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TROPHEE DES CHAMPIONS

Last-gasp Dembele strike helps PSG emerge champs

A TOTAL OF 39,682 FANS FLOCKED TO THE UNIQUE QATAR 2022 STADIUM TO SEE PSG, MONACO STARS

Agencies
Doha

Ousmane Dembele's stoppage-time goal settled the Trophée des Champions (French Super Cup) yesterday, giving Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) a 1-0 win over Monaco in a fixture played at Stadium 974 in Doha.

PSG's troubles in front of goal this season have often cost them in the Champions League, and they were thwarted throughout this game by a combination of poor finishing and some fine saves by Monaco goalkeeper Philipp Koehn.

However, it was ultimately a deserved victory for Luis Enrique's team, as PSG won the trophy - the French equivalent of a Super Cup or England's Community Shield - for the 11th time in the last 12 seasons.

This fixture was supposed to be staged in Beijing on August 8 as the curtain-raiser to the French campaign.

However, it ended up being called off by the Chinese authorities, and Qatar - which owns PSG via Qatar Sports Investments - stepped in to offer to stage the game.

A total of 39,682 fans flocked to the unique Qatar 2022 stadium to see PSG and AS Monaco compete for the French league's top title, cheering on stars including Marquinhos, Ousmane Dembélé, Lee Kang-in, Achraf Hakimi, Takumi Minamino and Eliesse Ben Seghir.

PSG won a clean sweep of the domestic honours in France last season and were looking to claim the first leg of another treble in this campaign.

A 4-2 win away in Monaco last month, when Dembele scored a double, allowed them to finish 2024 with a 10-point lead at the top of Ligue 1 from both Marseille and the principality club.

When Desire Doue pounced on a slack pass out by Koehn and sent a shot off the bar on eight minutes, it looked like it was going to be a very long evening for Monaco.

Vitinha sent a shot just wide and Lee Kang-in had a thunderous strike tipped over by Koehn,



PSG president Nasser al-Khelaifi and players celebrate with the trophy after the club won the Trophée des Champions at the Stadium 974 in Doha yesterday. PICTURES: Noushad Thekkayil

although Monaco also threatened when a Maghnes Aklouché hit was tipped away by Gianluigi Donnarumma.

Eliesse Ben Seghir also tested PSG's Italian goalkeeper shortly after the break, and Vanderson hit the post from a tight angle for Monaco, but PSG stepped up the pressure as the second half went on.

The game was nevertheless heading for penalties before the goal came in the 92nd minute, as substitute Fabian Ruiz was released down the left and sent a low ball across the penalty area for Dembele to convert at the far post.

Since hosting the first FIFA World Cup in the Middle East and Arab world in 2022, Qatar has hosted a number of large sporting events.

This includes the AFC Asian Cup Qatar 2023, which broke records for fan attendance and digital engagement, and the FIFA Intercontinental Cup, which con-



PSG coach Luis Enrique shakes hands with the club president Nasser al-Khelaifi after their victory yesterday.



PSG's Ousmane Dembele celebrates after scoring the winner yesterday.

cluded last month on the two-year anniversary of Qatar 2022.

Recently FIFA announced the dates of the first of five consecutive FIFA U-17 World Cups

to be hosted by Qatar annually. The elite youth tournament will take place between 5-22 November 2025.

Qatar will also host the FIFA

Arab Cup in 2025, 2029 and 2033, with the 2025 edition taking place end of this year.

Trophée des Champions Visit Qatar was organised by the Local

Organising Committee for Football Events and supported as a title sponsor by Visit Qatar, the main marketing and promotional arm of Qatar Tourism.

DAKAR RALLY

Qatar's al-Attiyah moves to second place, al-Rajhi leads



AFP
Bisha, Saudi Arabia

Five times champion Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah of Qatar and Yazeed al-Rajhi of Saudi Arabia had a good day at the office at the Dakar Rally yesterday, moving up to first and second in the car ranking, 1:19sec apart.

Al-Rajhi led at the midway point of the marathon 48-hour second stage as two big names suffered a wretched day in the dunes. Carlos Sainz lost 40 minutes after his Ford Raptor flipped while Sebastien Loeb's hopes of winning his first title cooled with a fan issue on his Ford.

That left the veteran former world rally legend over half an

hour behind virtual leader al-Rajhi, who can sympathise at his rivals' misfortunes after having to abandon the Dakar during this very stage 12 months ago. Introduced for the first time in 2024 the intrepid Dakar competitors on four wheels and two will cover almost 1,000km over the two days. The 48-hour stage is held in the kingdom's Empty Quarter, a vast sea of sand with dunes as far as the eye can see.

Yesterday's first segment came to a close when the clock struck 1700 in Saudi Arabia, the time for all competitors to head to their nearest break zone and try to get some sleep under the stars before Monday's conclusion, setting off at sunrise. Al-Rajhi, the race leader going into inaugural stage, had somersaulted out of the rally a few hours into the new challenge and al-Attiyah succumbed to mechanical gremlins.

Yesterday, Sainz suffered the

same fate as al-Rajhi last season, flipping over his car at km 327.

Unlike last year's first two-day stage the routes for the bikes and cars have been separated, meaning drivers will be unable to follow the trails set by the faster bikes. As the drivers headed off to get some well earned sleep al-Rajhi, third in 2022, was 1min 19sec clear of al-Attiyah, and also provisionally heads the Qatari five-time winner in the overall rankings.

In the bike race Australia's Daniel Sanders, winner of the first stage, leads American defending bike champion Ricky Brabec by 2min23sec.

Al-Rajhi and al-Attiyah, driving for Dacia Sandriders, will enjoy their starlit meal this evening. The reigning world champion and his runner-up will go to bed as the big winners of the first part of the stage, ensconced at the business end of the race with the Saudi one minute ahead.

The Dacia Sandriders' Nasser al-Attiyah and Edouard Boulanger in action during stage 2 of the Dakar Rally yesterday. (Reuters)

MATCH REPORT

Australia end 10-year wait for series win over India

PAT CUMMINS AND HIS SIDE WRAP UP A 3-1 WIN FOLLOWING VICTORY IN THE FIFTH AND FINAL TEST

Reuters
Sydney

Australia held their collective nerve to clinch a blockbuster five-Test series against India 3-1 yesterday and take custody of the Border-Gavaskar Trophy for the first time in a decade.

In keeping with a pulsating series where momentum swung back and forth by the session, the fifth Test remained on a knife edge until the final hour when Australia eased to a six-wicket triumph.

Perhaps helped by Jasprit Bumrah's inability to bowl because of a back injury, Travis Head and debutant Beau Webster guided Australia to their victory target of 162 runs with an unbroken fifth-wicket stand of 58.

The win in front of a packed house at a Sydney Cricket Ground bathed in pink for Glenn McGrath's cancer charity also ensured Australia will defend their World Test Championship title against South Africa at Lord's in June.

"It felt like it was kind of seesawing throughout the whole series so to finish it 3-1, to hold the trophy, is an amazing feeling," said Australia skipper Pat Cummins.

"I'm immensely proud, I absolutely love playing with these guys and it's been a lot of fun along the way as well."

The match had been played on fast forward over the first two days with 15 wickets falling on Saturday, and Australia removed four more in the first hour on a sunny Sunday morning to dismiss India for 157.

In the absence of Player of the Series Bumrah, his fellow pace bowlers Prasidh Krishna and Mo-



Australia players celebrate with the Border-Gavaskar Trophy after winning the Test series against India following the fifth Test at the Sydney Cricket Ground yesterday. (Reuters)

ammed Siraj kept Australian nerves on edge by removing four top-order batters on the spicy wicket.

Krishna sent back opener Sam Konstas for 22, Marnus Labuschagne for six and Steve Smith for four before lunch, while Usman Khawaja was caught behind off Siraj for 41 after the break to leave Australia on 104-4.

Smith was particularly forlorn as he trudged back to the dressing room on 9,999 career runs, having been dismissed one run shy of becoming the fourth Australian to pass the 10,000-run milestone.

Head, who scored 34 not out, and Webster, who was unbeaten on

39, got the job done, however, the latter continuing his nerveless debut by clubbing the winning runs with a straight four.

"It was a little frustrating but sometimes you have to respect your body," said Bumrah, who took 32 wickets over the five matches before the back spasms struck on Saturday.

"It was a great series. The whole series was well fought and we were still in the match today. Our young players will take a lot of learnings for the future."

Australia's victory was all the more impressive for having been achieved despite a 295-run thumping in the series opener in

Perth. What Australia coach Andrew McDonald described as the "generational" bowling talent on both teams ensured that the batters were on the back foot for much of the series with big scores at a premium.

Only five centuries were scored, two of them by Head with 140 in Australia's win in the day-night second Test in Adelaide and 152 in the drawn third Test in Brisbane.

The series felt like the end of an era for India, who had overpowered Australia on their last two tours having finally found a way to win Down Under in 2018-19. All-rounder Ravichandran Ashwin retired mid-series and out-of-form



Australia's captain Pat Cummins (left) is handed the trophy by former Australian skipper Allan Border after winning the match and series on day three of the fifth Test against India at the SCG yesterday. (AFP)

captain Rohit Sharma was dropped for the fifth Test at his own request, while Virat Kohli failed to fire on what was surely his final Test tour of Australia.

In Bumrah, though, they had the best player on the field and while he was bowling, their hopes of a third straight triumph in Australia to keep the Border-Gavaskar Trophy for a fifth straight series remained alive. As England bowlers have discovered to their cost over the years, playing five Tests in Australia is tough and the 31-year-old's Herculean efforts finally caught up with him in Sydney.

In Rohit's absence, Bumrah had captained the tourists to victory in the series opener in Perth and the momentum seemed to shift to India every time he was bowling.

Australia's 19-year-old opener Sam Konstas took him on with ramp shots on debut in Melbourne

and verbal barbs in Sydney to assure his place in Australia's plans for next year's Ashes.

Smith, who made his Test debut when Konstas was four, hit 140 in Australia's dramatic 184-run win in Melbourne to probably assure him of one final battle with the English at the end of the year.

For all the bowling talent on display over the series, it was back up Australian paceman Scott Boland who was named Player of the Match in Sydney after finishing with figures of 6-45 for a 10-wicket match haul.

BRIEF SCORES (Fifth Test, Day 3)
Australia 181 (Webster 57, Prasidh 3-42, Siraj 3-51) **and 162 for 4** (Khawaja 41, Webster 39", Head 34", Prasidh 3-65) **beat India 185** (Pant 40, Boland 4-31, Starc 3-49) **and 157** (Pant 61, Boland 6-45, Cummins 3-44) **by six wickets**

CAPTAIN CUMMINS DELIGHTED AS AUSTRALIA BEAT INDIA TO WIN 'EVERYTHING'

Sydney: Australia skipper Pat Cummins spoke of his pride in his team after they rebounded from losing the opening Test against India to clinch the series 3-1 yesterday and win the Border-Gavaskar Trophy for the first time in a decade.

The six-wicket victory in the fifth test in Sydney also secured his team the right to defend the World Test Championship (WTC) title against South Africa at Lord's in June.

"It felt like it was kind of seesawing throughout the whole series so to finish it 3-1, to hold the trophy, is an amazing feeling," he told reporters. "And then I think the extra layer is now securing a spot in the World Test Championship final, which was always a huge goal for

us in this cycle and we've done it. So really satisfied."

With the Border-Gavaskar Trophy safely in the cabinet, Australia now hold all the bilateral titles they play for in the longest format as well as the WTC crown they won by beating India in 2023.

"I didn't know that we'd won kind of everything until half an hour ago but that's always the aim," he said.

"One of the things I love most about Test cricket is it challenges you in so many different ways. You need more than 11 players, you need an amazing squad, you need amazing support staff to be able to win everywhere in the world. "So I think that consistency over a few years to do that with a very similar squad has been massive."

One player who has played only an occasional role in Australia's success is Scott Boland, the back-up pace bowler who was named Player of the Match for his 10-wicket haul in Sydney.

"He's just so good Scotty, I love him," said Cummins.

"As a captain he's a dream, because he just loves bowling. You know what you're going to get from Scotty and it's class every day. So happy for him to take a 10-fer."

Cummins said he was unlikely to tour Sri Lanka in February but was looking forward to locking horns with the Proteas in London in June for the WTC title.

"It's the trophy we're really proud to hold, so we want to go back and defend it," he said.

India cricket loss to Australia sparks questions back home

New Delhi: Indian cricket fans and pundits heaped praise on stand-in skipper Jasprit Bumrah yesterday, but questioned the future of several veteran players after their team lost 3-1 to Australia in a gripping five-Test series.

Star quick bowler Bumrah offered something for India to celebrate in an otherwise gloomy assessment of the team's performance following their six-wicket defeat in the final Test in Sydney.

"Trophy lost, questions aplenty, uncertain future," a *Times of India* headline read.

"Questions were continuously raised on the future of ageing superstars in that dressing room,

which doesn't look happy anymore," the paper wrote.

The Indian Express gloomily noted that "the big two were poor", referring to captain Rohit Sharma and batting superstar Virat Kohli. Sharma, who has averaged just 10.9 runs in his last eight Tests, stood down - or was dropped - for the final match because of his form.

For Kohli, apart from an unbeaten century in Perth, he was out every other time caught after edging to the wicketkeeper or slips.

Bumrah, however, was a revelation. Standing in as skipper in the final Test, he finished the tour with 32 wickets at an average of 13.06, and was named Man of the Series.

was let down by colossal batting failures and dubious selections," said the *Times of India*.

"The highlight of the series for me...has been watching Jasprit Bumrah bowl," said veteran commentator Harsha Bhogle, calling the loss a "fair result". "It will be one of the highlights of my media career."

Bumrah suffered a back niggle on Saturday and went for scans, and was ultimately forced to watch from the sidelines.

"Brave fightback by India, but Bumrah's absence was too big a loss to overcome," Indian cricket journalist Ayaz Memon wrote on social media.

Veteran Indian batting great Sachin Tendulkar said it was a "commendable performance".

SPOTLIGHT

Rashid lifts Afghanistan as Zimbabwe struggle



Afghanistan spinner Rashid Khan (third left) leads his team off the field during the third day of the second and final Test against Zimbabwe at Bulawayo yesterday. (@ACBofficials)

AFP
Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Leg-spinner Rashid Khan took six wickets in a row to put Afghanistan on the verge of victory in the series-deciding second Test against Zimbabwe in Bulawayo yesterday.

Zimbabwe were 205-8 in their second innings at stumps on day four - 72 runs off their target heading into the final day of a seesaw contest at Queens Sports Club.

Rashid, who took 4-94 in the first innings, finished the day with 6-66 in the second.

A star of T20 cricket but playing in only his sixth Test, it was Rashid's fifth five-wicket haul, the third time he has taken 10 wickets in a match.

Ismat Alam, playing in his first

Test, struck 101 to propel the tourists to 363 all out in their second innings and a lead of 276. Sikandar Raza and captain Craig Ervine put on 58 for the fifth wicket to leave Zimbabwe on 157-5 when Rashid dealt a massive blow to the home team.

BRIEF SCORES (Second Test, Day 3)
Afghanistan 157 (Rashid Khan 25; S. Raza 3-30, N. Nyamhuri 3-42) **and 363 in 113.5 overs** (Rahmat Shah 139, Ismat Alam 101; B.Muzarabani 6-95, R. Ngarava 3-76) **v Zimbabwe 243** (C. Ervine 75, S. Raza 61, S. Williams 49; Rashid Khan 4-94, Yamin Ahmadzai 3-62) **and 205-8 in 66 overs** (S.Ervine 53 not out, B. Curran 38, S. Raza 38; Rashid Khan 6-66)

Match situation: Zimbabwe need 73 runs to win with two wickets standing

FOCUS

Captain Masood leads from the front on Day 3

AFP
Cape Town

Shan Masood and Babar Azam shared a record opening partnership as Pakistan fought back after conceding a 421-run first innings deficit on the third day of the second Test against at Newlands yesterday.

Pakistan were 213 for one in their follow-on innings at close of play, still 208 runs short of making South Africa bat again.

Pakistan captain Masood made 102 not out, his sixth Test century, and Babar scored 81, his third successive half-century in the series.

Babar, who has not scored an international century since August 2023, fell short again when he was caught in the gully off Marco Jansen 14 minutes before the close of play.

Their partnership of 205 was the highest for the first wicket for Pakistan in Tests against South Africa. It also exceeded Pakistan's first innings total of 194, which prompted South African captain Temba Bavuma to enforce the follow on.

It was the second significant partnership of the day for Babar, who was forced to open the batting after Saim Ayub was ruled out of the match with a broken right ankle. Babar made 58 in the first innings and put on 98 for the fourth wicket with Mohammad Rizwan (46) before his dismissal triggered a collapse.

Babar and Rizwan resumed at the overnight 64 for three and batted comfortably through the first hour, seeing off the threat of Kagiso Rabada and Jansen, South Africa's premier strike bowlers. The stand was broken by 18-year-old debutant Kwena Maphaka five balls after the morning drinks break when Babar was caught behind by Kyle Verreynne, glancing a loose ball down the leg side. Ba-



Pakistan's Babar Azam (left) and Shan Masood celebrate their 200-run partnership during the third day of the second Test against South Africa at Newlands Stadium in Cape Town yesterday. (AFP)

bar had batted solidly in a 127-ball innings. He stood in seeming disbelief at his dismissal before returning to the pavilion. Rizwan followed five overs later when he charged down the pitch against Wiaan Mulder and edged a wild slog into his stumps.

There was minimal resistance from the rest of the batsmen. Masood and Babar showed in the second innings that there were no demons in a pitch on which South Africa scored 615. They kept the scoreboard moving with positive stroke play and good running between the wickets and seldom looked in danger of getting out. South Africa's frustration boiled over when

Mulder, after bowling a ball which Babar struck back firmly, threw the ball at the batsman, who was on 56.

The incident led to an exchange of words.

BRIEF SCORES (Second Test, Day 3)
South Africa 615 all out (R. Rickelton 259, T. Bavuma 106, K. Verreynne 100, M. Jansen 62, K. Maharaj 40; Mohammad Abbas 3-94, Salman Agha 3-148) **v Pakistan 194** (Babar Azam 58, Mohammad Rizwan 46; K. Rabada 3-55, K. Maphaka 2-43, K. Maharaj 2-14) **and 213-1** (Shan Masood 102 not out, Babar 81) **Match situation:** Pakistan trail by 208 runs

TENNIS

Impressive Sabalenka wins new season's first trophy

THE BELARUSSIAN BEATS QUALIFIER POLINA KUDERMETOVA IN THREE HARD-FOUGHT SETS

Reuters
Brisbane

Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka geared up for her title defence at the year's opening Grand Slam with a battling 4-6 6-3 6-2 win over Russian qualifier Polina Kudermetova in the final of the Brisbane International yesterday.

Sabalenka is bidding to become the first woman to lift three straight Australian Open trophies since Swiss Martina Hingis won from 1997-1999, and she will head to Melbourne Park brimming with confidence.

"I'm super happy to lift this trophy," said Sabalenka.

"It's a really important tournament before heading into the Australian Open. The final match was a bit tricky, (both of us) were over-hitting.

"I'm really curious about the average speed of our shots. It was a crazy match, and I'm really glad I got this win."

The world No.1 from Belarus, outclassed in last year's final by Elena Rybakina before going on to win a second straight Melbourne Park crown, appeared off the pace against Kudermetova and lost the first set by dropping her serve for a second time.

Kudermetova came under pressure on serve in the opening game of the next set but the aggressive world number 107 rode out the storm and began to dictate play with more heavy hitting from the baseline to trouble Sabalenka.

"That was really great tennis from her," Sabalenka told reporters after the match.

"It was really aggressive. She has some variations and she was using it really well. She definitely de-



Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus laughs as she holds her trophy after the singles final match against Polina Kudermetova of Russia at the Brisbane International at Pat Rafter Arena in Brisbane yesterday. (AFP)

served to be in the final. I'm pretty sure if she continues working the way she is, then she will be in the top 50 soon."

A delicate drop shot

A delicate drop shot handed Sabalenka the break, and the 26-year-old appeared much more like her usual dominant self in the rest of the set as she forced a decider, much to the delight of fans at a packed Pat Rafter Arena.

Sabalenka offered another reminder of her class by breaking in the deciding set with a neat cross-court forehand winner and staved off a late comeback attempt from Kudermetova to win her first title

of the season. Czech Jiri Lehecka claimed the Brisbane men's title yesterday after Reilly Opelka retired with an injury while trailing 4-1 in the opening set.

The American upset former world No 1 Novak Djokovic in the quarter-final but appeared to struggle with a wrist issue in his semi-final win over Giovanni Mpetshi Perricard.

The 6-foot 11-inch (2.11m) Opelka spent nearly two years on the sidelines due to wrist and hip issues that needed surgery and only returned to the elite circuit last season.

The Australian Open begins on Jan 12.

Tauson wins Auckland title after injured Osaka retires

Naomi Osaka's quest for a first title in four years ended in heartbreak as the former world number one retired with an injury after winning the opening set of the Auckland Classic final against Denmark's Clara Tauson yesterday.

It was an anticlimactic finish to the match and Tauson said winning her third WTA Tour title after a similar drought did not gloss over the worst final that she had played.

"I have to say I'm really sorry about this final. Naomi was playing some great tennis. I just feel sad about what happened today," Tauson said.



Clara Tauson of Denmark (left) celebrates with the trophy after her win over Naomi Osaka of Japan following the latter's retirement from their singles final match due to an abdominal injury at the WTA Auckland Classic yesterday. (AFP)

"Of course, when I process this, I'm going to be super happy about my week," Tauson added.

"I'm happy that I won, but not really."

Osaka, who won the last of her four Grand Slam trophies at the Australian Open in 2021, returned to the circuit a year ago after a long maternity break, but struggled for consistency and ended the season ranked outside the top 50.

She showed glimpses of just how devastating she can be in Auckland and grabbed a double break against Tauson with powerful hitting on both flanks in the opening set, which she wrapped up 6-4, despite dropping serve late on.

But the 27-year-old from Japan had tears in her eyes as she had an apparent abdominal issue checked

out on court before the start of the next set and threw in the towel, sparking concerns about her fitness for this month's Australian Open.

"She cut a more cheerful figure at the presentation ceremony, joking that skipping breakfast might have led to her defeat.

"I just want to thank everyone for welcoming me to such a beautiful city and I had a lot of fun playing here," said Osaka, without going into any layer of detail about her problem.

"I'm really sorry about how it ended but I hope you enjoyed the tennis that we did play. I'm just grateful to be here."

The Melbourne Park major, where Osaka has won two titles, will begin on Jan 12.

UNITED STATES CLAIM SECOND UNITED CUP TITLE WITH WIN OVER POLAND

Sydney: A dominant United States lifted their second United Cup mixed team tournament title in three years after they beat Poland 2-0 yesterday with Coco Gauff and Taylor Fritz both winning their singles matches.

The top seeds in the \$10mn tournament that began with 18 nations in contention clinched the trophy when Fritz defeated Hubert Hurkacz 6-4 5-7 7-6(4) after Coco Gauff outclassed Iga Swiatek 6-4 6-4 in Sydney.

The Americans had also won the 2023 title in the inaugural edition of the tournament, which serves as a tune-up event for the Australian Open Grand Slam.

With the second singles contest locked at one set apiece, Fritz raised his level at 3-3 in the tiebreak of the decider to see off Hurkacz and spark huge celebrations.

"Congratulations to Poland on a great week," said Fritz, addressing a dejected Polish side that finished runners-up at the tournament for a second successive year. "They're an incredibly tough team and the margins were very small. I feel that it could have gone either way. "I want to thank my team, unbelievable



United States captain Michael Russell is seen with Taylor Fritz, Coco Gauff and teammates as they celebrate with the trophy after winning the United Cup final against Poland at the Ken Rosewall Arena, Sydney, Australia, yesterday. (Reuters)

support. The vibes all week were amazing. That's one of the things that makes our team so great and one of the reasons why

we've been able to do so well. We've just really come together. It's amazing," he said.

Gauff earlier stepped up preparations for the year's first major that begins next Sunday with a second successive win over world number two Swiatek in a blockbuster showdown that gave fans at the Ken Rosewall Arena their money's worth. The world number three, who beat Swiatek en route to the WTA Finals title last season, squandered a 2-0 lead in the first set but battled back from there to gain the upper hand in the match as her opponent counted the costs of 19 unforced errors.

In another high-octane set that followed, Gauff recovered a break to level at 4-4 and went on to secure the win that ensured she ended her singles campaign at the tournament unbeaten.

"I have the belief that I'm one of the best players in the world. When I play good tennis, I'm hard to beat," said Gauff, who also beat Leylah Fernandez, Donna Vekic, Zhang Shuai and Karolina Muchova in the event.

"Today I think I played some great tennis. I'm glad I was able to get a point for Team USA. It was tough today, I'm not going to lie."

Krejcikova pulls out of Australian Open with back injury

Wimbledon champion Barbora Krejcikova pulled out of this month's Australian Open due to a back problem, the Czech said yesterday, while Caroline Wozniacki and Karolina Pliskova will also miss the year's first Grand Slam.

World number 10 Krejcikova, a surprise winner at the All England Club last year, sustained the injury in the WTA Tour's Asian swing of tournaments and looked to be affected by it at the season-ending WTA Finals in Riyadh in November.

"I wanted to share a quick update regarding my withdrawal from the Australian Open," Krejcikova, last year's Australian Open quarter-finalist, said on social media platform X. "Unfortunately, my back injury, which troubled me at the end of last season, is still not fully healed. It's disappointing because I love playing in Melbourne and have such great memories from reaching the quarter-finals last year... I'm working hard to get back to full health. "I can't wait to see you on the court soon."

Nuria Parrizas Diaz will take Krejcikova's spot in the draw.

GOLF

Japan's Matsuyama holds one-shot advantage over Morikawa at The Sentry

Reuters
Kapalua, Hawaii

There's no let-up and no room for missed chances at The Sentry.

Japan's Hideki Matsuyama is leading the charge, but he'll be pursued by a host of contenders in the final round.

Matsuyama shot an 11-under par 62 on Saturday to maintain a one-shot lead through three rounds in what turned into a shootout with Collin Morikawa on Saturday at The Plantation Course in Kapalua, Hawaii. Matsuyama, who was the second-round leader, couldn't shake Morikawa, who also shot 62 in the PGA Tour season-opening event.

"Collin played well and I just kind of followed him, so good day," Matsuyama said. "It was a lot of fun, but I would like for him to take it easy (in the final round)."

Don't count on it. And if either of the leaders falters just a bit, there's a pack of golfers in position to catapult to the top.

"I'm going to put everything out there tomorrow because I have the

goal to win," Morikawa said after the third round. "When you're playing that well, everyone talks about being in the zone, but you really are just focused on every shot."

Matsuyama, who set the tournament record for lowest 54-hole score at 27 under, and Morikawa were tied at the turn. Matsuyama had birdies on four of the last five holes. "Was nice to have to put a round together like that from start to finish," Morikawa said.

Belgium's Thomas Detry is in third at 22 under after his 65.

A 62 for South Korea's Sungjae Im moved him into fourth at 21 under. His round included an eagle on the par-5 fifth hole.

England's Harry Hall (66) holds fifth place at 20 under.

"The leaderboards are massive, they're just there in your face so sometimes you just accidentally glance at them," Detry said.

"But I don't really look at them, to be honest. I heard some of the guys behind me making lots of birdies, so I expected it to be really, really low again today."

Matsuyama caught a break with his tee shot on No. 17. It bounced a couple of times on the

cart path and he was able to locate the ball. "I didn't think it was going to be there, so I'm glad I went down and it was there," he said.

Otherwise, it tended to be a situation with him and Morikawa matching shots.

"There has been rounds where guys are feeding off each other, group's playing well you're kind of going back and forth," said Morikawa, who recorded an eagle on No. 5. Max Greyserman made a big move by shooting 63 to move to 19 under for the tournament.

He played a bogey-free round and is even in sixth place with Will Zalatoris (65) and first-round leader Tom Hoge (68).

Cam Davis shot 64, yet lost ground on the leaders despite eagles on Nos. 5 and 14. The Australian is at 18 under with five other golfers. "I've just got to keep doing what I'm doing," Davis said.

"Obviously, what I'm doing is working. It's not too much different than I would want tomorrow, maybe a couple more birdies, but, we're asking for a lot when you're going past 9-under. That's some of the best golf I played in a while, and it will be fun to keep it going."



Hideki Matsuyama of Japan walks on the third hole during the third round of The Sentry 2025 at Plantation Course at Kapalua Golf Club in Kapalua, Hawaii.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Diallo earns Man United deserved draw at Liverpool

JIMENEZ SCORES TWO PENALTIES AS FULHAM FIGHT BACK TO DRAW AGAINST IPSWICH

AFP
London

Manchester United rallied to snap a four-game losing streak and halt Liverpool's romp towards the Premier League title in a thrilling 2-2 draw at Anfield yesterday.

Liverpool move six points clear at the top of the table, with a game in hand to come, over second-placed Arsenal. But this was an opportunity lost for Arne Slot's men after they came from behind to lead 2-1 through Cody Gakpo and Mohamed Salah's penalty.

United broke their six-year goal drought at Anfield to open the scoring in spectacular fashion through Lisandro Martinez and got the point a much-improved performance deserved when Amad Diallo levelled on 80 minutes. A point edges the Red Devils up to 13th in the table and seven clear of the relegation zone.

Liverpool boss Slot warned that United were "much better" than their shocking league position suggested ahead of the game and so it proved. United had been carved open at will by Newcastle in a dismal 2-0 defeat on Monday that left manager Ruben Amorim declaring they were in a relegation battle. Amorim's hand was strengthened by the return of captain Bruno Fernandes and Manuel Ugarte from suspension, while Kobbie Mainoo also returned to the starting line-up.

The Portuguese's plan to frustrate Liverpool worked but the home side did have the chances early on to make the breakthrough.

Gakpo prodded past the far post from Ryan Gravenberch's through ball. Moments later Salah picked out Alexis Mac Allister with a sumptuous pass that the Argentine caught flush and forced Andre Onana into a fine save with his feet. United took time to begin to impose themselves as an attacking threat but should have been in front before the break.



Manchester United's Amad Diallo shoots past Liverpool's Andrew Robertson (left) to score their second goal during the Premier League match at Anfield in Liverpool yesterday. (AFP)

Diallo miscued his header with the goal gaping from Diogo Dalot's cross. Rasmus Hojlund then had the best chance of the first half when he raced in behind the Liverpool defence but could not beat Alisson Becker. However, confidence was suddenly coursing back into United players who have looked bereft in recent weeks.

The visitors' breakthrough came from an unlikely source as Martinez showed his strikers how to finish with a blistering hit in off the underside of the bar for just his second goal for the club. The Anfield crowd were beginning to get restless as the league leaders were briefly at sixes and sevens. However, Liverpool's position at the

top of the table owes much to the depth of firepower they possess. Even on a quiet day for Salah, they had an in-form forward to come up with the moment of magic required to turn the game.

Gakpo turned inside his Dutch international colleague Matthijs de Ligt and blasted high past Onana for his 10th goal in 15 games on the hour mark. Despite the equaliser Slot immediately made two offensive changes, as Diogo Jota and Darwin Nunez were introduced, and got his reward.

MacAllister's header flicked off De Ligt's outstretched arm inside the penalty area and a VAR review resulted in the awarding of a spot-kick. Salah smashed low and hard

beyond Onana for his 18th Premier League goal in 19 games.

However, United's spirited display got the point it merited to halt an alarming losing streak for Amorim so early in his reign.

Alejandro Garnacho's attitude has been questioned by his new boss but the Argentine came off the bench to make the equaliser as his low cross was turned in by Diallo.

And it should have been even better for United when Harry Maguire spooned Joshua Zirkzee's pass over the bar with the goal gaping deep into stoppage time.

Earlier in the day, Raul Jimenez scored two penalties as Fulham twice came from behind to draw

2-2 with relegation-threatened Ipswich at Craven Cottage. Sam Szmodics put the visitors ahead in the 38th minute, with Jimenez levelling from the spot midway through the second period.

Liam Delap restored Ipswich's lead with another penalty but Jimenez had the final say in stoppage time.

The result leaves Ipswich third from bottom of the table after falling agonisingly short of recording two consecutive league wins for the first time this season.

Mid-table Fulham enjoyed the lion's share of possession in the first half but Ipswich broke the deadlock against the run of play with their first chance of note.

Tottenham sign goalkeeper Kinsky

Tottenham announced yesterday they have signed Czech under-21 international goalkeeper Antonin Kinsky from Slavia Prague in a deal worth about £12.5mn (\$15.5mn).

Spurs have been without first-choice goalkeeper Guglielmo Vicario since he fractured his ankle during a 4-0 win over Manchester City in November and he is set to be sidelined until the end of February. Fraser Forster has been deputising for injury-hit Spurs but the England international missed Saturday's 2-1 loss at home to Newcastle with illness, meaning Brandon Austin deputised. Ange Postecoglou's Spurs have only won two of their past 11 games in all competitions and have slumped to 12th in the Premier League table.

The 21-year-old Kinsky, whose goalkeeping father was a Czech international, completed a medical at Tottenham on Saturday and has signed a contract until 2031.

He has made 29 appearances for Slavia Prague this season, keeping 14 clean sheets.

The goalkeeper told the Slavia Prague website the move was a "dream come true".

"It was clear that such an opportunity may not come again," he said.

"I decided to go for it, and then it was all down to a deal between the clubs."

The move is subject to international clearance and the granting of a work permit.

Ipswich Town have also signed defender Ben Godfrey on loan from Serie A side Atalanta for the rest of the season, the promoted Premier League club said yesterday.

SCOTTISH PREMIERSHIP

Celtic stretch lead to 13 points after Rangers held

AFP
Glasgow

Celtic extended their lead at the top of the Scottish Premiership to 13 points with a routine 3-0 win against St Mirren yesterday after Rangers drew 3-3 against Hibernian.

Brendan Rodgers' side, who suffered a stinging 3-0 defeat by their Old Firm rivals at Ibrox on Thursday, took the lead in the 33rd minute when German winger Nicolas Kuhn swept home.

Two minutes before the break US international Auston Trusty headed in a second for his first Celtic goal since signing from Sheffield United in August.

Kuhn notched his second in the 68th minute for his fifth goal in five games, making it 16 in total for the season.

"It's a very good afternoon for us," said Celtic manager Brendan Rodgers.

"The effort of the players, the movement of the players, the quality that they showed in the game was a really, really good level."

Any notion of a credible title race was far-fetched even after Rangers' midweek Old Firm win and their hopes were dented further by more dropped points at Easter Road despite Hamza Igamane's hat-trick.

Rangers were 2-0 up in the 19th minute but Hibs drew level with a double from Martin Boyle, the second of which was a penalty. Igamane restored the visitors' lead before Rocky Bushiri popped up with an 83rd-minute equaliser to make it six games in a row unbeaten for David Gray's side.

Rangers boss Philippe Clem-



Auston Trusty of Celtic celebrates scoring a goal against St Mirren at Celtic Park yesterday. @CelticFC

ent was angered by the penalty awarded against his team.

"I saw a lot of good things from my team, good football, good goals, but also a goal against with the penalty that I don't understand," he said.

"It's a collision between two players or even the attacking player maybe on full speed tries to slow down to get a contact. You can give the foul to both sides. You can never give a penalty for a situation like that. That was a decisive

moment. It gave Hibs a lot of energy and belief."

Aberdeen's dismal winless run was extended to 10 matches after they fell to a 2-0 defeat at Motherwell. There were also wins for Hearts, Ross County and Dundee.

FOCUS

Real Madrid hopeful Vinicius will escape suspension: Ancelotti



Reuters
Madrid

Real Madrid are hopeful Vinicius Jr will avoid suspension after the club appealed his straight red card during their 2-1 comeback win over Valencia last week, manager Carlo Ancelotti said yesterday.

The Italian coach confirmed Vinicius is travelling to Cartagena for today's Copa del Rey match against Deportiva Minera.

The Brazilian striker was sent off for slapping Valencia goalkeeper Stole Dimitrievski during Friday's LaLiga match and Ancelotti is confident that the 24-year-old will escape even the minimum two-game suspension for his red card.

"It wasn't a red, it was a yellow, and that's why we hope he will not face any suspension," the 65-year-old manager told reporters.

Ancelotti added that Vinicius, who is Black, is under immense mental stress due to previous incidents of racist abuse directed at him in Spain.

"It's difficult being in his shoes. It's not easy to endure everything he goes through, including the insults. It's not

simple, but he's trying to improve. He's upset about it and has apologised, we need to look ahead," he added.

"We hope he won't face a suspension. The only two, who are not travelling, are (goalkeeper) Thibaut Courtois and (defender) Antonio Rudiger. The rest are all travelling."

Ancelotti added that he had no issue with the new Copa del Rey regulations that mandate La Liga clubs start with at least seven players from their first-team squad.

"We have to respect it, and I have no problem with this rule. I want to give minutes to those who have played less," he added.

Real Madrid have missed three of their last four penalties, including two from Kylian Mbappe and Ancelotti said his side are working to improve their performance from the spot.

"It's a technical aspect that's very difficult to manage. There are good penalty takers, but what changes is the atmosphere in the stadiums," the Italian added.

"I want to clarify the matter for us as well (on penalty takers). I will clarify it before the match...it could be Vinicius, Mbappe, Jude (Bellingham), Arda Guler. We'll see how I feel."