepted the offence.

“With Nawaz accepting the sanction and agreeing to a substance abuse treatment programme, his provisional suspension was lifted after having served a two-and-a-half-month suspension, which is already over.

“Once the programme is complete, the suspension will ulti-



mately be reduced to one month,” said the ICC which is a signatory to the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) since 2006. “Nawaz admitted the offence and demonstrated that the substance had been used out-of-competition and in a manner unrelated to sport performance,” the ICC said.

Nawaz’s records from the match

against the Netherlands on February 7 and in subsequent matches until 1 May 2026 have been disqualified.

Nawaz has played six Tests, 44 one-day internationals and 98 T20 internationals for Pakistan but has not been selected for an ongoing training camp in the build-up to next year’s World Cup.

FORMULA 1

Antonelli fastest for Mercedes in second practice

The 19-year-old Italian clocked a best lap time to outpace Norris

AFP
Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium

World championship leader Kimi Antonelli topped the times for Mercedes ahead of defending champion Lando Norris of McLaren in yesterday's second free practice ahead of this weekend's Belgian Grand Prix. The 19-year-old Italian clocked a best lap time of one minute and 45.944 seconds to outpace Norris, who has a 10-place grid penalty for tomorrow's race after taking a new battery, by 0.190 seconds with Max Verstappen third for Red Bull.

The four-time champion was 0.472 seconds adrift after a much-improved day using the team's traditional rear wing after ditching the much-criticised 'Macarena' wing, described by Verstappen as very dangerous.

He had crashed at both the Austrian and British Grands Prix, but bounced back to go fastest in the earlier opening session yesterday.

Seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton was fourth for Ferrari ahead of Isack Hadjar in the second Red Bull, Oscar Piastri in the second McLaren and Franco Colapinto who was seventh for Alpine.

This left George Russell down in eighth in the second Mercedes, more than 1.2 seconds behind Antonelli, ahead of Racing Bulls' rookie Arvid Lindblad and Liam Lawson, the pair pushing Charles Leclerc down to 11th in the second Ferrari.

The session ended after an ex-



Mercedes' Italian driver Kimi Antonelli during the second practice session at the Spa-Francorchamps circuit, ahead of the Belgian Grand Prix, yesterday. (AFP)

tended red-flag interruption after Pierre Gasly crashed into the barriers in his Alpine. He was unhurt.

After a light shower between the sessions, the action began with Antonelli setting the pace in 1:46.911 with Verstappen chasing his time before a brief red flag delay to clear gravel from the track.

The Dutchman, showing some frustration, grumbled colourfully about his gearbox.

On resumption, several drivers swapped mediums for softs as Piastri joined the fray, after repairs for a hydraulics problem, in a spell of qualifying simulation laps.

Hadjar swiftly went top on

softs before Verstappen and then Antonelli regained the initiative, the Italian clocking 1:45.944 to soar nearly five-tenths clear.

Ferrari responded with both drivers setting personal-best times in the first and second parts of the lap, but Hamilton wound up third behind Verstappen and ahead of Hadjar. He was 0.747 adrift of Antonelli.

Russell, 25 points behind his 'silver arrows' team-mate in the drivers' title race, tried a lap on softs, but was 1.285 seconds slower than the flying Italian as he settled for sixth.

Like Russell, Piastri was strug-

gling to match his team-mate as Norris went second in 1:46.134, two-tenths off the pace. The Australian, last year's winner, went sixth, but was 0.982 adrift.

With 15 minutes remaining, the action was red-flagged when Gasly lost control of his Alpine and brushed the barriers at the Fagnes chicane. He was unhurt and walked away from his damaged car, which had lost its rear wing.

The action was suspended for 13 minutes allowing the teams only two minutes' action at the end of the session to complete their programme and engage in a few practice starts on the uphill grid.

FOCUS

India moves to bring F1 back to the country

Reuters
New Delhi

India's government is working to resolve tax and regulatory hurdles to bring Formula One back to the Buddh International Circuit on the outskirts of New Delhi in 2028, more than a decade after the race was dropped. The Indian GP debuted in 2011 but was dropped after its third running in 2013 following regulatory and taxation disputes.

Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya recently met stakeholders, including prospective track owners the Adani Group and representatives of the country's motor-sports federation, and said a task force would be set up to revive the race.

Navigating the complex tax and regulatory issues would feature high on the panel's agenda, a source in the ministry told Reuters.

"The task force will examine the challenges affecting the revival and growth of motorsports in the country, including Formula One, with a specific focus on taxation-

related issues, regulatory aspects, infrastructure, and other policy interventions..." the source said.

The task force will have representation from India's tax authorities. The government's apex policy think tank has been tasked with inter-ministerial coordination to cut red tape, the source said.

The Adani Group, which is in the process of taking over the company that previously owned the track, did not reply to a Reuters request for comment but Managing Director of Adani Ports & Special Economic Zone Ltd (APSEZ) Karan Adani has said he was "personally engaged" to bring Formula One back to the country.

Formula One chief executive Stefano Domenicali recently confirmed its "big interest" in returning to India but said significant homework needed to be done.

"There are the right things that we need to do - to again find back the right promoters, the right collaboration and the right timing, which will not be in the very short term," Domenicali told F1 India broadcaster FanCode in an interview last month.

CYCLING

Super Schmid claims Tour de France stage 13



Team Jayco AlUla's Swiss rider Mauro Schmid during the 13th stage of the Tour de France yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters
Belfort, France

Swiss cyclist Mauro Schmid edged Harold Tejada to win stage 13 of the Tour de France yesterday, as Briton Tom Pidcock finished third to move into the top four in the general classification, narrowing his gap with overall leader Tadej Pogacar.

Four-time champion Pogacar (UAE Team Emirates-XRG) was happy not to challenge for the stage and finished with the peloton more than seven minutes later, retaining a lead of three minutes and 36 seconds over second-placed Jonas Vingegaard (Visma-Lease a Bike) in the battle for the yellow jersey.

Pidcock, who was 10th in the general classification coming into the stage, moved up to fourth, and sits four minutes and 15 seconds behind Pogacar. Remco Evenpoel is third, nine seconds ahead of Pidcock.

"I can't believe it. It was an incredibly hard day right from the start," said 26-year-old Schmid (Jayco-AlUla) after his maiden Tour de France stage win.

"The whole team was motivated to get into the breakaway. We'd tried several times over the last few days, but things hadn't gone according to plan until now. I felt good from the start, it was just full gas from the very first minute."

Yesterday's stage, a 205.8km hilly ride from Dole to Belfort, had its first big attack about 40km in when a group of 37 riders broke from the peloton.

Pidcock, whose Pinarello-Q36.5 team are continuing without Chris Harper after the Australian lost a part of his thumb following a crash during stage 10, stayed in the mix as the leading group grew to 57 riders.

The peloton trailed by more than eight minutes going up to Ballon d'Alsace, the biggest climb of the day, about 30km from the finish line.

Pidcock waited until the last kilometre of the climb to launch his attack, and was the first to reach the peak as he looked to capitalise on the long descent. But with 16km to go, it was Schmid and Tejada (XDS-Astana) who sped ahead.

The chasing group led by Pidcock was 18 seconds behind the two breakaways going into the last two kilometres, but tried their best to close the gap as Tejada looked to get a solo finish.

But Schmid responded with a perfectly timed attack that got him a photo-finish win over Tejada, as Pidcock crossed the line two seconds later.

A tighter race for the yellow jersey will be the focal point again in today's stage 14, a 155.3 km mountainous ride from Mulhouse to Le Markstein Fellingier.

Warholm eyes win in London stadium that kickstarted his career

LONDON: **Karsten Warholm** today returns to the London Stadium where he won his first 400 metres hurdles world title in 2017, sparking riotous celebrations he has vowed not to repeat.

As a baby-faced 21-year-old, Warholm beat a host of favourites that rainy night in the British capital, apeing the famous painting 'The Scream' by fellow Norwegian Edvard Munch by putting his fingers round his mouth after crossing the line.

Warholm went on to complete a lap of honour wearing a Viking helmet in an image that truly caught the public's attention.

"It's one of my best memories. It was crazy," he said.

"It kicked off my career and changed everything."

"It was the day when I started to truly believe I could win big competitions."

Warholm added: "I think I invented the runner's high that evening. I don't think I'll celebrate like that again."

"It gives me very good vibes to be back in the stadium."

Back in 2017, Warholm had warned that track and field was like "porcelain - you can crack at any time".

But the hurdler has disproved that, setting a memorable world record when winning



Olympic gold in Tokyo in 2021 and three world titles. He had to be content with Olympic silver at the 2024 Paris Games, while he has also bagged three European titles.

FEAR OF THE AFTERLIFE

Warholm insisted he remained motivated and that there was no complacency despite his storied career thusfar.

"It's also the big fear of the afterlife," he said. "I'm just pushing. I want to continue as long as possible. If you really want to stay at the level, you need to put the work in."

He added: "I've turned 30, I have some grey hairs. There's no other way to the top than working hard."

Warholm has had a mixed start to the season, finishing second in three races, twice in the 400m hurdles and once in the 300m hurdles. "It's important for me now to try to get a win," he said.

"I've had a rough start to the season, beaten by (Brazilian rival Alison) Dos Santos a couple of times. I want a fast race and feel like the stride and pattern are there."

Warholm said it was important to "get some good races ahead of Birmingham", the English city which hosts the European championships in August.

"There are no races that are a given anymore."

Warholm insisted, however, he would not mirror Dutchwoman Femke Broeders-Bol, the two-time world 400m hurdles champion who has transformed herself into a 800m runner. "I would probably have a bigger chance running with the women rather than the men!" he joked.

"It would be 400 metres too long."

GOLF

Magnificent Herbert falls agonisingly short of historic 61, takes Open lead

Reuters
Southport, England

Australia's Lucas Herbert came within a five-foot putt of becoming the first golfer to shoot 61 in a men's major yesterday as he took a two-shot lead at the British Open with a brilliant 62 that was matched by Sam Burns at Royal Birkdale.

Only five rounds as low as 62 had ever graced a men's major but two arrived within minutes of each other on a sun-baked course as American Burns made it one of the most remarkable scoring days in Open Championship history.

Herbert, 30, leads on eight-under 132 with overnight leader Jackson Suber and fellow American Cameron Young two shots back and Burns at five under.

Northern Ireland's world number two Rory McIlroy, bidding for his second Open title, ensured

he will be around for the weekend with his three-under 67 leaving him seven shots behind.

Reigning champion Scottie Scheffler was three under for the tournament midway through his second round.

Herbert, who began the day on level par before embarking on a birdie blitz, looked dejected as he shook hands with his playing partners on the 18th despite equalling the 62s by Branden Grace at the 2017 Open also at Royal Birkdale, Rickie Fowler and Xander Schauffele at the 2023 US Open and Schauffele and Shane Lowry at the 2024 PGA Championship.

"It was a lot of fun, those first 12 holes I don't think I've ever played golf that well before," Herbert, who plays on the LIV Golf circuit, said.

"There was a great buzz out there and it felt like everyone wanted it to happen. I felt like I kind of let everyone down a bit missing that putt on the last."

With light winds lowering the



Australia's Lucas Herbert hits his approach on the 18th hole during the second round of the 154th Open Championship at Royal Birkdale Golf Club in Southport, Britain, yesterday. (AFP)

course's guard, the early groups took full advantage.

Herbert rolled in six birdies to

reach the turn in 28 shots - equaling the nine-hole Open record of Denis Durnian at Birkdale in 1983.

His assault continued on the back nine with birdies at the 11th, 12th and 16th and when he set up another birdie putt on the 17th with a stunning chip even a sub-60 round looked possible.

He missed that but a par on the long par-four 18th would have secured a 61.

After a wayward drive he left himself with a relatively straightforward up-and-down from in front of the green, but he faltered at the last.

Burns' 62 arrived via a very different route as he birdied the last three holes, including a chip-in birdie from a bunker on the 18th green that was met with a huge roar.

American Suber only saw a links course for the first time on Monday but led with an opening round 65.

The wheels seemed to be falling off yesterday with three successive bogeys but he posted a one-under 69 to stay very much in the mix.

"I'll probably sleep pretty well

tonight. I'm pretty exhausted," the 26-year-old said.

"I know that in a major things are going to get challenging at some point. It's just about being patient and letting the good golf come later."

England's Matt Fitzpatrick, a pre-tournament tip, missed the cut on four over, but his younger brother Alex was leading the home charge alongside Scotland's Robert MacIntyre and England's Matt Wallace, who reached halfway on four under.

With sea breezes picking up in the afternoon, scoring toughened up for the later groups on the parched fairways.

Scheffler, bidding to become the first man since Ireland's Padraig Harrington in 2008 to retain the Claret Jug, carded a two-under 68 on Thursday but was struggling to make much headway in his second round.

The cut line is expected to be one over.

FOCUS

Porro stakes claim to Spain's right-back role

Spurs full back impressed against Saudi, raised the level against others

Reuters
New York

Pedro Porro has turned Spain's right flank from a vacancy into a personal runway, capping a dazzling World Cup charge by helping shackle France's flying attackers and scoring a thunderbolt in Tuesday's 2-0 semi-final win in Dallas.

Two years after Marc Cucurella used Euro 2024 to leap from out-sider to Spain's first-choice left back, Porro appears to be writing the sequel on the opposite side of Luis de la Fuente's defence.

With Dani Carvajal and Jesus Navas gone, Spain's right-back role looked up for grabs before the tournament.

Marcos Llorente, fresh from an excellent season with Atletico Madrid, appeared well placed to claim it, but De la Fuente kept the door open for Porro.

For a while, the Spain coach rotated them. Then he stopped.

The Tottenham Hotspur full back impressed against Saudi Arabia, raised the level again against Austria and repeated the trick against Portugal. Against France, he produced his most complete performance, containing Kylian Mbappe, Bradley Barcola and Desire Doue before sealing the win with a superb goal and being named the semi-final's MVP.

"I'm very happy with the team's attitude, from start to finish. Today we did everything we needed to do. It's a dream come true; it's something I couldn't even have imagined in my wildest dreams," Porro said.

His rise has also carried a sense of footballing symmetry.

Cucurella's Euro 2024 chance came when Alejandro Grimaldo, after shining in Xabi Alonso's Bundesliga-winning Bayer Leverkusen side, was widely expected to own the position.

Instead, Cucurella became Spain's first-choice left back, was



Spain's defender Pedro Porro attends a training session at Melanie Lane Training Grounds in East Hanover, New Jersey, yesterday. (AFP)

voted the tournament's best in that role and this year signed for Real Madrid.

Now Porro has made his own case impossible to ignore.

His defensive interventions tell part of the story, but his value also

lies in the quieter details: covering space, choosing when to surge forward and giving Lamine Yamal the balance he needs on the right.

There was redemption too. Some still remembered the mistake that gifted Scotland a goal in

Spain's 2-0 defeat early in De la Fuente's tenure during Euro 2024 qualifying.

Against France, Porro buried the doubts as emphatically as his finish. Tottenham, who renewed his contract during the tournament despite interest from clubs including Manchester City, may feel their timing was as sharp as his.

One final examination remains: Sunday's World Cup final against Argentina, where Porro will have the chance to turn a breakthrough tournament into something far bigger.

Meanwhile, Lamine Yamal and Porro trained separately from the rest of the squad on Thursday as they began preparations in New Jersey for the final.

The pair lay on the pitch at one of Red Bull New York's training facilities during the opening session for Luis de la Fuente's side.

The Spanish football federation (RFEF) told Reuters that both players are expected to be available for the final and that their separate work was a precautionary measure as part of workload management.

De la Fuente said after Spain's semi-final win over France that Porro had been carrying a knock. Reuters understands the full back has suffered a hamstring strain, although the problem is not considered serious.

Yamal's situation appears less concerning. De la Fuente said after the France match that the teenager had "nothing", but the physical effects of his duel with Lucas Digne and Theo Hernandez were visible the following day, with the forward nursing aches and bruises from a demanding match.

Spain's priority is to ensure Yamal, Porro and the rest of the squad are as fresh as possible for the final.

For the rest of the squad, the 15 minutes of training open to the media passed without incident, with the players relaxed and upbeat despite humid conditions and temperatures of around 30 degrees Celsius (86 degrees Fahrenheit).

SPOTLIGHT

Lusail land Spanish forward Moreno for QSL debut

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Lusail Sports Club has announced the signing of Spanish forward **Rodrigo Moreno** as part of the team's preparations for the 2026-2027 sporting season.

The move forms part of the club's strategy to build a competitive squad capable of delivering strong performances in its first-ever campaign in the Qatar Stars League (QSL).

The acquisition of Moreno is in line with the sporting vision led by Sporting Director Alan Karimi, which focuses on recruiting experienced, high-quality players to strengthen the team's technical capabilities while supporting the club's long-term objective of establishing a professional football structure capable of competing at the highest level and achieving positive results.

Rodrigo Moreno brings with him an impressive career at both the European and international levels.

A former Spain international,



he has enjoyed successful spells with several European clubs before making a notable impact in Qatari football during his time with Al Rayyan and Al Gharafa.

He now returns to Qatar through Lusail Sports Club.

The signing further underlines Lusail Sports Club's commitment to its recruitment strategy of attracting players with extensive experience, enhancing the overall quality of the squad and ensuring the team is well prepared to compete throughout the 2026-2027 season.

Alexander-Arnold relishes chance to work with Mourinho at Real Madrid

Trent Alexander-Arnold said it is "a pleasure" to work with reappointed Real Madrid manager Jose Mourinho, adding that he has long admired the Portuguese coach and believes he can help the club win trophies.

Mourinho returned to Real Madrid in June for a second spell after a disappointing campaign last season in which they missed out on the LaLiga title and were eliminated from the Champions League quarter-finals.

"I have always admired the coach (Mourinho). I've played against him a couple of times, and it's a pleasure to work with him and his team," Alexander-Arnold said in a statement.

"It's intense," he added.

"The principles and the level of demand are very high, so I'm looking forward to seeing how, the more we get to know each other, the more we learn and the more he can teach us. And we're all willing and eager to learn and improve.

"I'm sure he'll teach us many things and help us win trophies this year."

Alexander-Arnold, who joined Real Madrid from Liverpool last year, endured an injury-hit first season in Spain and did not always command a regular place in the starting line-up, rotating in and out of the side.

However, the departure of defender Dani Carvajal in May has opened an opportunity for Alexander-Arnold to establish himself as Madrid's first-choice right-back.

"I've been out of action for a long time, so it's good to finally be back and to lay a solid foundation for a successful season," the 27-year-old Englishman added. Real Madrid begin their 2026-27 LaLiga campaign against Espanyol on August 22.

BOTTOMLINE

Neymar returns to Santos with questions hanging over his future

AFP
Sao Paulo

Neymar returns to his home club Santos yesterday with only a few months left in his contract and questions over his future after indicating he would no longer play for Brazil following the country's World Cup disappointment.

The injury-plagued Neymar was included in the World Cup squad almost three years after he last appeared for Brazil, and played only 37 minutes across two matches.

His only goal - a penalty - was not enough to prevent an early exit for Brazil after a 2-1 defeat to Norway in the Round of 16.

An AI-generated video created by a fan circulated on social media, showed a young Neymar asking the current Neymar to chase a sixth World Cup title with Brazil in 2030. Brazil's all-time leading scorer added a comment: three laughing/crying emojis.

The striker returned in January 2025 to his boyhood club Santos from Saudi club Al Hilal, and his contract runs out in December.

After undergoing left-knee surgery late last year, Neymar played in only eight of the 19 matches Santos contested in the 2026 Brasileirao - the country's top football league.

Nevertheless, he tallied four goals and two assists, offering glimpses of the footballer who dazzled fans at Barcelona and Paris Saint-Germain.



A source at Santos told AFP that the renewal of Neymar's contract will largely depend on board elections in December.

Santos president Marcelo Teixeira, who spearheaded Neymar's return, has not said whether he will seek re-election.

"The first question was whether Neymar would stop playing," a club official told AFP on condition of anonymity.

"It ends here," Neymar said after Brazil's loss to Norway, which saw him collapse in tears after the final whistle.

Amid press speculation about a permanent retirement, his father and agent Neymar Santos Sr urged

him not to give up. "Son, keep playing football. Feel the joy of having the ball at your feet again; smile on the pitch again," he wrote in a letter released via an Instagram video.

"Don't be afraid of tomorrow!" Media reports have indicated that Neymar is considering continuing his career with US Major League Soccer (MLS), and that negotiations had taken place with FC Cincinnati, but fell through.

The MLS is home to veteran stars such as Lionel Messi (Inter Miami), Frenchman Antoine Griezmann (Orlando City), and German Thomas Mueller (Vancouver Whitecaps).

ANNOUNCEMENT

Liverpool midfielder Szoboszlai signs new five-year contract

AFP
London

Liverpool midfielder **Dominik Szoboszlai** signed a new five-year contract yesterday, ending speculation over his future.

Szoboszlai had two years remaining on his previous deal, but the Hungary captain has been rewarded for his fine form last season. It had appeared negotiations between the 25-year-old's representatives and Liverpool sporting director Richard Hughes had stalled last season.

However, talks accelerated in recent weeks and Szoboszlai has finally put pen to paper on his improved contract.

"It's maybe my biggest day. There are a couple in front of it - probably when I signed for Liverpool the first one and when I got my baby, of course. But in my football career, I can say this is in the top three," he said.

"I can't wait to go again and again and again. There's always more to come. I think I can do even better. I think that's why I'm sitting here, because that pushed me since I was a kid: that it was never enough. And I'm thinking the same now.

"When I signed, I said I want to win everything. That didn't change for a moment either. It stayed the same: I want to win everything that is possible in this country, also let's say the Champions League.

"I'm ready to go for it."

Szoboszlai's decision to commit his long-term future to Liv-



erpool is a major boost for new manager Andoni Iraola, who has arrived from Bournemouth to replace the sacked Arne Slot. Szoboszlai has become an integral figure at Anfield since signing from German outfit Leipzig in 2023. He scored 13 goals and provided 12 assists in 53 matches last term, becoming the first Liverpool midfielder to reach double figures in both categories since Steven Gerrard in 2013-14.

Szoboszlai has won the Premier League and League Cup with Liverpool and was voted player of the year by his club's fans last season.

Leeds sign Muharemovic
Leeds signed Bosnia and Herzegovina defender Tarik Muharemovic from Sassuolo on Friday in a deal worth a reported \$45mn. The 23-year-old centre-back, who played for Bosnia at the World Cup, agreed a five-year contract with the Premier League club. "Muharemovic becomes our second signing of the

summer and everyone at Leeds would like to welcome him to the club, as we continue our preparations for the 2026-27 Premier League season," Leeds said in a statement.

Muharemovic, who impressed with Sassuolo in Serie A last season, is a replacement for Pascal Struijk, who joined Brighton for £20mn in June. He follows Harry Wilson to Elland Road after the Wales forward's free transfer from Fulham earlier in the close-season.

Meanwhile, Germany defender Robin Gosens signed with Schalke on Friday, joining from Fiorentina on a season-long loan which will become permanent if the freshly promoted club stay up this season. A former Inter Milan, Atalanta and Union Berlin defender, Gosens, 32, spoke of his "special connection" to Schalke, the club he supported as a boy. "They outlined their plan and explained exactly what my role would be and what they expect from me," Gosens said.