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ATHLETICS | Page 2

Werro focused on Euro medal, not 800m world record



TENNIS | Page 3

Spanish teen Jodar ousts eighth seed Lehecka

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SPORT

FOOTBALL

Iraola's first Anfield match as Liverpool manager ends in Monaco defeat

Page 4

MOTOGP

Fernandez's 'perfect' race earns him British GP victory

Championship leader Martin started on pole but was outpaced from the flag by his compatriot



Aprilia-Trackhouse's Spanish rider Raul Fernandez is the 12th different winner at Silverstone in 12 Grand Prix races on the legendary course, which also hosts Formula One. (Reuters)

AFP
Silverstone, United Kingdom

Aprilia-Trackhouse's Spanish rider Raul Fernandez won the British MotoGP Grand Prix, claiming just the second race victory of his career. Championship leader Jorge Martin started on pole but was outpaced from the flag by his 25-year-old compatriot. Martin finished second with Italian Marco Bezzecchi rounding off the podium.

"I think it was a perfect race," Fernandez said. "I'm happy and this win is special because we got three consecutive podiums and this one was a victory. Now we want more."

After crashing out of contention in the sprint on Saturday, Fernandez said he was "an idiot". But yesterday, he led all 20 laps of the Silverstone circuit from start to finish after Martin got off to a poor start, possibly due to a mechanical problem follow-

ing a shower of sparks from the rear.

Fernandez is the 12th different winner at Silverstone in 12 Grand Prix races on the legendary course, which also hosts Formula One Grands Prix.

It was nonetheless a fine weekend for 2024 world champion and Silverstone sprint winner Martin as he grew his lead in the overall standings to 31 points.

"This result gave us a big, big boost for our motivation," Martin said. "Today I wanted that victory so badly. I was really focused, but I did a small mistake in the first corner and I lost a lot of places."

Japan's Ai Ogura, who had started second on the grid and was sitting second overall, slid off midway through the race and now trails Martin by 37 points.

Instead Martin's Aprilia teammate Bezzecchi is now his principal challenger for the title following a heroic weekend after he had spent the summer break recovering from a collarbone fracture suffered in qualifying at the Germany MotoGP

last month. "It's been a tough weekend, a tough period in general," Bezzecchi said.

Bezzecchi had also been disqualified from the Czech Grand Prix in June for slapping a track steward in a fit of anger following a crash.

"We worked hard through the whole summer break," he added. "Obviously I didn't expect such a great (comeback)... I couldn't have given anything more because I am destroyed now. It was good..."

The Grand Prix, which Fernandez completed in under 40 minutes with top speeds of 330 km/h on the straights, saw several riders crash out, notably Ogura and former Italian world champion Francesco Bagnaia, who endured a very poor weekend. Spain's Alex Marquez of Ducati-Gresini finished fourth, ahead of KTM's Spaniard Pedro Acosta and Italy's Fabio Di Giannantonio of Ducati satellite team VR46. Reigning world champion Marc Marquez of Spain, on his factory Ducati, finished only seventh.

RESULTS

1. Raul Fernandez (ESP/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 39 minutes 45.930 seconds, 2. Jorge Martin (ESP/Aprilia) at 2.538sec, 3. Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Aprilia) 3.393, 4. Alex Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 4.702, 5. Pedro Acosta (ESP/KTM) 6.256, 6. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 6.382, 7. Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati) 9.550, 8. Brad Binder (RSA/KTM) 22.288, 9. Luca Marini (ITA/Honda) 23.845, 10. Diogo Moreira (BRA/Honda-LCR) 25.411, 11. Franco Morbidelli (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 26.301, 12. Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) 26.883, 13. Jack Miller (AUS/Yamaha-Pramac) 29.458, 14. Pol Espargaro (ESP/KTM-Tech3) 41.310, 15. Toprak Razgatlioglu (TUR/Yamaha-Pramac) 41.492, 16. Augusto Fernandez (ESP/Yamaha) 42.379

Did not finish: Joan Mir (ESP/Honda), Alex Rins (ESP/Yamaha), Enea Bastianini (ITA/KTM-Tech3), Iker Lecuona (ESP/Ducati-Gresini), Cal Crutchlow (GBR/Honda-LCR), Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati), Ai Ogura



Raul Fernandez holds up the winner's trophy as celebrates after winning the British Grand Prix at Silverstone. (AFP)

(JPN/Aprilia-Trackhouse)

OVERALL STANDINGS

1. Jorge Martin (ESP/Aprilia) 240 points, 2. Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Aprilia) 209, 3. Ai Ogura (JPN/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 203, 4. Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati) 200, 5. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 199, 6. Raul Fernandez (ESP/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 184, 7. Pedro Acosta (ESP/KTM) 163, 8. Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati) 143, 9. Alex Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 106, 10. Luca Marini (ITA/Honda) 86, 11. Fermin Aldeguer (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 76, 12. Enea Bastianini (ITA/KTM-Tech3) 76, 13. Brad Binder (RSA/KTM) 72, 14. Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) 59, 15. Diogo Moreira (BRA/Honda-LCR) 54, 16. Franco Morbidelli (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 53, 17. Johann Zarco (FRA/Honda-LCR) 34, 18. Joan Mir (ESP/Honda) 29, 19. Jack Miller (AUS/Yamaha-Pramac) 22, 20. Alex Rins (ESP/Yamaha) 21, 21. Toprak Razgatlioglu (TUR/Yamaha-Pramac) 13, 22. Maverick Vinales (ESP/KTM-Tech3) 10, 23. Iker Lecuona (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 9, 24. Augusto Fernandez (ESP/Yamaha) 5, 25. Pol Espargaro (ESP/KTM-Tech3) 2

Cherif and Tijan named Asia's best beach volleyball players

Qatar's beach volleyball duo Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan have been honoured as Asia's best beach volleyball players at the Asian Volleyball Confederation Awards in Bangkok. The recognition celebrates the Team Qatar pair's outstanding performances and major achievements at both Asian and international levels, further cementing their status among the continent's elite beach volleyball stars.

FIFA warns of effort to undermine Infantino as leadership crisis deepens

London: FIFA yesterday warned against what it called a "concerted and ongoing effort" to undermine President **Gianni Infantino**, saying attempts to challenge his leadership must follow the governing body's statutes and democratic procedures.

The statement came amid an increasingly bitter standoff over Infantino's leadership following the collapse of his proposal to raise about \$4.2 billion by selling a stake in the commercial rights of the World Cup and other tournaments.

The plan triggered criticism from UEFA, national associations and senior FIFA officials, led to calls for Infantino to resign and prompted a crisis meeting in Morocco this week at which FIFA's leadership reaffirmed its support for the president.

FIFA did not identify those it said were seeking to undermine Infantino or specify which reports or allegations it was referring to.

The statement followed reports by The Daily Telegraph about payments made by UEFA to a former employee during Infantino's time as the European governing body's general secretary, allegations he has denied and that FIFA has rejected as unfounded.

"Those who do not have the support of FIFA's Member Associations should not seek to achieve through allegation, insinuation or misinformation what they cannot achieve through FIFA's established democratic processes," FIFA said.

It said recent reporting had included "unsubstantiated assertions and demonstrably false claims" concerning FIFA and its president, adding that it would challenge inaccurate or misleading reports "directly and vigorously".

FIFA added it would not support, facilitate or tolerate any process concerning the election of its president that was inconsistent with its statutes, democratic procedures and governance framework. "The FIFA president

was democratically elected by FIFA's member associations and continues to serve with their mandate," it said.

Following a crisis meeting in Morocco on Wednesday, FIFA apologised to its 211 member associations for mistakes in the handling of the proposal and said its leadership had reaffirmed its full support for Infantino.

The fallout has cast a shadow over Infantino's bid for a fourth term at the FIFA Congress in Morocco in March. No clear candidate to challenge him has yet emerged.

European soccer's governing body UEFA has said it no longer has confidence in Infantino, while Norwegian Football Federation President Lise Klaveness called for him to resign on Friday, saying he no longer had the institutional trust required to govern FIFA.

But Infantino continues to enjoy substantial support among FIFA's 211 members. The Confederation of African Football (CAF) unanimously backed his leadership on Thursday, while South America's CONMEBOL rejected any attempt to oust him that did not involve a vote of all FIFA members.

Mexico's football federation (FMF) also backed Infantino, despite its regional confederation CONCACAF having called for a "comprehensive reckoning" with his presidency. "The FMF will neither recognise nor approve any process convened outside of that institutional framework," the Mexican federation said.

EUROPEAN ATHLETICS CHAMPIONSHIPS

Werro focused on medal, not 800m world record

‘SO I DON’T KNOW IF THE RACE WILL BE FAST OR IT WILL BE A TACTICAL RACE’



Switzerland's Audrey Werro, Britain's Matthew Hudson-Smith, Amy Hunt, and Netherlands' Jessica Schilder pose ahead of the European Athletics Championships in Birmingham yesterday. (Reuters)

AFP
Birmingham

In-form Swiss athlete Audrey Werro said she was focused on winning a medal in a loaded 800m field at the European Athletics Championships and not on Jarmila Kratochvilova's 43-year-old world record. Werro has run the world's fastest time this year, becoming the first woman to dip under 1:54 since 1983, when Kratochvilova, of the then-Czechoslovakia, timed 1min 53.28sec. The Swiss clocked 1:53.98 to win at the Stockholm Diamond League, ahead of Olympic 800m champion Keely Hodgkinson. Werro then bettered that in Paris to 1:53.80, edging ever closer to Kratochvilova's long-standing and often-contested mark. When asked if the record could be broken, Werro replied: "I don't know. "Now it's the European cham-

pionships, and I don't think it's the best place to do a world record because the goal is to win a medal. "So I don't know if the race will be fast or it will be a tactical race. "I don't have the world record now in my head. My goal for the European championships is to do a podium. So this is just my goal for now." Britain's Hodgkinson, the darling of British media after storming to Olympic gold in Paris two years ago, leads a stacked field in the two-lap race. Also competing will be Dutchwoman Femke Broeders-Bol, the two-time 400m hurdles world champion busy transforming herself into a 800m specialist. If the race is a tactical one, it would take a brave pundit to rule out Broeders-Bol, known for her devastating turn of pace with the finish line in sight. "Right now we really have a great density on the 800m," Werro said Sunday on the eve of the August

10-16 champs in the English city of Birmingham. "For me it's really cool because it's better when we are a lot of athletes. "It pushes us to be great every day. I really like that because, like that, I think it's easier to achieve a really fast time because we can push each other until the end of the race." Werro also revealed what was behind her roaring celebrations in victory. "When I was younger, like maybe 12 years old, my father used to tell me before the race, I have to be a lion, and I should not be shy because I was really shy as a child," she said. "So it was from there... the sign of a lion." The 800m will undoubtedly be one of the most hotly-contested events in Birmingham. Hodgkinson improved her own British record to 1:54.33 behind Werro in Stockholm in June. She then went on to win the London Diamond League. Hodgkinson had broken the

24-year-old world indoor record in Lievin in February before claiming a first world indoor title in March. Two weeks later, Hodgkinson pulled out of the 400m final at the British championships, complaining of "a little twinge" moments before the race. After Werro improved her best time to 1:53.80 in Paris, Hodgkinson went to Eugene, but came in second to world champion Lilian Odira having sustained injuries to both knees in a heavy training fall. But the English runner also played down expectations of a tilt at the world record, saying it would be a blank slate in Birmingham, with the final scheduled for Friday at 2046 GMT. "It'll probably be three rounds in three days, which is completely different," Hodgkinson said. "There's be no pacing, times don't matter, it's all about championship racing and handling pressure."

FIVE TO WATCH IN BIRMINGHAM

A host of top names will grace the European athletics championships that start today in Birmingham. Armand 'Mondo' Duplantis, Karsten Warholm and Keely Hodgkinson are but three of a raft of elite track and field stars who will make the trip to the English city. AFP Sport looks at five athletes who could claim their own moment in the spotlight:

Audrey Werro (SUI) One of the most hotly-anticipated races will be the women's 800m. It pitches home hope Keely Hodgkinson and Dutchwoman Femke Broeders-Bol, the former world 400m hurdles champion, against Werro, the Swiss runner still widely unknown to the larger audience despite her incredible recent form. Werro clocked a blistering 1:53.80 to win at the Paris Diamond League. Competition is such that the oldest world record in athletics history could be in doubt: the 1:53.28 set in 1983 by Jarmila Kratochvilova of then-Czechoslovakia.

Lamont Marcell Jacobs (ITA) It seems incongruous to include the Tokyo Olympics 100m champion in a list of who might star at the first European champs to be held in Britain. But the 31-year-old Jacobs is back to a rich vein of form at just the right time. The Italian raced to an astonishing 9.67sec in the 100m at the Austrian Open in Eisenstadt in early July, albeit with a tailwind of 4.1m/s. It was the third fastest men's 100m in all conditions in history, only surpassed by Usain Bolt's world record of 9.58 set at the 2009 world championships in Berlin and his Olympic 100m record of 9.63 from London in 2012. Jacobs could realistically target a third consecutive men's Euro 100m title to match Russian Valeriy Borzov (1969, 1971, 1974) and Britain's Linford Christie (1986, 1990, 1994).

Yaroslava Mahuchikh (UKR) Still just 24 years old, Mahuchikh is already the winner of four senior global titles: 2022 and 2026 world indoor championships, the

2023 world outdoor championships and the Paris Olympics in 2024. The three-time Diamond League title holder will be gunning for a third European title after winning in Rome in 2024 and Munich two years previously. Mahuchikh, who set the world record of 2.10m at the 2024 Paris Diamond League, has won all but one of her competitions this season. In the absence of circuit rivals Nicola Olyslagers and Eleanor Patterson, both of Australia, the odds are on for the Ukrainian sealing a treble at continental level.

Georgia Hunter Bell (GBR) Hunter Bell is a late bloomer who won silver in the 1,500m at the Rome Euros in 2024. Since then, 32-year-old Hunter Bell won Olympic 1500m bronze in Paris and 800m silver at the 2025 world championships in Tokyo, outpacing her training partner Keely Hodgkinson in the last 30 metres. In March she claimed the world indoor 1,500m title in Torun. And only last week, Hunter Bell won her first major outdoor title at the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow where she kicked away from world champion Lilian Odira for 800m gold. France's Agathe Guillemot, the world indoor champion, and Hunter Bell's Irish training partner Sarah Healy, the reigning European indoor 3,000m champion, are likely to be the Briton's main opposition.

Samuel Vessat (FRA) Vessat ran 44.24sec to shatter Leslie Djhone's French 400m record in Albi last month. It made him the fourth fastest European of all time. The 24-year-old only started competitive running in 2024 after shining on the basketball court for Edward Waters University. Now enrolled on a track scholarship with Purdue University, Vessat could be the one to push local favourite and two-time former champion Matthew Hudson-Smith for glory in the one-lap event. A darkhorse, but one his rivals will have their eye on.

Sarfaraz to replace recovering Sudharsan in Sri Lanka series

India's Sai Sudharsan has been ruled out of the upcoming two-Test series in Sri Lanka, with Sarfaraz Khan named as his replacement, the country's cricket board said yesterday. The Board of Control for Cricket in India said left-handed batter Sudharsan had made "significant progress" in recovering from a toe problem, but that Khan would replace him. "He will link up with the Indian squad in Colombo before the team travels to Galle for the first Test," the BCCI said in a statement. The decision comes after India completed their three-day warm-up game against Sri Lanka Cricket XI in Colombo yesterday. The opening Test will begin on August 15 in Galle. The second Test will be played between August 23-27 in Colombo. The series will be India's first in the current World Test Championship (WTC) since the 2-0 home defeat to



South Africa in November. India are fifth in the WTC standings, which are led by Australia, with Sri Lanka sixth. The updated India squad includes Shubman Gill (captain), KL Rahul (vice-captain), Yashasvi Jaiswal, Rishabh Pant (WK), Dhruv Jurel (WK), Ravindra Jadeja, Kuldeep Yadav, Manav Suthar, Mohammed Siraj, Prasidh Krishna, Gurnoor Brar, Devdutt Padikkal, Saransh Jain, Aaquib Nabi and Sarfaraz Khan.

Brenner claims Tour of Poland

Germany's Marco Brenner won the Tour of Poland yesterday at the end of the seventh and final stage, a 12.5 km time-trial around Wieliczka won by Swiss specialist Stefan Kueng. The 23-year-old Tudor rider, who secured the first major victory of his career, finished ahead of New Zealander Finn Fisher-Black (Red Bull-Bora Hansgrohe), who came second, 10 seconds behind, and Spain's Ivan Romeo (Movistar) in third. Brenner claimed victory without winning a single stage, snatching the yellow leader's jersey at the very last moment from Italian Christian Scaroni of Astana, who had moved to the top of the general classification on Saturday following the queen stage. Scaroni, who was clearly out of his depth in the time-trial, finished 47 seconds behind Kueng and slipped to seventh place overall. One of the standout performers of this Tour has been Italian champion Jonathan Milan of Lidl-Trek, who won the first three stages in sprint finishes.

CYCLING

Vollering wins Tour de France Femmes



FDJ United-Suez's Demi Vollering celebrates on the podium with the trophy wearing the yellow jersey after winning stage 9 and the Tour de France Femmes with second placed Canyon/SRAM's Katarzyna Niewiadoma-Phinney and third placed UAE Team L'Imad's Elisa Longo Borghini in Nice yesterday. (Reuters)

AFP
Nice, France

Dutch rider Demi Vollering took the Tour de France Femmes overall title in style yesterday, winning the hilly final stage to extend her lead on nearest rival Kasia Niewiadoma, who finished second overall after a tense struggle. The 29-year-old also won the 2023 title and earned her second one by timing the nine-day slog to perfection, carving out solo wins on the final two stages, which both ended in Nice.

"It's a dream to live this life," Vollering said after hoisting her bike above her head at the finish line. "I knew my level and even when Kasia won on Mont Ventoux I was still confident," added Vollering, who has also finished second on this race twice in its five editions. Niewiadoma took the yellow jersey on Friday's climb of Mont Ventoux, setting up a pulsating finale. Vollering then edged into the overall lead on Saturday, attacking late on a small hill and edging into an eight-second overall lead on Niewiadoma. A furious Niewiadoma, how-

ever, complained she had been blocked by a teammate of Vollering's at a crucial moment, but no action was taken. Vollering said her team had been both honest and humble after Sunday's race adding that her teammate Celia Gery, the alleged blocker, had received death threats on social media. "Celia had a really bad night. I'm sure deep down that Kasia knows these kind of things can happen in a race," Vollering said. The scene was set for a tense final stage that was contested over four climbs of the Col d'Eze just outside Nice, where Vollering waited until the fourth ascent

to pounce. Attacking near the summit, she took a 20sec lead and thundered down towards Nice never looking back. Italy's Elisa Longo Borghini came third overall after Swiss rider Marlen Reusser fell on a descent and lost a two-minute cushion on the podium. Dutch sprinter Lorena Wiebes won the green sprint points jersey mainly thanks to her victories on the two opening stages. Also from the Netherlands Puck Pieterse secured the polka dot climb points jersey ahead of the final stage. The best young rider jersey was won by Germany's Antonia Niedermaier.

MONTREAL MASTERS

Spanish teen Jodar ousts Lehecka to enter quarter-finals

‘I’m happy to get out in two sets. I’m confident with how I’m playing right now’

AFP
Montreal

Spanish teen Rafael Jodar defeated Czech eighth seed Jiri Lehecka 6-3, 6-3 on Saturday to reach the quarter-finals of the ATP Montreal Masters.

Jodar dominated the night match after an afternoon rain delay in the Masters 1000 hardcourt event.

The 19-year-old Spaniard, runner-up last week in Washington, never let Lehecka into their fourth-round match in collecting his 33rd victory of the season.

World number 15 Jodar has reached the last eight in seven of his past eight events and a Montreal title would send the youngster to a top-10 ranking for the first time.

Jodar will play for a semi-final berth against French 18th seed Arthur Fils, who defeated Britain's Cameron Norrie 6-2, 7-6 (10/8).

Fils, who lost to Jodar last week in Washington, will play in his fourth Masters quarter-final of the year.

“It was a very nice battle,” Fils said. “The second set was back and forth. He really raised his level. I got a bit tight but I’m happy to get out in two sets. I’m confident with how I’m playing right now.”

Italian Luciano Darderi fuelled himself with an expresso shot during a mid-match changeover in a 4-6, 6-3, 7-5 victory over Nuno Borges to reach the quarter-finals.

It was not the first time Darderi had downed his national rocket fuel to fire up the afterburners in a tight situation on court.

Darderi will bid for the semis against Brandon Nakashima, whose match with Arthur Rinderknech was interrupted for nearly two hours with the final set level at



Rafael Jodar of Spain celebrates a victory against Jiri Lehecka of Czechia during their Montreal Open match in Montreal. (AFP)

4-4. Players were taken off court due to rain and the threat of lightning, returning to finish after almost two hours.

Nakashima withstood a love game from his French opponent but broke serve a game later before finishing a 7-6 (7/4), 5-7, 7-5 victory on his first match point thanks to 22 unforced errors from Rinderknech.

He broke through in a Masters round of 16 after losing in his first five matches at this level.

“Coming out after the break I knew I had to fire at the beginning,” Nakashima said.

“My level is growing with each

match and I’m trying to make the most of it.”

ATP number 22 Darderi will be playing in an ATP-leading 10th quarter-final of the season after earning his 30th victory of 2026.

Darderi will be playing in his second Masters last-eight of the season after achieving the quarters last May at home in Rome.

‘I deserved this win’

The 24-year-old overcame more than 40 winners off the racquet of his Portuguese opponent, starting his comeback in the second set with a 5-2 lead and carrying momentum into the third.

Darderi broke for 4-3 as Borges double-faulted but lost his own serve moments later for 4-all.

The Italian got an insurance break for 6-5 as a net cord bounced out for Borges, then served out the triumph with an ace on match point a game later.

“This is my first Masters quarter-final on hardcourt so I’m very pleased,” the winner said. “I like the conditions here and the crowd helped me in the third set. I deserved this win. I’ve improved my hardcourt game a lot. I try to play every match at full power. Paying well on hard is good for me after starting (my career) on clay.”

SPOTLIGHT

Sinner withdraws from Cincinnati Open with right knee injury

AFP
Paris

World number one Jannik Sinner has pulled out of the Cincinnati Open due to a right knee injury, the Italian announced yesterday.

“After consulting with my doctors and my team, I have to announce that I need to withdraw from the Masters 1000 tournament in Cincinnati,” he said in a statement posted on the ATP website.

“My right knee has been bothering me and even though we have been working hard with my medical team, I have to accept that I’m not ready to compete yet.”

The tournament begins on Thursday, the same day as the end of the Masters event in Montreal, which Sinner also missed.

The five-time Grand Slam winner had been on a six-tour-

namet winning streak at 1000 level heading into the North American hard-court swing, before skipping the event in Canada.

The 24-year-old said at the time the decision was taken to “prioritise my health.”

Sinner’s subsequent withdrawal from Cincinnati follows that of world number two Carlos Alcaraz as he continues to battle a wrist injury.

The Cincinnati Open and Montreal Masters are the two principal warm-up events ahead of the final Grand Slam of the season, the US Open, which starts in New York on August 30. Sinner has not played since successfully defending his title at Wimbledon last month, whereas Alcaraz has been out of action since withdrawing from the Barcelona Open in mid-April.

The pair disputed the US Open final last year, with the 23-year-old Spaniard emerging triumphant in four sets.

Al Shamal signs midfielder Ben Romdhane from Al Ahly



The 21-year-old midfielder completed his medical examination and is expected to join Al Shamal’s training sessions ahead of the new season, which begins August 20 with the opening round of the QSL. Ben Romdhane joined Al Ahly in 2025 from Hungarian club Ferencvárosi TC. He made 33

appearances across competitions during the 2025-26 season, scoring two goals and helping the Cairo-based club win the Egyptian Super Cup. His signing comes as Al Shamal prepares for its first appearance in the AFC Champions League Elite. The club finished second in the QSL last season. Al Shamal has also signed Frenchman Wesley Said, Uruguayan Federico Bais and Ibrahim Coulibaly during the offseason.

TENNIS

Alexandrova stuns Sabalenka in fourth round of Toronto Masters

AFP
Toronto

World number one Aryna Sabalenka and Jessica Pegula were both upset in fourth-round matches on Saturday at the Toronto Masters.

Four-time Grand Slam winner Sabalenka suffered a blow to her preparations for a tilt at a third consecutive US Open title, beaten 7-6 (7/3), 4-6, 6-4 by Russian 16th seed Ekaterina Alexandrova.

“I wasn’t trying to think about the score or anything like beating number one,” said Alexandrova after ousting the Belarusian in 2hr 29min.

“I was just trying to do my best. “I just tried to play every single point as if it was the last one because with her, you don’t get a lot of chances during the match,” Alexandrova said.

“I had a lot today, but I couldn’t realize some of them. I’m super happy that I could win because after the second set, I thought (winning) was already past me.”

Alexandrova moves on to a quarter-final against Ukraine’s Elina Svitolina, who dispatched American Amanda Anisimova 6-2, 6-4 in 78 minutes.

Russian 15th seed Shnaider upset world number three Pegula 6-3, 6-3 to book a last-eight date with Poland’s Iga Swiatek.

The 22-year-old left-hander took only 73 minutes to defeat Pegula.

“This week I’ve been very comfortable on both defending and just firing some winners,” Shnaider said.

“It was working well. I was choosing a bigger target today but sometimes ripping the ball.”

Sabalenka dropped the first set on a tiebreak as her Russian opponent won five of the last six points.

“I was trying to play super ag-



Ekaterina Alexandrova celebrates her win against Aryna Sabalenka in Toronto Masters. (AFP)

gressive, the way I didn’t play for a long time. It worked,” said Alexandrova.

“I had the feeling I have some kind of power and I can create something and it helped me mentally.”

Sabalenka levelled the match but in the decider faced match points on her serve in the 10th game.

She saved the first on a service winner and the second with an ace.

But, after sending a backhand beyond the baseline, the Belarusian made her sixth and final double fault to lose the match.

“I didn’t have any expectations before the match,” Alexandrova said. “I knew it was going to be super difficult when I walked on the court.

“I was trying to risk as much as possible because it felt like it was the only way to create some chances. It caused many more mistakes but at the same time I created many more opportunities.”

Former world number one Swiatek, the seventh seed, rallied to defeat Ukraine’s 10th-seeded Marta Kostyuk 3-6, 6-1, 6-2.

Swiatek, a four-time French Open champion, saved nine break points in the last two sets without dropping serve.

“In the second I came out... playing a bit faster and more heavy and pushing Marta a little bit more,” Swiatek said.

“Game by game I felt like it was a good plan and a good choice and I went for it.”

FOCUS

Brennan surges into joint lead entering final round of Wyndham

Reuters
Greensboro, North Carolina

Michael Brennan moved into an ideal spot Saturday in the Wyndham Championship. He’s the co-leader with Beau Hossler, who was just happy to finally finish the third round.

Brennan posted five birdies across the final eight holes to shoot 7-under-par 63 on Saturday and move into a share of the lead with Hossler through three rounds in Greensboro, N.C. “That’s the spot you want to be, you want to be in the last group coming down the stretch on Sunday,” Brennan said. “I’m glad I put myself into that position.”

The duo is level at 16-under 194 for a one-shot edge entering Sunday’s final round.

Hossler, who was the second-round leader, completed his round of 66 following two late-round weather-related pauses at Sedgefield Country Club.

“It was incredibly chaotic,” Hossler said. “I got off to a really poor start as far as my ball-striking. Really settled in nicely, and then I think clearly the delays ruined the momentum a bit. ... just glad to make it through.”

Brennan’s lone bogey came on the second hole before he got rolling. Hossler’s best finish this year was a tie for third place at the Myrtle Beach Classic in May. Still seeking his first career win on tour, he has twice been runner-up when losing in playoffs and finished second four total times. Brennan’s only PGA Tour victory came in last year’s Bank of Utah Championship.

South Korea’s Tom Kim also shot 63 and sits at 15 under in third place.

Alex Smalley (65) and Sweden’s Alex Noren (65) are at 14 under, while Davis Thompson



Michael Brennan of the United States lines up a putt on the 18th green during the third round of the Wyndham Championship at Sedgefield Country Club in Greensboro, North Carolina. (AFP)

(65) is in sixth place at 13 under.

Colombia’s Nico Echavarria’s 62 marked the best score of the round, allowing him to move to 11 under and climb into a tie for eighth place. A day earlier, he was one stroke away from missing the cut. On Saturday, his eagle on the par-5 fifth hole got him rolling in a bogey-free round.

“There was enough wind where it was shifting, but I’m very happy the putter got hot and hit some quality shots,” Echavarria said. “So everything was clicking.”

This is the final tournament in the PGA Tour’s regular season. Golfers need to be in the top 70 of the season’s standings to advance to next week’s FedEx Cup playoffs. “It’s really hard to stay in the present,” Brennan said. “It’s easy to kind of think about the consequences of where you finish the tournament.”

Because he’ll have a later final-round tee time than he anticipated, the surge up the leaderboard caused Echavarria to change his flight plans for Sunday night in advance of next week’s FedEx Cup playoff opener in Memphis.

Hossler began the round with a one-stroke lead. Nineteen golfers were within four strokes of him. Several golfers rose past Hossler on the leaderboard before he began his round.

Hossler notched five birdies during a 10-hole stretch before the momentum was halted because of a lightning delay. He was bogey-free through 15 holes before storms caused the day’s first suspension of play. He bogeyed the 16th hole upon the resumption of play.

There was another suspension prior to Hossler playing No. 18, with his tee shot going into the rough off the right side of the fairway. But he recovered for par with a 4-foot putt to maintain a share of the lead.

“Certainly probably wasn’t exactly the ideal situation,” Hossler said. “But with that being said, you’ve kind of got to deal with the cards you’ve dealt and hopefully make the best of it.”

Jordan Smith had a highlight even though he shot even-par 70 and remained at 11 under. He notched a hole-in-one on the 16th hole.

FRIENDLIES

Iraola's first Anfield match as Liverpool boss ends in defeat to Monaco

Van Dijk, Becker and Gakpo all made their first appearances since the World Cup

AFP
London

Andoni Iraola's first Anfield match as Liverpool manager ended in a 3-2 friendly defeat by Monaco after his side squandered a two-goal lead for the second week in a row.

Alexander Isak and Florian Wirtz put the Reds ahead, but like against Leeds last week in Chicago – when Liverpool were two goals up but lost 4-2 – they were unable to pre-serve their lead.

Aleksandr Golovin's penalty and Mika Biereth got Monaco back on level terms, before Paris Brunner headed in a late winner. Iraola made 11 changes to his side in the second half and gave a first Liverpool appearance to new signing Victor Munoz.

"I think (this was) quite similar to the game we played against Leeds," said 44-year-old Spaniard Iraola. "I think we played really good (in the) first half, especially the first 30 minutes, but right now probably we don't have much more in terms of the level required to play like this.

"Then they (Monaco) were much better in the second half, in the same way we were better in the first half, they were much better in the second half, and they deserved to turn around the game, yes."

Captain Virgil van Dijk, goalkeeper Allison Becker and winger Cody Gakpo all made their first appearances since the World Cup. "I think they were in different levels but mostly they were in a good place," said Iraola of the returning players.

"I think the ones that it was their first game, or even the ones that it was their second game, they had energy. The problem is right now probably they don't have the energy for 90 minutes and they start to get tired. It will take time with them, we need more training with them. But we can take a lot of positives, but also a lot of negatives from today."

Liverpool begin their Premier League season away to Newcastle on August 23.

MARESCA DELIGHTED AFTER MAN CITY BEAT ATLETICO

Manchester City manager Enzo Maresca praised the impact of his wide players after



Monaco's German forward Paris Brunner (right) scores during the pre-season friendly against Liverpool at Anfield in Liverpool. (AFP)

Antoine Semenyo supplied assists for Omar Marmoush in a 3-1 victory over Atletico Madrid on Sunday to wrap up their pre-season tour of Asia.

Marmoush scored twice in the space of three minutes early in the second half before substitute Rayan Ait-Nouri added a third in stoppage time, helping City overturn a halftime deficit in front of more than 50,000 fans at Seoul World Cup Stadium.

"Overall, it was a very good test against one of the best teams in Europe," Maresca said. "Credit to the players for the effort they have done. From tomorrow pre-season is finished and the real business starts."

City dominated possession and created

the better chances but fell behind against the run of play when Jorge Dominguez scored from close range shortly before half-time.

The Premier League side finally made their pressure count in the 57th minute as Semenyo raced down the left and crossed for Marmoush to slide home the equaliser. Two minutes later, the pair combined again, with Semenyo delivering another low cross that Marmoush converted.

Semenyo finished the Asia tour with four assists in three matches, while Savinho also impressed on the opposite flank.

Ait-Nouri completed the scoring late on, but Maresca said City still needed greater

efficiency in front of goal.

"We need to be clinical. It's something we need to improve," he said. "Slowly we are getting there and with Erling (Haaland) we can be even more dangerous. Today Omar scored twice. This is a boost."

Maresca also said he was encouraged by the progress made during his first three matches in charge after succeeding legendary manager Pep Guardiola, with City ending their Asia tour with a draw against Inter Milan, before a penalty-shootout defeat, and victories over a K League All-Stars side and Atletico.

They face Arsenal in the Community Shield on August 16.

Arteta backs Guimaraes to 'ignite something different' at Arsenal

London: Mikel Arteta has backed Bruno Guimaraes to "ignite something different" in Premier League champions Arsenal.

Brazil international Guimaraes was introduced to Gunners fans ahead of 3-2 friendly defeat by Borussia Dortmund, after completing a move from top-flight rivals Newcastle reported to be worth £75mn (\$101mn).

The 28-year-old has strengthened an already impressive midfield featuring Declan Rice, Martin Odegaard, Mikel Merino, Martin Zubimendi and Eberechi Eze.

"You can see the immediate reaction," Arteta told Arsenal's website after Guimaraes was given an enthusiastic reception. "I think he describes himself as a warrior," the Spaniard added.

"I think he's a warrior with a tremendous quality as well and intuition and leadership and charisma that is going to help us, that is going to really ignite something different in the team. I think he's going to push everybody inside the team as well and that's the type of player that we need."

Arsenal, after finishing runners-up for three successive seasons, finally ended their 22-year wait for a Premier League title last term, as well as reaching the Champions League and League Cup finals.

Guimaraes watched on against Dortmund as an Ethan Nwaneri strike and Viktor Gyokeres's penalty were not enough to prevent defeat. Samuele Inacio, Konstantinos Kareltsas and Joane Gadou scored for the Bundesliga side at Emirates Stadium.

Arsenal face Manchester City in the Community Shield next weekend before launching their title defence against newly-promoted Coventry on August 21.

PSG SIGN FRANCE FULL-BACK DIGNE FROM VILLA

Aston Villa left-back Lucas Digne has joined Paris Saint-Germain on a three-year deal, the European champions announced. The 33-year-old French international, who grew up in the Paris region, returns to PSG, where he played for two seasons between 2013 and 2015.

After PSG, Digne spent time on loan in Serie A with Roma before signing for Spanish giants Barcelona, who were then coached by current PSG boss Luis Enrique.

TRIBUTE

Messi bids farewell to father who guided his glittering career

AFP
Rosario, Argentina

Argentina football icon Lionel Messi bid farewell to his father Jorge, the global star's emotional anchor and agent since childhood who passed away following a battle with cancer aged 68.

The eight-time Ballon d'Or winner touched down on a private flight from Miami late on Saturday with his wife Antonela Rocuzzo and their children.

A private ceremony with close family and a few Argentina teammates took place at a cemetery in the town of Perez, adjacent to Rosario.

The gates of the town's El Prado cemetery displayed handwritten messages from fans – "Stay strong, Leo, we love you" and "Stay strong, Messi family" – alongside a large floral wreath.

Messi's teammates rallied around their captain following the announcement that Jorge Messi had passed away late Friday at a clinic in Rosario.

"It will surely do him good for us to be there," Boca Juniors midfielder Leandro Paredes told journalists after his team's match on Saturday. "I need to speak with a few of my teammates to see if we go now or sometime tomorrow."

According to media reports midfielder Rodrigo de Paul – close friend of Messi and his Inter Miami teammate – travelled to Argentina.

After scoring a goal in a 2-1 defeat to Monterrey in Miami on Saturday, De Paul paid tribute by taking off his shirt to reveal Messi's number 10 jersey.

There was a handful of fans outside the cemetery, including 15-year-old Lucas Blanco, who hung a sign reading "Stay strong, Messi" on the gate. "He has brought so much joy to this country, now it's our turn to give a little back and offer him some comfort," he said.

"We drove 700 kilometres to be here. We wanted to stand by Leo during this time," said Carlos and Ana, a couple who travelled from Tres Arroyos, a town south of Buenos Aires.

The cause of death was not disclosed,



The gates of the town's El Prado cemetery displayed handwritten messages from fans – "Stay strong, Leo, we love you" and "Stay strong, Messi family". (AFP)

but local media reported that Jorge Messi had been suffering from cancer. His unusual absence from the World Cup in June had already attracted attention.

Messi's family asked the media for "humanity" during the tournament amid persistent rumours over Jorge's health. After bursting into tears after scoring against Algeria, 39-year-old Messi had admitted to dealing with "a situation outside of sports".

"I went through a few difficult, complicated days," he later acknowledged. "But I am grateful to the entire delegation and my teammates, because they stood by me, as always."

Immediately after the World Cup final defeat against Spain, Messi returned to spend a few days with his family in Rosario.

A guiding figure throughout his son's career, Jorge Messi was his first coach who left everything behind to accompany his son to Spain. A metalworker in Rosario, 340 km north of Buenos Aires, Jorge managed youth teams at the small local club Grandoli.

He was the one who introduced Argentina's future captain to the game

aged four on vacant lots where local kids played. His life changed course in 2000 when Barcelona invited the young prodigy, then aged 13, to Catalonia to continue treatment for a growth hormone deficiency while playing for the club's youth teams.

Jorge left behind his job in Argentina, his wife, and his three other children to settle in Spain with Lionel. "When we arrived in Barcelona, I used to lock myself in my room to cry alone, and my father did the same -- either without me seeing him or thinking I didn't see him. We pretended we were both fine, but we were struggling," Messi later said.

His father was later the agent who negotiated contracts on his behalf, from Barcelona to Paris Saint-Germain and Inter Miami. Messages of sympathy have poured in since Saturday from the football world, including from the clubs Messi played for and the Spanish Football Federation.

The Argentine Football Association (AFA) ordered a minute's silence before matches and that black armbands be worn at games across all age groups for the week.

SCOTTISH PREMIERSHIP

Hogh's hat-trick inspires Celtic rout, Rangers lose

AFP
London

Kasper Hogh scored a hat-trick, his first goals for Celtic, as the Scottish champions thumped Kilmarnock 5-1, while Rangers were beaten at home by Hibernian.

A second straight league win to start the season took Celtic above St Mirren on goal difference at the top of the early Scottish Premiership table. Hoops manager Martin O'Neill, 74, missed the trip to Rugby Park after a "small procedure" in hospital earlier this week.

Celtic raced 3-0 ahead before half-time thanks to a treble from Hogh, the Glasgow giants' club-record signing after joining from Bodo/Glimt for a reported £11mn (\$15mn).

"I'm so happy right now. It was a good feeling, but the most important was how we did as a team and it was a crazy, good game," Hogh, who failed to score on his debut against Dundee, said. "I said I would take one day at a time and try to do better."

Hogh needed less than a minute on Sunday to open the scoring, heading in at the back post from a cross by Arne Engels. Hogh doubled Celtic's lead in the 33rd minute, with Camilo Duran seizing on Johnly Yefko's pass out of defence.

He combined with Benjamin Nygren to work the ball to Hogh on the left edge of the box, with the forward finishing well. Two minutes later, Hogh had his hat-trick after heading into an empty net from a Duran cross that took Kilmarnock goalkeeper Max Strzyk out of play.

Celtic were effectively gifted a fourth goal by Strzyk early in the second half after his pass went straight to Nygren. Michael Schjonning-Larsen pulled a goal back for Kilmarnock in the 56th minute.

But Celtic were four goals ahead again when substitute Luke McCowan, moments after coming on, volleyed in from close range 15 minutes from time.

Celtic's Glasgow rivals Rangers suffered a 2-1 loss at home to Hibernian, made worse by striker Youssef Chermiti being carried off on a stretcher. Defeat left new Rangers boss Derek McInnes, previously in charge



of Hearts, still looking for his first win since taking over, after a 1-1 draw at Dundee United last weekend and a first-leg Europa League qualifying defeat by Jagiellonia in Poland on Thursday.

Hibs went ahead in the 11th minute with a Josh Campbell penalty and Rangers's problems intensified before half-time when Chermiti went off injured. Rangers, however, equalised five minutes from the end of normal time through Hibs defender Miguel Chaiwa's own goal.

But substitute Callum Wright let fly with a shot into the far corner to give Hibs a stunning winner in the third minute of added time. "There are little things going against us at the minute but we have to stay strong, we're not as bad as people think," McInnes said. He added: "I understand the fans' frustration, they want and expect to see their team win. I share the frustration."

Elsewhere, last season's runners-up Hearts delivered Belgian boss Wouter Vrancken his first win as manager at the fifth attempt with a 4-0 defeat of Dundee United at Tynecastle.

Hearts came into Sunday's fixture on the back of a 6-1 thrashing by Benfica in the Europa League qualifiers. But they were 2-0 up against Dundee United inside 12 minutes through Tom Renaud and Calvin Miller's penalty before Claudio Braga and Josh McPake extended the lead in the second half.