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CRICKET
Hundred hero Hodge stars for West Indies as England toil without Anderson

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BRITISH OPEN

Lowry leads, Scheffler in the hunt as Woods misses cut

'IT WASN'T VERY GOOD. I WAS FIGHTING IT ALL DAY AND WAS NEVER CLOSE ENOUGH TO MAKE BIRDIES'

Reuters
Troon, Scotland

Ireland's Shane Lowry led the Open from English qualifier Dan Brown after a masterful second round at Royal Troon and world number one Scottie Scheffler and England's Justin Rose were moving ominously into contention yesterday.

Links lover Lowry, the 2019 champion, rolled in a superb 20-foot birdie putt on the 18th green to complete a two-under 69 to reach seven under, two shots clear of overnight leader Dan Brown who again impressed with a one-over 72.

Former US Open champion Rose, who had to qualify this year, put together a magnificent three-under 68 in the toughest afternoon conditions to join Brown on five-under.

The 43-year-old went bogey-free for 29 holes and finished by sinking a superb 40ft birdie putt on the 18th green to raise hopes of a first English winner at the Open since Nick Faldo in 1992.

American Scheffler was warming to the task of lifting the Claret Jug for the first time although a bogey at the 18th rather jolted his serene progress on the Ayrshire coast.

Conditions were calmer for the early starters yesterday although winds increased considerably throughout the day to stifle upward movement on the leaderboard and leave the hopes of several favourites in tatters.

But Lowry was supreme, making birdies at the first and fourth and after dropping a shot at the fifth he made birdie on the treacherous par-three eighth known as the Postage Stamp.

His only moment of concern was a double-bogey on the 11th but he quickly shrugged that off



Ireland's Shane Lowry lines up his putt on the 3rd green during his second round of the 152nd British Open Golf Championship at Royal Troon on the south west coast of Scotland yesterday. (AFP)

and made birdie at the 16th before his majestic finish on the last hole.

"It was pretty good, it was tough out there," Lowry said.

"The wind wasn't quite as strong as yesterday but it was still tricky. The 11th was a bit of a disaster but I handled that well and managed to finish nicely!"

Scheffler, who has six wins on the PGA Tour this season including The Masters, plotted his way

around impressively with three birdies although he was left frustrated following a bogey five at the 18th after finding a fairway bunker.

"I've played two solid rounds and it put me five shots back, and I'll continue to try to execute and just continue to try to hit good shots and hit good putts out there," he said. Brown, playing his first major, dropped two shots on his front nine but hung in well and

made two birdies on the way back. "I'm proud of what I've done, and hopefully I can continue and sort of still be lingering around on Sunday," he said.

While others lost their heads in the elements, Rose was calm and collected as he showed the virtue of staying out of trouble.

He made two birdies and six pars in his first eight holes, although he finally made a bogey at

the 12th. But birdies at the 16th and 18th earned the biggest roars of the day.

"I was aware of the scores around me and knew it was tough so I knew I was doing some good work out there," Rose said.

Several players made use of the relatively benign early conditions including American Billy Horschel and South Africa's Dean Burmester after rounds of 68 and



Tiger Woods acknowledges the crowd after finishing his second round yesterday. (Reuters)

69 respectively. American Patrick Cantlay scored a 68 to move to one under, as did Australia's Jason Day while Canada's Corey Conners (-1) and American PGA champion Xander Schauffele (-1) were the only other players below-par after 36 holes.

There was to be no miraculous recovery for Tiger Woods as the American great bowed out with a disappointing round of 77 after carding 79 on Thursday.

The 48-year-old American recorded six bogeys and two double bogeys on Thursday and struggled again with just a single birdie despite plenty of support from the packed galleries.

"It wasn't very good," Woods said. "I was fighting it all day and was never close enough to make birdies."

With the cut projected at plus six, the likes of former champions Francesco Molinari, Zach Johnson, Henrik Stenson and Louis Oosthuizen all looked certain to miss the weekend.

US Open champion Bryson DeChambeau, who began the day five over, and world number two Rory McIlroy's 10-year wait to win a major will stretch into 2025 after missing the cut. The world number two ended a torrid two days on 11 over par in blustery conditions on Scotland's west coast.

FOCUS

IT outage hits athletes arriving for Paris Games

AFP
Paris

The Paris Olympics were affected by the global IT outage yesterday, with organisers temporarily unable to hand out accreditation to athletes and officials arriving for the Games.

Airlines, banks, TV channels and other business across the world have scrambled following one of the biggest computer crashes in recent years, caused by an update to an antivirus programme. "Like a lot of organisations, we suffered this global Microsoft outage," chief organiser Tony Estanguet told reporters, a week before the opening ceremony of the Olympics.

"All of our servers were affected this morning."

By 5pm (1500 GMT), the organising committee said its operations were "now running normally", with the evening hours at its accreditation centre extended to help clear a backlog of demands. Thousands of athletes have begun flying into the French capital ahead of the July 26-August 11 event, while the organising committee is also distributing badges and uniforms to 45,000 volunteers. The IT problems did



not affect Paris airport operator ADP, but "the arrival of some delegations has been impacted by delays to their flights," the organising committee added.

Paris is putting the finishing touches to preparations for the first Olympics in the French capital in a century. The venues are on track, the weather has brightened up after months of rain, and the water quality in the Seine has improved, making outdoor swimming events in the river possible after months of suspense.

New data released yesterday showed the river was clean enough to swim in on six out of seven of the last days.

"We weren't necessarily ex-

pecting an IT outage a few days before the start of the Games," Estanguet said.

Security is already tight across the capital, with much of the central areas of the city near the Seine fenced off, with vehicles and everyone except local residents banned from entering.

Trade groups representing Paris shops, restaurants, bars and clubs complained on Friday that they were facing an "unprecedented slump in business and footfall", blaming in part the "heavy security measures".

Estanguet was talking in Paris at an event with the creative team behind the wildly ambitious opening ceremony which is set to

take place over a six-kilometre (four-mile) stretch of the Seine next Friday.

Around 6,000-7,000 athletes are set to sail down the river on 85 barges and boats, with around 3,000 dancers, singers and entertainers positioned on the banks, bridges and nearby monuments.

It will be the first time a Summer Olympics has opened outside the main athletics stadium, with up to 500,000 people set to watch in person from stands, on the river banks and the overlooking apartments.

Director Thomas Jolly, a well-known theatre director, 42, said the main theme would be "love" and the performances would celebrate diversity.

"We are a city of love, and also because in the world there are a lot of fractures," he explained.

"We want to say, we are all living together in the same city, the same country, the same continents and the same planet."

Jolly's plans have been criticised by some conservatives in France, but he said his work would be a celebration of cultural, linguistic, religious and sexual diversity. "I think the people who want to live together in this diversity, this otherness, are much more numerous, but we make less noise," he told AFP.

Aussie player amputates part of finger to compete at Paris Games

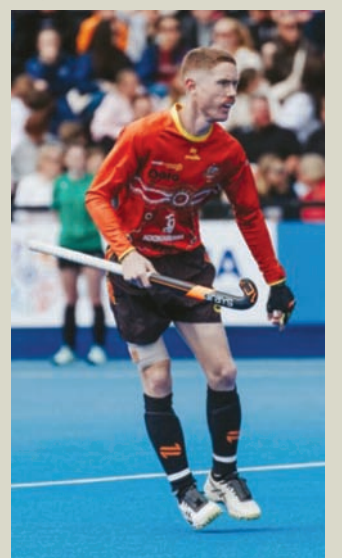
Melbourne: Australian field hockey player Matt Dawson has gone to extraordinary lengths to compete at the Paris Olympics, amputating part of a finger to ensure he will be fit for his third Games.

The 30-year-old, a silver medallist at the Tokyo Games, was a doubt for Paris after recently breaking the ring finger on his right hand. Doctors gave him a choice of amputating part of his finger or letting it recover. Only one way would ensure he got to Paris. "I didn't have much time to make the decision," he told Australian broadcaster *Seven Network*. "I made the decision then I called my wife and she said, 'I don't want you to make a rash decision'."

"But I guess I had all the information I needed to make a decision for not only playing in Paris, but for life after and giving myself the best health."

The *Seven Network* showed footage of Dawson wearing a protective black guard over his finger. The Australian men's coach praised Dawson for his courage and commitment, while admitting he was not sure if he would do the same. "The best way of recovering from it was to just chop the end of the finger off," coach Colin Batch said.

"So that's what he decided to do. It's not something a coach can decide for a player. "Full marks to Matt. Obviously he's really committed to playing in Paris. I'm not sure I would have done it, but he's done it, so great." Australia, runners-up up to Belgium at Tokyo, will hope to go one better in Paris where the hockey tournament starts on July 27.



Australia hockey player Matt Dawson in action. (Instagram/@therealmattdawson06)

CRICKET

Hundred hero Hodge stars for West Indies on Day Two

'Hodge, dropped on 16, made 120 in what was just the 31-year-old's seventh innings at this level'

AFP
Nottingham, United Kingdom

Kavem Hodge scored his maiden Test hundred as West Indies made life tough for England in Nottingham yesterday during their first day in the field since James Anderson's international retirement.

West Indies were 351-5 in reply to England's first-innings 416 at stumps on the second day of the second Test at Trent Bridge, a deficit of 65 runs.

Hodge, dropped on 16, made 120 in what was just the 31-year-old's seventh innings at this level.

He shared a partnership of 175 with fellow Windward Islands batsman Alick Athanaze (82), who fell in sight of what would have been his first Test century after the fourth-wicket duo, showing the kind of skill and determination many pundits feared the West Indies were lacking, batted throughout the whole of the second session. The pair came together shortly before lunch with West Indies in trouble at 84-3 despite a good pitch and sunny skies, allied to a lightning quick outfield, meaning conditions were in favour of the batsmen.

It was the type of situation in which England would have called upon veteran paceman Anderson for much of the past 21 years.

But the 41-year-old had bowled out of Test cricket with 704 wickets - the most by any fast bowler - after England's crushing innings and 114-run thrashing of the West Indies in the series opener at Lord's, with team chiefs looking to refresh the side ahead of the 2025/26 Ashes in Australia.

This is also England's first home Test since 2012 without either Anderson or his long-time new-ball partner Stuart Broad, who retired after last year's Ashes.

Between them, the pair took 1,308 Test wickets and their absence was always bound to create a gap despite Anderson's new role of England fast-bowling mentor.

Instead it was Chris Woakes and fast bowler Gus Atkinson, fresh from a stun-



West Indies' Kavem Hodge shakes hands with England's Joe Root after losing his wicket after scoring a century on Day Two of the second Test at Trent Bridge Cricket Ground, Nottingham, Britain, yesterday. (Reuters)

ning 12-wicket haul on Test debut at Lord's as England went 1-0 up in a three-match series, who shared the new ball on Friday.

Bashir's double strike

England captain Ben Stokes's decision to bring on off-spinner Shoaib Bashir rather than himself as second change was soon rewarded with Mikyle Louis and Kirk McKenzie both out to rash shots as the 20-year-old took his first Test wickets on

home soil.

In between, West Indies captain Kraigg Brathwaite fell for 48 when the opener fended a rising Atkinson delivery straight to Ollie Pope at short leg.

But just as England had benefited from several dropped catches on Thursday, with Pope missed twice on his way to 121, so too was Hodge given a reprieve when he edged express quick Mark Wood - recalled in place of Anderson - to first slip, only for

Joe Root to floor a regulation two-handed chance. Athanaze had made 48 when he was struck flush on the helmet by a rapid Wood bouncer.

But he recovered to complete a maiden Test fifty, with Hodge - whose previous highest Test score was the 71 he made during the West Indies' thrilling eight-run win over Australia in Brisbane in January - following suit.

But the pair were eventually separated

when Stokes, who didn't come on until the 50th over, had Athanaze slapping a wide ball to Harry Brook at gully to end a 99-ball stay including 10 fours and a six.

Hodge, however, pulled Stokes for four to go to 97 before driving the all-rounder straight down the ground for a 17th boundary in 143 balls faced to complete his century, with the diminutive batsman joyfully leaping into the arms of towering non-striker Jason Holder. He eventually fell lbw to Woakes, the dismissal upheld on review by umpire's call. But at 305-5 the West Indies had already made far more than the 257 runs combined they managed in two innings at Lord's.

Woakes finished the day with 1-59 from 18 overs but Wood, who repeatedly both topped speeds of 93 mph (150 km/h) and beat the outside edge, had no reward in a return of 0-51 in 14.1 overs before pulling up and leaving the field.

SCOREBOARD

England 1st Innings		416
West Indies 1st Innings		
K. Brathwaite c Pope b Atkinson		48
M. Louis c Brook b Bashir		21
K. McKenzie c Stokes b Bashir		11
A. Athanaze c Brook b Stokes		82
K. Hodge lbw b Woakes		120
J. Holder not out		23
J. Da Silva not out		32
Extras (lb3, nb8, w3)		14
Total (5 wkts, 84 overs, 390 mins)		351
To bat: K Sinclair, A Joseph, S Joseph, J Seales		
Fall of wickets: 1-53 (Louis), 2-78 (Brathwaite), 3-84 (McKenzie), 4-259 (Athanaze), 5-305 (Hodge)		
Bowling: Woakes 18-1-59-1 (1nb); Atkinson 16.5-2-77-1 (1nb, 3w); Wood 14.1-3-51-0 (1nb); Bashir 23-0-100-2 (1nb); Stokes 12-0-61-1 (4nb)		

England: Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Ollie Pope, Joe Root, Harry Brook, Ben Stokes (capt), Jamie Smith (wkt), Chris Woakes, Gus Atkinson, Mark Wood, Shoaib Bashir

Match position: West Indies are 65 runs behind with five first-innings wickets standing.

FOCUS

Crouser sees light at end of tunnel going into Olympics

AFP
London

Ryan Crouser says he can see the light at the end of the tunnel as he readies his bid for a third successive Olympic shot put title off the back of three injury setbacks.

The American won the world indoor title in Glasgow in March, but since then has suffered two debilitating elbow injuries either side of tearing a pectoral muscle.

Hardly the lead-in to the Paris Games the stand-out shot putter in the world would have wanted.

"It's easy to press the panic button," Crouser said ahead of today's Diamond League meet in London, the final outing before travelling to France for the Olympics.

"This year has been limited but I'm rounding into shape.

"I'm happy with how things are progressing, with the ultimate goal being the Paris Olympics. There's been a general upward trend since the trials so I'm excited about that."

Those trials, Crouser admitted, had been "very stressful" as he battled injury concerns to qualify for Paris, while acknowledging he only had himself to blame.

"It's been a frustrating year, to say the least," said the two-time outdoor world champion.

"As an athlete, you dream about your preparation for the Olympics going perfectly, all the work that's going to go in, all the work that's going to pay off.

"I probably did a little bit of over training. I write my own programmes - I'm my own coach.

"And at 31 years of age, I probably didn't want to admit that I have to slow things down a little bit from when I was 25 or 26.

"So all of it's on me! I'm my own coach, I can't blame him for anything! It's been a learning process."

Crouser, who comes from a family of throwers, added: "Measuring my progress coming



Ryan Crouser wins the shot put at 74-11 1/4 (22.84m) during the US Olympic Team Trials at Hayward Field. (USA TODAY Sports)

back from what felt like nearly ground zero was not optimal.

"But it takes a certain mindset to realise I am progressing, I am moving in the right direction and I'm taking that as the small win it is."

Crouser previously won Olympic golds in Rio in 2016 and the Covid-delayed 2021 Tokyo Games, but said he was looking forward to Paris.

"I'd like to think I've grown a lot as an individual and an athlete since my first Games," he said, having skipped graduation to make the trip to Rio for just his

third professional meet."

He added: "Tokyo felt like a bit of a pressure cooker.

"There was the situation mentally of just working around the pandemic, Covid testing every morning and hoping you didn't get the call, as (US pole vaulter) Sam Kendrick did and he was in my same suite.

"This is one I'm excited for simply because the crowd is back and we're back to the spirit of the Olympics."

Crouser said he was "old enough to know I won't be doing this forever."

"It gives me a moment to stop and appreciate the opportunities I've had and will have.

"Every four years the world comes together and puts aside its differences and I think we didn't have that in Tokyo.

"I'm excited to see that Olympic spirit return in Paris."

First up, however, is London.

"I expect tomorrow to be a very good competition," Crouser predicted.

"There's myself coming into shape, Joe Kovacs in exceptional shape and Leonardo Fabbri as well."

SPOTLIGHT

Indian players 'trust' Suryakumar more than Pandya: Report

AFP
New Delhi

The Indian cricket board's choice of **Suryakumar Yadav** as T20 captain over Hardik Pandya has been attributed to him having the backing of players, according to a report yesterday.

Suryakumar, 33, was named Rohit Sharma's successor in the T20 format as selectors late Thursday announced the squads for India's white-ball tour of Sri Lanka starting July 27. Suryakumar will lead a 15-member squad in three T20 matches in Pallekele, but has not been selected to play the following three ODI matches.

Rohit, who along with Virat Kohli and Ravindra Jadeja quit T20 internationals after India's World Cup triumph last month, will continue to lead the ODI team, which will face Sri Lanka on August 2, 4, and 7 at Colombo's R. Premadasa Stadium. The 30-year-old Pandya, who was Rohit's deputy during the T20 showpiece, lost out in the captaincy race to a player who made his debut five years later than the star all-rounder.

A report in the *Indian Express* newspaper said, "feedback received by the board was that players trusted Surya more than Pandya and were more comfortable working under him".

Pandya's frequent injury breakdowns, including an ankle injury during the ODI World Cup last year at home, also went against him. According to reports, new coach Gautam Gambhir did not want a captain with injury concerns and was impressed with Suryakumar's game awareness.

'CIRCLE OF CAPTAINCY'

Suryakumar, a T20 regular who redefined batting in the format, made a late debut for India at the age of 30 but soon became the team's go-to batter in the middle order. His audacious stroke-play, including a lap shot behind the stumps, makes him a bowler's nightmare, considered a "360 de-



gree" player for hits all around the ground.

Most recently, Suryakumar took a stunning catch at the boundary in a tense last over from Pandya to help India clinch a thrilling victory in the World Cup final over South Africa in Barbados.

Suryakumar, who previously captained Mumbai in domestic cricket, last year led India to a 4-1 T20 series win over Australia and followed it up with a 1-1 result in South Africa. Pandya had a good World Cup with bat and ball, but the ride has been rough for the Indian star, who replaced Rohit as IPL captain at Mumbai Indians.

He was booed across venues by fans of Rohit, and Mumbai ended bottom of the 10-team table in the T20 tournament. Pandya has also struggled on the personal front, and on Thursday announced his separation from his wife and Serbian model Natasa Stankovic. They will co-parent a son from their four-year marriage.

"So in test matches & ODIs, Hardik Pandya will play under Rohit Sharma. In T20s, Hardik Pandya will play under Suryakumar Yadav. In IPL, Rohit Sharma & Suryakumar Yadav will play under Hardik Pandya. Circle of captaincy," Indian author Ramesh Srivats, wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

CYCLING

Pogacar crushes rivals with superb solo climbing attack

POGACAR'S EXPLOSIVE ATTACK TO WIN STAGE 19 MOVED HIM ONE STEP CLOSER TO THE TITLE

Reuters
Paris

Tadej Pogacar produced a climbing masterclass as he stormed to a stunning solo victory yesterday's stage 19 of the Tour de France in the Alps, a 145km (90.1 miles) ride from Embrun to Isola 2000.

Pogacar's explosive attack to win the stage moved him one step closer to the title as the yellow jersey holder crushed his closest rivals and extended his lead over Jonas Vingegaard and Remco Evenepoel.

After overtaking breakaway leader Matteo Jorgenson inside the final 2km to win the stage, Pogacar's lead over second-placed Vingegaard is now over five minutes while Evenepoel is more than seven minutes behind with two stages left.

"We were speaking in the training camp (about) how we want to race this day and we did it exactly like we said to the point where I attacked. It went really 100% perfect," Pogacar said.

"I was a little bit empty in the last 2km. When I caught Carapaz



UAE Team Emirates' Tadej Pogacar celebrates winning stage 19 of the 111th Tour de France yesterday. (Reuters)

and Simon Yates, there was already a limit. But then when I see that

Matteo was also losing a bit, I tried to push through. "And then when

I tried to pass him with the speed a little bit, I killed my legs. And

then I was thinking maybe he (will) come back and out-sprint me or something.

"He was really strong today, chapeau to Matteo and all the breakaway guys."

After six riders broke away, it was Jorgenson who made the first move to surge ahead, but with 10km left, Richard Carapaz looked to catch up to the American with Simon Yates not too far behind.

Three minutes back
Pogacar had been following three minutes back and he launched his attack less than 9 km from the finish, leaving Vingegaard and Evenepoel behind.

As Vingegaard and Evenepoel battled it out for second place in the overall standings, Pogacar was on a mission to catch up to Jorgenson as he pedalled furiously and passed Olympic champion Carapaz with 3.5km left and Yates 500 metres later.

Jorgenson had done well to hold on to his advantage for as long as he could but he could only watch on as Pogacar passed him with ease, erasing the three-minute gap within the last few kilometre-

tres of the stage. Pogacar eventually crossed the line all by himself, first raising his fists before taking a bow with his arms outstretched and then showing four fingers - the number of stages he has won this year.

Jorgenson finished second with his head bowed, wondering what might have been if not for Pogacar, while Yates was third.

Vingegaard and Evenepoel crossed the line together, with the former inconsolable knowing his chances of winning the Tour had all but slipped away.

The Tour's penultimate stage today is another mountain stage, a 133km ride from Nice to Col de la Couillole, before Sunday's time trial from Monaco to Nice.

"I'm super happy. It's quite a margin now.

"Tomorrow I can just enjoy the stage," Pogacar added.

"We'll let the breakaway go and maybe we enjoy the roads where we were training a month before the Tour and where I trained all my career almost.

"Let's go enjoy tomorrow and hope nothing serious happens," he said.

TENNIS

Nadal in Bastad semi-finals after four-hour marathon

AFP
Bastad, Sweden

Rafael Nadal fought into the semi-finals of the Bastad Open yesterday as he defeated Argentina's Mariano Navone 6-7 (2/7), 7-5, 7-5 in three hours and 59 minutes.

The 22-time Grand Slam champion is through to the last four of a tournament for the first time since Wimbledon two years ago.

"It was very close, long and tiring," said Nadal, whose near four-hour victory was the second longest three-set match of his career - after the 2009 Madrid semi-final against Novak Djokovic, which lasted 4hr 3min.

"For moments he was in control. For moments I was in control. At the end, no one was in control. That's the truth," added Nadal.

"I was able to hold physically till the end. Let's see how I am tomorrow. Today I'm alive and I'm in the semi-finals. So that's super important."

Nadal had to overcome a poor start against the fast-rising Navone, now ranked 36th in the world after beginning the year outside the top 100.

He dropped serve three times in a row against an opponent who became the first man in the Open era to be seeded in his maiden Grand Slam appearance at this year's French Open.

The Spaniard trailed 4-1 and was down a double break but battled his way back into the set, saving two set points in the 10th game before eventually moving 6-5 ahead.

Nadal himself had two set points as Navone served to stay in it, the



Rafael Nadal of Spain celebrates winning his match against Argentine Mariano Navone at the Bastad Open yesterday. (@NordeaOpen)

fourth seed showing his mettle to force a tie-break in which he won the first five points to take charge.

Navone secured the first set when Nadal sprayed a forehand

wide, but the Spaniard quickly regrouped and raced into a 3-0 lead in set two. His advantage was swiftly erased though by Navone who pocketed four games on the

spin before Nadal stopped the rot.

Navone held to put the pressure back on Nadal, the 2005 Bastad champion, but the 38-year-old didn't flinch, winning his service game and then breaking for a 6-5 edge.

He sent the contest to a decider after sealing the set with an emphatic smash and celebrating with an animated fist pump.

Navone nudged 2-0 ahead in the third set before Nadal hit back with authority, sweeping five successive games before a late stumble allowed his rival to haul himself level at 5-all.

But Nadal broke again and finally crawled over the finish line when Navone dumped a forehand return into the net.

Nadal will next face Croatian qualifier Duje Ajdukovic, the world number 130 who had won just two four-level matches in his career prior to this week.

The 23-year-old Ajdukovic beat Brazil's Thiago Monteiro in three sets in the quarter-finals.

Nadal won the last of his 92 singles titles at the 2022 French Open, as he claimed a record-extending 14th Roland Garros crown.

He is using the event in Bastad as a tune-up for the Paris Olympics, where the tennis will be played at Roland Garros. Nadal returned to action this week for first time since losing in the first round of the French Open in late May.

Nadal is also still involved in the doubles in Sweden, where he is teaming up with Casper Ruud. They are due to play in the semi-finals today, after Nadal plays his singles match. "It's time to work on the recovery. Let's see how I am tomorrow," he said.

FOCUS

Gutsy Silverman on top at Barracuda Championship

Reuters
Truckee, California

Ben Silverman of Canada racked up seven birdies over his final nine holes to shoot a plus-19 and take the first-round lead at the Barracuda Championship on Thursday at Tahoe Mountain Club in Truckee, California.

The Barracuda Championship uses a Modified Stableford scoring format that encourages risk-taking.

Birdies are worth two points, eagles are worth five and albatrosses are worth eight.

Each par is zero points while bogeys are minus-1 point and double bogey or anything worse is worth minus-3.

Silverman is two points clear of Kelly Kraft at plus-17, while Nate Lashley is in third place at plus-15.

Sam Ryder and South Korea's SH Kim are tied for fourth at plus-14.

Silverman piled up 10 birdies in all.

After opening with his only bogey of the day at the 10th hole, he birdied Nos 11, 13 and 15 before making his charge on the front nine.

He stuck his approach shot at the par-4 first hole within a foot of the cup, and five of his seven birdies on that side came from inside 6 feet.

Silverman's final birdie came on a 22-foot putt at the par-3 eighth.

"This place is gorgeous," Silverman said.

"Really like this golf course. You try to put the points out of your head and just focus on making birdies and adding up your score normal.

"You get rewarded for birdies

and the points kind of take care of themselves."

The 36-year-old is in the hunt for his first win on the PGA Tour at this alternate event opposite the Open Championship.

Kraft, 35, is like Silverman: a journeyman who has yet to break through for that maiden PGA Tour victory.

Kraft lost his card and is playing the season on conditional-tour status.

A victory would lead to big changes for him.

"This year I guess since the elevated stuff and guys aren't getting in those, everybody else, Korn Ferry categories and all those guys are pretty much playing whatever they get into, so there is really not much for my category to fill the field," said Kraft, the 2011 US Amateur champion.

"Hadh't been a whole lot of fun, but I've got a couple little ones at home so I've had a little more time at home, so that's been great.

"You know, basically just playing everything I can get into."

Some PGA Tour winners this season are in the field because they didn't qualify for The Open that is currently on in the UK.

Canadian Taylor Pendrith, who won the CJ Cup Byron Nelson, and Nick Dunlap, who won The American Express, are among six players tied at plus-12.

The 2024 Barracuda Championship is being held at Tahoe Mountain Club's Old Greenwood course in Truckee, California.

Situated on 600 acres of forest and meadowland surrounded by the Sierra Nevada Mountains, the Jack Nicklaus Signature Golf Course is the perfect setting for the Barracuda Championship.

GOLF

Late surge lifts Choi to the LPGA Dana Open lead

AFP
Los Angeles, United States

South Korea's Choi Hye-jin birdied her last two holes to take a one-shot lead on seven-under par 64 at the LPGA Dana Open in Sylvania, Ohio, yesterday.

The 24-year-old, who is chasing a first LPGA tour victory, was one shot in front of India's Aditi Ashok and China's Lin Xiyu, Ashok firing six birdies without a bogey in her six-under 65 while Lin posted eight birdies and two bogeys.

"It was a really great day," said Choi, who teed off on 10 and didn't pick up her first birdie until the 17th.

That launched a run of four straight birdies. She added another at the fifth before closing with birdies at the eighth and ninth to move ahead of early pacesetters Ashok and Lin.

She said an adjustment to her putting, after

she struggled in the pro-am on Wednesday, made the difference.

"I hit it too hard yesterday," she said, adding that she tried to soften her stroke and focus on her tempo on the greens.

"It worked," she said. "So it's good." Lin, the highest-ranked player in the field at 15 in the world, holed out from bunkers twice as she played her way into contention for a first LPGA title.

The first time was at the 15th. The second was at the first hole - her 10th, where she said she was just trying to get her ball on the green but watched it bounce just short and rattle into the cup.

"I'm like OK, that's the only way I can stop it," she said.

"Almost like two impossible shots to hole out, that's a bit of luck," added Lin, who is using the tournament as a final tuneup for her third Olympics in Paris.

Lin played alongside Ashok and defending champion Linn Grant of Sweden, who launched her title defence with a 67.

"I think I really like the golf course," Ashok said. "It's something similar to what I grew up on, tree-lined and smaller greens. That's kind of how it was when I grew up back in India. Yeah, I had my first-ever top 10 on tour at this course (and) played well here last year.

"Yeah, good memories and I think that helps sometimes."

Thailand's Chanettee Wannasaen and Natthakritta Vongaveelap and South Africa's Paula Reto shared fourth on 66.

The Dana Open is one of the longest running events on the LPGA Tour.

The Dana Open was founded in 1984 and has been played yearly, except in 1986 and 2011, in Sylvania, Ohio. Over the past 39 years, the tournament has raised \$13.9mm for more than 250 local children's charities.



Ben Silverman hits an approach shot on the fifth hole during the first round of the Barracuda Championship at the Old Greenwood course at Tahoe Mountain Club in Truckee, California. (AFP)

FORMULA 1

Norris on top after beating Verstappen in second practice

'I THINK THIS WAS SERGIO'S BEST FRIDAY PERFORMANCE SINCE CHINA'



McLaren's Lando Norris (also inset) drives during the second practice session at the Hungaroring race track in Mogyorod near Budapest yesterday, ahead of the Formula One Hungarian Grand Prix. (AFP)

AFP
Budapest

McLaren's Lando Norris outpaced world champion Max Verstappen of Red Bull to top the times in yesterday's second free practice session, run in hot conditions, ahead of this weekend's Hungarian Grand Prix.

The 24-year-old Briton, who trails the three-time champion by 84 points in the drivers' title race, clocked a best time of one minute and 17.788 seconds to beat his friend and rival by 0.243 seconds in a tightly-contested session.

Carlos Sainz was third for Ferrari, one-tenth down, ahead of an improving Sergio Perez in the second Red Bull, George Russell of Mercedes and Haas's Kevin

Magnussen, who is set to leave the team at the end of the year.

Seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton, hoping to claim a record-increasing ninth Hungarian victory, was seventh ahead of RB's Daniel Ricciardo, Alex Albon of Williams and two-time champion Fernando Alonso of Aston Martin. Eight different teams were represented in the top ten, signalling how close the field has become - only Red Bull and Mercedes providing both drivers - and how a tight race is in prospect for Sunday.

The session began with Nico Hulkenberg leading the way in searing heat amid temperatures of 32C (air) and 60C (track), setting the first lap time on mediums before being usurped by Perez in 1:18.568, the Mexican at last finding some pace. On his first run,

Verstappen complained that his brakes were "not working, they're not biting". He was fifth and then went second behind his Red Bull team-mate.

After a promising first session, Ferrari's fortunes dipped when the luckless Leclerc lost control and ran wide at Turn Four, ran over the kerbs and hit the barriers.

"I touched the wall," he reported, having damaged his car and the advertising hoardings.

The session was red-flagged for 14 minutes before resuming.

For Mercedes, it was also a troubled day following technology problems arising from partner CrowdStrike's global IT glitch which had resulted in them working with blank screens on the pit-wall during opening practice.

Russell and Hamilton were first out on the re-start with the lead-

ing contenders all taking softs for some qualifying simulation runs.

Russell clocked 1:18.294 to go top ahead of Hamilton by 0.069 seconds before Norris took over in 1:17.788, four-tenths clear of Sainz who had set the pace for Ferrari in the opening session until Verstappen slotted into second.

After this flurry of action, most returned to mediums for race preparation while Piastri returned to McLaren for repairs to the floor of his car, his second lengthy absence of the day.

In this period, Perez showed he was back on form in race trim, making it important for him to recover some pure pace in qualifying today.

"I think this was Sergio's best Friday performance since China," said Red Bull team chief Christian Horner.

FOOTBALL

Como confirm Fabregas as coach, sign former Spain full-back Moreno

AFP
Milan, Italy

Cesc Fabregas was confirmed yesterday as Como coach before the ambitious club signed former Spain defender Alberto Moreno ahead of their first Serie A season in 21 years.

"Como 1907 are delighted to confirm that Cesc Fabregas will become head coach of the men's team on a four-year contract," said Como in a statement. Former Spain midfielder Fabregas was assistant to Osian Roberts as Como won automatic promotion to the top flight last season.

The 37-year-old was also interim coach for a month following the sacking of Roberts' predecessor Moreno Longo in November, but could not take permanent charge until he got the coaching badges required by European governing body UEFA.

Fabregas previously managed Como's youth team after retiring as a player last summer, and had long been tipped to take over the first team of a club finely attuned to international marketing.

Bankrolled by tobacco giants Djarum, Como have stormed through the divisions since being acquired in 2019 following multiple bankruptcies.

Como have created a glitzy image thanks to their glamorous

location on Lake Como in northern Italy and have been busy this summer, bringing in a host of new players. The latest was Moreno, who on Friday Como said has arrived on a one-year deal "with automatic renewal for another season if certain conditions are met".

Left-back Moreno, who played four times for his country, joined Como after being released by Villarreal at the end of last season. The 32-year-old is a two-time Europa League winner with Sevilla and Villarreal, and played for five seasons for Liverpool where he had a small role in the Reds winning the 2019 Champions League.

Como, who are at Juventus in their opening game of the coming Serie A season, are also in the hunt for former France defender Raphael Varane.

But they were embroiled in controversy on Tuesday when one of their players referred to South Korea forward Hwang Hee-chan as Hollywood action star 'Jackie Chan' during a stormy friendly defeat to Wolverhampton Wanderers.

Como attracted widespread criticism when in a statement they insisted the unnamed player "did not say anything in a derogatory manner" and "the reaction of certain Wolves players has seen the incident blown out of proportion".

Morata signs for AC Milan

Alvaro Morata signed for AC Milan from Atletico Madrid yesterday, the Spain striker returning to Serie A days after winning Euro 2024.

The 31-year-old has signed a four-year deal with Milan who brought him in to replace departed Olivier Giroud following the former France international's transfer to Los Angeles FC.

"Morata has signed with the Rossoneri until 30 June 2028, with an option to extend for an additional year," said Milan in a statement.

Italian media report that Milan paid Morata's 13-million euro (\$14.2 million) release clause and that the player will earn around 4.5 million euros per season.

Morata played in every match

in Spain's triumph at the Euros, netting his only goal of the tournament in La Roja's 3-0 thumping of Croatia which kicked off their campaign in Germany.

He has scored 36 goals in 80 international appearances for his country. Morata returns to Italy after two spells with Milan's rivals Juventus, where he won two league titles and three Italian Cups. Morata has also won the FA Cup with Chelsea and featured in two triumphant Champions League campaigns with Real Madrid, in 2014 and 2017.

Milan, who finished second in Serie A last season but 19 points behind champions Inter Milan, begin the league season under new coach Paulo Fonseca with the visit of Torino on August 17. (AFP)

FOCUS

Howe 'very committed' to Newcastle after England link



AFP
London

Eddie Howe insists he is "very committed" to Newcastle as long as he is backed by the club after being installed as one of the leading contenders to take over as England manager.

The English Football Association said yesterday that they have identified a number of candidates to replace Gareth Southgate, who resigned following Sunday's Euro 2024 final loss to Spain.

Howe is among the bookmakers' top choices, along with former Chelsea bosses Thomas Tuchel, Mauricio Pochettino and Graham Potter. But Newcastle chief executive Darren Eales this week said the Premier League club would fight to keep Howe.

And the Magpies boss was ada-

mant yesterday that he remains content at St James' Park. "It is an unbelievable football club. I'm very, very proud to be the manager," Howe told BBC Radio Newcastle.

"I love the supporters, I love the players, I love the staff. So really, there has been no thought in my mind on anything else and I have been very committed to the job here.

"For me, as long as I am happy and feel supported and feel free to do the work that I love to do at Newcastle, I'll be very happy. And I am very happy."

Howe has long been ranked as one of the brightest young English coaches after his impressive work with Bournemouth and then Newcastle. In his three years in charge, Howe has taken Newcastle back to the Champions League for the first time in 20 years and also reached the League Cup final.

However, Newcastle finished a disappointing seventh in the Premier League last season amid concerns that they would have to sell key players this summer in a bid to stay in line with financial fair-play rules. If that might be a reason for Howe to consider taking the England job if he was offered it, the 46-year-old said he was ready to remain on Tyneside - as long as he feels supported by the club's Saudi owners.

"Of course that is my expectation because I am the manager of Newcastle and I am very proud to be," he said when asked if he would be in charge for their opening Premier League game against Southampton on August 17.

"But as I said, it is all about the environment I am working in. As long as that is one where I feel I can give my best, then absolutely, we will crack on and I am looking forward to next season."

SPOTLIGHT

Argentina apologises to France in football-chant controversy

AFP
Buenos Aires

Buenos Aires apologised to France after Argentina's vice-president called the European country "colonialist" and its people "hypocrites" in an argument over alleged racist chants by Argentine footballers.

President Javier Milei's office said yesterday it had sent a senior official to the French embassy to explain that Victoria Villarruel's angry statement on social media was made in her personal capacity. FIFA has announced an investigation into the chants sung by Argentina players, including

Chelsea and Argentina midfielder Enzo Fernandez, 23, after they won the Copa America.

The chants were heard on a live video posted on social media by Fernandez from the team bus in the wake of the Copa victory over Colombia in Miami on Sunday.

The song targets France's star striker Kylian Mbappe among others and includes racist and homophobic insults.

Fernandez has apologized, but Chelsea have launched an internal disciplinary procedure against him. The French Football Federation (FFF) has complained to FIFA.

On Wednesday, Villarruel expressed support for Fernandez on X, saying: "No colonialist

country is going to intimidate us because of a stadium chant nor for speaking truths that they do not want to admit. Enough with feigned outrage, hypocrites."

The diplomatic incident came just days before Milei is due to travel to Paris to attend the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games.

"Diplomatic relations with France are intact," presidential spokesman Manuel Adorni said yesterday.

Argentina's under secretary for sports, Julio Garro, was dismissed from his post this week after saying captain Lionel Messi and the Argentine Football Association should apologize for the chants.

Hjulmand resigns as boss with Denmark needing 'new ideas'

Kasper Hjulmand said yesterday that Denmark needed "new ideas" after resigning as head coach following the last 16 defeat at Euro 2024.

Hjulmand, 52, had been in the position since May 2020 before stepping down after June 29's loss to hosts Germany. He led Denmark to the European Championship's semi-finals three years ago before being knocked out of the 2022 World Cup group stage. "I can feel that it will be best for the team that a new face and new ideas come in, who can write a new big chapter for this amazing team, and therefore it is best, that someone else leads the team forward," Hjulmand said in a Danish Football Association

(DBU) statement. "It's not about me. It's about what's best for the team," he said.

Hjulmand's assistant coach Morten Wieghorst will replace him until the end of the year, which will include Nations League games against Switzerland, Serbia and Euro 2024 champions Spain.

"We have a fantastic pool of talent in Danish football, and I am very much looking forward to tackling the tasks in the autumn," former Celtic defender Wieghorst said. "Together with the staff and the players, I will give everything so that we can achieve success in the exciting matches in the Nations League," he added.

