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TENNIS

Nadal makes
first final in
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at Bastad

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LONDON DIAMOND LEAGUE

Abakar finishes third in 400m hurdles, Barshim withdraws

Barshim says he decided not to jump due to lack of space on the runway at London Stadium

Agencies
London

Qatar's high jump Olympic champion Mutaz Barshim made a last-minute withdrawal at yesterday's London Diamond League, while Ismail Doudai Abakar smashed his lifetime best by almost a second to finish third in 47.72 secs in 400m hurdles.

With one eye on the Paris Games, Barshim, who famously shared Tokyo gold with Italian Gianmarco Tamberi, decided not to jump due to lack of space on the runway at London Stadium. Later, Barshim - who has struggled with injuries this season - admitted that he did not want to take a risk with Olympics round the corner.

"I didn't jump, unfortunately. I'm disappointed," Barshim said yesterday. "There was no space; it was a technical mistake I think from the organisers and it was very tight. So, when I tried to set up my run-up to jump, it was impossible. There was no place to do it."

"I've been jumping officially for about 15 years. This is only the second time in my career that something like this has happened. Of course, I'm frustrated, not only for myself but also for everyone who came out there to support me. I feel bad because I don't like letting people down. I'm not injured; I wanted to come here and perform at my best. But, as I said, things happen. It's frustrating, but we move forward. We have the Olympics soon, so I'm looking forward to that," the 33-year-old.

In Barshim's absence, World indoor champion Hamish Kerr won event with 2.30m jump. Last week, Barshim had won in Heilbronn, Germany with a leap of 2.31 metres, equalling his season's best as eyes another Olympic podium finish in Paris.

Meanwhile, 20-year-old Abakar sprang a surprise with a stunning show. Starting in lane 8, Abakar finished third behind Brazil's 2022 world champion Alison dos Santos, who was a convincing winner in 47.18. Jamaica's Roshawn Clarke produced a season's best of 47.63 to take second.

"That was a huge personal best for me so I am very excited now for Paris," an elated Abakar said later. "I knew I could do it and now I can go there and I really feel I can get to the final. To take this much off my personal puts me really in the right place for the Olympics."



Qatar's Ismail Doudai Abakar celebrates after achieving a personal best in the 400m hurdles during the Diamond League meeting in London yesterday. (AFP)

LYLES FIRES OLYMPIC 100M BROADSIDE, BOL CRUISES

Meanwhile, US sprint star Noah Lyles fired out a timely broadside at pretenders to the Olympic 100m crown at Diamond League meeting in London, where Femke Bol again shone in the hurdles.

Lyles, who won the world 100-200m titles in Budapest last year, clocked a personal best of 9.81 seconds in the blue ribbon event. It could not have been better timed, with the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics just six days away. "I'm going to win, it's what I always do. I'm getting faster every week," Lyles said.

In her own fine-tuning, world champion Bol set a new meet record of 51.30sec as she cruised to victory in the women's 400m hurdles. "I am excited for Paris and of course to put on my best race there," she said, with world record holder and

Olympic champion Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone in her crosshairs. "I am looking forward to racing Sydney - that will push us both. I will be ready for it and the relay as well of course."

There was a fantastic send-off to a raft of Paris-bound British athletes in front of a near sell-out crowd of 58,000 at London Stadium, the venue for the 2012 Olympics and home to English Premier League club West Ham United. World and Olympic silver medallist Keely Hodgkinson just missed out on Caster Semenya's Diamond League record by blasting to a stunning victory in 1:54.61 in the women's 800m.

Perfectly led out by pacemaker Erin Wallace, the European champion was in total control of the race and came flying through the line in a meet record that improved her own British record. Hodgkinson's British teammate Mat-



United States' Noah Lyles (right) sprints to 100m victory ahead of Britain's Louie Hinchliffe at the London Diamond League yesterday. (USA TODAY Sports)

thew Hudson-Smith might have sat out the European championships in Rome, but that didn't show as he bettered his own European record to 43.74sec in a scintillating 400m. It did not all go totally to plan for home favourites as Dina Asher-Smith and Daryll Neita could only finish third and fourth in the 200m behind American winner Gabrielle Thomas - in a meet record of 21.82sec - and second-placed St Lucian Julien Alfred (21.86).

There were three individual Australian winners at London Stadium: world champion Nina Kennedy claimed victory in the women's pole vault with 4.85m; Oliver Hoare claimed the men's mile in 3:49.03;

and Mackenzie Little won the women's javelin in a personal best of 66.27m.

There was a surprise in the men's shot put, however, as Italy's European champion Leonardo Fabbri snatched a late victory with his fifth effort of 22.52 metres. American favourite Ryan Crouser, who will seek a third successive Olympic title in Paris, finished second with 22.37sec.

Nickisha Pryce of Jamaica proved her form with an impressive world lead of 48.57sec in the women's 400m, a personal best and meet record. There was a further meet record in the non-Olympic distance of 3,000m, Switzerland's Dominic Lokinyomo Lobalu winning in 7:27.68.

Younousse, Tijan leave for Olympics



Qatar beach volleyball players Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan pose for a photograph with team officials prior to their departure for Paris, France, ahead of the Olympic Games, yesterday. The Tokyo Olympics bronze winners, Cherif and Ahmed will take on Italians Paolo Nicolai and Samuele Cottafava in their opening Pool A match at the Paris Games on July 27 at the foot of the iconic Eiffel Tower.

FOCUS

Palestinians are winners by just being at Paris Games, say athletes

Reuters
Paris

The presence of Palestinian athletes at the Paris Olympic Games is already a major victory for the team amid the conflict in the Middle East, they said yesterday, less than a week before the start of the Olympics.

The Palestinian team for the Games starting on Friday consists of six athletes who will be competing in boxing, judo, taekwondo, shooting and swimming, with slim hopes of a medal. "Whether a medal or not, we already win," swimmer Yazan al-Bawwab told Reuters.

"The fact that we're here. The fact that people don't want us to be here, they don't want us to play sports. They don't want us to exist. People don't want Palestinians to exist. They look at the flag and they don't want it. So to be here is



Palestinian swimmer Valerie Tarazi dives into the pool during training ahead of the Olympics in Paris yesterday. (Reuters)

a win," said al-Bawwab, who will be the team's flag bearer during the opening ceremony.

About 1,200 people were killed and more than 250 were seized and taken as hostages to Gaza in an at-

tack on southern Israel led by the Palestinian militant group Hamas last Oct. 7, according to Israeli tallies. The Israeli military offensive launched in response in Hamas-governed Gaza has killed almost

39,000 Palestinians, health officials in the Palestinian enclave say. Israel says 326 of its soldiers have been killed in Gaza.

In the run-up to the Paris Olympics, Palestinian athletes had been given support by Arab states, including Kuwait, Qatar, Libya and Egypt, to allow training in those countries. Palestinian sports officials have said that since the start of the conflict in October 2023 more than 300 athletes, referees and sports officials have been killed and all sports facilities in Gaza demolished.

"I said it before but I'm one of the luckiest people in the world," swimmer Valerie Tarazi said. "I have the opportunity to compete for my country, to raise the flag for my country."

"My heart is with them. Every time I swim, every time I jump in the pool, I'm thinking about the people of Palestine, their struggles. And I just want to represent them in the best way possible."

CRICKET

Brook leads England into strong position against WI

Brook's unbeaten 71 helped England to 248 for 3, a lead of 207 after a last-wicket stand took visitors to 457

AFP
Nottingham, United Kingdom

Julian Guyer Harry Brook's unbeaten fifty guided England into a strong position at stumps on the third day of the second Test against the West Indies at Trent Bridge.

England were 248-3 in their second innings at Saturday's close, already a lead of 207 runs.

Brook was 71 not out and star batsman Joe Root unbeaten on 37, with the Yorkshire duo having shared an unbroken stand of 108 in 23.4 overs.

England had been in control against a wayward West Indies attack as Ben Duckett made 76, his second dashing fifty of the match, and Ollie Pope added 51 to his first-innings 121.

But a change of ball led to a change of luck for the West Indies, with paceman Alzarri Joseph removing both batsmen as England's 127-1 was soon transformed into 140-3.

Root and Brook, however, restored England's grip on the match as they scored briskly against a tiring West Indies pace attack, with a third-day pitch still providing an excellent surface for batting.

England opened their second innings 41 runs behind after being frustrated by an aggressive last-wicket stand of 71 between Joshua Da Silva (82 not out) and Shamar Joseph (33) that took the West Indies to 457.

It was the first time the West Indies had made 450 in a Test innings for nearly a decade.

Zak Crawley, dismissed for a duck in England's first innings, was then unluckily run out for three after Jayden Seales deflected a Duckett drive onto the stumps at the bowler's end.

But Pope underlined England's determination to wrestle back the momentum with three fours off successive Seales deliveries.

Left-hander Duckett was also in fine touch, sweeping off-spinner Kevin Sinclair for three fours in a



England's Harry Brook in action during the second Test against West Indies at the Trent Bridge Cricket Ground in Nottingham yesterday. (Reuters)

row on his way to a 55-ball 50.

But the first delivery following the change of ball ended a second-wicket partnership of 119 when Pope edged an Alzarri Joseph delivery low to Sinclair in the gully. The bowler's excellent inswinging yorker then had Duckett lbw.

But Brook counter-attacked by advancing down the pitch to drive towering all-rounder Jason Holder for four.

Brook then completed the third fifty of the innings by stylishly check-driving Alzarri Joseph to the long-off rope for a fifth four in 62 balls faced.

Even so, the West Indies could take heart from a batting performance all the more creditable given they had been dismissed for just 121 and 136 during an innings and 114-run defeat by England at Lord's.

That left them 1-0 down in this three-match series.

West Indies resumed on 351-5, 65 runs behind, after Kavem Hodge (120) and Alick Athanaze (82) shared a stand of 175 that revived them from 84-3.

England, in their first home Test since 2012 without retired duo James Anderson or Stuart Broad -

who between them took 1,308 Test wickets - had struggled on Friday.

But an overcast Saturday morning promised to aid England's pacemen, armed with the new ball, as Jason Holder (23 not out) and Da Silva (32 not out) looked to narrow the deficit.

Chris Woakes removed Holder and then dismissed Alzarri Joseph and Seales with successive deliveries before Shamar Joseph survived the hat-trick ball, with the Warwickshire seamer taking 4-84 in his 50th Test.

Da Silva, however, completed an 87-ball 50 in spectacular style

when he launched fast bowler Mark Wood high over extra-cover for six.

And the wicketkeeper then took West Indies past 400 with an extravagant uppercut six off Wood.

Boundaries came at both ends, Shamar Joseph pulling fast bowler Gus Atkinson - fresh from 12 wickets on debut at Lord's - for six to level the scores.

Two balls later Atkinson again dropped short as Shamar Joseph hoisted him for another six that knocked tiles off the roof of the Larwood and Voce Tavern.

England captain Ben Stokes

turned to Root to break the stand but Da Silva clubbed the part-time spinner for three fours and a six off successive balls.

Wood eventually had Shamar Joseph chipping to mid-on, his only wicket of an innings where he topped 97mph (156kph) and beat the outside edge.

SCOREBOARD

England 1st Innings 416
West Indies 1st Innings (overnight: 351-5)
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 c Smith b Woakes 27
J. Da Silva not out 82
K. Sinclair c Brook b Atkinson 4
A. Joseph c Smith b Woakes 10
J. Seales b Woakes 0
S. Joseph c Atkinson b Wood 33
Extras (b4, lb3, nb8, w4) 19
Total (all out, 111.5 overs, 510 mins) 457
Fall of wickets: 1-53 (Louis), 2-78 (Brathwaite), 3-84 (McKenzie), 4-259 (Athanaze), 5-305 (Hodge), 6-355 (Holder), 7-362 (Sinclair), 8-386 (A Joseph), 9-386 (Seales), 10-457 (S Joseph)
Bowling: Woakes 28-1-84-4 (1nb); Atkinson 24.5-4-107-2 (1nb, 4w); Wood 20-4-71-1 (1nb); Bashir 25-0-108-2 (1nb); Stokes 12-0-61-1 (4nb); Root 2-0-19-0

England 2nd Innings
Z. Crawley run out (Seales) 3
B. Duckett lbw b A Joseph 76
O. Pope c Sinclair b A Joseph 51
J. Root not out 37
H. Brook not out 71
Extras (lb8, nb2) 10
Total (3 wkts, 51 overs, 255 mins) 248
Fall of wickets: 1-8 (Crawley), 2-127 (Pope), 3-140 (Duckett)
Bowling: A Joseph 12-0-58-2 (1nb); Seales 12-1-62-0; S Joseph 10-0-36-0 (1nb); Holder 9-0-38-0; Sinclair 7-0-40-0; Brathwaite 1-0-6-0
Match position: England lead by 207 runs with seven wickets standing.

FOCUS

Qatar Rail Chess Championship concludes successfully



Winners of the Qatar Rail Chess Championship pose with officials yesterday.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Algerian Jamal Ferhi and Qatari Khaled al-Jamaat claimed the top two places in the 2024 Qatar Rail Chess Championship which concluded at the Al Bidaa Station of Doha Metro yesterday.

The blitz chess tournament's finals saw the participation of 20 players played according to the Swiss system of nine rounds. While Jamal Ferhi finished with a tally of 8.5 points, al-Jamaat totalled six points.

Indian Sagan Albin finished third place with six points, while Filipino Ryan Mendoza came in fourth with 5.5 points, ahead of the Kazakh Oleg Em, who had the same number of points.

Among other Qatari players, Khaled Abdul Rahman al-Khulaifi came 16th (3.5 points), Irfan Muhamed 18th (3 pts), and Hamad al-Kuwari in 19th place with 2.5

points. The preliminary rounds took place at the Qatar Chess Training Center last Thursday and witnessed the participation of 80 players.

Mohamed al-Mudahka, President of the Qatar Chess Association, said: "We are proud to collaborate with our partners at Qatar Rail in organizing this successful tournament. We had high expectations for this tournament, considering the significant participation and fierce competition. We appreciate the fruitful co-operation with Qatar Rail and thank them for their continuous support in promoting the game within the community and encouraging people to engage in chess. We look forward to continuing and developing our cooperation in this field and organising more exceptional events."

Ajlan Eid al-Enazi, Chief of Strategy and Business Development at Qatar Rail stated: "We are delighted to collaborate with the Qatar Chess Association to or-

ganize the Qatar Rail Chess Open 2023, on World Chess Day. We are pleased with the high level of participation and enthusiasm shown since the beginning of the tournament. It has been an exceptional tournament on all levels, and we extend our congratulations to the winners. The successful organisation of the tournament enhances our ability to provide diverse community experiences and foster communication among individuals within the metro stations. Our investment in such events reflects our commitment to offering unique travel experiences for our customers within the stations."

He said: "We remain committed to further enhancing the Doha Metro and Lusail Tram networks as permanent destinations for residents and visitors alike, by organising and hosting various events. These events play a significant role in our strategy to transform the stations to preferred destinations throughout the year."

Pakistan's Babar and Afridi denied permission to play in Canada T20 league

Pakistan's leading all-format players Babar Azam, Shaheen Afridi and Mohamed Rizwan have been denied permission by their cricket board to play in the Global T20 in Canada over workload concerns.

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) had earlier refused permission to fast bowler Naseem Shah to play in The Hundred competition in England.

"After taking into consideration Pakistan's busy and packed cricket calendar... and following

consultations with the three players as well as the national selection committee, it has been decided to decline their requests," the PCB said in a statement late on Friday.

"The three are all-format cricketers and their services are expected to be required in the upcoming eight months during which Pakistan will play nine tests, 14 ODIs, and nine T20Is.

"As such, and in line with the PCB's workload management policy, it is in the best interest of

Pakistan cricket and the players that they skip the upcoming event in Canada so that they are in their best mental and physical shape for the season."

Pakistan begin their home season next month with a two-test series in Bangladesh. Asif Ali, Iftikhar Ahmed, Mohamed Amir and Mohamed Nawaz - all predominantly limited-overs players - have been cleared for the Global T20, which begins next week.

(Reuters)

MOTORSPORT

World champion Rovannerpa in cruise control at Rally Latvia

AFP
Paris

Kalle Rovannerpa strengthened his grip on Rally Latvia yesterday, opening up a commanding lead of more than 40 seconds on eight-time world champion Sebastien Ogier.

Latvian rookie Martins Sesks, of M-Sport Ford, was in third place behind the two Toyota drivers going into today's final day.

Ott Tanak, the 2019 world champion, was fourth after a late problem while series leader Thierry Neuville of Hyundai was eighth, more than two minutes 30 seconds off the lead held by defending champion Rovannerpa.

British driver Elfyn Evans suffered a bizarre incident on the 14th stage when his Toyota collided with an inflatable advertising arch. The structure then got caught in the wheels of Tanak's Hyundai, leaving the Estonian annoyed that he had not been warned by officials of the hindrance.

"They were certainly having a good meal and a good wine when,



Kalle Rovannerpa of Finland and his co-driver Jonne Halttunen of Finland steer their Toyota GR Yaris Rally1 Hybrid during the WRC TET Rally Latvia in Vecpils, Latvia, yesterday. (AFP)

from the camera, they could see that the road was blocked and that a car was coming," said Tanak who managed to remove the arch himself. Four final stages will be contested on the rally today.

STANDINGS:

1. Kalle Rovannerpa/Jonne Halttunen (FIN/Toyota) 1:58:55.6,
2. Sebastien Ogier/Vincent Landais (FRA/Toyota) at 42.5

- sec. 3. Martins Sesks/Renars Francis (LVA/Ford M-Sport) 47.2,
4. Ott Tanak/Martin Järveoja (EST/Hyundai) 1:08.0,
5. Adrien Fourmaux/Alexandre Coria (FRA/M-Sport Ford) 1:16.4,
6. Elfyn Evans/Scott Martin (GBR/Toyota) 1:34.3,
7. Takamoto Katsuta/Aaron Johnston (JPN-IRL/Toyota) 1:46.0,
8. Thierry Neuville/Martijn Wydaeghe (BEL/Hyundai) 2:33.9

TENNIS

Nadal makes first final in two years at Bastad

AFP
Bastad, Sweden

Rafael Nadal reached his first final yesterday since winning the 2022 French Open, defeating Croatian qualifier Duje Ajdukovic in a three-set tussle in Bastad ahead of the Paris Olympics.

A day after his four-hour quarter-final victory, the 22-time Grand Slam champion was again tested by Ajdukovic, the world number 130 who had won just two tour-level matches before this week.

The Spaniard rebounded from dropping the opening set to prevail 4-6, 6-3, 6-4, returning to the final of a tournament he won as a teenager on his last appearance in 2005.

"It was a very tough match. It was very difficult honestly, but I found a way to survive and be through to the final after a long time without being in a final, so that's great news and I'm very happy with that," said Nadal.

The 38-year-old will play Portuguese seventh seed Nuno Borges, who overcame Argentina's Thiago Agustin Tirante 6-3, 6-4, as he goes in search of the 93rd singles title of his career.

His most recent triumph came two years ago at Roland Garros, when he won the tournament for a record-extending 14th time.

"It's always a great feeling to be back in the final. I won four matches in a row, something I wasn't able to make happen since two years ago," said Nadal, whose ranking has tumbled to 261 after a string of injuries.

"A lot of things happened... I'm still in this process of recovering a lot of things I lost because I had a very important hip surgery almost one year ago, so things are not going that easy.

"But I'm fighting, I've fought during the whole tournament to be where I am today. Matches like yesterday and today help to improve a lot of things on court, so I'm happy with that. Let's see if I'm able to play a little bit better tomorrow."

Nadal struggled early against the 23-year-old Ajdukovic as he fell 3-0 and a double break down in the opening set, but he fought his way back with two breaks in the second after another poor start.

The former world number one appeared in complete control in the third set when he surged 3-0 ahead only to lose his serve twice in succession, suffering a repeat of the stumble that nearly cost him on Friday.

He broke again in the seventh game and then resisted two more break points in the next, eventually securing victory with a comfortable hold two games later.

Nadal is using the event in Bastad as a tune-up for the Olympic Games, where the tennis will be played on the clay at Roland Garros. He won gold in the singles in Beijing in 2008 and gold in the doubles at Rio 2016.

He only returned to action this week for the first time since losing in the first round of the French Open in late May.

Nadal was also due to play in the doubles later on Saturday alongside Casper Ruud but announced he was pulling out as a precaution after spending six hours on court over his past two singles matches.



Spain's Rafael Nadal celebrates after winning Nordea Open semi-final against Croatia's Duje Ajdukovic in Bastad, Sweden, yesterday. (AFP)

CYCLING

'Out of this world' Pogacar on brink of third Tour win

'Tomorrow can still be dangerous so I will try and come safely into Nice'

AFP
Nice, France

Tadej Pogacar won for a fifth time on this year's Tour de France yesterday, moving to the brink of a third title, with an "out of this world" performance ahead of defending champion Jonas Vingegaard and Remco Evenepoel.

With just today's concluding time trial to come, two-time champion Pogacar has a five minute 14-second lead over Vingegaard as he effectively made sure of becoming the first man in 26 years to capture the Giro d'Italia-Tour de France double in the same season.

"Tomorrow can still be dangerous so I will try and come safely into Nice," said Pogacar, who rode most of the stage aided by teammates, likely to conserve energy for the last day.

"I wanted to ride and finish with the team," he said, knowing he will finish alone today.

The Slovenian won the Tour de France in 2020 and 2021 before his attack-minded tactics backfired as Vingegaard beat him into second place in 2022 and 2023.

"Five wins! If you had told me that before the Tour then I would not have believed you," said Pogacar.

"It's out of this world, I'm super happy."

The day's action started in Nice and culminated on the tough Col de Couillolè climb.

Evenepoel's Quick Step team set the tempo and attacked Vingegaard in an attempt to take second place overall.

Instead Evenepoel dropped around 53sec on the Dane, making



UAE Team Emirates team's Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar celebrates after winning the 20th stage of the 111th edition of the Tour de France in Col de la Couillolè, southeastern France, yesterday. (AFP)

it less likely the Belgian can claim second place after Sunday's time trial, where he is favourite for the stage win.

Vingegaard said he had not been targeting a win on yesterday's pe-

ultimate stage after admitting on Friday that his title hopes were over when Pogacar also pocketed the 19th stage.

"I was riding more to put more time into him (Evenepoel) rather

than going for the stage today. He's the best time trialist in the world so you never know," said the 27-year-old Dane.

"I felt really bad yesterday, completely empty, so to bounce back like this is really nice."

Evenepoel virtually guaranteed third place overall and the white jersey as best young rider.

Olympic champion Richard Carapaz, regarded as the most combative rider on the 2024 Tour, will win the climb points jersey.

Carapaz came third Saturday, won a stage and even took the yellow jersey for a day early in the Tour.

Pogacar also claimed he never intended to win Saturday's stage.

"We were letting the breakaway go, we had (teammate) Marc Soler in the breakaway and gave him carte blanche."

Of the 3,498km on this 2024 Tour there remains just 34, a challenging run along the narrow, undulating cornice between the principality of Monaco, where many in the peloton live, and the French Riviera town of Nice.

The Tour traditionally ends with a parade into Paris with a sprint finish contested on the Champs Elysees.

However, due to the Olympics in the French capital, the Tour de France avoided the region altogether and instead ends with a new-look finale that may yet produce a surprise.

Veteran British sprinter Mark Cavendish established a stand alone 35 stage wins all time record on this edition, and finished safely yesterday, showing great respect for the race by climbing through the Alps while many other sprinters pulled out ahead of the onslaught.

FOCUS

Berrettini overturns Tsitsipas to reach final

AFP
Gstaad, Switzerland

Matteo Berrettini took another big step on his road back to the top echelons of the ATP circuit when he beat Stefanos Tsitsipas 7-6 (8/6), 7-5 yesterday to reach the final in Gstaad.

The 28-year-old Italian, who won the final in Gstaad in 2018, has struggled with injury since reaching a career-high world number six in May 2022.

He had lost his previous five meetings with the 12th-ranked Greek but edged the key moments in Switzerland to reach his third final of the year, following Marrakesh in April and Stuttgart in June.

Berrettini's serve was key: he did not face a break point and won 92 percent of points behind his first delivery.

"I kept serving well and believing that something could happen in a return game, and it happened in the end," said Berrettini, currently ranked at 82, in his on-court interview.

"Stefanos is a great player, he knows how to mix things up and

the tie-break was really tight, but again like yesterday I think I played a little bit better in important moments."

He will face French qualifier Quentin Halys, ranked 192, who beat the German Jan-Lennard Struff 6-3, 7-6 (7/2) to make his first ever ATP final.

The two players have met once before at an ITF World Tennis Tour event in Italy in 2015, when Halys came out on top.

"It was a long time ago. I remember it was in Piombino in Tuscany, definitely on a different surface, a hard court," said Berrettini.

"I remember I couldn't return his serve, so hopefully tomorrow I'm going to be able to do it. It's going to be a tough one, but I'm going to be ready."

Berrettini's return to form and fitness began with that win in Marrakech after which he progressed to the final in Stuttgart where he was beaten in three sets by Britain's Jack Draper.

He did not compete at the French Open but put up a good show in the second round at Wimbledon where he came second best to compatriot Jannik Sinner in a tight four-setter.

Zverev into 35th career final in Hamburg

World number four and defending champion Alexander Zverev reached his 35th career final with a straight sets win over Pedro Martinez of Spain in Hamburg yesterday.

Top seed Zverev eased to a 6-2, 6-4 victory as the 27-year-old booked a spot in a third consecutive clay-court final after Rome and the French Open.

Zverev now leads the ATP Tour with 44 wins this year, two ahead of top-ranked Jannik Sinner. The German will face Arthur Fils in today's final. He has a 2-0 head-to-head record over the Frenchman, beating him in three sets on grass in Halle last month and in the semi-finals in Hamburg in 2023.

"He's somebody that is extremely aggressive and he's somebody that is very young," Zverev said. "He obviously has the talent, he has the potential to be one of the best players in the world, and it's up to him to realise his potential."

"Tomorrow I'm going to do everything that I can to prevent that, for him to make a step forward. But he's a great talent and there's nothing bad to say about him."

Fils, 20, defeated third seed Sebastian Baez 6-2, 6-2 in his semi-final. "It was very hot, so it was very fast and my serve was working pretty well. That helped me a lot today and I don't know if tomorrow it will be that hot, but I hope so," said the world number 28.

Meanwhile US teen Alex Michelsen ended Reilly Opelka's comeback from a layoff of nearly two years yesterday, ousting his countryman to reach the Hall of Fame Open final.

Michelsen, last year's Newport runner-up, defeated Opelka 6-2, 6-0 in only 59 minutes in the ATP grass-court event at Rhode Island.

(AFP)

SPOTLIGHT

Russell planning ahead with help from Djokovic

Reuters
Budapest

Tennis grand slam great Novak Djokovic has been helping Mercedes Formula One driver George Russell prepare for sporting longevity.

The 26-year-old Briton told Reuters at the Hungarian Grand Prix that he first met the 37-year-old Serbian in Monaco some years ago and admired his professionalism and dedication to human performance.

"I bumped into him at the gym

and we walked home together," explained Russell. "We've shared ideas together and he's been really open with me with things he's trying and what's working for him," added the two times race winner.

"We're just talking, many different ideas. Physical and mental."

"I don't want to share too much because they are private conversations but I just really like how he's constantly wanting to learn more and that inspires me to learn more about myself, what works for me, what works for them and pushing the boundaries."

Russell, whose seven times

world champion teammate Lewis Hamilton is 39 and moving to Ferrari next season, said Djokovic wanted to learn more about motor racing and planned to attend a grand prix.

"There's a lot that he knows that I won't and vice versa and you've got to take all these ideas from the best in each profession and see what you can take for yourself," he said. "I feel fit, healthy and in a great place right now at the age of 26 but I need to make sure that I'm fit, healthy and as motivated in 10 years' time, 15 years' time, who knows 20 years' time."

"I'm trying to put in work now."

Russell attended Wimbledon with his Spanish girlfriend this month, with Djokovic losing in the final to Spaniard Carlos Alcaraz.

"I love the tennis. It's probably my favourite sport to watch. I don't play tennis but (I have a) huge amount of respect for the players," said the driver.

"For these tennis players, their body is like how the car is for us."

"We've got man and machine, for them they are out there by themselves so the physio, the training, the cooling, the hydration, the nutrition - all of that is the fuel that we put in our car, the aerodynamics."



BRITISH OPEN GOLF

Horschel leads as torrential rain sets up thrilling final round



Billy Horschel of the US plays from a bunker on the 14th hole during the third round of the 152nd British Open Golf Championship at Royal Troon in Scotland yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Troon, United Kingdom

American Billy Horschel leads the British Open at four under par heading into today's final round after torrential rain and a swirling wind at Royal Troon blew the challenge for the Claret Jug wide open.

Horschel leads by one from a group of six, featuring USPGA Championship winner Xander Schauffele, English duo Justin Rose and Daniel Brown, South Africa's Thriston Lawrence and Americans Sam Burns and Russell Henley. World number one Scottie Scheffler is just one shot further back at two under after battling to an even par round of 71.

A total of 12 players are within four shots of the lead for what promises to be a fascinating final round. Overnight leader Shane Lowry had a day to forget as the 2019 champion crumbled in the sodden conditions to collapse from eight under par after seven holes to one under by the end of his round.

Horschel was one of the big movers in a round that had allowed for lower scoring earlier in the day before the wind and rain picked up. Starting at two under, Horschel produced a sublime

four-under 32 on the front nine thanks to birdies at four, six, seven and nine.

A bogey followed at 11 before another dropped shot at the last. Brown, ranked 272 in the world, had been set to lead heading into the final round until a double bogey at the last.

But he and Rose remain in the hunt to become the first English winner since Nick Faldo in 1992.

Lowry began the day with a two-shot lead and extended that to three with a birdie at the par-five fourth. However, the Irishman's round began to come off the rails with a double bogey at the 130-yard Postage Stamp eighth. Worse was to come as five bogeys in eight holes on the back nine dropped Lowry back into ninth.

Fresh from his maiden major win at the USPGA, Schauffele is eyeing another. The world number three moved to five under at one stage before bogeys at 11 and 18 knocked him back to three under after a round of 69. "I'll let myself dream tonight," said Schauffele.

Scheffler is also right in the mix to win his third major and win for a seventh time in 15 starts this year. A birdie at the third got the American off to a fine start but he then played the next 13 holes in two over before picking up

a shot at the 17th to remain ominously poised. "The back nine, I think that was probably the hardest nine holes that I'll ever play," said Scheffler.

Lawrence, Burns and Henley made the most of the benign early morning conditions to shoot through the pack to three under. Lawrence and Burns posted six-under 65s, while Henley made 66 to move into contention before the leaders had to face the worst of the weather.

Two-time major champion Justin Thomas and former Masters winner Adam Scott also impressed to move to level par and remain on the fringes of the battle for the Claret Jug. But the challenge from the big names on the breakaway LIV circuit failed to materialise.

Jon Rahm slipped back to two over, while Brooks Koepka is back at eight over after a 78. One of the loudest cheers of the week so far was reserved for Si Woo Kim after he produced the longest hole-in-one in British Open history on the 17th that brought him back to five over for the tournament. "I was not doing very well, and then I was feeling terrible for my shots the last couple days. Then finally I got the best golf shot I've ever had this week," said the South Korean.

FORMULA 1

Norris on pole as McLaren lock out Hungary front row

Verstappen was three-hundredths of a second adrift in third

AFP
Budapest

Lando Norris grabbed pole position ahead of his teammate Oscar Piastri for the Hungarian Grand Prix yesterday as McLaren locked out the front row of the grid for the first time since 2012.

Red Bull's three-time champion Max Verstappen had to settle for third and the second row in the tense wet-dry qualifying. The 24-year-old Briton, who is 84 points behind Verstappen in this year's title race, clocked a best lap in one minute and 15.227 seconds to outpace the Australian by 0.022 seconds.

Verstappen was three-hundredths of a second adrift in third ahead of Ferrari's Carlos Sainz, who leaves the team at the end of the year, and seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton of Mercedes, who will replace him. Charles Leclerc, in the second Ferrari was sixth ahead of two-time champion Fernando Alonso and his Aston Martin teammate Lance Stroll and the RBs of Daniel Ricciardo and Yuki Tsunoda, who had survived a high-speed crash earlier in Q3.

It was Norris's second pole in four races and the third of his burgeoning career as he gains front-running experience in his bid to challenge Verstappen who, on Sunday bids to complete a hat-trick of Hungarian wins. "I'm very happy with that and it wasn't easy at all in difficult conditions so ending up on top is the best for us all and a great result for the team," said Norris. "We have come into this weekend confident we can do a good job so to be on pole is sweet."

After Friday's sweltering conditions for practice, qualifying began in much cooler weather with temperatures and light rain falling. The McLaren pair were first out on soft slick tyres along with Kevin Magnussen in his Haas.

George Russell was also struggling before the session was red-flagged when Sergio Perez smacked the wall at Turn Eight, having lost control and made a sideways slide into the barriers in the second Red Bull. For the under-pressure Mexican driver, it was another Q1 setback in a sequence of bad qualifying outings and came just seconds after Russell had saved his car sliding off at the same place as the rain intensified.

After a 12-minute break, the action resumed with Perez hanging on in ninth from his earlier



McLaren's Oscar Piastri (left) and Lando Norris talk after the qualifying session at the Hungaroring race track in Mogyorod near Budapest yesterday. (AFP)

efforts, before he suffered his fourth Q1 exit in six outings as he embarked on two racing weekends that many observers believe offer him a last chance to save his seat at Red Bull.

In a frantic finale to Q1, on a damp circuit, Russell managed to jump from 14th to 10th but it was not enough as others improved to leave him 17th and out, taking an early exit for the second year running at the Hungaroring along with Perez, 16th, Zhou Guanyu of Sauber and the two Alpines of Esteban Ocon and Pierre Gasly who stayed in the pits.

Unexpectedly, Daniel Ricciardo was fastest for RB in the changing conditions while Norris was only 13th.

The Q2 segment started with Sainz on top, until Hamilton and then Verstappen took over, the Dutchman in 1:15.770, nine-tenths faster than Hamilton's pole in 2023. Piastri went second only 0.015 off the pace. On his second run,

Norris took command in 1:15.540 while Hamilton struggled to survive in 10th and Haas's Nico Hulkenberg, Valtteri Bottas of Sauber, Williams' Alex Albon, Sargeant and Magnussen missed the cut to the top-ten shootout.

All this left Norris and Verstappen to scrap for pole, as rain was forecast, and the Dutchman led them out to clock 1:15.555 before Norris cut that time by 0.328 with his lap in 1:15.227. It was provisional pole, as rain began to fall.

The world champion pushed to improve but stayed third as Yuki Tsunoda crashed at Turn Five in his RB to prompt a red-flag stoppage. It was a big accident, but the Japanese driver was unhurt. Two minutes and 13 seconds remained, enough time for one more flying run as the marshals cleared the debris. In the event, as it drizzled, only Ricciardo improved his time to take ninth from his teammate.

FOOTBALL

Shamal and Ahli win friendlies, Gharafa lose

Al Shamal defeated Umm Salal 1-0 in a friendly match yesterday during their training camp in the Netherlands, as part of their preparations for the upcoming 2024-2025 Qatar Stars League season. The winning goal for Al Shamal was scored by Mehdi Salem in the first half. Both teams used the opportunity to field a large number of players.

The friendly was Al Shamal's second match of the camp, following a 1-0 defeat to Dutch side Volendam in their first game. Shamal are scheduled to play two more friendly matches on July 28 and August 1, with their opponents yet to be determined.

Umm Salal have four more friendly matches lined up during their training camp. They will face French team Valenciennes on July 24, followed by a match against Dutch side Heracles on July 27. Their fourth friendly will be against UAE's Al Wasl on July 31, and they will conclude their camp with a match against Dutch team Telstar on August 2.

Meanwhile, Al Ahli clinched a 2-1 victory over PSV Eindhoven U-23 in a friendly match yesterday as part of their training camp in the Netherlands. Abdel Rahman Fahmy and Erik Exposito netted the goals for Al Ahli. The team's coach took the opportunity to rotate the squad extensively, ensuring all players gained valuable match practice.

Ahli's pre-season preparations include three more friendly encounters: they will face UAE's Al Wasl on July 24, Belgium's Lommel on July 27, and conclude their



Al Shamal's Baghdad Bounedjah in action during the friendly match against Umm Salal.

friendly matches on August 1 against a yet-to-be-determined second division Dutch team.

The training camp, based in the Merlo region of the Netherlands, will continue until August 2. Following this, the team will return to Doha to finalize their preparations for the upcoming season. Al Ahli's QSL campaign will kick off with a match against Al Wakrah on August 11 at Al Janoub Stadium in the first round of the competition.

In Bratislava, Al Gharafa lost to Lokomotiva Zvolen 1-2 in the first friendly during the preparatory training camp held in Slovakia. Jamal Hamad was the scorer for Gharafa.

The Cheetahs are scheduled to play three more friendlies during their preparatory camp. Their next match will be against UAE Sharjah FC today and are due to face Al Ahli Saudi FC in the third match scheduled on July 26, before concluding the friendlies against the Cyprus Apollon Limassol on July 31.



Al Ahli beat PSV Eindhoven U-23 in a friendly match yesterday as part of their training camp in the Netherlands.

Paris Olympics preparations move up a gear ahead of Friday's opening ceremony

Paris: Preparations for the Paris Olympics went up a gear yesterday as security teams scoured the banks of the Seine ahead of Friday's opening ceremony and top International Olympic Committee officials met in the French capital.

Police with sniffer dogs were seen checking the six-kilometre (four-mile) route along the Seine for the ceremony in which up to 7,000 athletes will sail on nearly a hundred barges and river boats watched by 300,000 spectators.

The stakes are high for the waterborne parade – the first time the opening ceremony of a Sum-

mer Games will take place outside a stadium. French police will be bolstered by colleagues from several countries, including Spain, Britain and Qatar.

Early yesterday, a rehearsal for the ceremony was held on the river but security barriers and police screened it from the eyes of residents and media to keep the contents secret. IOC spokesman Mark Adams said that although he had not seen the full plan for the opening ceremony, the show will "blow your socks off".

"I have a good idea, but not a full idea of what is in it. You can

imagine it is going to be pretty amazing for the Olympic Games, first time outside the stadium," Adams said at a news conference. The preparations for the ceremony have caused extensive disruption to residents of central Paris, who must have a pass with a special QR code to cross the Seine.

"We've had far fewer customers than usual for the last two weeks. There aren't many tourists and lots of Parisians have left town. All our local clientele has gone," said Behi Samadian, 69, in a boutique in Saint-Germain-des-Près.

Organisers say 8.8m tickets

have already been sold, beating the record from the 1996 Atlanta Olympics and that figure will rise because tickets are still on sale for some of the 45 sports.

The IOC's top brass, led by President Thomas Bach, met yesterday to prepare for a larger gathering of all of the movement's members on Tuesday and Wednesday. There had been fears that the awarding of the 2030 Winter Olympics to the French Alps – they are the only candidates – could be delayed by a row over the French government's reluctance to give funding guarantees while the country is in political

paralysis following inconclusive snap elections.

IOC spokesman Adams sought to allay those fears, saying: "It will be on the agenda on Wednesday." He admitted though that the political situation in France "makes it a bit more complicated".

Russia will be the big absentee from the Paris Games, with just 15 Russians and 17 Belarusians accredited to compete as neutrals as most sports have turned their backs on the Russians in response to the invasion of Ukraine. The IOC said yesterday it was resigned to the Paris Games being targeted by

disinformation attacks following recent incidents blamed on Russia.

Adams said he believed a campaign against the Paris Olympics was already under way. "Clearly there is a campaign of some sort going on," he said. "It's not the first or last time that the IOC will be targeted with misinformation. It's getting more and more sophisticated."

Adams was responding to a question concerning a feature-length fake documentary that emerged in 2023 titled *Olympics Has Fallen* which used AI-generated audio to impersonate Hollywood star Tom Cruise.