

To subscribe
GULF TIMES Newspaper
Please call
444 666 35



CRICKET | Page 2

Chapman slams century as New Zealand win first Pakistan ODI



FOOTBALL | Page 4

Bayern survive St Pauli scare to stay on course for Bundesliga title

To advertise here,
PLEASE CALL
444 666 21

Sunday, March 30, 2025
Shawwal 1, 1446 AH

GULF TIMES
SPORT



TENNIS

Djokovic oozing confidence ahead of century bid

Page 3

QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Duhail beat Gharafa to maintain one-point lead over Sadd

Afif nets a double for Al Sadd in 3-0 win over Al Wakrah

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Al Duhail continued to hold their slender 1-point lead over defending champions Al Sadd in the Qatar Stars League 2024-2025 season.

On an evening of four simultaneous kick-offs yesterday, Al Duhail beat Al Gharafa 2-0 at the Thani Bin Jassim Stadium while Al Sadd drubbed Al Wakrah 3-0 on their home turf at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium.

Meanwhile, Al Ahli kept up their run in the top four as they beat Al Rayyan 1-0 at Al Thumama Stadium. Al Arabi were held to a goalless draw by Qatar SC at the Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium.

Two goals on either half saw Al Duhail get the better of The Cheetahs as Almoz Ali (15th minute) and Ismael Mohammed (87th minute) scored for the Red Knights to extend their tally to 44 points while Al Gharafa stayed on 37.

Al Duhail could have gone one up as early as the third minute of play if not for Youssef Ayman being caught slightly offside.

Nine minutes later, Al Gharafa were forced to make an early substitution due to an injury to Ferjani Sassi, with the Tunisian central midfielder having to make way for

Within three minutes of the newcomer, Al Duhail registered the opener through Ali whose right-footed low but powerful shot from the edge of the box caught goalkeeper Khalifa Ndiaye napping.

Michael Olunga would have doubled the lead in the 29th minute had his left-footed shot from the centre of the box been a little bit more precise, while Homam El Amin also missed the bull's-eye by the slightest of margins four minutes later.

Al Gharafa were more determined in the second half and they



Al Duhail players celebrate after defeating Al Gharafa 2-0 in their QSL match at the Thani Bin Jassim Stadium yesterday.



Al Sadd's Akram Afif celebrates after scoring against Al Wakrah yesterday.

almost got their equaliser three minutes post break had not the offside flag been raised with Rabeh Boussafi sight on goal.

Fabricio Diaz's right-footed shot from more than 35 yards in the 51st minute also went narrowly wide.

Al Duhail ensured the match was beyond Al Gharafa's reach in the 87th minute with a fantastic teamwork play that resulted in Ismael Mohammed having the

easiest job of putting the ball into the net after being fed a diagonal pass from the left side of the box by Homam Ahmed, who had earlier received a brilliant pass from Paulo Edmilson, to the delight of the Red Knights fans and bench.

Meanwhile Akram Afif scored off two penalties in Al Sadd's 3-0 win over Al Wakrah at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium.

The skipper converted from the spot in the 72nd and 86th

minutes of the match, while Youcef Atal added another goal to the scoreline in stoppage time (90+10 minute) as The Wolves collected the three maximum points to keep up their chase with league leaders Al Duhail.

Al Sadd are now on 43 points, still 1-point behind Al Duhail, while Al Wakrah, suffering their tenth loss of the league, stay in 10th place with 21 points. Al Sadd held sway from the start and came close to scoring twice in the opening half.

In the 20th minute, a Mohamed Camara kick just wide of right post while in the 35th minute Afif missed out on what would have been a fine strike.

Afif made a brilliant rock and roll effort as he first took the ball on his head and later made a run down to strike but while the ball beat a diving Al Wakrah goalkeeper Saoud Mubarak al-Khater to his left, it went on to hit the bottom of right post to go away.

Al Sadd's efforts continued in the second session but they failed to break the deadlock until late when a corner kick from Afif saw Pedro Miguel head the ball home but the flag for off side was up.

The referee however had a VAR and caught a foul before Miguel made the header and a penalty was awarded. Afif stepped up and coolly converted putting the ball into the left side as the goalkeeper dived the other way.

Fourteen minutes later, Al Wakrah erred again as Hamdy Fathy brought down Afif with a wrong tackle inside the box and Al Sadd won a penalty again. Afif again repeated his act for his side to double the lead.

There was more joy for Al Sadd as Afif set up another making a fine pass from inside left to substitute Ali Asadalla, who set the ball up for a dashing in Atal to go on and score the team's third goal of the match.

Exposito scores for Al Ahli
Eric Exposito struck in the 53rd minute as Al Ahli beat a ten-man Al Rayyan at the Al Thumama Stadium.

Julian de Sart of Al Rayyan was given the marching order in the 72nd minute of the match. The win saw Al Ahli's tally swell to 32 points to be fourth in the standings while Al Rayyan are fifth with 27 points.

Tebogo to make 'every moment count' as he preps for Doha debut

Olympic 200m champion and World Athlete of the Year Letsile Tebogo will race over 200m at the Jetour Doha Meeting at the Qatar Sports Club on May 16.

The 21-year-old, a world 100m silver and 200m bronze medallist in 2023, clocked an area record of 19.46 to take victory in Paris and in doing so made history by claiming his country's first Olympic gold medal in any sport. It was the fastest time in the world in 2024 and moved him to fifth on the world all-time list.

Demonstrating his incredible range, the two-time world U20 100m champion - who owns the fastest 300m time in history with 30.69 - finished sixth in the Olympic Games 100m in 9.86, also a national record, and won 4 x 400m relay silver. His anchor leg split of 43.04 is one of the fastest ever recorded.

Having opened his season with a series of 400m races, Tebogo, who ran sub-20 seconds for 200m on nine occasions in 2024, will drop down to the 100m for the Diamond League meetings in Xiamen and Shanghai/ Keqiao before stepping back up to 200m in Doha.

"I'm excited to race in Doha, my first time competing there," he said.

"I know the field will be very competitive and I'm looking forward to seeing how I perform. Last year was tough both emotionally and physically but I'm excited to compete and to see how the season develops. It's going to be a very long season, but I'm more experienced and mature and I'm ready to push my body to its limits and make every moment count."

The Doha Meeting is the third meeting of the 2025 Wanda Diamond League. The series - which will pay out a record total of \$9.24mn dollars in prize money - comprises 15 of the most prestigious events in global track and field across four different continents, starting with Xiamen on 26 April and concluding with a single final across two days in Zurich (August 27-28).



FOOTBALL

PSG rally to thrash Saint-Etienne 6-1, move to verge of Ligue 1 crown

AFP
Reims, France

Paris Saint-Germain (PSG) moved to within touching distance of an 11th Ligue 1 title in 13 seasons as they came from behind to thrash Saint-Etienne 6-1 yesterday.

After second-placed Marseille crashed 3-1 to Reims earlier, PSG will win the league with seven games still to go if Nice draw at third-placed Monaco in the day's final match. The visiting Parisians were stung after nine minutes when Lucas Stassin headed in Zuriko Davitashvili's cross to put Saint-Etienne ahead.

Goncalo Ramos brought the reigning champions level from the penalty spot just before half-time, slotting home after he had been tripped in area by Florian Tardieu.

PSG took control early in the second half when Khvicha Kvaratskhelia intercepted a misplaced back pass on the halfway line and tore towards the Saint-Etienne

goal before shifting the ball to his left foot to score.

As Saint-Etienne's effort level dropped, Desire Doue notched a double for PSG, either side of a goal from Joao Neves.

Substitute Ibrahim Mbaye completed the job with PSG's sixth goal, side-footing home from Bradley Barcola's cross.

Marseille slumped at Reims where Japanese international Keito Nakamura put the home side ahead midway through the first half before Mamadou Diakhon and Valentin Atangana added to the visitors' misery.

Valentin Rongier scored a spectacular goal to give Marseille hope in the final 15 minutes, but Roberto De Zerbi's side lost further ground on leaders PSG and are now 22 points behind in second.

Reims went ahead when Nakamura turned in the box and fired into the bottom corner for his ninth league goal this term.

Marseille dominated as the match progressed but as they pushed forward, Reims broke on 51

minutes to double their lead.

Nakamura turned provider this time, galloping onto Junya Ito's pass and prodding the ball to Diakhon, who rounded the last defender before finishing emphatically. The relegation battlers then had De Zerbi scratching his chin in disbelief when they netted their third.

Reims struck on the counter again as Atangana raced onto Hafiz Ibrahim's through ball and slotted past Geronimo Rulli.

On 78 minutes, Rongier received the ball near the Reims box and surged forward before smashing the ball home.

Marseille midfielder Adrien Rabiot could not hide his displeasure at his teammates after a defeat which leaves them in an increasingly tight scrap for the Champions League places.

"It hurts to show this kind of spirit. I feel like I'm seeing guys who don't want to go into the Champions League and don't want to fight to get a taste of that," Rabiot told beIN Sports.



Paris Saint-Germain's Desire Doue (right) celebrates with teammates after scoring his team's sixth goal during the Ligue 1 match against Saint-Etienne at the Geoffroy-Guichard stadium in Saint-Etienne, central France, yesterday. (AFP)

CRICKET

Chapman shines as New Zealand crush Pakistan

Chapman's 132 formed the foundation of an imposing 344-9

AFP
Napier, New Zealand

Mark Chapman struck a sub-lime century and Nathan Smith claimed four wickets yesterday as New Zealand eased to a 73-run win over Pakistan in the first one day international in Napier.

Chapman's career-best 132 formed the foundation of an imposing 344-9 at McLean Park before Pakistan's promising chase capitulated, to be all out for 271 in the 45th over.

The tourists looked on track at 249-3, at that point needing 96 runs to win, with more than 11 overs remaining. However, seamer Smith (4-60) helped to spark a late collapse, with the last seven wickets falling for 22 runs. Pakistan captain Mohammad Rizwan lamented a lack of contribution from his lower order, with the bottom six batsmen scoring just three runs between them.

"We started the innings with good intent," Rizwan said.

"Obviously, at the end, the pressure increases because you're getting nearer to the chase. We lost wickets and it changed the momentum."

Earlier, the recalled Babar Azam top-scored for Pakistan with 78 off 83 balls, but it was his dismissal that started the rot.

Salman Agha struck a defiant 58 off 48, but he was let down by a series of loose shots from lower order teammates as New Zealand moved one-up in the three-match series.

Chapman's 111-ball innings featured 13 fours and four sixes, lifting New Zealand out of early trouble after they were asked to bat and stuttered to 50-3.

The left-hander put on 199 for the fourth wicket with Daryl Mitchell (76 off 84) before the home side's innings was finished off in record-breaking fashion by debut all-rounder Muhammad Abbas.

Pakistan-born Abbas struck 52, setting a world record for the fastest half-century on debut when he reached 50 off the 24th ball he faced.



New Zealand's Mark Chapman celebrates his century during the first ODI against Pakistan at McLean Park in Napier yesterday. (AFP)

Player of the match Chapman said he and Mitchell needed to apply themselves in the early stages.

"It was certainly pretty tricky early on, the ball was moving a lot. We were probably aiming for a total a little bit lower than what we got in the end," he said.

"But it's something we pride ourselves on, being able to adapt to the conditions and then stay in the game and just keep scrapping.

"We rode our luck at times and then Abbas put the icing on the cake. It was outstanding to see."

Pakistan left-arm quick Akif Javed claimed 2-55 on his international debut, but the best

figures were recorded by part-time seamer Irfan Khan, who took 3-51 off five expensive overs at the death. Both teams feature numerous changes to those who played out a five-match T20 series, won 4-1 by New Zealand.

The second match of the series is in Hamilton on Wednesday.

Chapman is in doubt after injuring his hamstring in the field and exiting the game.

BRIEF SCORES
New Zealand 344 for 9 (Chapman 132, Mitchell 76, Abbas 52, Irfan 3-51) **beat Pakistan 271** (Babar 78, Agha 58, Smith 4-60) **by 73 runs**

COMMENT

Chennai grapple with home truth after RCB loss

Reuters
Chennai

An exasperated Chennai Super Kings coach Stephen Fleming said their failure to read the pitch at Chepauk has denied them any home advantage in the new season of the Indian Premier League (IPL).

Five-time champion Chennai suffered their biggest defeat at home, in terms of runs, on Friday when Royal Challengers Bengaluru thumped them by 50 runs. It was Bengaluru's first victory against Chennai at Chepauk since the league's inaugural edition in 2008.

"Well, as we've been telling you for a number of years, there was no home advantage at Chepauk," Fleming said after Chennai's first defeat of the new season.

"We haven't been able to read the wickets here in the last couple of years," he added. "So it's not new. We are trying to come to grips each day with what we get, and we don't know."

Chennai's spinners were not really effective, while Josh Hazlewood led Bengaluru's superb pace display to set up their victory.



Chennai Super Kings' MS Dhoni plays a shot during the IPL match against Royal Challengers Bengaluru in Chennai on Friday. (AFP)

"It's not the Chepauk (of old) where you can just go in and play four spinners," former New Zealand captain Fleming said. "We're having to work really hard to try and understand what the nature of each pitch is, and it's quite different."

Even the dew that Fleming had expected set

in during the second innings did not materialise and Chennai fell well short of their target of 197. "No, we didn't get it right," Fleming said. "It's so hard to read, but we thought it was going to skid on with the dew, but it actually got a bit tacky. So, it certainly made it (batting) harder here."

SPOTLIGHT

Siraj, Krishna and Sudharsan guide Gujarat defeat Mumbai Indians



Gujarat Titans' Sai Sudharsan plays a shot during the Indian Premier League match against Mumbai Indians in Ahmedabad yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Ahmedabad

Fast bowlers Mohammed Siraj and Prasidh Krishna took two wickets each as Gujarat Titans thrashed IPL powerhouse Mumbai Indians by 36 runs for their first win this season yesterday.

Gujarat rode on Sai Sudharsan's 63 off 41 balls to post 196-8 after being invited to bat first at the world's biggest cricket stadium in Ahmedabad. Siraj then led the bowling charge to limit the opposition to 160-6 as five-time winners Mumbai went down to their second straight loss in the 18th edition of the T20 tournament.

Siraj removed the Mumbai openers to dent the chase and Krishna hurt the middle-order to return figures of 2-18.

Mumbai's former captain Rohit Sharma started on the front foot with two successive boundaries but Siraj had the last laugh as he bowled the opener for eight on the fourth ball.

Siraj was on fire when he bowled South

African wicketkeeper-batsman Ryan Rickelton for six as the left-hander got an inside edge on to his stumps. Tilak Varma and Suryakumar Yadav attempted to rebuild in a third-wicket stand of 62 until Krishna struck to remove Varma for 39.

Suryakumar hit 48 and smashed four sixes in an attempt to keep up with the ever-increasing scoring rate and along with skipper Hardik Pandya looked to pull things back.

But the bowling remained disciplined and Krishna got his reward with Suryakumar's wicket and South African quick Kagiso Rabada dismissed Pandya, for 11, as the chase fizzled out.

Earlier, Gujarat openers Sudharsan and Shubman Gill started cautiously before the two hammered 35 runs across overs five and six.

Returning Pandya cut short skipper Gill's knock on 38 when he had the attacking opener caught at deep square leg to end a 78-run opening stand.

Pandya missed his team's opening loss due a suspension from the previous edition when he was charged for a slow-over

rate offence. He returned figures of 2-29 with his pace bowling.

The left-handed Sudharsan built another key stand with England's Jos Buttler, who kept up the charge with regular boundaries as he hit 39 off 24 balls.

Afghanistan spinner Mujeeb Ur Rahman dismissed Buttler, caught behind as the Gujarat bowlers hit back.

Pandya dismissed the big-hitting Shahruxh Khan for nine and West Indies left-hander Sherfane Rutherford fell to seam bowler Deepak Chahar for 18.

Sudharsan held firm in a middle-order stutter and reached his fifty before New Zealand left-arm quick Trent Boult trapped the batsman lbw.

Disciplined bowling denied Gujarat a big finish in the final few overs but the total proved enough for the team's first win in two matches.

BRIEF SCORES: Gujarat Titans 196 for 8 (Sudharsan 63, Buttler 39, Gill 38, Pandya 2-29) **bt Mumbai Indians 160 for 6** (Suryakumar 48, Tilak 39, Prasidh 2-18, Siraj 2-34) **by 36 runs.**

CYCLING

Simmons wins wind-hit Tour of Catalonia stage six victory over 25km



Team Lidl-Trek's US rider Quinn Simmons crosses first the finish line ahead of Team Picnic Postnl's Pavel Bittner at the end of the 6th stage of the 2025 Volta a Catalunya cycling tour of Catalonia, a 159km stage race between Berga and Queralt, yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Barcelona

US rider Quinn Simmons edged Pavel Bittner to take the sixth stage of the Tour of Catalonia yesterday as dangerous winds played havoc on the planned route.

Home favourite Juan Ayuso retained his one second lead on Primoz Roglic at the top of the general classification, with Enric Mas a further 20sec back in third.

Stage six was on paper the toughest mountain stage of the race but the conditions led organisers to modify the route significantly, with only 25 kilometres of racing permitted.

What was supposed to be a 159 kilometre ride from Berga to a summit finish at Queralt turned

into a largely flat loop starting and ending in Berga.

Visma's Matthew Brennan, who has won two stages this week, pulled out before the start, with his team saying the 19-year-old was being given "some extra rest".

The race began neutralised because of the dangerous winds and stayed that way until the final 25 kilometres.

General classification times were taken with five kilometres remaining, with UAE Team Emirates-XRG's Ayuso maintaining his slim advantage on 2023 winner Roglic.

Lidl-Trek's Simmons made an attack in the final stages and held off Team Picnic-PostNL's Bittner to claim victory. The race finishes today in Barcelona with an 88.2 kilometre ride up to the Olympic stadium on the city's Montjuic hill.

Sangha, Carey help SA end Sheffield Shield title drought



South Australia players celebrate with the Sheffield Shield after they beat Queensland in Sydney yesterday. (www.cricknet.com.au)

Sydney: South Australia claimed their first Sheffield Shield title in 29 years after hundreds by Jason Sangha and Alex Carey helped them pull off a record chase in the final against Queensland yesterday.

Sangha smashed an unbeaten 126 and forged a 202-run stand with Australia Test wicketkeeper Carey (105) to secure their four-wicket victory on a flat Karen Rolton Oval pitch.

The match was shifted to a smaller venue after Australian Rules team the Adelaide Crows refused South Australia permission to host the Shield final at Adelaide Oval.

Chasing 270 for victory, South Australia slumped to 3-28 but Sangha and Carey combined in a massive fourth wicket stand to guide them towards victory. Sangha got a reprieve on 13 when Ben McDermott spilled

him at second slip and the batter, in his first season with the side, did not look back after that. Queensland skipper Marnus Labuschagne packed the off-side with eight fielders and asked Jack Wildermuth to bowl short outside the off-stump but the ploy did not work.

Carey departed chopping a Mark Steketee delivery onto his stumps but Sangha stayed put to hit the winning runs triggering wild celebrations.

The highest successful chase in the final also helped South Australia complete the Shield and One-Day Cup double for the first time under captain Nathan McSweeney and coach Ryan Harris.

"We're going to try and win a few now," Harris said.

"We will definitely enjoy this one but I have already started thinking about next year."

TENNIS

Djokovic oozing confidence ahead of century bid

‘I AM GOING TO GO ALL IN. I HAVEN’T DROPPED A SET’

AFP
Miami Gardens, United States

Novak Djokovic stands on the brink of a landmark 100th professional title at the Miami Open, with the Serb saying he is playing his best tennis in a “long time”

A comfortable 6-2 6-3 win over Grigor Dimitrov on Friday sent Djokovic through to Sunday’s final, where he will face emerging Czech talent Jakub Mensik who beat American third seed Taylor Fritz 7-6, 4-6, 7-6.

Only Roger Federer (103) and Jimmy Connors (109) have passed the century mark in pro victories, and Djokovic admitted that joining that elite club has been on his mind.

“After the Paris Olympics, which was my 99th title, I knew that every tournament I play I am going for 100. I wasn’t able to achieve that - until hopefully Sunday,” he said.

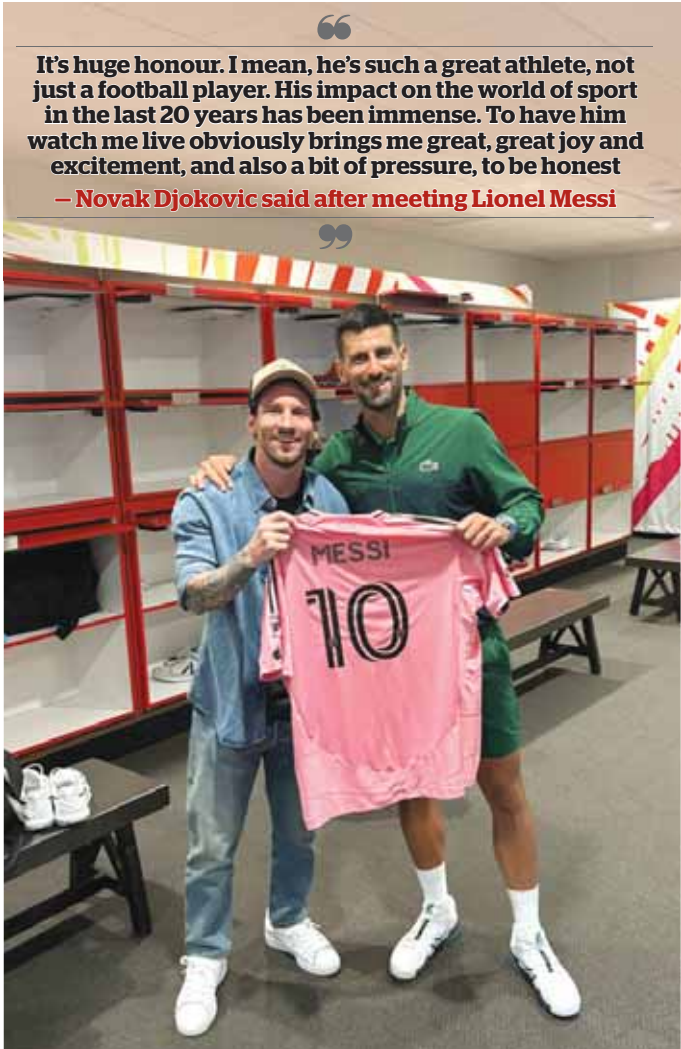
“I am going to go all in. I haven’t dropped a set. I’m playing really good tennis, as good as I’ve played in a long time. It’s a great opportunity. Let’s see what happens in two days,” he said.

The 37-year-old lost in the final in Shanghai in October and reached the semi-finals of the Australian Open where he had to retire with a leg injury.

He came into Miami after losing in the second round at Indian Wells to lucky loser Botic van de Zandschulp but has not dropped a set at Hard Rock Stadium.

His serving has been outstanding, he made 87% of his first serves against Dimitrov but said that he hadn’t been particularly focused on that aspect of his game during his sessions with coach Andy Murray coming into the tournament.

“We did work on the serve, don’t get me wrong but we did not only work on that, we actually paid more attention to some other shots of the game with Andy,



Tennis Grand Slam king Novak Djokovic of Serbia poses for a picture with FIFA World Cup winning captain Lionel Messi of Argentina in Miami yesterday. (@DjokerNole)

but serve is very fluent in this tournament,” he said.

What is also evident is that Djokovic is full of self-belief and clearly relishing the prospect of a late career burst of success.

“He’s got a little bit more freedom (now),” said Dimitrov when reflecting on facing the record 24-time Grand Slam winner over the years.

“If you have done what he has done, of course, you have a bit more. That confidence, it almost stays there like a stain that you cannot wipe off.

“Honestly, it is a beautiful thing to see. There are only a very few athletes on earth that have that and clearly he is one of them,” he said.

Djokovic’s win on Friday was

watched by another player used to breaking records - eight-time Ballon d’Or winner Lionel Messi - who took his family to meet the Serb after the match.

“It’s huge honour. I mean, he’s such a great athlete, not just a football player. His impact on the world of sport in the last 20 years has been immense. To have him watch me live obviously brings me great, great joy and excitement, and also a bit of pressure, to be honest,” Djokovic said with a grin. “I was rated by one of his sons today as eight out of 10, which is pretty good. He with a serious face told me I have too make 10 out of 10 next match. So I have quite a bit of pressure from Messi’s son there,” he added.

Mensik cherishes Messi handshake ahead final

Meeting Lionel Messi before the Miami Open semi-finals was just the boost Jakub Mensik needed, as the 19-year-old upset world number four Taylor Fritz on Friday to reach his first Masters 1000 final, where he will face Novak Djokovic.

Czech Republic’s Mensik shook hands with Messi and thanked the Argentine soccer great by writing “Thx Leo” on a camera lens after securing the biggest win of his career.

“I was shaking his hand... kind of chilling with him a little bit. I didn’t wash my hand before I stepped on the court, and probably that was the key for today,” Mensik joked after beating Fritz 7-6(4) 4-6 7-6(4).

The final against Djokovic, who is bidding for a record 100th career title, pits Mensik against one of his heroes.

“My tennis inspiration is Novak Djokovic. Because of him, I started to play tennis. He’s my biggest idol,” Mensik told ATP Tour in an interview last year.

Djokovic beat Mensik in straight sets at the Shanghai Masters in October, the only time they have met on court.

ATHLETICS

Australian sprinting prodigy Gout Gout upstaged in 200m



Australia’s Gout Gout (centre) competes in the men’s 200m event during the Maurie Plant Athletics Meet at Lakeside Stadium in Melbourne yesterday. (AFP)

AFP
Melbourne

Australian sprinting prodigy Gout Gout was upstaged yesterday by compatriot Lachlan Kennedy in a pulsating men’s 200m in Melbourne yesterday.

Kennedy held off a fast-finishing Gout to produce a personal best time of 20.26 seconds in front of a lively 10,000-strong crowd at the Maurie Plant Meet.

The 17-year-old Gout, who was born in Australia after his parents migrated from South Sudan, finished second with 20.30 in the biggest race of his fledgling career.

The lanky youngster rose to prominence in December when he clocked the quickest time ever by a 16-year-old and then ran the fastest 200m in the world this year with 20.05 this month.

“My goal was just to hold him off and I think five more minutes he definitely would have had me,” said 21-year-old Kennedy, who won silver in the men’s 60m at last week’s World Indoor Championships in Nanjing.

Kennedy earlier fell short of becoming only the second Australian to clock under 10 seconds over 100 metres.

But his time of 10.17 was still enough to edge Sebastian Sultana (10.29) and Rohan Browning (10.30).

Gout started slowly in his first race against senior runners this season and was well behind Kennedy at the back straight before

motoring towards the finish line.

“Racing is great and helps build my confidence and what I need to do,” said Gout, who has drawn comparisons with eight-time Olympic gold medallist Usain Bolt.

Gout has enjoyed a meteoric rise, becoming Australia’s highest-profile track athlete and pocketing a lucrative multi-year sponsorship.

He did not have to face 200m Olympic men’s sprint champion Letsile Tebogo, who chose to compete in the 400m.

Tebogo, 21, ran a season-best time of 45.26 but finished second behind fellow Botswana runner Bayapo Ndori, who held off a late surge from Tebogo to cross in 45.14.

“Will focus on the 200m now, did what we wanted to do,” an exhausted Tebogo said.

Rising Australian runner Cameron Myers strengthened his credentials after a powerful finish to win the men’s 1500m.

“I knew it was going to be bloody tough with the wind, so I was trying to conserve as much energy for the last 900m,” said 18-year-old Myers, who finished with a time of 3:34.98.

In the field events, Australian Olympic bronze medallist Matthew Denny produced a meet record in the men’s discus throw after launching 68.17m.

He secured his spot at this year’s World Athletics Championships in Tokyo, while compatriot Eleanor Patterson won the women’s high jump after clearing 1.94m.

SPOTLIGHT



Marc Marquez of Spain and Ducati Lenovo Team rides during the Sprint session for the 2025 MotoGP Grand Prix of the Americas at Circuit of The Americas. (AFP)

Ducati’s Marquez wins Texas Sprint

Reuters
Texas, Austin

Marc Marquez won the MotoGP Sprint at the Grand Prix of the Americas yesterday to extend his unbeaten start to the season.

Just as in 2025’s opening two weekends Marquez was followed sweeping in a 29 1/2-footer for birdie. Schefler wound up with four birdies on each nine.

Marc Marquez is in sensational form since moving to the factory Ducati team.

He rattled off wins in the sprint

and race from pole in Thailand and Argentina.

And he will be red hot favourite for today’s main event to continue his monopoly on the 2025 season.

After earlier claiming pole, his eighth at the Circuit of the Americas, a record, Marquez got a decent getaway from lights out.

But Bagnaia exploded off the line from sixth on the grid to battle his new teammate from turn one.

Alex Marquez on a satellite Ducati joined in the fun in a frantic opening lap.

Marc Marquez kept his cool to edge clear of his brother and 2022-2023 world champion Bagnaia third.

Once in control Marquez senior controlled the 10-lap dash to move 19 points clear of his younger sibling.

Today the championship leader seeks a record-extending eighth main race win at the Texas track.

Earlier Marc Marquez set the fastest time in qualifying as the factory Ducati rider and MotoGP championship leader stormed to his third straight pole position in regulation.

Marquez, a record seven-times winner at the Circuit of the Americas, had set the fastest lap in Q2 but his brother Alex of Gresini Racing briefly took top spot with just over a minute left in the session.

GOLF

Scheffler fires 62, leads Houston beset by delays

Reuters
Austin, Texas

Scottie Scheffler is alone atop the leaderboard at the Texas Children’s Houston Open after he fired an 8-under-par 62 in his second round at rain-soaked Memorial Park Golf Course on Friday.

The World No 1 stood at 11-under 129 after his lowest round of the season, and when play was suspended due to darkness late Friday evening, that was enough for a one-stroke advantage. Scheffler’s 62 tied the tournament’s single-round scoring record.

Canadian Taylor Pendrith shot his second straight round of 65 to get to 10 under for the tournament, while Colombia’s Nico Echavarria was working on a white-hot round thanks to a front-nine 29. Echavarria was 9 under for his round and 10 under for the event as he stood on the 17th green when the horn sounded to stop play.

The rest of the top five also hadn’t finished their rounds - Australian Min Woo Lee (5 under through 16) and Ryan Gerard (4 under through 11) were two behind Scheffler at 9



under. Scheffler, a Texas native who has twice tied for second at the Houston Open, began his round with two birdies at Nos 10 and 11. The latter was a 26 1/2-foot putt on a par-3.

He bettered that on the par-3 second hole by sweeping in a 29 1/2-footer for birdie. Schefler wound up with four birdies on each nine.

It was the kind of putting day Scheffler has been looking for.

“I felt like I was hitting so many good putts, especially at The Players, putts that were going around the edge,” Scheffler said. “Today was a day where I felt like my ball-striking

could have been a bit better and I was able to hole some putts.” He was fortunate to get his round in before a dangerous weather delay paused the action for just more than two hours in the afternoon. Pendrith took advantage of the damp conditions and holed six birdies, including four on his final eight holes.

“Obviously the course is a little soft right now,” Pendrith said. “There wasn’t much wind today, so scores are lower today, for sure. I haven’t really looked at the wind forecast (for the weekend), but if it’s breezy, it will be tricky, for sure. I think you’re going to need a couple more low ones to get it done.”

Pendrith broke through for his first PGA Tour win last May at the CJ Cup Byron Nelson. The Houston Open has yet to have a winner from Canada.

Per the tour, 52 players still need to complete their rounds on the third morning. They will attempt to fit in the third round by having threesomes tee off at both No 1 and No 10.

The projected cut line as of Friday night was 3 under par. Northern Ireland’s Rory McIlroy made three straight birdies at Nos 15-17 to shoot a 66 and eke ahead of the cut line at 4 under.

FOCUS

Lilia Vu shoots 64, grabs two-shot lead at Ford

Reuters
Chandler, Arizona

Lilia Vu birdied three of her first four holes on Friday and grabbed a two-shot lead at the midpoint of the Ford Championship in Chandler, Arizona.

Vu matched the best score of the day, an 8-under-par 64 at Whirlwind Golf Club’s Cattail Course, to move to 14-under 130.

Four players are tied for second at 12 under: world No. 1 and defending champion Nelly Korda, who shot a 65 on Friday; first-round leader Charley Hull of England (second-round 69); Denmark’s Nanna Koerstz Madsen (68); and Thailand’s Jeeno Thitikul (64).

Japan’s Ayaka Furue (68) and

South Koreans Sei Young Kim (69) and Ina Yoon (69) share sixth place at 10 under. Eight players are at 9 under, tied for ninth.

Vu didn’t expect the hot start to what proved to be a bogey-free round. She wound up hitting 10 of the 14 fairways and 16 of 18 greens in regulation.

“I know I was a little stressed on the range and my caddy could kind of tell, and so he told me, we’re just going to stick to or start lines today and then I’ll handle everything. So I trusted him in that sense,” Vu said.

“I think that really helped me going into the round, and just focused on the shot in front of me and getting from point A to point B. That really kind of helped me. So, yeah, somehow just happened to play well. Felt like everything was grooving in the right spot.”

BUNDESLIGA

Bayern survive scare to stay on course for title

AFP
Berlin

Leroy Sane spared Bayern Munich's blushes with two second-half goals yesterday, as the Bundesliga leaders beat relegation-threatened St Pauli 3-2 to stay six points clear at the top of the table.

Sane settled Bayern's nerves after an uneasy first half, as Vincent Kompany's side struggled once again against weaker opposition.

"It was a bit tight at the end, but we are really happy to have got the three points," Sane told Sky.

Having dropped unexpected points against Bochum and Union Berlin in recent weeks, Bayern were under pressure to avoid a third slip after reigning champions Bayer Leverkusen narrowed the gap to three points with a 3-1 win over Bochum on Friday.

Sane insisted that pressure was a good thing for Bayern, "because it helps us keep our rhythm when we know we have to win every game".

Yet they looked sluggish against

a fearless St Pauli side who almost took the lead early on when a Jackson Irvine header hit the bar.

The visitors handed Bayern the opener on a silver platter just two minutes later, when Siebe Van der Heyden was caught napping at left-back.

Sane settled Bayern's nerves after an uneasy first half, as Vincent Kompany's side struggled once again against weaker opposition

Van der Heyden was robbed of possession by Jamal Musiala and Bayern swarmed into the box, allowing Harry Kane to sweep the ball in from close range.

It was Kane's first goal against St Pauli, meaning he has now scored against every team he has faced in the Bundesliga. Unbowed, the visitors snatched a deserved equaliser just before the half-hour mark through Elias Saad.

The Tunisian forward slipped under the radar in the Bayern box and tapped in a Manolis Saliakas cross to score his first goal since September.

Sane restored the lead after half-time, smashing the ball in unchallenged after a clever switch of play left him with acres of space on the left. He sealed the win 20 minutes from time, turning in a Kane cross from close range after a ruthless Bayern transition.

Yet Bayern still had to survive a nervy final few minutes after Lars Ritzka pulled one back for St Pauli in added time. And there was more bad news for the Bavarians as defender Hiroki Ito was forced off in the final minutes, adding to a growing list of injury concerns.

Elsewhere, RB Leipzig suffered a blow in the race for the Champions League with a 1-0 defeat at Borussia Moenchengladbach.

A poacher's finish from Alasane Plea saw Gladbach snatch a valuable three points and leapfrog Leipzig into fifth.

Werder Bremen overtook Borussia Dortmund in mid-table thanks to a comfortable 3-0 win over bottom club Holstein Kiel.

Marvin Ducksch whipped a brilliant free-kick into the top corner from a tight angle to give Bremen the lead in the first half.

Felix Agu doubled the lead after the break with an equally elegant finish, curling the ball under the bar from the edge of the penalty area, before Marco Gruell made it three in added time.

Kiel are now five points adrift of safety after fellow strugglers Heidenheim snatched a 1-0 win away to Wolfsburg thanks to a first-half penalty from Marvin Pieringer.

Augsburg's Samuel Essende broke a Bundesliga record in his side's 1-1 draw with Hoffenheim, scoring the fastest goal ever by a substitute.

Essende netted just 10 seconds after coming on at half-time, but Andrej Kramaric levelled from the spot later in the second half, ending a 683-minute run without conceding for Augsburg goalkeeper Finn Dahmen.

Bayern Munich's Leroy Sane (centre) celebrates with Harry Kane (left) and Raphael Guerreiro after scoring a goal against St Pauli during the Bundesliga match in Munich yesterday. (AFP)



FOCUS

Forest reach FA Cup semis for first time in 34 years

Forest knock Brighton out on penalties, Eze leads Palace into semis

AFP
Brighton, United Kingdom

Nottingham Forest reached the FA Cup semi-finals for the first time in 34 years as Belgian keeper Matz Sels starred in a 4-3 penalty shoot-out win over Brighton yesterday.

After the quarter-final clash at the Amex Stadium finished 0-0 following extra-time, Sels took centre stage to send Forest to Wembley. Sels saved spot-kicks from Jack Hinshelwood and Diego Gomez and, although Forest's Neco Williams blazed over, Ryan Yates held his nerve to stroke home the winner. Forest also needed shoot-outs to get past third-tier Exeter and top-flight strugglers Ipswich in the fourth and fifth rounds respectively this season.

Nuno Espirito Santo's side are enjoying a remarkable season that could culminate in Champions League qualification and a first FA Cup final appearance since 1991.

Forest, who last won the FA Cup in 1959, have climbed to third in the Premier League, leaving them within touching distance of appearing in the Champions League for the first time since 1980-81.

They are five points clear of fourth-placed Chelsea and six ahead of fifth-placed Manchester City with nine games to go. Brian Clough's men were the last Forest team to make the FA Cup semi-finals, beating West Ham before losing the final to Tottenham.

Forest join Crystal Palace in the last four after the Eagles won 3-0 at Fulham in yesterday's other quarter-final. Eberechi Eze in-



Nottingham Forest manager Nuno Espirito Santo and players celebrate after they defeated Brighton & Hove Albion in the FA Cup quarter-final in Brighton yesterday. (Reuters)

spired Crystal Palace to quarter-final win at Fulham with a goal and an assist in a four-minute period in the first half. Fresh from scoring his first England goal against Latvia on Monday, Eze broke the deadlock with a stunning strike from outside the box. He then turned provider for Ismaila Sarr to rapidly double Palace's lead and Eddie Nketiah added more gloss to the scoreline as a second-half substitute.

Today, Manchester City travel to Bournemouth and Aston Villa visit Championship side Preston, the last club from outside the top tier in this season's tournament.

Forest crushed Brighton 7-0 at the City Ground in Premier League in February, a result that ranked as the Seagulls' heaviest defeat for 67 years. Since that humbling loss,

Brighton had won four times in a five-game unbeaten run in the league, but they were unable to stop Forest's penalty mastery.

Nuno surprisingly dropped wingers Callum Hudson-Odoi and Anthony Elanga to the bench in a move that appeared to prioritise Tuesday's league clash with Manchester United. Forest were also without Chris Wood after their leading scorer suffered a hip injury on international duty with New Zealand. Wood's replacement Taiwo Awoniyi went close to an early opener, accelerating on to Ola Aina's pass for a stinging strike that Bart Verbruggen saved at his near post. But, shorn of their best attacking options, Forest struggled to make headway after that.

Brighton were hardly much more

incisive, with Pervis Estupinan's long-range blast pushed away by Sels. Carlos Baleba was inches away from putting the Seagulls ahead on the stroke of half-time, lashing just wide from the edge of the area. After their tepid start, Forest finally showed signs of life when Morgan Gibbs-White's strike from distance forced a superb save from Verbruggen.

But Nuno had seen enough and sent on Hudson-Odoi and Elanga. Verbruggen repelled Elanga's close-range effort to force the tie into extra-time.

Gomez nearly won it for Brighton in the closing stages, but his header from Brajan Gruda's cross was brilliantly saved by Sels, foreshadowing the keeper's heroics in the shoot-out.

LA LIGA

Atletico title hopes evaporate in draw with Espanyol

AFP
Cornellà de Llobregat, Spain

Atletico Madrid's slim Spanish title hopes faded further with a disappointing 1-1 draw at Espanyol yesterday in La Liga.

Javi Puado earned the Catalan side a point with a penalty after Cesar Azpilicueta put the visitors ahead, leaving the Rojiblancos six points behind league leaders Barcelona despite having played an extra match.

Barcelona host Girona today in a Catalan derby, while Real Madrid, second and three points ahead of Atletico, welcome Leganes. "Two points escaped, two important ones, I don't know why this is happening to us," Atletico goalkeeper Jan Oblak told Movistar.

"If we don't have consistency we can't fight for the title. "We don't have it, we're losing points and I think the teams behind us are catching up."

After Barca beat Atletico 4-2 in their previous top flight outing, before the international break, Diego Simeone's side knew they could not afford to lose further ground in the title race. Simeone put Julian Alvarez and Rodrigo de Paul on the bench after they featured in midweek for Argentina against Brazil in South American World Cup qualifying.

Uruguay international Jose Gimenez also began on the bench but he was needed to re-

place Robin Le Normand midway through the first half after a clash of heads. Espanyol, battling relegation and provisionally 15th, fought gamely against an Atletico side that played within themselves. Marcos Llorente had a goal disallowed early on for offside but Atletico failed to create further chances until Azpilicueta blasted the visitors ahead from distance.

It was his first goal for three years and also his first for Atletico Madrid, but it was worth the wait as he hit a sumptuous volley into the top corner after Antoine Griezmann's cross was cleared to the edge of the box.

Conor Gallagher came close before the break and Alexander Sorloth dragged a shot wide of the post as Atletico sought a second. Espanyol had created little danger but found a way back level when Clement Lenglet blatantly pulled Leandro Cabrera's shirt in the box.

Puado rammed the resulting penalty into the top corner past Oblak's outstretched arm after 71 minutes. Alvarez, on from the bench, hit the sidenetting as the clock ran down on Atletico's ambitions, with Joan Garcia saving from a Griezmann header at the death. Eliminated from the Champions League by rivals Real Madrid, Simeone's side's last realistic hope of silverware is in the Copa del Rey, where they face Barcelona in the semi-final second leg on Wednesday. Espanyol are now two points above the relegation zone.



Atletico Madrid's goalkeeper Jan Oblak fails to stop a penalty shot as Espanyol's Javier Puado scores their first goal yesterday. (AFP)

SERIE A

Tudor's Juve beat Genoa to relaunch Champions League bid

AFP
Milan

Juventus returned to winning ways under new coach Igor Tudor with yesterday's 1-0 win over Genoa which kept them a point away from Serie A's Champions League positions.

Kenan Yildiz made sure fifth-placed Juve would stay on Bologna's heels in the race for a spot in Europe's top club competition with a fine individual strike in the 25th minute in Turin.

Turkey attacker Yildiz lifted home his seventh goal of the season in all competitions for Juve after skipping into the box and around Genoa defender Koni De Winter.

Tudor's reign began with a limp dis-

play similar to those which cost his predecessor Thiago Motta his job, with Yildiz's strike one of the few moments of quality in a largely lacklustre match.

Former Croatia international Tudor was hired until the end of the season to get Juve, with whom he spent the bulk of his playing career, into the Champions League after Motta flopped.

And the result on Saturday was at least the right one after Juve conceded seven goals without reply in Motta's final two matches in charge against Atalanta and Fiorentina.

Genoa are 12th and 12 points above Empoli who sit just inside the relegation zone after drawing 1-1 at ambitious Como.

Juve stayed outside the top four due to Bologna winning 1-0 at struggling Venezia earlier in the day, Riccardo Orsolini's

stunning volley securing a hard-fought win on the Venetian Lagoon. Italy international Orsolini guided home a superb finish from Nicolo Cambiaghi's cross three minutes after half-time to ensure Bologna of a fifth straight win and fourth place for at least another week.

Venezia have failed to win in 13 league matches and are second from bottom, five points behind Parma who are just outside of the relegation zone and face Verona on Monday.

Lecce, in 16th, are level on 25 points with Parma and host in-form Roma in late match.

Juventus' Kenan Yildiz scores a goal against Genoa during their Serie A match at the Allianz Stadium in Turin yesterday. (Reuters)

