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TENNIS | Page 3

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champion
Shelton storms
to Montreal win



FOOTBALL | Page 4

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ATHLETICS

Duplantis bids for
fourth European
title as stars align
in Birmingham

Page 2

MOTOGP

Martin extends lead with British GP sprint victory

Ogura and Bezzecchi complete podium, Marc Marquez finishes ninth

Reuters
Silverstone, United Kingdom

Jorge Martin led from start to finish to win the British Grand Prix sprint at Silverstone, extending his Mo-toGP championship lead as the Italian manufacturer locked out the podium in dominant fashion.

The Spaniard converted pole position into a commanding 10-lap sprint win, with Trackhouse rider Ai Ogura finishing second and Martin's team mate Marco Bezzecchi completing an all-Aprilia podium in third.

Martin's victory moved him to 220 points in the championship standings, opening up a 17-point gap over second-placed Ogura while Bezzecchi leapfrogged Marc Marquez to move up to third, 27 points behind.

Marquez's title aspirations suffered a significant blow as the Ducati rider slumped from sixth on the grid to ninth at the chequered flag after suffering from tyre wear. He now sits 29 points behind Martin. "A lot of work during summer, finally, all the work we did was worth it. So I'm really, really happy. Today, what can I say? Incredible job," Martin said.

The polesitter, who smashed the lap record in qualifying, made a perfect getaway but had to manage his resources carefully as tyre degradation became a significant factor.

"I tried to be as fast as possible, trying to manage. At the end, I had no rear tyre (grip)," he added. "So I thought Ai would catch me, but I was able to manage the distance and another sprint victory is always amazing."

Ducati riders had won the last three sprints at Silverstone but the best they could manage was Gresini Racing's Alex Marquez finishing fourth, while VR46 Racing

rider Fabio Di Giannantonio was fifth. While Martin controlled proceedings at the front, the drama unfolded behind as Marquez made contact with Bezzecchi at the start before recovering to move up to fourth.

However, the Aprilias' superior corner speed soon proved decisive, with Bezzecchi overtaking the reigning champion on lap five and pulling clear. Marquez's afternoon went from bad to worse as tyre wear hampered his pace, allowing his brother Alex to move past him before KTM's Pedro Acosta, Joan Mir and Franco Morbidelli also found their way through.

The reigning world champion barely held on to ninth place as Diogo Moreira closed in during the final moments, with Ducati mechanics immediately examining his rear tyre upon his return to the pits.

But the day belonged to Aprilia and, while Martin was elated, an emotional Bezzecchi was in tears after securing a podium on his return from collarbone surgery, with the Italian still not fully fit and riding through pain.

"It was a tough period, as you probably can imagine. So it was very important to come back and enjoy on the bike. We did a very good job," Bezzecchi said.

"It's difficult for me to say what I'm feeling right now. But I want to say just a massive thanks to all the team and all the people that stayed close to me. They worked hard with me."

BRITISH GRAND PRIX GRID

Front row: Jorge Martin (ESP/ Aprilia), Raul Fernandez (ESP/ Aprilia-Trackhouse), Ai Ogura (JPN/Aprilia-Trackhouse)

2nd row: Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/Ducati-VR46), Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Aprilia), Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati)

3rd row: Alex Marquez (ESP/ Ducati-Gresini), Franco Morbidelli



Aprilia Racing's Spanish rider Jorge Martin celebrates after winning the British Grand Prix sprint race at Silverstone circuit. (AFP)

(ITA/Ducati-VR46), Pedro Acosta (ESP/KTM)

4th row: Iker Lecuona (ESP/ Ducati-Gresini), Jack Miller (AUS/ Yamaha-Pramac), Joan Mir (ESP/ Honda)

5th row: Fabio Quartararo (FRA/ Yamaha), Diogo Moreira (BRA/ Honda-LCR), Luca Marini (ITA/ Honda)

6th row: Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/ Ducati), Alex Rins (ESP/Yamaha), Brad Binder (RSA/KTM)

7th row: Enea Bastianini (ITA/ KTM-Tech3), Cal Crutchlow (GBR/ Honda-LCR), Pol Espargaro (ESP/ KTM-Tech3)

8th row: Toprak Razgatlioglu (TUR/Yamaha-Pramac), Augusto Fernandez (ESP/Yamaha)

PREMIER LEAGUE

Guimaraes eager to 'make history' at champions Arsenal

AFP
London

Bruno Guimaraes said he wanted to "make history" at Arsenal after joining the Premier League champions from top-flight rivals Newcastle for a reported fee of £75mn (\$101.2mn).

The Brazil midfielder spent four-and-a-half seasons with Newcastle and became captain of the Magpies.

Arsenal, who ended a 22-year wait for a top-flight English league title last season, did not disclose the exact length of Guimaraes's "long-term" deal. But British media reports said he had signed a four-year contract with a further one-year option.

"I feel good, I feel amazing. I'm glad for the opportunity," Guimaraes told Arsenal's media channels. "We have tough games to play this season so the squad is going to be very, very important and I'm hopeful we can achieve our dreams."

The 28-year-old said he'd been enthused about joining Arsenal right from his initial contacts with sporting director Andrea Berta and manager Mikel Arteta. "Since the first time I spoke to Berta and Mikel I was excited," said Guimaraes. "I just felt inside of me that I need a new challenge in my life and I think to be an Arsenal player is going to be an exciting challenge in my life."

"I think after playing two World Cups, I'm at the point of my life, I think I need a challenge like this. I want to win trophies, I want to make history and I think I'm in the right place to do it. I'm so excited to start."

Guimaraes is Arsenal's most high-profile signing of the transfer window so far, joining fellow new arrivals Illan Meslier and Christos Tzolis.

"With Bruno joining us, we are further strengthening the heart of our team," said Berta.

"As we have all seen, Bruno can play as a defensive midfielder and as a box-to-box player. He combines quality with quantity, and has provided goals and assists for his team every year."

"Bruno will allow Mikel to further develop our playing style and will also increase our internal competitiveness, which is essential for maintaining the



standards required when we are aiming to win major trophies."

Guimaraes was also linked with Arsenal in January 2022, when he ended up leaving Lyon for Newcastle. But he has now joined the Gunners after scoring 31 goals in 195 appearances for the Magpies.

Under coach Eddie Howe, Guimaraes helped Newcastle end a 56-year major trophy drought when they won the 2025 League Cup and was also involved as they twice qualified for the Champions League.

Guimaraes is the third high-profile player to leave the north-east club ahead of the new season following the exits of Anthony Gordon and Sandro Tonali.

"This is one of the toughest decisions of my life. When I arrived, the club was in a challenging position and I am incredibly proud of what we achieved together," Guimaraes said in Newcastle's statement. "I fell in love with this place. I really mean that."

Howe stepped down as Newcastle manager last week and has since been replaced by German Matthias Jaissle.

Guimaraes, who played for Brazil at the recent World Cup, will compete for a place in Arsenal's midfield with Declan Rice, Myles Lewis-Skelly, Martin Zubimendi and Mikel Merino.

Arsenal kick off their season against Manchester City in the Community Shield next Sunday, before starting their title defence against newly-promoted Coventry five days later.

Newcastle get their campaign under way against Liverpool at St James' Park on August 23.

SPOTLIGHT

Infantino denies allegations of affair, favouritism while at UEFA

AFP
Paris

FIFA president Gianni Infantino, who has endured a week of scathing criticism revolving around the now shelved private investment plan, has been accused by a British newspaper of paying off an alleged lover while at UEFA.

According to *The Telegraph*, the Italian-Swiss lawyer, who served as secretary general of European football's governing body from 2009 to 2016, also previously used his influence to secure a promotion for the same UEFA employee with whom he was in an intimate relationship.

Infantino has categorically denied the allegations, according to the article which was published late on Friday.

When contacted, a FIFA spokesperson had not responded.

According to *The Telegraph*, which did not cite its sources, this employee received a "a six-figure sum" upon her departure - at an unspecified time - in addition to the payment of tuition fees for a business school amounting to around £45,000 (\$60,700).

When contacted, UEFA acknowledged that "a departure payment was made to

the individual in question" at that time, "coupled with the payment of fees for an MBA course at a local business school".

However, it insisted "the payment was in line with the regulations that existed for departing staff at the time", before adding that "such regulations have been tightened since 2016".

Quoted by *The Telegraph*, a FIFA spokesperson stated that Infantino, who has been married since 2001, "strongly denies these allegations", which were "categorically untrue".

"Any insinuation of inappropriate conduct or violation of statutes or regulations is defamatory," FIFA added. "No employee at UEFA and FIFA has ever raised a complaint regarding Infantino's behaviour because there never was an incident where he was involved."

Infantino, who is standing for re-election next March, has been embroiled in a crisis since the announcement late last month of his controversial - and ultimately abandoned a plan to open up the World Cup to private investors.

He faces opposition in particular from UEFA and it's president Aleksander Ceferin, which on Thursday stood by its threat to boycott the World Cups, deeming the mere withdrawal of the controversial plan to be insufficient.



INFANTINO GETS BACKING OF SOUTH AMERICAN FOOTBALL

Meanwhile, Infantino on Friday received support from several leading South American football figures as he visited Colombia amidst the crisis engulfing world football's governing body.

Infantino arrived early on Friday in the Colombian city of Cali to attend hard-right president Abelardo de la Espriella's

inauguration. Photos released by the Colombian Football Federation show a smiling Infantino standing alongside South American Football Confederation (CONMEBOL) president Alejandro Dominguez and the president of the Colombian federation, Ramon Jesurun.

The 56-year-old Italian-Swiss lawyer, who has been in office since 2016, declined to answer a question about wheth-

er he considered FIFA's woes to be over. Later, while attending a children's football festival at a sports complex in Cali, he spoke of his "happiness" at being at the event.

"It is a joy to be here today," the FIFA boss told dozens of children kitted out in football gear at an event in the southwestern city.

"Football is joy, football is happiness, football is unity," he said, adding that "so many champions" were born "in this part of the world, in this part of Colombia."

CONMEBOL, which has only 10 FIFA-affiliated members but includes iconic federations such as Argentina and Brazil, had on Thursday expressed its "concern regarding the repeated unilateral actions taken" by FIFA.

However, when asked by a Colombian media outlet on Friday, the CONMEBOL president stated that "one cannot ignore the great work" done by Infantino. "We must continue working for football through dialogue; it is not necessary to always agree," Dominguez added.

Following the powerful Argentine Football Association (AFA) and the Paraguayan federation on Thursday, Infantino also received support on Friday from two other South American federations - Venezuela and Ecuador.

FOCUS

Johnson reveals ‘stress’ of Grand Slam Track collapse, clarifies payment

AFP
London

Michael Johnson said he had “nights where I didn’t sleep” during the collapse of his Grand Slam Track (GST) athletics circuit as he insisted a payment made to him just days before its season was cut short had been entirely legitimate.

US sprint great Johnson, a four-time Olympic champion, launched Grand Slam Track earlier in 2025 with the bold goal of transforming athletics, promising a concentrated format featuring more frequent head-to-head races between the world’s best athletes.

But the circuit stalled amid fi-

nancing issues, with Johnson forced to cancel the fourth and final leg of the circuit in Los Angeles in June last year following meets in Kingston, Miami and Philadelphia.

GST filed for bankruptcy protection in December but a legal filing by GST’s creditors in March accused Johnson of “secretly” paying himself \$500,000 (£370,598) days before the season collapsed. A GST representative said at the time the claim was “unfounded and false”.

Johnson, in an interview with Britain’s *Daily Telegraph* newspaper published yesterday, clarified the payment by saying: “I’m happy to clear it up, because it’s the most hurtful thing and the exact opposite of what was reported.

“Our credit card was full at

Grand Slam Track, because we were facing significant cash-flow issues. We had 96 athletes, plus companions, whom we needed to fly to Miami and Philadelphia.

“We had 170 people to house in hotels in both cities, and the credit card had no room left. I instructed our travel team to put it on my credit card, and I would be reimbursed for it. “So, what I received was reimbursement. I also loaned the company \$2mn (£1.5mn) to make sure we took care of the athletes. I decided to forgo my own salary.”

The 58-year-old Johnson, speaking about the stress he suffered as a result of GST’s collapse, added: “It was 10 (out of 10).

“In Olympic sprinting, you have to deliver your best performance in seconds, and you get

one opportunity every four years - there’s probably nothing more stressful than that. But this was the most stress I had dealt with in a very long time.

“I definitely had nights where I didn’t sleep, where I would be awake thinking, “This is on me. This headline just came out - do the athletes believe that?” Those things weighed on me very heavily, and on my family as well.

“I was asking myself, ‘Are you stupid? Why did you do this? This is not what you need?”

Michael Johnson, a four-time Olympic sprint champion, launched Grand Slam Track in early 2025 with the bold goal of transforming athletics. (AFP)



EUROPEAN ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIPS

Duplantis bids for 4th European title in Birmingham

Ingebrigtsen returning to the track, having not raced at all in 2026

AFP
Birmingham

Serial world record setter Armand ‘Mondo’ Duplantis leads 10 world champions seeking glory when a high-quality European Athletics Championships get under way in Birmingham tomorrow.

Duplantis is joined by Isaac Nader (1,500m), Jimmy Gressier (5,000/10,000m), Mattia Furlani (long jump), Pedro Pichardo (triple jump), Daniel Stahl (discus) and Leo Neugebauer (decathlon) in men’s events.

Femke Broeders-Bol (400m hurdles but contesting the 800m), Ditaji Kambundji (100m hurdles) and Maria Perez (20km and 35km race walk but contesting the half marathon race walk) are the female world champs.

Duplantis is also Olympic champion, alongside Jakob Ingebrigtsen (5,000m), Miltiadis Tentoglou (long jump), Keely Hodgkinson (800m), Yaroslava Mahuchikh (high jump) and Yemisi Mabry (shot put).

Duplantis, Ingebrigtsen, Tentoglou and Norway’s 400m hurdler Karsten Warholm are all targeting their fourth successive European titles. Mahuchikh and Hodgkinson are eyeing a hat-trick of golds.

Duplantis makes his return to competition after a scare that saw him withdraw from the London Diamond League meet with a left thigh problem after clearing 5.95 metres.

“No sign of injury after a professional examination that also included an MRI and x-ray,” his agent Daniel Wessfeldt told AFP.

“His planned competition programme stays firm. Next meet the European championships in Birmingham.”

The double Olympic and triple world champion has broken the



Sweden’s Armand Duplantis celebrates with fans after setting a new pole vault world record at 6.29m during the Hungarian Athletics Grand Prix in Budapest. (AFP)

world record 15 times, first with 6.17m back in 2020. His most recent mark was 6.31m in Sweden in March.

Ingebrigtsen focus on 5,000

Norway’s Ingebrigtsen is also returning to the track in Birmingham, having not raced at all in 2026 after surgery on his Achilles tendon in January.

“I can confirm he will run. He is looking forward to being back. It is a great relief, and he is looking forward to it,” Ingebrigtsen’s spokesman Espen Skoland said.

Ingebrigtsen, unbeaten at the Euros having swept the 1,500/5,000m titles at the last three editions dating back to Berlin 2018 when he was just 17, will skip the shorter event in Birmingham to focus on the 5,000m.

“If you’re waiting for the perfect preparation, perfect conditions, perfect timing, you’ll be waiting your whole life,” said the Norwegian.

The defence of his titles in Rome two years ago saw him become the first male athlete in European Athletics Championships history to win six gold medals.

“Anyone who has watched me race over the years will know that competition is what drives me. I am healthy, training has been going well and after discussing with my team, we reached the conclusion that there is no reason not to race,” he said.

“What better way than to return to the European championships, where I have so many golden memories?”

The championships, the first

Euros to be held in Britain, will also feature a host of home hopes, notably Olympic 800m champion Keely Hodgkinson, her training partner Georgia Hunter Bell and 2022 world 1,500m champion Jake Wightman.

Their teammate Dina Asher-Smith, the two-time 100m champion, could overtake the seven golds of Croatian discus thrower Sandra Elkasevic with another blue riband victory, to become the most successful athlete in the history of the championships.

In all, athletes from 49 nations will compete for 50 gold medals, including a mixed 4x100m relay for the first time.

The 10 leading performances of the August 10-16 champs will each also be rewarded with a cheque for 50,000 euros.

SWIMMING

Marchand to skip medleys at European competition

AFP
Paris

Swimming star **Leon Marchand** has cut back on the events he will compete in at the European championships starting tomorrow because of a lingering thigh injury.

The French federation confirmed yesterday that Marchand will not compete in the 200m and 400m individual medley events in Paris.

The Frenchman had already ruled out the 200m breaststroke but remains entered in the 200m butterfly and 400m freestyle that place less strain on the adductor muscles. He may also participate in one or two relays with the French team.

“The injury is healing well, and recovery is largely complete. However, since competing in the



200m and 400m individual medley carries a non-negligible risk of recurrence, and to safeguard the remainder of the competition, the decision was made not to enter these races,” explained team doc-

tor Sebastien Le Garrec.

The four-time Olympic champion injured his adductor during the 200m breaststroke heats at the French championships in June, subsequently withdrawing

from the rest of the competition. He suffered a setback during a training session in Marseille three weeks later.

Earlier this month, he had confirmed his participation in the European championships, though he was doubtful regarding the 400m individual medley.

Ultimately, he decided to withdraw from the shorter distance as well as a precautionary measure.

The withdrawal from his two signature events is a major setback for the 24-year-old, who had made these championships the primary goal of his season.

He had also stated he wanted to break his own world record in the 400m individual medley this season.

“It’s something I want to do in the near future, and I imagine doing it in Paris at the European championships would be great,” he had said.

CRICKET

Head wins 2nd straight Allan Border Medal

AFP
Sydney

Star batsman **Travis Head** has won Australia’s top cricketing honour for the second year in a row, edging Alex Carey to claim the Allan Border Medal.

The opener polled 153 votes, one ahead of wicketkeeper and South Australia teammate Carey, and three clear of fast bowler Mitchell Starc.

Fellow players, the media and umpires select the player of the year, with the awards handed out at a function in Brisbane on Friday evening.

Head played 30 matches across all three formats during the 2025-26 international season, blasting 1,437 runs.

The left-hander’s highlight was a brilliant 123 off 83 balls on day two of the Ashes Test against England in Perth which

helped Australia claim an eight-wicket win. He went on to score two more big Ashes centuries.

“To think that I’ve got two medals and my kids can look at them and I can tell them (about it) in 20 years’ time is pretty cool,” said Head.

Head was only the fifth player to win back-to-back Allan Border Medals, following in the footsteps of Ricky Ponting, Michael Clarke, David Warner and Shane Watson.

Starc’s remarkable durability through Australia’s 11 Tests last season, including 31 Ashes wickets, saw him recognised as Australian Test player of the year. Mitchell Marsh was named ODI player of the year while Tim David took the Twenty20 honour.

Earlier this year, Annabel Sutherland claimed her second consecutive Belinda Clark Award, which recognises Australia’s best woman cricketer.



Flintoff quits England Lions role after Sydney Thunder appointment

Andrew Flintoff said he had stepped down from his role as coach of the second-string England Lions after his appointment as head coach of the Sydney Thunder in Australia’s T20 Big Bash League.

The former England captain had been in charge of the Lions for almost two years after he returned to cricket in 2024 following a car crash while presenting on BBC television motoring show Top Gear.

“Unfortunately, I’ve made the decision to step away from my role with the Lions,” said the 48-year-old Flintoff.

“Not only have I enjoyed my time having the opportunity to work with the best young cricketers in the country, but have taken great pride in seeing them develop.

“I’d like to thank the coaches and staff for all their passion, tireless work and support they give every day. In particular, Ed Barney who I’ve loved working with and was so lucky to have as a performance director, and obviously Rob (Key) for trusting me with one of the most important roles in English cricket.

“I can’t wait to get started with the Thunder later in the year and see where coaching takes me.”

Flintoff has been England Lions head coach for 23 months, but spent time with England’s senior white-ball teams and was part of the backroom staff at the 2024 T20 World Cup.

Former all-rounder Flintoff, a key figure in England’s 2005 Ashes-winning triumph, also coached the Northern Superchargers franchise in English domestic cricket’s Hundred competition.

Barney, the England and Wales Cricket Board’s men’s performance director, said: “Fred (Flintoff) has helped to transform the Lions environment into a programme that has had a major impact on young players. “By creating an environment that both supports and pushes excellence at all times he has helped bring forward a new generation of young players.”

Bangladesh crash to heavy defeat ahead of Australia Tests

Bangladesh folded for just 54 yesterday to lose their only warm-up game ahead of a two-Test series against top-ranked Australia by an innings and 38 runs. The tourists were skittled by young quick Campbell Thompson, who claimed a stunning 8-25 off 11 overs as a Cricket Australia XI romped to victory before lunch on the third and final day in Darwin.

It does not bode well for Bangladesh, who face a full-strength Australia spearheaded by pace trio Pat Cummins, Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood in the same city next week.

Opener Tanzid Hasan was the only batter to reach double figures with 22. Bangladesh made 263 in their first innings with the CA XI responding with 355.

“To clean it up this morning, I had a clear process -- just try to use the new ball, swing it and hit the stumps,” said 22-year-old Thompson, who had played just one previous first-class match.

“I was lucky enough to get a few wickets.”

TENNIS

Defending champ Shelton storms to Montreal win

‘I found a way to break his serve and kept the foot on the gas’

AFP
Montreal

Ben Shelton threw down eight aces and produced three love games in the second set in dominating Zizou Bergs 6-3, 6-2 on Friday in reaching the fourth round of the ATP Montreal Masters.

Fifth seed Shelton, highest-ranked man remaining in a severely depleted field, improved his chance for a second straight title in Canada with the rout in 65 minutes. The American profitted from foot faults and double-faults from his Belgian opponent in advancing to a round of 16 for the first time this season.

“It was a good day for me, I managed the match well,” said 23-year-old Shelton. “He came out serving extremely well. I had to make some adjustments.

“I found a way to break his serve and kept the foot on the gas when I got the lead.” Shelton play for a repeat spot in the last eight when he faces Brazilian teenager Joao Fonseca, who defeated ninth seed Casper Ruud 7-6 (8/6), 6-3.

Fonseca recovered after a slow start, trailing the Norwegian 4-2 before fighting his way back into contention. The youngster finished off the win after leading 5-2, claiming victory on a second match point winner into the empty court. “It was not easy at the start. He was serving well,” the Brazilian said. “I fought to finally get the win.”

Fonseca said he learned much after beating Ruud at Roland Garros: “Playing with the big guys this year was really important for my development. When it comes to Shelton, Fonseca said, “I think I’ll be prepared. He’s a nice guy. I don’t need to say how good he is on court. I’m just trying to rest and be prepared.”



Ben Shelton of the United States watches the ball against Zizou Bergs of Belgium during their third round match of Montreal Masters in Montreal. (AFP)

Tallon Griekspoor followed up his defeat of top-seeded Roland Garros champion Alexander Zverev, with the Dutchman gaining late momentum and getting through a rough patch for a 3-6, 6-4, 6-3 defeat of Matteo Arnakdi.

The Italian French Open semi-finalist took early command before Griekspoor took motivation through player box instructions from Swedish coach Thomas Hogstedt and turned the match on its head. World number 66 Griekspoor went up two breaks in the deciding set against the 2024 Canadian semi-finalist, lost one

of them but broke back for victory in his third match point after more than two hours. “Tennis is such a tricky sport. It’s never over until the last ball is hit,” Griekspoor said. “I tried to stay focused, I’m happy with how I managed.

“I’ve had a good level in practice but was not able to convert it to the match court. Today was not easy but I’m pleased after a win like this. I was far from my best but I’m happy I played myself into the match to win it.”

Griekspoor will bid for a quarter-final place when he takes on Spaniard Daniel Merida, who put

out Alex Michelsen 6-4, 6-7 (4/7), 6-1, saving two match points in the second set for the American.

Merida, who had never won a tour-level hardcourt match prior to this week, arrived in Canada after winning the Umag title on clay in Croatia last month. Czech Jakub Mensik advanced past Terence Atmane 7-5 6-4, winning back-to-back matches for the first time since reaching the semis two months ago in Paris to break fresh ground in Canada. He will next play Botic Van De Zandschulp, who beat Hubert Hurkacz 3-6, 7-6 (7/4), 7-5.

TORONTO MASTERS

Rybakina advances to fourth round as Andreeva out

AFP
Toronto

Reigning Australian Open champion Elena Rybakina advanced to the fourth round of the WTA Toronto Masters on Friday while French Open winner Mirra Andreeva was eliminated by Canada’s Leylah Fernandez.

World number two Rybakina from Kazakhstan defeated American 28th seed Ann Li 6-2, 7-5 in 90 minutes, winning five of six break chances while saving two of four against her.

Rybakina, who also won the 2022 Wimbledon title, advanced to a last-16 meeting with Russia’s Liudmila Samsonova, who outlasted Australian Maya Joint 7-5, 6-7 (3/7), 6-2. Samsonova leads the career rivalry with Rybakina 4-2, but Rybakina has won their past two WTA meetings, most recently in last year’s Strasbourg final.

Fernandez, the 30th seed, dispatched 19-year-old fifth-ranked Russian Andreeva 6-1, 6-4 in 80 minutes, snapping a seven-match losing streak against top-10 opponents.

Fernandez last beat a player ranked so high when she downed fourth-rated Jessica Pegula on her way to last year’s WTA Washington title.

“The key for me was to stay positive, stay strong, and to keep being patient,” Fernandez said. “She wasn’t going to give away some easy balls.”

The Canadian left-hander won 24 of 27 points on her first serve and captured 17 of 23 points on Andreeva’s second serves to advance. Andreeva made 34 unforced errors to 17 winners.

“I’ve put in the work. I know physically I’m strong. I know I can endure long rallies, long matches,” Fernandez said. “So if it’s going to take 100 balls to hit to put it in to break her down, then so be it.”

Fernandez will next face four-time Grand Slam winner Naomi Osaka, the 11th seed from Japan who defeated Belgium’s 20th-seeded Elise Mertens 6-1, 6-2 in 71 minutes.

Osaka fired seven aces and took four of eight break points while denying Mertens on her three break chances.

Fernandez and Osaka have split two career meetings, the Canadian winning at the 2021 US Open on the way to a runner-up finish. Osaka won last year at Wuhan.

“It’s tough because she’s lefty,” Osaka said. “Obviously there aren’t many lefties on tour, so it takes me awhile to get used to that. She has a really good attitude. I’ve never seen her down. She always keeps fighting. I really appreciate that about her.”

Gauff, Eala advance

US fourth seed Coco Gauff, a two-time Grand Slam winner, advanced by defeating Greece’s Maria Sakkari 6-1, 6-4 in 76 minutes.

Gauff cruised to a 5-1 lead in the second set before Sakkari rallied within two points of pulling level before winning five of the last six points, taking the match on a backhand volley winner and service winner.

“I’m happy with how I played. Maria is a tough opponent,” Gauff said. “Her level definitely raised toward the end of that second set but I’m glad I was able to close it out. That last game was a big test for me.”

Gauff will next face 19-year-old Russian Alina Korneeva, who ousted US 13th seed Iva Jovic 6-3, 6-4. Korneeva won seven of eight break points to reach the last 16 after 82 minutes. Alexandra Eala, the 21-year-old Philippines left-hander who won her first WTA title Monday at Washington, reached the fourth round by defeating American Caty McNally 6-3, 5-7, 6-4.

Eala had her right ankle taped by a trainer leading 3-2 in the second set, was broken at love in the sixth game and pushed to a third set before taking the victory after two hours and 39 minutes.

World number 20 Eala next faces Swiss 12th seed Belinda Bencic, who outlasted American Taylor Townsend 6-7 (5/7), 7-6 (7/4), 6-4 after three hours and 24 minutes.

CYCLING

Vollering grabs Tour de France lead in Nice

AFP
Nice, France

Demi Vollering’s late attack and solo break for victory earned the overall lead of the Tour de France Femmes on Saturday as overnight leader Kasia Niewiadoma finished third on the day.

The Dutch FDJ United-Suez rider now leads the Pole by eight seconds with a title struggle in the hills outside Nice ripe for a tense finale on Sunday’s final stage with a series of four climbs of the steep seven-kilometre Col d’Eze.

Stage 8 was a 171.9 km run from Sisteron to Nice with a flat route interrupted by a late climb which the 2023 champion used to full advantage, dropping Niewiadoma on its steepest section.

The 29-year-old Vollering then extended her advantage to 17sec at the Nice seafont Promenade des Anglais finish line although Niewiadoma would later complain about FDJ tactics.

“I can’t tell you how much I suffered, but with all the good people I have round me, that made



FDJ-SUEZ’s Dutch rider Demi Vollering celebrates as she crosses the finish line to win the 8th stage of the Women’s Tour de France in Nice, France, yesterday. (AFP)

it possible. I gave it everything,” said Vollering, who appeared to be exhausted. “This is proof that if you really believe in something, if you really dream big about something, then it doesn’t matter what it needs to take, how much pain it will cost you.”

The 31-year-old Canyon-

SRAM rider Niewiadoma, who beat Vollering to the 2024 Tour de France femmes title by the agonising margin of four seconds, also slugged out on a climb day.

But after the finish Niewiadoma accused Vollering’s team of gamesmanship, by blocking her during Vollering’s attack.

“I was annoyed at the beginning of the climb because (Celia) Gery, on purpose, just blocked me to the barriers where I had to stop pedalling,” she said after confronting Gery on live tv.

“If they want to compete, they should compete fair play and not look to block me on the barriers because I feel it is so childish. Honestly, I lost all respect for them for that.”

Swiss rider Marlen Reusser who took the yellow jersey in Tuesday’s time-trial and held on another day, is now in third place 1min 12sec off the pace, with Elisa Longo Borghini at 3min 05sec in fourth.

Defending champion Pauline Ferrand-Prevot withdrew Saturday morning due to illness after having struggled to the finish line on Friday over 10min down at the line.

Puck Pieterse of Fenix-Premier Tech still leads the polkadot climb points rankings, Antonia Niedermaier of Canyon-SRAM leads the best young rider’s standings and Lorena Wiebes retains the green sprint points standings she has led since the opening day.



Elena Rybakina returns a shot to Ann Li of the United States during day six of the Toronto Masters. (AFP)



Mirra Andreeva leaves the court after losing to Leylah Fernandez of Canada in the Toronto Masters. (AFP)

GOLF



Joaquin Niemann of Chile plays his tee shot on the 12th hole during day two of LIV Golf New York in Bedminster, New Jersey. (AFP)

Chilean Niemann extends lead to five shots

AFP
New York

Joaquin Niemann fired a 6-under-par 65 and extended his lead to five shots halfway through LIV Golf New York in Bedminster, N.J.

After rounds of 64-65, the Chilean stands at 13-under 129, five strokes ahead of England’s Lee Westwood and six better than Spain’s Sergio Garcia. Westwood and Garcia both matched Niemann’s 65 at Trump National Golf Club. Northern Ireland’s Tom McKibbin (66) and Harold Var-

ner III (67) are tied for fourth place at 6 under par. Australia’s Lucas Herbert and England’s Ian Poulter both started the day two shots behind Niemann, but fell off the pace with rounds of even-par 71 and 1-over 72, respectively. At 5 under through 36 holes, Herbert is tied with three others, while Poulter is tied for 10th at 4 under.

Niemann, who is looking for his ninth LIV Golf individual title, leads the field in strokes gained off the tee and approach. But he is still not satisfied with where he is.

“I mean, to be honest, that’s the kind of discussion that I always have with my coach,” Niemann

said. “He would come out to me and say, ‘Hey, you were No. 1 in strokes gained off the tee or approach to the green or whatever stat.’ But I don’t feel like - I feel like I’m hitting it a lot better. I feel like it can be a lot better, too, right now.

“I know how I can kind of get closer to that better. So I’m just working towards that. I just like feeling my body before the shot, seeing what the ball wants to do and try to match my body muscles to kind of recreate that.”

The 27-year-old has yet to make a bogey through 36 holes. For the second consecutive day, he birdied five of the nine holes on the front

side. Niemann went on to par Nos. 10-17 and closed with a birdie four at the par-5 18th hole.

After hitting 15 of 18 greens in regulation Thursday, he found the surface 16 of 18 times on Friday.

Westwood caught fire on the sixth hole, birdieing three in a row and four of five. Like Niemann, he converted for birdie on No. 18. The veteran Englishman will keep the same game plan for the weekend. “I’m delighted with 8 under par after two days,” Westwood said. “Joaco is obviously a world-class player. For me, he’s top 20 in the world. When he’s on his game, he can run away with a tournament.”

SPOTLIGHT

Atletico Madrid will not sell Alvarez, says coach Simeone

AFP
Madrid

Atletico Madrid will not allow forward Julian Alvarez to leave the club during the current transfer window despite interest from Barcelona, coach Diego Simeone said.

Last month, Atletico filed a complaint to FIFA over Barcelona allegedly tapping up Alvarez. The Argentina international has also been linked with a possible move to Premier League champions Arsenal and was the subject of a rejected 150mn euro (\$173.4mn) bid from Real Madrid in June.

"I think the situation is very clear. The club has made a decision that (CEO) Miguel Angel (Gil Marin) has explained very well," Simeone told reporters ahead of a pre-season friendly against Manchester City in Seoul. "From a sporting perspective, we're very happy to have a footballer

like Julian... We will help him continue to grow, continue to improve and continue delivering the best – which has been a tremendous amount – that he has given us over the last two years."

Alvarez is due to rejoin the Atletico squad in two days' time after taking a break following Argentina's World Cup final loss to Spain.

While on World Cup duty, the 26-year-old said he "believed a transfer is best for everyone", but did not confirm his preferred destination.

Alvarez has scored 49 goals for Atletico since signing from Manchester City two years ago. "We don't want to transfer him. We didn't accept the 100mn euro offer, nor will we accept one for 150mn or 200mn," Gil Marin told the club's in-house media channel.

"I have no doubt that Atletico is the right place for Julian and that Julian is the centre-forward for Atletico Madrid. We

want to keep him."

When asked about how Alvarez might be received by Atletico fans following the transfer speculation, Simeone pointed to Antoine Griezmann.

The Frenchman made a big-money move to Barcelona before returning to Atletico. He was initially met with some hostility, but won the supporters back over and departed last season a club legend.

"We went through a period with Antoine in recent years where he had to leave, come back, and prove his quality and stature on the pitch," said Simeone. "I see no other path than focusing on the sporting side of things, doing our part and helping him (Alvarez), just as we have done over the last few years."

Atletico get their La Liga campaign under way on August 19 with a home match against newly-promoted Malaga. The capital club finished fourth last season, 25 points adrift of champions Barcelona.



Atletico Madrid forward Julian Alvarez (left) and coach Diego Simeone.

FRIENDLY

Mount picks up injury as United draw with PSG

Midfielder, who joined United from Chelsea in 2023, has been hampered by injuries

AFP
Gothenburg, Sweden

Manchester United managed a creditable 1-1 draw with European champions Paris Saint-Germain in a Gothenburg friendly but the result was overshadowed by an injury to Mason Mount.

The England midfielder, who joined United from Chelsea in 2023, has been hampered by injury problems since arriving at Old Trafford and he lasted less than 20 minutes on Saturday after starting against PSG.

Mount, 27, appeared to suffer a foot injury in Sweden and, following discussions with coaches on the touchline, left the field to be replaced by Tyler Fletcher.

Mount has been restricted to just 31 league appearances – many of them as a substitute – during his first two seasons with United, who will be competing in the 2026/27 Champions League alongside PSG next term after finishing third in the Premier League.

United were 1-0 down to PSG at the time of Mount's injury, having gone behind in the second minute through an Ibrahim Mbaye goal even though the French giants were missing many of their star players.

But Bryan Mbeumo equalised for United



Manchester United's Youri Tielemans (left) vies for the ball with Paris Saint-Germain's Marquinhos and Vitinha during a friendly match in Gothenburg, Sweden.

ed in the 32nd minute, with Amad Diallo playing him in after winning the ball back. There were more injury concerns for

United early in the second half when their 40-year-old goalkeeper Tom Heaton suffered a right hamstring problem while

rushing out to make a clearance. Mbeumo might have doubled his tally but for the fine form of PSG's Matvey Safonov. The goalkeeper, however, left the pitch to jeers after escaping punishment for clattering into Joshua Zirkzee way outside of his area – an incident that may well have seen him sanctioned in a competitive match.

At the other end, there were late chances for Fletcher, Shea Lacey and captain Bruno Fernandes, who linked up well with new arrival Youri Tielemans in an encouraging sign for United manager Michael Carrick.

"I enjoyed it," Carrick said "Good challenge. Slightly different with the way they play. We should've scored more goals."

The former United and England midfielder added: "The things we were trying to get out of the game, a lot of it was there. It's good for the boys sometimes to have to problem solve and find their own way and I thought we did that.

"That prepares them for the season as well. In that respect there were a lot of things that maybe people don't always see that we were quite happy with. There were some good signs there."

United have two more friendly fixtures, against bitter rivals Leeds in Dublin on August 12 and AC Milan in the Polish city of Wroclaw three days later, before launching their Premier League campaign away to newly-promoted Hull on August 22.

LOSS

Messi's father dies aged 68 in Argentina

Reuters
Buenos Aires

Lionel Messi's father, **Jorge**, died on Friday night aged 68 at a medical clinic in the Argentine city of Rosario after a long illness, the footballer's family confirmed.

Jorge spent his final months alternating between a medical center in Rosario and his home, accompanied by his wife Celia and his children Rodrigo, Matias and Maria Sol, the family said. Lionel Messi spent time with his father after the World Cup in North America before rejoining his club Inter Miami, for whom he returned to action a week ago.

He was expected to arrive in Rosario at around 8pm local time on Saturday on a private flight from Miami to bid farewell to his father during a private wake, according to a source close to the footballer's family.

Jorge closely accompanied his son Lionel throughout his career, beginning with his early years at Barcelona. He acted as a crucial pillar of support and, for several years, served as his representative. "I always needed my dad's approval, ever since I was a kid. After every match, I'd ask him what he thought of how I played," the 39-year-old had said previously.

During the World Cup, the Argentine captain experienced mixed emotions after scoring a hat-trick in the opening match against Algeria, breaking down in tears while celebrating his first goal.

Later, at a press conference, Lionel explained that his tears were due to "something unrelated to football" after going through "a few difficult, complicated days."

Days later, the family issued



a statement regarding Jorge's "health situation", informing the public that he was undergoing medical treatment.

Jorge's remains will be transferred to El Prado private cemetery in Perez, a town near Rosario, according to local media reports.

Several clubs, including Real Madrid and Lionel Messi's youth team Newell's Old Boys, along with the Argentine FA (AFA) expressed condolences to the family.

The AFA also said a minute's silence would be observed at matches across all of Argentina's divisions, while players, coaches and referees will wear black armbands.

"From here, we stand in solidarity with the entire family during this difficult time and send the most heartfelt, warm, and affectionate embrace. Strength to you all," the Argentine FA said in a statement.

Barcelona, where Messi spent most of his career from his senior debut in 2004 to 2021, said in a statement: "FC Barcelona thanks Jorge Messi for his commitment to our club, for entrusting us with the beginning and the most glorious years of his son Leo's football career."

FOCUS

Dimarco stars in Inter Milan's friendly win over Juventus

AFP
Perth, Australia

Federico Dimarco continued his strong pre-season form and Frenchman Andy Diouf hit the target as Serie A champions Inter Milan defeated Juventus 2-1 in Perth.

Dimarco opened the scoring in the 20th minute in front of 50,325 fans in brisk conditions, before 23-year-old Diouf doubled Inter's advantage in the second half.

Francisco Conceicao produced a late highlight for Juventus when he finished superbly in the 85th minute. The 28-year-old Dimarco is rounding into top gear, having also scored Inter's only goal in their 1-1 draw with rival AC Milan on the same ground on Wednesday.

Having impressed in goal against AC Milan, new signing Ivan Provedel kept a clean sheet before being substituted midway through the second half.

Juventus rued sloppy finishing and their methodical style of play did not trouble Inter, who bagged the Italian domestic double last season.

Juventus, who finished sixth in last season's Serie A, entered unbeaten in the pre-season, which included beating Chelsea 1-0 in Hong Kong on Wednesday.

Rising Turkish winger Kenan Yildiz started, having come off the bench against Chelsea amid reports that he has been battling a knee injury.

In what has become their brand under coach Luciano Spalletti, Juventus were patient in the early exchanges and played along the flanks.

But Inter were not flustered and made their move when Dimarco tapped in a sharp cross from Ange-Yoan Bonny.

Inter took control only to be denied by goalkeeper Michele Di Gregorio, who completed several outstanding saves.

After a quiet start, Yildiz attempted to spark his side before the interval but his bullet from outside the box was off target.

Both coaches rang the changes at the break, including Dimarco after he played the entire game against AC Milan.

Inter continued to press and were rewarded in the 62nd minute when Diouf hit the back of the net after finishing off a crisp pass from Pio Esposito, who is reportedly being courted by Manchester United and Arsenal. Juventus attempted a late ral-

ly when Conceicao scored, but it wasn't enough.

They round out the Perth friendlies against Serie B team Palermo on August 11, while Inter wrap up their pre-season against Real Betis in Bari on August 15. The Serie A season starts on August 22.

Inter coach Cristian Chivu was pleased with the win, but was looking ahead to make sure the team is in the best possible shape for the start of the competitive season. "We always have to believe that we can improve, but after the work we've put in over these past few weeks, I'm happy with the way we've finished this tour beyond Europe: without injuries and with a good performance," Chivu said.



Inter Milan's Federico Dimarco celebrates after scoring against Juventus in Perth.

Mosimane set to succeed Broos as South Africa coach



It will be a second spell in charge of South Africa for Pitso Mosimane, who was fired in 2012 after a disappointing World Cup qualifying result.

Johannesburg: Pitso Mosimane is set to succeed Belgian Hugo Broos as coach of South Africa, the national football association announced.

A statement said the national executive committee had approved Mosimane for the post, but salary negotiations were not concluded. "The executive has approved the appointment of coach Pitso, but we need to tie up some loose ends. We will make a formal announcement next week," said association president Danny Jordaan.

It will be a second spell in charge of the national team for the 62-year-old South African, who was fired in 2012 after a disappointing World Cup qualifying result. South Africa drew 1-1 at home against Ethiopia and an association official travelled 130 kilometres from Johannesburg late the same day to fire Mosimane.

Undeterred, Mosimane became coach of Pretoria club Mamelodi Sundowns and led them to numerous triumphs, most notably winning the 2016 CAF Champions League.

In 2020 he became the first sub-Saharan African to coach Al Ahly, and won back-to-back CAF Champions League titles with the famed Egyptian club.

He later coached clubs in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates and, most recently, Esteghlal in Iran. A forward who made four appearances for South Africa, Mosimane played for three South African clubs, including Sundowns, then had spells in Greece, Belgium and Qatar.

Mosimane inherits a national team that created history at the 2026 World Cup under Broos by reaching the second round for the first time after three failed attempts.

South Africa beat South Korea 1-0 to finish runners-up in Group A behind co-hosts Mexico, then lost 1-0 to Canada in a last-32 match. Broos, 74, resigned after the World Cup following five years in charge, saying he wanted to spend more time with his family.

The first challenge Mosimane faces will be to qualify South Africa for the 2027 Africa Cup of Nations in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. South Africa are in Group D with Kenya, Guinea and Eritrea. Kenya are automatic qualifiers as joint hosts, but will be play qualifiers to gain competitive match practice.

The other three countries will chase one qualifying place and South Africa host Serhou Guirassy-inspired Guinea and visit minnows Eritrea during September. South Africa face Kenya twice in November, then travel to Guinea and entertain Eritrea next March.