



CRICKET | Page 2 All-rounder Pandva. Kohli lead Bengaluru to top of IPL table



Liverpool smash Tottenham to win Premier League title

FOOTBALL | Page 4



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GULF TIMES PORT



TENNIS

Zverev, Sabalenka battle through in Madrid Open, Rublev defence over

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ASIAN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE ELITE

Kawasaki beat Sadd in extra time, to face Al Nassr in semis

CAPTAIN WAKIZAKA'S GOAL EARNED THE J1 LEAGUE CLUB A HISTORIC LAST-FOUR BERTH

AFP

Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

apan's Kawasaki Frontale set up an Asian Champions League Elite semi-final against Cristiano Ronaldo and Al Nassr with a 3-2 victory in extra time against Qatari side Al Sadd yesterday.

The J1 League club, who arrived at the inaugural Elite Finals on the back of five-match domestic winless streak, came through the quarter-final at Prince Abdullah Al Faisal Stadium in Jeddah after the match had finished 2-2 in normal time.

Frontale had twice taken the lead, through first-half goals from Brazilian duo Erison and Marcinho, with Al Sadd replying both times courtesy of their own Brazilians, Paulo Otavio and Claudinho.

However, Frontale captain Yasuto Wakizaka got the winner midway through the first period of extra time. Frontale will now take on Al Nassr, captained by Ronaldo, on Wednesday in the Saudi-dominated last four.

The other semi-final, to take place on Tuesday, sees record four-time champions Al Hilal face fellow Saudi Pro League side A Ahli. Jeddah is the host city for the final three rounds of the revamped tournament.

It took Frontale only four minutes to opening the scoring against Al Sadd, when Erison met Akihiro Ienaga's cross from the right first time to cushion his half-volley past Qatar goalkeeper Meshaal

Al Sadd rebounded within five



Al Sadd's Claudinho (right) celebrates with captain Hassan al-Haydos after scoring their second goal during the Asian Champions League quarter-final at Prince Abdullah Al-Faisal Sports City Stadium in Jeddah yesterday. (Reuters)

minutes, Otavio exchanging passes with current Asian Player of the Year Akram Afif before rifling his shot from an acute angle on the

left that somehow beat Frontale goalkeeper Louis Yamaguchi at his

Parity lasted all of 12 min-



Kawasaki Frontale's Yasuto Wakizaka and Al Sadd's Tarek Salman vying for the ball during the Asian Champions League quarter-final at Prince Abdullah Al-Faisal Sports City Stadium in Jeddah yesterday. (Reuters)

a one-two from deep with Yuki Yamamoto and raced onto the return pass to poke past Bar-

Frontale maintained their lead until the 71st minute, when Claudinho sent a powerful drive into the net following Al Sadd captain Hassan al-Haydos' clever dummy to force an extra half-hour. Frontale did find the

Hasebe's side pouncing on a mistake by Al Sadd substitute Guilherme in the 98th minute.

The ball found its way to Wakizaka, who swept home the finish to send his boyhood club into the semi-final.

The result means Frontale are the only team from East Asia to remain in the tournament, which runs until the final on May 3.

Al Hilal SFC (KSA) v Al Ahli Saudi FC (KSA) Venue: King Abdullah Sports City

Stadium (Jeddah) Kick-off: Tuesday, 19:30 (UTC+3) Al Nassr Club (KSA) v Kawasaki Frontale (JPN)

Venue: King Abdullah Sports City Stadium (Jeddah) Kick-off: Wednesday, 19:30

MOTORSPORT

Alex reigns in Spain to claim first MotoGP victory

AFP

Jerez de la Frontera, Spain

pain's Alex Marquez claimed a memorable maiden MotoGP victory in winning the Spanish Grand Prix yssterday to take the lead in the overall standings.

29-year-old Ducati-Gresini rider came home clear of 2021 world champion Fabio Quartararo on a Yamaha - his first podium in a year-and-a-half with Francesco Bagnaia third on a Ducati. Marquez leads his brother Marc by a point after the older sibling slid off early in the race but battled back to finish in the points.

They are the first brothers to win MotoGP's and it was the 200th time a Spanish rider has won in the category.

"It was the best birthday present to win in Jerez, it is something amazing," said Marquez, who turned 29 last Wednesday.

"I cannot ask for more. The race I was largely really clever apart from the beginning when I attacked too much.

"I raced perfectly after that," added a grinning Marquez, who had launched himself over the barrier and into the mechanics arms on dismounting from his bike. Although it is still Yamaha's longest run without a win, Quartararo was delighted after a superb weekend, taking pole and then an impressive second spot.

"Incredible to be on podium," said the Frenchman. "Super special especially as Alex had so much more in his bike.

"It has been long years since such a feeling but super happy to be back. See you in Le Mans, added Quartararo, referring to the next race the French MotoGP in a fortnight.

Bagnaia cut a frustrated figure, his dreams of a fourth successive win in Jerez dashed.

"Honestly I do not like races like this," said two-time world champion Bagnaia. "Every time I was getting closer Fabio found something extra."

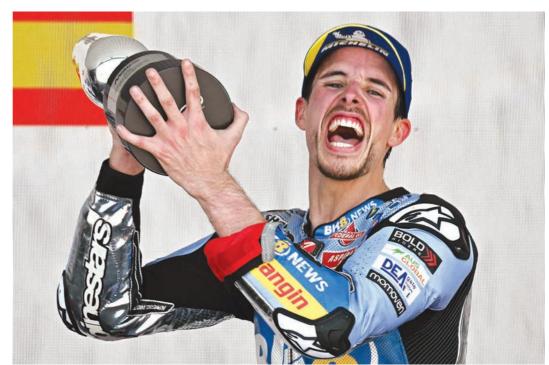
The race was preceded by a minute's silence for Pope Francis, who died last Monday.

Quartararo had held off the challengers for the first lap. Alex Marquez's daring charge almost ended with him crashing out but he managed to limit the damage and held fourth spot.

Bagnaia and Marc Marquez may be teammates but no quarter was given as they came together with the Italian holding onto second. Drama ensued on the third lap as Marc Marquez slid off and returned at the back of the field - his mechanics putting their hands to their mouths and groans ringing round the venue.

His compatriot Fermin Aldeguer also paid for being too ambitious early on and rejoined in a

vain attempt to get into the points. Quartararo, whose last win as well as Yamaha's was in the German MotoGP in 2022, looked comfortable but Marquez pounced as they went out for the 11th lap



Gresini Racing's Spanish rider Alex Marquez celebrates on the podium after winning the MotoGP Spanish Grand Prix at the Jerez racetrack in Jerez de la Frontera yesterday. (AFP)

sparking roars of delight from the

massed ranks of Spanish fans. Another of the legion of Spanish riders, Joan Mir, then bowed out, the Honda rider coming to grief on the 15th lap and unable to get back on the track, walking away in despair. Alex Marquez was blissfully unaware of the damage being done behind him, opening up a lead of nearly two seconds with eight laps

The former Moto2 and Moto3 world champion even had time to wave to the crowd as he raced round on the final lap before he took the chequered flag waved by tennis star Carlos Alcaraz.

On the sidelines of the race world champion Jorge Martin, whose defence of the title has been ruined by injury, is making progress after suffering serious injuries in a crash at the Qatar MotoGP. The 27-year-old has three broken ribs according to Angel Charte, MotoGP's head of the medical department, as cited by his team Aprilia. "The evolution is very positive," he said.

1. Alex Marquez (ESP/Ducati-Gresini) 40min 56.374sec. 2. Fabio Quartararo (FRA/Yamaha) at 1.561sec, 3. Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati) 2.217, 4. Maverick Vinales (ESP/KTM-Tech3) 3.678, 5. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/ Ducati-VR46) 7.267, 6. Brad Binder (RSA/KTM) 8.529, 7. Pedro Acosta (ESP/KTM) 9.764, 8. Ai Ogura (JPN/ Aprilia-Trackhouse) 10.923, 9. Enea Bastianini (ITA/KTM-Tech3) 15.879, 10. Luca Marini (ITA/Honda) 17.239 11. Johann Zarco (FRA/Honda-LCR) 17.784, 12. Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati) 20.890, 13, Alex Rins (ESP/Yamaha) 21.120, 14. Aleix Espargaro (ESP/Team HRC) 23.678, 15. Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/ Aprilia) 24.510, 16. Raul Fernandez (ESP/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 25.726, 17. Augusto Fernandez (ESP/ Yamaha-Pramac) 31.429, 18. Lorenzo Savadori (ITA/Aprilia)

Did not finish

Somkiat Chantra (THA/Honda-LCR), Jack Miller (AUS/Yamaha-Pramac), Joan Mir (ESP/Honda), Franco Morbidelli (ITA/Ducati-VR46), Fermín Aldeguer (ESP/ Ducati-Gresini)

Overall standings

1. Alex Marquez (ESP/Gresini Racing MotoGP) 140pts, 2. Marc Marquez (ESP/Ducati) 139, 3. Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati) 120, 4. Franco Morbidelli (ITA/ Ducati-VR46) 84, 5. Fabio Di Giannantonio (ITA/Ducati-VR46) 63, 6. Fabio Quartararo (FRA/ Yamaha) 50, 7. Johann Zarco (FRA/Honda-LCR) 43, 8, Ai Ogura (JPN/Aprilia-Trackhouse) 37. 9. Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Aprilia) 35, 10. Pedro Acosta (ESP/KTM) 33

Selected 25. Jorge Martín (ESP/Aprilia) O **CYCLING**

Pogacar wins Liege-Bastogne-Liege again

AFP Lieae. Belaium

lovenian cycling superstar Tadej Pogacar produced a stunning turn of pace to solo his way to his third Liege-Bastogne-Liege yesterday to close the spring classics season.

The 26-year-old road race world champion, who took off as expected on the Cote de la Redoute with 34km to go, finished a minute ahead of Italy's Giulio Ciccone and Ireland's Ben Healy.

His main rival, Belgian Remco Evenepoel, the winner in 2022 and 2023, was never in the hunt and finished more than three minutes behind the winner.

Pogacar has already done enough in his cycling career to be considered a legend but his third win, after 2021 and 2024, only underlines his remarkable record.

Yesterday's win means the UAE leader becomes only the second rider after Eddy Merckx, still considered to be the greatest of all time, to win the Tour of Flanders and Liege-Bastogne-Liege in the

The reigning world champion, who wrote a note in felt-tip pen on his race number in memory of the mother of his partner who died three years ago, is the first rider to finish on the podium of six consecutive Monuments.

"It's great to finish the first part of the season in such a way," said the three-time Tour de France winner. "It's been a perfect season so far and I'm very happy."

'Feeling good'

It was no great surprise to see Pogacar take off on the Cote de la Redoute with 34km to go, accelerating very early on the climb, but it was to find that no one was able to follow him, including Evenepoel who hung around in 30th position.

"His team controlled the race but all of a sudden all the Quick-Steps had disappeared," said a bemused Pogacar.

"I thought they were saving themselves for the Redoute but when I looked around I saw that he (Evenepoel) wasn't there. That also encouraged me to speed up."

The UAE leader pulled away with disconcerting ease, without giving the impression of forcing himself at all. "I decided to test my legs a bit

and see at the top if the gap was big enough to continue alone," he said. "I was feeling good so I decided to

With Pogacar gone, the focus of the race quickly shifted to the battle for second place.

A group of four chasers first emerged with Tom Pidcock, Healy, Ciccone and Julian Alaphilippe.



UAE Team Emirates rider Slovenian Tadej Pogacar crosses the finish line to win the men's elite race of the Liege-Bastogne-Liege one day cycling event, 252km from Liege, over Bastogne to Liege yesterday. (AFP)

and Alaphilippe dropped off and in the end, Ciccone beat Healy in the sprint, narrowly holding off the return of a big peloton of around 40 riders in the intense battle.

Umm Salal coach

mm Salal coach Patrice Beaumelle spoke to the media ahead of their 2024-2025 season Play-

Off match against Al Markhiya. "We have played many matches this season, but this particular match is the most important and difficult for us. It is crucial in every sense of the word," Beaumelle said

"We achieved two important victories in our last two league matches against Al Ahli and Al Arabi, and I see the team's performance improving steadily. We

will enter the Al Markhiya match

fully prepared, with the spirit and

ambition to advance and achieve

makes the match more difficult

and I hope it does not negatively

affect them during the match. We

are fully prepared and our focus is

focus on ourselves and play with

the same high spirit and enthusi-

asm that we showed in the league

matches. I have great confidence

in the players and their ability to

give their best to achieve victory

and ensure our survival in the First

Manse said: "This is a single, de-

Umm Salal player Antonio

Division," said Beaumelle.

"The important thing is that we

entirely on this decisive match.

"The pressure on the players

our desired goal.

expects tough battle

against Al Markhiya

FOOTBALL

Pogacar now has nine Monument wins - the five biggest classics on the calendar - to his name, joining Fausto Coppi, Sean Kelly and Costante Girardengo in third place on the all-time list.

Merckx holds the record with 19 Monuments, including five Liege-Bastogne-Liege wins.

Pogacar's victory in Liege rounded off an intense classics campaign in which the Slovenian shone on all fronts.

His earlier wins in the Strade Bianche, Tour of Flanders and Fleche Wallonne gives him four victories and he also had three other podiums, including Paris-Roubaix, in his seven races.

He will now take a break of over a month before returning to racing at the Criterium du Dauphine in June to prepare for his next major objective - the Tour de France in July where he will be aiming for a fourth victory.

Umm Salal coach Patrice

Beaumelle during a press

cisive match and there is no al-

ternative but to win. I have never

played against Al Markhiya, but

it is a special match and we will

do everything in our capacity to

achieve victory. We are training

with all our strength and focus in

preparation for this great chal-

lenge, and we realise that victory is

essential for us, especially in view

of the intense pressure we are feel-

ing. However, we are ready to fight

until the last second of the match

The match will be played Al Bayt

The kick-off time for the match

to achieve our goal?

Stadium today.

is set for 7pm

conference vesterday.

CRICKET

Pandya and Kohli lead Bengaluru to top of IPL table

All-rounder Pandya smashes an unbeaten 73 off 47 balls

New Delhi

ndian all-rounder Krunal Pandya starred with bat and ball as Royal Challengers Bengaluru beat Delhi Capitals by six wickets to top the Indian Premier League table yesterday.

Chasing 163 for victory, Bengaluru slipped to 26-3 before Virat Kohli and Pandya put together 119 runs to achieve their target with nine balls to spare at Delhi's Feroz Shah Kotla ground.

Delhi-born Kohli hit 51. The left-handed Pandya smashed an nbeaten 73 off 47 balls after be returned 1-28 with his left-arm spin in Bengaluru's seventh win of this season from 10 matches to reach the top of the 10-team

It was Bengaluru's sixth successive away win as they and Kohli search for their first IPL title since the league's inception in

Bowlers set up victory after Bhuvneshwar Kumar and fellow pace bowler Josh Hazlewood shared five wickets between them to restrict Delhi to 162-8.

Delhi skipper Axar Patel opened the bowling and struck two early blows to send back IPL debutant Jacob Bethel, out for 12, and Devdutt Padikkal, for a duck, two balls later.

Bengaluru skipper Rajat Patidar was then run out for six, but Kohli and Pandya waded through the overs with caution and quick running between the wickets.

Once set, Pandya unleashed his power with boundaries and



Royal Challengers Bengaluru's Virat Kohli (left) and Krunal Pandya bump their fists during the IPL match against Delhi Capitals in New Delhi yesterday. (AFP)

reached his fifty off 38 balls with a four off Axar.

Kohli hit his sixth half-ton as he went past Mumbai Indians batter Suryakumar Yadav (427) as the leading batsman of this season with 443 runs

He finally fell to Sri Lanka fast bowler Dushmantha Chameera before Pandya and Tim David, who hit an unbeaten 19 off five balls, took the team over the line.

Earlier, Bengaluru's Australian import Hazlewood struck first, taking the wicket of Abishek Porel in the fourth over after the opener had got Delhi off to a flying start with his 11-ball 28.

Delhi lost another wicket in the next over before Faf du Plessis, who hit 22 on his return from a groin injury he suffered earlier this month, and KL Rahul (41) steadied the innings. Pandya cut short Du Plessis' knock but Rahul stood firm on a sluggish pitch, putting on stands with Axar and then with Tristan Stubbs.

Axar was bowled by Hazlewood and Kumar got Rahul, but Stubbs kept up the charge as he smashed 34 off 18 balls. Kumar gave away just nine runs off his last two overs and took three wickets to return figures of 3-33.

Hazlewood, who starred in his team's previous win with figures of 4-33, leads this season's bowling chart with 18 wickets in 10 matches.

BRIEF SCORES

Royal Challengers Bengaluru **165 for 4** (Krunal 73*, Kohli 51, Axar 2-19) beat Delhi Capitals 162 for 8 (Rahul 41, Stubbs 34, Bhuvneshwar 3-33, Hazlewood 2-36) by 6 wickets

PREVIEW

Bangladesh aim to bounce back in second Zimbabwe Test

AFP Chittagong, Bangladesh

angladesh will look to bounce back in the second and final cricket Test against Zimbabwe starting in Chattogram today following a crushing defeat in the opener.

Bangladesh failed to prove their batting mettle as they were bundled out for under 200 runs in the first innings in the series opener at Sylhet, making it impossible for them to make a comeback.

In order to bolster their toporder batting, the hosts have recalled opener Anamul Haque who hit four centuries recently in the domestic circuit.

"I think we know that as a unit we didn't bat properly in the first innings," Bangladesh coach Phil Simmons said yesterday in Chattogram. "We put ourselves in problems. We want to play a brand of positive Test cricket, not just going for 200 runs in a day," he added.

Zimbabwe have been revelling in the success, with the victory ending their winless drought of four years in Tests.

"The win in Sylhet brought a good vibe, a good atmosphere, and also belief," Zimbabwe captain Craig Ervine said at the pre-match press conference. "It's a nice place to be at the moment."

Pace bowler Blessing Muzarabani was the star of the show for Zimbabwe, bagging a nine-wicket haul in the match.

Bangladeshi batters failed to negotiate the pace and bounce



Bangladesh coach Phil Simmons

he generated on Sylhet's pacefriendly surface. However, the pitch in Chattogram is expected to be more friendly to the spinners.

In view of this, Bangladesh have included uncapped left-arm spinner Tanvir Islam in the squad.

Four of the top five bowlers in Chattogram are spinners - three of whom are in Bangladesh's current setup - a clear indication of what spinners are capable of at this venue. "We found the nets a little bit slower. Maybe as the game goes on, spin will play a bigger part in this Test." Ervine said.

Mehidy Hasan Miraz, who bagged 10 wickets in the first match, would lead Bangladesh's spin attack along with Taijul Islam.

Zimbabwe would rely on leftarm spinner Wellington Masakadza, and off-spinner Wessly Madhevere.

Bangladesh have played 25 Tests at this venue, losing seven and drawing 16, whereas Zimbabwe lost their only previous Test here

by 186 runs about a decade ago. The two teams have faced each other in 19 Tests, with eight wins each, while the other three match-

es ended in a draw.

FOCUS

Bumrah claims 4-22 as Mumbai beat Lucknow

AFP Mumbai

ace bowler Jasprit Bumrah returned figures of 4-22 to lead IPL heavyweights Mumbai Indians to their fifth successive win with a 54-run hammering of Lucknow Super Giants yesterday. Five-time champions Mumbai posted

215-7 after South Africa's Ryan Rickleton, a left-hand wicketkeeper-batsman, hit 58 and Suryakumar Yadav hammered 54 at the Wankhede Stadium. All the bowlers contributed, including Eng-

land's Will Jacks who took two wickets in one over, as Mumbai bowled out Lucknow for 161, pushing them up to second in the 10-team table in the T20 tournament. It was Mumbai's 150th victory in the Indian

Premier League, the first time for any team in the league. Bumrah stood out after he dismissed Aiden

Markram to go past former quick Lasith Malinga's record of 170 IPL wickets to become Mumbai's leading bowler.

Bumrah, who has returned from a back injury that made him miss India's Champions



Mumbai Indians' Jasprit Bumrah (right) and captain Hardik Pandya gesture during the IPL match against Lucknow Super Giants. (AFP)

Trophy title win in Dubai last month, now has 174 wickets. Lucknow opener Mitchell Marsh and Nicholas Pooran hit back with a flurry of boundaries in their breezy partnership of 42.

Jacks got Pooran out for 27 with his off-spin and struck two balls later to send back Lucknow skipper Rishabh Pant, caught out for four while the left-hander attempted a reverse

Wicketkeeper-batsman Pant, who was brought by Lucknow at an all-time auction record of \$3.21mn in November, has flopped with the bat, scoring just 110 runs in nine in-New Zealand left-arm quick Trent Boult

took down Australia's Marsh for 34 and later got Ayush Badoni out on 35 to derail the chase and returned figures of 3-20. Wickets kept tumbling and Bumrah re-

player David Miller out for 24 to shut out Luc-The batters set up victory after the lefthanded Rickleton began quickly with a rush of boundaries despite losing his opening partner

turned to take three in one including impact

and former captain Rohit who fell to returning speedster Mayank Yadav's slower ball for 12. Rickleton countered the spin threat to hit back in a 55-run second-wicket stand with Jacks, who hit 29, but finally fell to leg-spinner Digvesh Rathi. Jacks hit a few boundaries be-

BRIEF SCORES Mumbai Indians 215 for 7 (Rickelton 58, Survakumar 54, Mayank 2-40, Avesh 2-42) beat Lucknow Super Giants 161 (Badoni 35. Marsh 34, Bumrah 4-22, Boult 3-20) by 54

fore being bowled by Prince Yadav.



ATHLETICS

Assefa, Sawe top London Marathon fields

Reuters London

thiopia's Tigst Assefa shattered the women's-only world record in winning the 45th London Marathon yesterday, while Kenyan Sebastian Sawe made a brilliant tactical decision to demolish a stacked men's field en route to victory.

The 28-year-old Assefa, silver medallist in the event at last year's Paris Olympics, pulled away from Joyciline Jepkosgei of Kenya over the final couple of kilometres after the two had set a blistering early pace.

She crossed the finish line in two hours, 15 minutes and 50 seconds, beating the previous women's-only record of 2:16:16 set last year in London by Kenyan Peres Jepchirchir, and said the blazing London sun helped, with temperatures approaching 20 degrees Celsius by race's end.

"Last year, I did have some problems with the cold," said Assefa,



Ethiopia's Tigst Assefa crosses the line to win the women's race at the 2025 London Marathon yesterday. **Right:** Kenya's Sabastian Sawe wins the men's race at the London Marathon. (AFP)

who was second in the 2024 London race. "My hamstring tightened up towards the end of the race. This year, the weather suited me really well, and that's why I'm really pleased with the way the race went. I was second here last year, and to win here this year is very special"

Jepkosgei, 31, crossed second in 2:18:44.

The sizzling early pace was too much for reigning Olympic marathon champion and 2024 London winner Sifan Hassan of the Netherlands, who fell back off the leaders around the halfway mark en route to finishing third in 2:19:00.

The 29-year-old Sawe, who made a stunning marathon debut by winning in Valencia in December, pulled away from the lead pack when the others reached for bottles to refuel with about 10 kilometres to go, on his way to crossing in

"So happy, this is my first time

to win a major marathon, I was well prepared for this race, and that's why it has become easy for me to win," Sawe said.

"It does now give me hope that my marathoning future will be so important to me, and it will be so easy to me."

asy to me."
Jacob Kiplimo of Uganda, who

shattered the world half-marathon record in February, was second in his marathon debut in 2:03:37, while last year's winner Alexander Mutiso Munyao of Kenya was third in a photo finish with Abdi Nageeye of the Netherlands, both crossing

in 2:04:20.

It was a Swiss double in the wheelchair events, with Marcel Hug racing to his sixth London marathon title in 1:25:25 and Catherine Debrunner winning her third women's title in four years in 1:34:18, missing her own world

record by two seconds.

A world record 56,000 runners were expected to participate in the 42.195-kilometre race that started at Greenwich Park, snaked along the River Thames before finishing on The Mall.

Among them were Britain's Alex Yee, Olympic gold medallist last year in the triathlon, who was a respectable 14th in his marathon debut, and Eilish McColgan, who set a Scottish record of 2:24:25 to finish eighth in her debut at the distance.

TENNIS

Zverev advances after tough win, Rublev crashes

World No.1 Aryna Sabalenka beats Elise Mertens in three sets

AFP Madrid

orld number two Alexander Zverev was taken to the limit by Alejandro Davidovich Fokina in a gripping Madrid Open third round battle yesterday, progressing 2-6, 7-6 (7/3),

The Spaniard, roared on by the partisan home crowd, broke in the first and third games to claim the first set with ease.

Zverev fought to get back on serve after falling a break behind at the start of the third, and saved two break points in the ninth game which would have left Davidovich Fokina serving for the

The German won the tie break and was stronger in the third set, breaking for a 5-4 lead.

However serving for the match, Zverev was broken to love by the in-form Davidovich Fokina, ranked 29th, but it was his last hurrah as the top seed dominated the second tie-break.

"The first set wasn't my best tennis, but in sport it can change very quickly, I was down a set and a break but I kept fighting and I'm very happy for the win," Zverev told TVE.

"It was a very tough win... Alex was playing unbelievable tennis, the best tennis of his life and I am happy I am through."

The two-time Madrid champion will face Francisco Cerundolo or Francisco Comesana in the last 16, depending who emerges triumphant from the all-Argentine

Earlier Andrey Rubley's Madrid Open title defence hit the rocks in a defeat by Alexander Bublik.

Bublik beat Rublev 6-4, 0-6, 6-4 for his 10th win over a top 10 player, although the Russian is set to sink to 17th after his surprise exit in the Spanish capital.

Kazakh Bublik, ranked 75th, secured a break in the first game





Aryna Sabalenka celebrates after winning her match against Belgium's Elise Mertens at the Madrid Open yesterday. (Reuters)

of the deciding set and held on to his advantage.

He will face American Ben Shelton, seeded 12th, or Jakub Mensik in the last 16.

On Saturday record 24-time Grand Slam winner Novak Djokovic crashed out, while home favourite Carlos Alcaraz pulled out injured earlier in the week.

In the women's draw last year's defeated finalist Aryna Sabalenka

fought back to beat Elise Mertens

and reach the last 16.

Women's world number one Sabalenka progressed 3-6, 6-2, 6-1 against Belgian Mertens, ranked 26th.

"It was one of those days I didn't feel my best I got super emotional in the beginning of the first set, with myself in a tough situation," the Belarusian told TVE. "I'm really happy I was able

to bring such a high level in the second and third set."

She will face Peyton Stearns or Rebeka Masarova in the fourth round. Sabalenka lost a gripping final

against Iga Swiatek in Madrid last year, and the Pole also eased into the last 16 on Saturday, offering hope of a repeat. "I'm trying to take it step by

"I'm trying to take it step by step and I really hope to make it to the final and take revenge," added Sabalenka.

There were surprise eliminations for world number three Jessica Pegula and Jasmine Paolini.

Japan's Moyuka Uchijima, ranked 56th, earned the biggest win of her career with a 6-3, 6-2 victory over the American, breaking her serve on five occasions.

Italian world number six Paolini was defeated in straight sets by Maria Sakkari, 6-2, 6-1.

The Greek, ranked 82nd, secured her first top 10 win in over a year with a confident display as she surges back into form, leaving Paolini to recompose herself ahead of the Italian Open.

London hoping to host 2029 World Athletics Championships

London: London hopes to host the 2029 World Athletics Championships, UK Sport, the Mayor of London and Athletic Ventures announced yesterday ahead of the 45th running of the London Marathon. A formal expression of interest will be submitted to World Athletics in September, with the bid contingent on securing £45mn (\$59.91mn) in government support.

A feasibility study projects a record-breaking economic and social impact of over £400mn, UK Athletics, Mayor Sadiq Khan and Athletic Ventures said in a statement yesterday.

Athletic Ventures is a joint venture between UK Athletics (UKA), Great Run Company and London Marathon Events.

London followed up on the 2012 Olympics by hosting a successful world championships in 2017, with sell-out crowds for all the evening sessions at the Olympic Stadium.

"London 2017 showed the world what this city and this country can

do," said UKA President Denise Lewis, who was part of the team that secured the 2017 bid.

"It was an incredible example of how we can unite behind a vision – full stadiums, clobal energy, and a lesting impact. I know we can do it

full stadiums, global energy, and a lasting impact. I know we can do it again in 2029."

Yesterday's London Marathon provided the springboard for the announcement, with 56,000 runners expected to take part. The bid for 2029 is part of a wider vision to redefine the delivery of major international events in the UK, said Lewis, the Olympic heptath-

lon gold medallist in 2000 in Sydney. Birmingham in England has been selected to host the 2026 European Athletics Championships.

MOTORSPORT

Dominant Rovanpera romps home in Rally Islas Canarias

AFP Las Palmas, Spain

wo-time world champion
Kalle Rovanpera eased
to a dominant victory on
the asphalt roads of the
Rally Islas Canarias yesterday, the
fourth of 14 rounds of the WRC

World Rally Championship.
The Finn won 15 of the 18 special stages, allowing himself to ease off on the final day to secure his first victory since the Rally of Chile last September.

He also won the final race, the Power Stage, on Sunday to score additional points in the championship.

Still just 24 years old, it was Rovanpera's 16th WRC victory as he finished more than 53 seconds ahead of French driver Sebastien Ogier, with Toyota taking the top four places. It marks an uptick in form after an indifferent start which saw his best return a fourth-place in Monte Carlo.

"It wasn't the best start to the season but I'm very comfortable in these conditions and we're back on top now," said Rovanpera, who ran only a few events last season after winning back-to-back championships in 2022 and 2023,

Welshman Elfyn Evans finished third to retain the lead in the world championship with 109 points, ahead of Rovanpera (66) and reigning world champion Thierry Neuville (59), who could do no better than seventh in his Hy

Eight time world champion Ogier, who is only competing in a few races, is fourth in the standings thanks to his victory in the season-opening Monte Carlo Rally, the only other race he has participated in this season.



Kalle Rovanpera of Finland (right) and his co-driver Jonne Halttunen of Finland from the team Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT hold their trophies as they celebrate after winning the World Rally Championship (WRC) Rally Islas Canarias on the island of Gran Canaria in Spain's Canary Islands yesterday. (AFP)

No world record but Warholm shows ominous early season hurdles form

Xiamen, China: Norwegian hurdling great Karsten Warholm surprised even himself with how good he felt in his first run-out of the season at the Xiamen Diamond League on Saturday

The 29-year-old was all smiles after taking two tenths of a second off his own world best time by clocking 33.05 seconds to win the rarely-run 300 metres hurdles.

"I was a little bit surprised over how easy my legs were feeling out of the last bend," Warholm said at Egret Stadium.

"Of course, you feel it a little bit in the end, but after the last hurdle I managed to really push in the last 45 metres. I'm pretty happy."
Warholm set his previous world mark of 33.26

in 2021 a month before claiming the 400m world record, which he again improved a few weeks later to win gold at the Tokyo Olympics.

"That's the level I am pushing for and that is where I want to be," he said of the chase for world records. "So this at least shows that the speed over the hurdles is there ... I knew it was in my body to perform that, but you obviously have to do it."

His time will not yet count as a world record. Although World Athletics gave the 300m hurdles official recognition last month, it is waiting to see how popular it is before granting it full status.

Warholm might be able to help with that. He

plans to run the distance again in the fifth leg of the Diamond League circuit on home soil at the Bislett Games in Oslo in June. "If we're running again in Bislett and all the guys will be there, we'll push it under the

guys will be there, we'll push it under the 33-second line, I'm pretty sure," he said. The "guys" are the other two fastest men of all time in the 400m hurdles behind the Norwegian-American Rai Benjamin, who took Warholm's Olympic title off him in Paris last year, and Brazilian Alison dos Santos, who won the 2022 world title.

Warholm finished seventh in that world championships final in Oregon after an injury-plagued season, but won the title back the following year in Budapest.

PREMIER LEAGUE

Imperious Liverpool smash Tottenham 5-1 to claim title

ARNE SLOT'S SIDE WIN RECORD-EOUALLING 20TH LEAGUE TITLE

AFP Liverpoo

iverpool demolished Tottenham 5-1 to clinch the Premier League title at an Impassioned Anfield yesterday, sealing a record-equalling 20th English top-flight crown.

Arne Slot's men stormed back after conceding a surprise early goal to dominate the first half as the decibel level soared among the 60,000-plus crowd.

Liverpool, who can no longer be caught by second-placed Arsenal, are now level with bitter rivals Manchester United as the jointmost successful club in English top-flight history.

Slot's men started on the front foot at an expectant Anfield after a stirring rendition of club anthem "You'll Never Walk Alone" in the warm spring sunshine.

Mohamed Salah had an early sighter and Cody Gakpo went close with a spectacular overhead kick but Tottenham briefly threatened to become party poopers when Dominic Solanke powered home a header from a James Maddison corner in the 12th minute.

But Liverpool were level just four minutes later when Luis Diaz converted Dominik Szoboszlai's cross from close range. The offside flag went up but VAR awarded the goal. The momentum was now all with Liverpool and the home side took the lead in the 24th minute when Alexis Mac Allister thundered the ball home from the 18yard line past the flying Guglielmo

Now the party was well and tru-



Liverpool's Mohamed Salah takes a selfie with fans after winning the Premier League title yesterday. (Reuters)

ly started and Gakpo made it 3-1. slamming a shot into the bottom corner after Spurs failed to clear.

Tottenham manager Postecoglou had made eight changes from the team that lost to Nottingham Forest last week as he prioritises the semi-finals of the Europa League and they now had a mountain to climb.

The Liverpool fans - deprived of celebrating the 2020 Premier League trophy due to Covid restrictions, ran through their full repertoire of songs as their team pushed for a fourth goal in the second half. Top-scorer Salah scored the goal the crowd craved, collect-

ing Szoboszlai's pass before cutting in and blasting his shot into the bottom corner. He celebrated by grabbing a fan's phone before

taking a selfie in front of the Kop. Deafening cheers of "We're going to win the league" and "We shall not be moved" rang out.

Liverpool had a fifth when Spurs defender Destiny Udogie poked the ball past his own goalkeeper from close range with about 20 minutes to go as the game turned into a procession.

As the game went into added time the club's anthem rang out again as scarves were held aloft and the final whistle elicited a

thunderous roar. "It was clear we couldn't lose this game," said Slot.

"Everyone on the bus said there's no way we're going to lose this game. They always find a way to win. Incredibly proud, not only of the players but the people standing here, sport directors, my staff members, we should give them a big round of applause.

"Let's forget it's the second in 35 years, it's the second in five years (second since 2020)."

The win leaves Liverpool on 82 points, 15 clear of nearest challengers Arsenal with just four games remaining.

Tottenham are a miserable 16th



Liverpool's Dutch manager Arne Slot celebrates after winning the Premier League match against Tottenham Hotspur at Anfield in Liverpool yesterday. (AFP)

in the Premier League table after their 19th defeat of the season, putting Postecoglou under enor-

mous pressure. Tens of thousands of fans swarmed around Anfield in the build-up to kick-off in anticipation of Liverpool's coronation, setting off flares as the home team bus arrived. Flags and scarves saying "Liverpool 20-time Champions" were on sale from stalls outside the ground. At the start of the campaign, Pep Guardiola's Manchester City were favourites to extend their dynastic Premier League reign and make it five titles in a row but their form collapsed.

Arsenal emerged as their closest challengers but they drew too many games, failing to take advantage of the rare Liverpool slip-ups. It was feared Liverpool's players would need time to adapt to the methods of Slot, who replaced Jurgen Klopp last June following the German's departure after nine trophy-filled years at Anfield.

But the former Feyenoord boss has sailed serenely through the season despite relentless speculation over the futures of three of his biggest stars - Salah, captain Virgil van Dijk and Trent Alexander-Arnold. Both Salah and Van Dijk have now signed two-year extensions, though England defender Alexander-Arnold is believed likely to be on the verge of a move to Real Madrid.

FOOTBALL

Man City sink Forest to reach third successive FA Cup final

London

anchester City will face Crystal Palace in their third successive FA Cup final after cruising to a 2-0 win against Nottingham Forest at Wembley yesterday.

Pep Guardiola's side took an early lead through Rico Lewis and Josko Gvardiol's second-half goal sealed a comfortable semi-final success. City can look forward to a showdown with Palace at Wembley on May 17 after the Eagles won 3-0 against Aston Villa in the other semi-final on Saturday.

Their 14th FA Cup final appearance gives City a chance to win the competition for the eighth time and the third since Guardiola arrived in 2016. City lost to Manchester United in last season's FA Cup final after beating their cross-town rivals in the 2023 showpiece. Guardiola is hoping to salvage a turbulent season by lifting the FA Cup and qualifying for the Champions League via a top five finish in the Premier League. City, who sit fourth in the league with four games left, will go into the final as favourites after thrashing Palace 5-2 at the Etihad Stadium earlier in April.

But nothing has come easy for City this season and Guardiola will need no reminding of that after their four-year reign as English champions was officially ended by Liverpool's win against Tottenham at the exact moment the final whistle blew at Wembley.

Forest, only two points adrift of third-placed Newcastle with a game in hand, have to lick their wounds and focus on their bid to reach the Champions League for the first time since 1980-81. It was City's 28th trip to Wembley since it reopened in 2007 and just Forest's second. So it was no surprise the Forest hordes who made the trip were far more vocal as kick-off approached, while swathes of empty seats stood out in the City sections. But it wasn't long before City's fans made themselves heard as they stormed into the



Manchester City's Josko Gyardiol (left) celebrates scoring their second goal with teammate Ruben Dias vesterday. (Reuters)

lead in the second minute. Guardiola had claimed this week that City will be much stronger next season because they have finally rediscovered their spirit and

The City boss was encouraged by his players' wild celebrations of Bernardo Silva's early goal in a crucial 2-1 win against Villa on Wednesday and once again they made a fast start. After a probing spell of City passing, Lewis was given far too much space on the edge of the Forest area and he took full advantage with a fierce drive into the bottom corner.

City's pressing was too intense for Forest to handle and Nico O'Reilly waltzed through the Forest defence for a blast that fizzed just wide.

With Neco Williams suspended and Ola Aina and Ryan Yates injured, Forest boss Nuno Espirito Santo had gambled on 18-year-old Zach Abbott at rightback, while Anthony Elanga was surprisingly left on the bench. For much of the first half, Nuno's moves backfired, with Abbott - who had played just 60 minutes this season - repeatedly exposed by City's attacks and Forest lacking a cutting edge without Elanga.

MOTORSPORT

Al-Marri clinches Qatar Free-Style Championship



Director General of the QRC Sheikh Jabor bin Khalid al-Thani poses with the winners of the fourth and final round of the Qatar Free-Style Championship.

By Sports Reporter

aoud al-Marri emerged champion in the fourth and final round of the Qatar Free-Style Championship for the 2024-2025 season.

The championship, under the patronage of chairman of Qatar Racing Club (QRC) Sheikh Khalid bin Hamad al-Thani, saw fierce competition.

The round kicked off on Thursday with registration and technical inspection, featuring broad participation with 44 contestants.

The organising committee had set several conditions and requirements for participants, some concerning the vehicles - such as the mandatory installation of a roll cage and secure battery placement - and others concerning the drivers themselves, mainly focused on safety elements like wearing sports gear, helmets, and having a functioning seatbelt, among others.

As per the competition format, each participant was given one opportunity to enter the track and perform five manoeuvres: drifting, reverse movement, the loop manoeuvre, and



Action from the final round of the Qatar Free-Style Championship.

the "Rios" manoeuvre. These were to be completed within a total of four minutes. The faster the participant completed these manoeuvres, the more points they received.

Additionally, a score was awarded for the overall style and execution of the performance.

The competition lasted for more than four hours and concluded with al-Marri winning his first championship title and achieving his first podium finish. His previous best result was a fourth-place finish in the opening round.

Abdullah al-Qahtani, the winner of the previous two rounds, came second.

Al-Qahtani was the only competitor to finish all the season's rounds on the podium, having placed third in the opening round. Third place in this round went

to Rashid al-Banna, winner of the opening round. On the other hand, Mohamed al-Mohannadi, who had finished second in the past three rounds, missed out on the podium this time, finishing fourth ahead of Ahmed al-Banna, who finished fifth.

At the conclusion of the competition, Sheikh Jabor bin Khalid al-Thani, Director General of Qatar Racing Club, crowned the top three winners on the podium.

With that, the fourth and final round of the Free-Style Championship — the club's final event of the 2024/2025 season – came to

Barcelona edge Real Madrid in extra-time to win Copa del Rey final

Barcelona players celebrate with their trophies after winning the Spanish Cup final against Real Madrid at La Cartuja stadium in Seville. Barcelona defender Jules Kounde struck deep in extratime to decide a gripping Copa del Rey Clasico final earning his side a 3-2 win over rivals Real Madrid. The Catalans, aiming for a quadruple this season, won the first major trophy of Hansi Flick's reign as coach and a record-extending 32nd Spanish cup in dramatic fashion. (AFP)

