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SPOTLIGHT

We're ready, say Paris Olympics organisers

45,000 members of the French security forces will be on Opening Ceremony duty

AFP
Paris

Paris Olympics supremo Tony Estanguet said yesterday that the city was "ready" for the Games as he played down complaints from some residents and businesses about the impact of the event. "We are ready as we head into the final phase," Estanguet told a press conference in Paris, five days from the opening ceremony next Friday.

He added: "For as long as the closing ceremony hasn't finished, we need to remain vigilant. But today we are exactly where we would have dreamed of being a few years ago."

Finishing touches are being applied to the venues across the City of Light and thousands of athletes and officials are pouring in, while the weather has brightened up after months of rain. In a further boost for organisers, the water quality of the river Seine - which is set to be used for outdoor Olympic swimming events - has also improved dramatically since the start of July. "All the indicators for the Seine are positive at this stage," Estanguet added.

The river is set to host the opening ceremony which will see 6,000-7,000 athletes sail down it on 85 barges and boats. It will be the first time a Summer Olympics has opened outside the main athletics stadium, with up to 300,000 ticketed spectators set to watch from stands and on the river banks and another 200,000 expected to watch from the overlooking apartments.

Around 4,000 tickets are still available for the ceremony, Estanguet said. "We've always tried to maintain as high a level of ambition as possible so that these Games make France shine," Estanguet added.

The vast security operation for the opening ceremony is causing some friction, however, with large parts of central Paris along the banks of the river and around Olympic venues off-limits for most people. 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".

"It was always a choice made in full conscience that the success of Paris 2024 would mean having the Games in the city," Estanguet explained. "That was the completely unprecedented concept for Paris 2024."

As well as the opening ceremony in the heart of the city, much of the sport is set to take place at temporary venues around



Soldiers patrol on a street in front of the Eiffel Tower in Paris ahead of the Olympics, which begins from Friday. (Reuters)



Paris 2024 President Tony Estanguet (left) and CEO Etienne Thobois address a press conference in Paris yesterday. (Reuters)

Paris, with beach volleyball at the Eiffel Tower, archery at the Invalides and skateboarding at the Place de la Concorde. "We can't do it without some disruption. We can't do it without some restrictions," Estanguet said.

He thanked "those who have understood this because it's really to honour our country in the most beautiful way."

Around 45,000 members of the French

security forces are set to be on duty on Friday when the Olympics kick off at 7:30pm (1730 GMT). "Security was the number one priority for Paris 2024," Estanguet said.

Cybersecurity is also a major concern, with a global IT outage last Friday caused by an update to CrowdStrike software leading to temporary disruption to accreditation system for the Games. The International Olympic Committee has said

it is bracing for disinformation attacks targeting the Paris Games following recent incidents blamed on Russia, in response to a near-ban on Russian athletes because of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

In another development, a hard-left MP said Israeli athletes were not welcome in Paris because of the war in Gaza. France Unbowed (LFI) lawmaker Thomas Portes said at a rally in support of Palestinians that "Israeli sportspeople are not welcome at the Paris Olympic Games".

He later told *Parisien* that "France's diplomats should pressure the International Olympic Committee to bar the Israeli flag and anthem, as is done for Russia. It's time to end the double standard."

Some LFI lawmakers came out in support of Portes. "The Israeli flag, stained with the blood of Gaza's innocents, should not fly in Paris this summer," MP Aymeric Caron wrote.

Opposition to Israel's actions in Gaza featured heavily in his party's campaign for European elections last month. The territory's Hamas-run health ministry said yesterday that almost 39,000 people had been killed in the fighting, which was sparked by the bloody October 7 attacks by Hamas.

France rejected many
Games accreditation
requests over
security fears

Paris: French security services rejected more than 4,000 applications for Paris 2024 Olympics accreditations, including over espionage and cyberattack concerns, the country's caretaker interior minister said yesterday.

Gerald Darmanin said French authorities have so far checked close to one million accreditation requests for the Games that kick off on July 26 and had rejected 4,340 people, some over radical Islamist connections or suspicion of being foreign spies.

Close to one hundred were rejected over espionage fears or concerns they were agents trying to get an accreditation using a different profession. "They are probably not there to carry out attacks. But in addition to intelligence and traditional espionage, there is the possibility of accessing entry points into computer networks to carry out a cyberattack," Darmanin told the weekly *Journal du Dimanche*.

He said they had applied as journalists or technical staff and their countries of origin were Russia and Belarus, among others, which he did not name. "For example, we refused a large number of 'journalists' who claimed to cover the Games. On the other hand, we accepted the presence of Russians who work for the International Olympic Committee (IOC). We apply the precautionary principle," he said.

Russian journalists have been allowed to get accredited for the Games and have already arrived in the French capital. Paris will be deploying 45,000 security personnel to guarantee the safety of the Games and its unique opening ceremony along the river Seine where athletes will float on barges past hundreds of thousands of spectators.

Organisers have reduced the initial number of spectators from 600,000 to around 300,000.

"To our knowledge, we have no known threat to the security of the Olympic Games," Darmanin said. "In the past days I did a new reconnaissance by boat on the Seine with the police. I confirm that the ceremony will take place in the format announced by the President of the Republic."

"Apart from the flow of the river and the low risk of bad weather, there is - to date - no identified threat to the Games. Neither our intelligence services nor the foreign services with which we coordinate have detected any foreign threat. But you have to stay very humble and focused."

Qatar's Younousse and Tijan arrive in Paris



Qatar's beach volleyball duo Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan pose on their arrival in Paris for the Olympics Games, which begins on Friday. The pair, who had won bronze at the Tokyo Games, will begin their campaign Paris with a match on July 28 against Italy's Paolo Nicolai and Samuele Cottafava. The following day, Younousse and Tijan will face Sweden's David Ahman and Jonatan Hellvig and then conclude the group stage with a match against Australia's Isaac Kapa and Mark Nicolaidis on August 1.

Dujardin eyes seventh equestrian medal in Paris

London: CHARLOTTE DUJARDIN can become Britain's most decorated female Olympian if she wins a seventh medal in Paris and the dressage rider says she wants to inspire her baby daughter.

The 39-year-old, who clinched gold in the individual and team events on Valegro at London 2012 and won team silver and individual gold at the Rio Games, will be competing in her fourth Olympics starting on Friday.

Dujardin also won two bronze medals at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics and a medal of any colour in Paris would take her tally past that of retired cyclist Laura Kenny, who also has six Olympic medals. "(The record) isn't really something I'm thinking about going to Paris if I'm honest. I'm going to compete and do my best," Dujardin told Reuters.

"It's going to be a very different Olympics now that I'm a mum. I guess obviously if that does happen that is a huge achievement. It just makes me feel so proud as a mum. Hopefully one day when she (daughter Isabella) is a bit older and whatever she wants to do in life, whether it be horses or another sport, I can inspire her and make her realise how hard work it is and what it takes to be able to go to an Olympic Games."

Having won team gold in the European Championships last September after giving birth to Isabella in March 2023, Dujardin said she is back in the groove. "It's always a worry I think having time out and you get back on and think, 'Can I still do it?'," she said after Britain's squad was announced.



"I was like, 'Yep, I can still do it, I can still have all the feelings that I had before.'"

Dujardin, ranked fourth in the International Equestrian Federation's (FEI) world dressage standings, will be riding 11-year-old gelding Imhotep - known as Pete in the stables - in Paris. "Pete's a very enthusiastic horse and that's the sort of horse that I like," she said. "Pete at nine years old did the world equestrian games, at 10 years old he did the European Championships and at 11 years old he's doing the Olympics. That just goes to show how clever and talented he is."

The dressage competition begins on July 20 at the Chateau de Versailles. Dujardin will compete in the team events alongside her European Championship-winning teammates Carl Hester and Charlotte Fry.

TENNIS

Borges beats Nadal in Bastad Open final

AFP
Bastad, Sweden

Rafael Nadal lost his first final in two years yesterday as the Spaniard went down 6-3, 6-2 to Portugal's Nuno Borges at the clay-court Bastad Open.

The Spanish tennis great had shown signs of a return to form in Scandinavia as he made an impressive run to the final, just one week before tennis at the Olympic Games gets underway on the clay in Paris.

But Nadal, rather than celebrating his 64th title on the surface and first since Roland Garros 2022, was dominated by seventh seed Borges as he struggled to find fluency with his serve and ground strokes. "Many congratulations to Nuno," said Nadal.

"You've been playing great during the whole week, so you deserve it more than anyone else here. Congratulations and enjoy your moment, it's always special winning a title."

"Today wasn't my best day, but all the credit to Nuno. He played very well and it was so difficult for me, so well done."

Borges was the first to make headway in the match when he broke the Spaniard's serve to go 3-1 up, with Nadal saving break points before overcooking a forehand down the line.

But the 14-time French Open winner struck back immediately on the Borges serve, earning two break-back points before the Portuguese dumped a forehand into the net from inside the service box.

But neither player could quite grab the ascendancy in the first set as Borges quickly ran up a 0-40 lead in the next service game, converting his second break point with a perfectly executed drop shot.

Nadal was struggling to find his first serve but managed to hold just his second service game of the opening set to force Borges to serve one more time. The world number 51 kept his nerve to do just that.

The 38-year-old showed signs of his old self serving at deuce in the first game of the second set with a booming forehand winner down the line, before he eventually held but that was one of the few highlights for Nadal on the day.

Borges then struck at 2-2 as he broke Nadal's serve for the first time in the second set and fourth time overall to edge ahead.

The 27-year-old followed it up by winning the next three games, sealing a maiden career title in his first-ever match-up against the former world number one with an ace.

"I don't know what to say. I think I was wishing for this moment for a while already," said Borges in his post-match interview.

"It's crazy, in tennis it doesn't happen when you expect it sometimes. I know we all wanted Rafa to win, a part of me wished that too, but something even bigger inside of me really pushed through today... I'm just really happy overall. I really don't know what to say, I'm very emotional."



Portugal's Nuno Borges celebrates with the trophy after winning over Spain's Rafael Nadal in the Bastad Open final in Bastad yesterday. (AFP)

CYCLING

Pogacar achieves first Giro/Tour double since 1998

'I cannot describe how happy I am after two hard years in Tour de France'



UAE Team Emirates team's Slovenian rider Tadej Pogacar (also inset) celebrates his overall victory in the 111th edition of the Tour de France cycling race, a 33.7km individual time-trial between Monaco and Nice, yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters
Nice, France

Tadej Pogacar became the first rider to achieve the Giro d'Italia/Tour de France double since 1998 when he claimed his third Tour title yesterday, cementing his domination by winning the final stage for his sixth stage success.

The Slovenian beat defending champion Jonas Vingegaard of Denmark and Belgian Remco Evenepoel, who were second and third overall and on the final stage, with a winning margin of six minutes and 17 seconds.

"I'm super happy, I cannot describe how happy I am after two hard years in the Tour de France, always some mistakes and this year, everything to perfection," Pogacar said. Pogacar won the 33.7-km individual time trial from

Monaco to Nice in a time of 45 minutes and 24 seconds, destroying his rivals with a gap of one minute and three seconds over Vingegaard, winner of the last two Tours.

The winner could easily have played it safe having started the final day with a commanding lead over Vingegaard, but once again he showed no mercy and from the off he went for the stage win, his third in a row, to finish the Tour in style.

Eritrea's Biniam Girmay won the green jersey for the points classification with Richard Carapaz of Ecuador taking the polka dot jersey for the mountains classification.

Pogacar's UAE Team Emirates won the team classification, while Evenepoel, who won the stage seven time trial, took the white jersey for the best young rider in his first Tour, finishing 9:18 behind the winner.

The Tour finished outside Paris for the first time in its 121-year history, due to the upcoming Olympic Games and it was the first time the Tour ended with a time trial since 1989 when Greg LeMond overtook Laurent Fignon on the final day.

This was never going to be as dramatic, however, given Pogacar's emphatic lead and domination of the race. Pogacar led since winning stage four, extending the gap to over three minutes after taking stages 14 and 15 before another two successive victories on stages 19 and 20 all but confirmed his overall win.

Vingegaard came into this year's event having not raced for three months after suffering a collapsed lung and fractured rib at the Tour of the Basque country, and while he never looked like retaining his title, he did manage a stage win.

On stage 11, Vingegaard held off

Pogacar to take the victory, and moved ahead of Evenepoel into second place after finishing runner-up to Pogacar on stage 14.

Evenepoel had hoped to repeat his earlier time trial stage win, but was soon overtaken by Vingegaard at the first intermediate checkpoint, but once Pogacar set off it was clear he had the stage victory in mind, to show his utter domination of the Tour.

No rider has completed the Giro/Tour double since the late Marco Pantani, and Pogacar became only the eighth rider to achieve the feat after also won six stages on his way to winning the Giro. "I think this is the first Grand Tour where I was totally confident every day, even in the Giro I remember I had one bad day I won't tell which one," Pogacar said.

"This year's Tour de France was just amazing and I was enjoying it since day one until today."

SPOTLIGHT

India's Paes, Amritraj make history joining Tennis Hall of Fame

AFP
New York

Former doubles world number one Leander Paes and tennis broadcaster, actor and player Vijay Amritraj became the first Asian men inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame on Saturday.

The first inductees from India were joined by British tennis journalist and author Richard Evans in enshrinement ceremonies at the Hall of Fame in Newport, Rhode Island. Paes recounted his youth playing football and hockey before turning to tennis and eventually following his hockey-captain father as an Olympic medalist.

"It's my greatest honour to be on this stage with not only these legends of the game, people who have inspired me every single day of my life - not because you've only won Grand Slams, not because you've shaped our sport but every single one of these people have shaped the world we live in," Paes said.

"I would like to thank you so much for giving this Indian boy hope."

Amritraj, 70, played from 1970 until retiring in 1993, winning 15 ATP singles titles and 399 matches and being ranked as high as 18th in the world and helped India to the Davis Cup finals in 1974 and 1987.

"I am humbled and honoured to join this incredible and exclusive group that have brought glory to our sport," Amritraj said. After his playing days, Amritraj has helped humanitarian causes, backed ATP and WTA events in India and has acted in the James Bond and Star Trek movie series.

"A feeling came over me that I had never experienced," Amritraj said of learning about his election to the Hall. "This was an honour not just for me, for

my family, for my parents, but for all of my fellow Indians and my country who live around the world."

Like Amritraj, Evans was inducted in the contributor category for his life impact on the sport. Paes, 51, was an 18-time Grand Slam champion in doubles and mixed doubles who was selected in the player category after honing his trade in an Amritraj youth academy.

'INSPIRE THE WORLD'

Paes and Amritraj made India the 28th nation represented in the Hall of Fame. "Playing for 1.4 billion people could either be pressure or it could be wind within your wings," Paes said.

"I'd like to thank every single one of my countrymen who supported me, who stood by through all the ups and downs, and we've been through a few, but you all were the inspiration, the support, you were even the strength to guide me through when even I didn't believe."

Paes won career Grand Slams in both men's and mixed doubles, completing one in men's by winning the 2012 Australian Open and another in mixed by capturing the 2016 French Open. He won the 1996 Atlanta Olympics bronze medal by defeating Brazil's Fernando Meligeni 3-6, 6-2, 6-4. His only ATP singles title came in 1998 on Newport grass in the same venue where he was inducted.

"As my father always said to me, if you believe in yourself, you work hard, you'll be passionate not only to win prize money and trophies, but you do that to inspire the world," Paes said. "It has been my greatest honour to play for my countrymen in seven Olympics, to stand where the national anthem is playing in all those Davis Cups, and to prove that we Asians can win Grand Slams and also be number one in our field, be it tennis or anything."



Leander Paes, Richard Evans and Vijay Amritraj pose after getting inducted into the International Tennis Hall of Fame in Newport, Rhode Island, US. (Reuters)

BERRETTINI BRUSHES HALYS ASIDE TO WIN GSTAAD TITLE

Matteo Berrettini breezed to a 6-3, 6-1 win against France's Quentin Halys in the Gstaad final on Sunday, earning the Italian his second clay-court title of the year. The sixth seed Berrettini capped off a fine week in Switzerland by needing just 59 minutes to dispatch the world number 192 Halys. "It feels unbelievable. It feels like it was yesterday that I won my first title here six years ago, but a lot of matches and a lot of things

happened," said Berrettini. "I'm just so glad that I can keep playing and enjoying, and I think I found the energy of six years ago during this week. This place is special for me. I'm just so happy," added the 28-year-old who has struggled with injuries since reaching a career-high world number six in May 2022. Berrettini's second title on clay this season, after winning in Marrakesh in April, will ensure he breaks back into the ATP top 50 today.

Currently ranked 82, Berrettini was outside of the top 150 in March but a return to fitness and a fine 16-6 record for the current season has seen the 2021 Wimbledon finalist begin to rekindle his best level. Sunday's final was briefly interrupted for rain just after Berrettini secured a crucial first break in the opening set. When the players returned 30 minutes later, the Italian then won six of the next seven games to claim his second Gstaad title.

Fils upsets Zverev to win Hamburg Open

France's Arthur Fils came out on top after a gruelling three-set encounter with Alexander Zverev to win the Hamburg Open yesterday, defeating the hometown player 6-3, 3-6, 7-6 (7/1) After victory in Lyon last year, it is the 20-year-old's second ATP title as he confirms his position as one of the sport's leading next-gen players. World number 28 Fils overcame German top seed Zverev on the clay in Hamburg after just over three-and-a-half hours on court. Fils pounced on a slow start by the big-serving Zverev to capitalise on a double fault and break the German in his very first service game.

GOLF

'Calm' Schauffele wins British Open to collect second major

'He's an ice cold competitor and one of the best players in the world and it was tough to keep up'

AFP
Troon, United Kingdom

Xander Schauffele said a "sense of calm" helped him win the British Open yesterday as the American claimed his second major just two months after triumphing at the PGA Championship.

The 30-year-old Californian delivered a faultless, zen-like six-under-par final round at Royal Troon to emerge from a congested leaderboard and clinch the Claret Jug. Schauffele finished on nine-under par for the championship, two shots ahead of England's Justin Rose and Billy Horschel of the USA.

Schauffele, who registered a major record of 21-under-par to win the PGA at Valhalla in May, is the first player to win two majors in a year since Brooks Koepka in 2018. His victory on the west coast of Scotland completes an American clean sweep of the game's biggest titles in 2024.

"I thought (winning the PGA) would help me and it actually did. I had this sense of calm, a calm I didn't have when I played earlier at the PGA," said Schauffele.

"I was telling my caddie Austin (Kaiser) that I felt pretty calm coming down the stretch and he said he was about to puke on the 18th tee. I just told myself to just hit it down there and keep moving

along," added the world number three, who described clinching the Open as a "dream come true".

Schauffele had started the last 18 tied for second with five other players, a shot behind overnight leader Horschel. He put together a tidy front nine under benign conditions on the links course, reaching the turn at two-under par for the day after birdies at the sixth and seventh.

He then burst into life at the start of the inward half as his nearest challengers - former US Open champion Rose, world number 62 Horschel and South African Thriston Lawrence - began to falter. Schauffele hit a sublime approach to the difficult 11th to set up a tap-in birdie before sinking a 16-foot birdie putt on the 13th to get to seven under alongside 27-year-old Lawrence.

Moments later Schauffele was in front on his own after Lawrence dropped his first shot of the day on the 12th. The American then rolled in a 12-footer on hole 14 and suddenly he had a two-shot lead. That extended to three after a delightful chip over a bunker at the 16th led to another birdie.

Two closing pars sealed the championship. Lawrence, bidding to join a high-profile list of South Africans to have lifted the Claret Jug including Gary Player, Ernie Els and Bobby Locke, had held a one-shot lead at the turn.

Rose, chasing his second ma-



USAs Xander Schauffele poses with the Claret Jug after winning the 152nd British Open Golf Championship at Royal Troon on the south west coast of Scotland yesterday. (AFP)

jo title and England's first Open victory since Nick Faldo in 1992, briefly enjoyed a share of the lead with Lawrence after hitting three birdies in his opening nine holes.

But he bogeyed twelve before too-little-too-late birdies on 16 and 18 put him on seven-under.

"He's an ice cold competitor and one of the best players in the

world and it was tough to keep up," Rose, ranked 67th, said of Schauffele. "I played some of the best golf but it didn't quite add up to the trophy."

America's Horschel suffered an inconsistent opening ten holes before birdieing the last three to finish tied for second with Rose. Lawrence finished on his own in fourth at six under, while American Russell Henley was a shot further back in fifth.

Ireland's Shane Lowry, the leader after two rounds, posted a 68 to finish four-under par and in sixth place.

World number one Scottie Scheffler and two-time major champion Jon Rahm both briefly threatened a run up the leaderboard but finished tied for seventh on one under alongside South Korea's Im Sung-jae.

Unheralded Englishman Daniel Brown, playing his first major, posted a three-over-par round of 74 for a tie for 10th. Several stars struggled this week due to the testing weather conditions, thick rough and well-placed punitive pot bunkers.

Rory McIlroy missed the cut, extending his decade-long wait for a fifth major into 2025, as did US Open champion Bryson DeChambeau, Ludvig Aberg, Wyndham Clark and Viktor Hovland. Three-time champion Tiger Woods also missed the weekend, recording his worst-ever performance at the Open with a 14-over score of 156. Home favourite Robert MacIntyre finished nine over after failing to repeat the heroics that secured last week's Scottish Open.

FORMULA 1

Piastri claims maiden win at quarrel-hit Hungarian GP

AFP
Budapest

Oscar Piastri claimed his maiden Formula One victory yesterday when he finished ahead of his McLaren teammate Lando Norris, after a vexed radio argument produced an extraordinary finish to an incident-filled Hungarian Grand Prix.

In a race of fluctuating fortunes and many quarrels on and off the track, the McLaren duo secured a comprehensive one-two after starting from the team's first front row lockout since 2012, Norris finally obeying team orders to hand his teammate his first career win. Piastri, 23, won by 2.141 seconds with seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton finishing third for Mercedes to claim his record 200th podium finish.

He survived a late collision with Red Bull's three-time champion and series leader Max Verstappen, who flew off, but recovered to finish fifth. Charles Leclerc came home fourth and Ferrari teammate Carlos Sainz sixth, sandwiching a grumpy Verstappen who was called to see the stewards to explain his collision with Hamilton.

Sergio Perez finished seventh for Red Bull, having started 16th on the grid, ahead of George Russell in the second Mercedes, who started 17th, and RB's Yuki Tsunoda. Lance Stroll was 10th for Aston Martin. "It's very special," said Australian driver Piastri. "I dreamt of this as a kid and if it was a bit complicated at the end, I did put myself in the right position at the start of the race. It's a hell of a lot of fun racing with McLaren. This is an incredible feeling."



Winner Team McLaren-Mercedes' Oscar Piastri celebrates on the podium with the trophy after the Formula One Hungarian Grand Prix at the Hungaroring race track in Mogyorod near Budapest yesterday. (AFP)

Norris was first to congratulate his teammate, after he had appeared to reject team orders and allow the Australian to pass in the closing stages. "Well done, a good 1-2 and lots of good points for the team. Well deserved," he said.

Norris had made an uncertain start and he, Piastri and Verstappen were three abreast into Turn One where Piastri exited in the lead as the Dutchman ran wide and cut back into second place, gaining a clear advantage and pushing Norris down to third. This prompted an exchange of messages before race engineer Gianpiero Lambiase told Verstappen to allow Norris to pass, a command that clearly irked him. "So, you can just run people off the track?" barked the Dutchman.

By lap 10, Piastri led Norris by 2.7 seconds with Verstappen third adrift by two seconds ahead of Hamilton and the two Ferraris,

led by Leclerc. Hamilton eventually reeled off a series of fast-laps to rise to third, but Verstappen on younger tyres reeled him in, waiting to pounce as the Briton endured a lurid slide out of Turn 12 before pitting again on lap 41 after fending off the Dutchman.

At the front, Piastri was in cruise mode ahead of Norris with Verstappen third, 11.5 seconds adrift. Hamilton rejoined fifth behind Sainz, but with Leclerc, on new mediums, on his tail. Norris pitted again for mediums on lap 46, rejoining fourth ahead of Hamilton, followed by Piastri on 47, handing the lead to Verstappen with Norris up to second, but told to "re-establish the order at your convenience".

Verstappen made his second stop, for mediums, on lap 50, rejoining fifth behind Leclerc, but adrift of the Ferrari by 4.5. In the

lead, Norris was reminded of his team instructions and responsibilities as Piastri closed in. "We know you'll do the right thing," said McLaren, but Norris, knowing he could reduce Verstappen's championship lead, stayed silent when told not to stress his tyres. "Tell him to catch up, please," he said.

As McLaren's tensions boiled over, Verstappen lunged down the inside of Hamilton at Turn One on lap 63, but locked up and clipped the Mercedes. The collision sent him airborne briefly before he bounced clear and wide before rejoining in fifth. McLaren then issued an ultimatum to Norris. "There are five laps to go. The way to win a championship is not by yourself. It is with the team. You are going to need Oscar and you are going to need the team." With three laps remaining, Norris slowed dramatically to gift Piastri the lead.

FOOTBALL

Al Sadd reaches 'amicable resolution' with defender Hassan

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's football powerhouse Al Sadd yesterday announced they have made peace with former player Abdelkarim Hassan.

The defender, who made 190 appearances for Al Sadd from 2010-2022, had left in unceremonious terms after the club said Hassan's contract termination was not on mutual terms and would take legal action against the player and Al Jahra club.

Hassan had joined Kuwait's Al Jahra club after leaving Al Sadd. He then went on to play for Iran giants Persepolis. The rumour mills suggest Hassan is set to join Al Arabi ahead of the new season and on the eve of his return to Qatar, Al Sadd released a statement saying they have reached 'an amicable resolution' with the player.

"The management of Al Sadd Club is pleased to announce that an amicable resolution has been reached with Abdelkarim Hassan, allowing both parties to move past previous differences," the club said on their website.

"This evening, Abdelkarim visited the Al Sadd Club premises

and met with Mohamed Ghanem al-Ali, the head of the football department. Abdelkarim emphasised that his relationship with Al Sadd is significant and historic, marked by numerous achievements and cherished moments. He stated that no difference in opinion could ever tarnish this bond. He expressed his deep respect and appreciation for Al Sadd Club and reaffirmed his loyalty to this esteemed institution.

"Abdelkarim Hassan remains one of the club's devoted players, and Al Sadd warmly welcomes his initiative and visit, thanking him for this commendable gesture. The club wishes Abdelkarim the very best in his future endeavours," the statement added.

Hassan had found himself in hot waters after Qatar's debacle in the 2022 FIFA World Cup at home. He was handed an indefinite suspension by the Qatar football federation (QFA) following an altercation with a fan over social media.

Following the group stage exit at the World Cup, Hassan responded to a complaint on Snapchat about team's poor show by posting, "Relax, do you think it's war?" Hassan was also deducted 50% of his salary, fined 200,000 Qatari riyals and issued a warning by the QFA.



MARQUEZ APPOINTED INDIA COACH AFTER STIMAC SACKING



Manolo Marquez has been appointed coach of the India men's football team, over a month after Igor Stimac's acrimonious exit. Spaniard Marquez, 55, has been coaching league teams in India since 2020 and will take on the role for the national team "effective immediately", the All India Football Federation said in a statement yesterday.

"We are delighted to welcome Mr Marquez to this important role," AIFF President Kalyan Chaubey said, adding the federation was look-

ing forward to working with the new coach "in the years ahead". Marquez, who has more than two decades of international experience in football management, had been the coach of FC Goa since June last year and said he was "grateful" to AIFF for the opportunity as he considers India "my second home."

"I want to do my best to bring success to the millions of fans we have," he said. Former West Ham and Croatia defender Stimac was sacked in June following India team's poor perform-

ance in World Cup qualifiers. Stimac's five-year tenure ended controversially, with India's federation accusing him of using astrology to pick his teams. Stimac, who played a World Cup semi-final for Croatia in 1998, became India coach in 2019 and they briefly broke into the top 100 of FIFA's world rankings for only the second time in nearly three decades. Once called "a sleeping giant" of the sport by former FIFA president Sepp Blatter, India are currently ranked 124th.

Croatia's Rakitic signs for Hajduk Split
Former Croatian international midfielder Ivan Rakitic has signed with Hajduk Split, the club announced. Rakitic who arrives after cancelling his agreement with Saudi side Al-Shabab, will play for Hajduk for the next season. "One of the best players in the history of Croatian football minutes before midnight has signed an agreement with Hajduk until the end of the season with an option for further extension of one season", Hajduk Split announced.