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# GULF TIMES SPORT



CRICKET

Jones blasts USA  
to debut T20  
World Cup win  
over Canada

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FRENCH OPEN

# Alcaraz books quarter-final rematch with Tsitsipas

Swiatek demolishes Potapova in 40 minutes to reach quarter-finals, Jabeur ends Tauson's run

AFP  
Paris

Carlos Alcaraz produced his best display of the tournament to line up a quarter-final rematch with Stefanos Tsitsipas at the French Open, while Iga Swiatek ramped up her bid for a third successive Roland Garros title with a 40-minute blitz yesterday.

Alcaraz says he feels much more like himself in Paris after an injury-hit build-up saw him sidelined by a sore forearm for almost a month.

His 6-3, 6-3, 6-1 win over Canadian 21st seed Auger-Aliassime suggested he is rounding into top form, sending an ominous signal to his rivals as he made the last eight for the third year in succession.

The Spaniard pumped 34 winners past Auger-Aliassime as the persistent rain which heavily disrupted the first week of the tournament finally relented, allowing matches on the two main courts to go ahead without the need for their retractable roofs.

"I'm really happy with my performance. I think I played a really high level of tennis," said Alcaraz, beaten by eventual champion Novak Djokovic in the semi-finals last year.

"The most important thing is to believe in myself. It doesn't matter that I don't have too many matches on my back and that I didn't come with a lot of rhythm."

"My game is getting better and better," he added. "My confidence is getting higher. Every practice that I'm doing or every day that I'm here in Roland Garros, I'm feeling better and better."

Alcaraz moves on to play Tsitsipas after the 2021 Roland Garros runner-up fended off Italy's Matteo Arnaldi 3-6, 7-6 (7/4), 6-2, 6-2, the turning point coming in the second set when he saved four set points.

"It was one of the craziest comebacks I've had," said ninth



Spain's Carlos Alcaraz Garfia plays a backhand return to Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime during their match on day eight of the French Open at the Roland Garros Complex in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

seed Tsitsipas. "That game when I broke (down 5-3 in the second set) was the biggest pleasure I've experienced in tennis for a long time."

Alcaraz boasts a 5-0 career head-to-head record over Tsitsipas with three wins on clay, including a straight-sets victory in the French Open quarter-finals a year ago.

"He has said in the past he likes playing against me, so I hope he gets to like it a little bit less this time," said Tsitsipas.

Second seed Jannik Sinner has yet to drop a set through three rounds and takes on the last remaining Frenchman in the draw, Corentin Moutet, in the night session.

Australian Open champion Sinner has lost only two matches this year and will replace Djokovic as world number one if he reaches the final.

Sinner withdrew from Madrid with a hip problem and then skipped Rome, a precaution which appears to be paying off.

"I feel good. The hip at the moment feels good," he said. "Me and my team, we made a very good job to be in the position to play here."

Earlier in the day, women's world number one Swiatek demolished Russia's Anastasia Potapova 6-0, 6-0, dropping only 10 points in the shortest completed match of her career.

"I was really focused and in the zone. I wasn't looking at the score

so I continued working on my game," said Swiatek.

"It went pretty quickly... pretty weird."

The Pole's brisk victory came on the same Court Philippe Chatrier where Djokovic had completed his third round win at 3:07am, the latest finish to a French Open match after more than four hours and five sets.

Swiatek, who saved a match point against Naomi Osaka in the second round, is a red-hot favourite to lift the Coupe Suzanne Lenglen and become only the fourth woman to win four Roland Garros titles in the Open era.

She next plays Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova, the fifth seed who ended the run of

Serbian qualifier Olga Danilovic in straight sets.

US Open champion Coco Gauff made light work of Elisabetta Cocciaretto, sweeping past the world number 51 from Italy 6-1, 6-2.

Cocciaretto had taken down two seeds to reach the last 16 of a major for the first time but was no match for third seed Gauff, the 2022 French Open runner-up.

The American advances to a quarter-final with three-time Grand Slam finalist Ons Jabeur, who beat Denmark's Clara Tauson 6-4, 6-4.

World number nine Jabeur broke the 72nd-ranked Tauson's service in a tight third game and nearly dropped her own right afterwards in a marathon 26-point



Poland's Iga Swiatek celebrates after winning her match against Russia's Anastasia Potapova in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

game but held firm and went on to clinch the first set.

With a superb passing shot, the 29-year-old Tunisian immediately took the lead in the second set but could not hold it and had to wait until the fifth game to break again as Tauson hit two mistimed unforced errors.

Tauson, who defeated 2017 Roland Garros champion Jelena Ostapenko in the second round and former runner-up Sofia Kenin in the third, nearly drew level in the 10th game but Jabeur kept the upper hand to wrap up victory in little over an hour and a half.

Jabeur waved her arms and bounced up and down while singing along with fans during her post-match interview on court, later saying that the song was a mix of Arabic, French and Italian that she loosely translated as "it's incredible, step by step to the final".

Jabeur, targeting a first Grand Slam title after finishing runner-up twice at Wimbledon and at the US Open last year, will face world number three Gauff in the quarter-finals.

"It's going to be difficult. She's such a fighter," Jabeur said of the American. "I know I can bother her also but it's going to be a great match."

BOTTOMLINE

# Djokovic 3am finish sparks health fears in tennis

AFP  
Paris

Novak Djokovic believes "things could have been handled differently" after winning his French Open third round match at 3:07am (0107 GMT) yesterday as US star Coco Gauff warned that players' health was being put at risk.

Defending champion and 24-time Grand Slam title winner Djokovic came from two sets to one down to defeat Lorenzo Musetti 7-5, 6-7 (6/8), 2-6, 6-3, 6-0 in a clash which only started just before 10:45pm (2045 GMT) on Saturday. It was easily the latest finish to a French Open tie and came after organisers squeezed in extra matches onto the two main show courts, which both have retractable roofs, to counter the scheduling chaos caused by a seventh day of rain in Paris.

"I don't want to get into this debate," said Djokovic initially before adding: "I think certain things could have been handled differently. "There is a certain beauty

in winning the match at three in the morning if it was the last of the tournament, but this isn't the case."

Djokovic's four-hour 29-minute victory allowed the 37-year-old world number one to equal Roger Federer's record of 369 Grand Slam match wins.

"Physically, I really went to my limits to win this match. When you play rallies of more than 20 shots, at two in the morning... Who plays at two in the morning?" he added.

"We play few matches in our life at this time. The conditions were very heavy, it was very cold. You didn't have many free points behind your serve."

Djokovic must now recover to face Argentinian 23rd seed Francisco Cerundolo in the round of 16 today after avoiding what would have been his earliest exit at the French Open in 15 years. "I definitely think it's not healthy," said women's world number three and US Open champion Gauff.

"It may be not fair for those who have to play late because it does ruin your schedule.

"I definitely think for the health

and safety of the players it would be in the sport's best interest to try to avoid those matches starting after a certain time."

Gauff explained that a 3:00am finish didn't mean the end of a player's commitment for the day as a match is usually followed by physical recuperation and media duties. "So that's probably not going to bed until 5:00 at the earliest, maybe 6:00, and even 7:00," said the American.

Women's world number one Iga Swiatek said night sessions need to start earlier for the sake of the public as well as players.

"I don't know if the fans are watching these matches if they have to go to work next day or something when the matches are finishing at 2:00 or 3:00am," said the defending champion.

"It's not up to us. We need to accept anything that is going to come to us."

In stark contrast to Djokovic's marathon efforts, Swiatek reached the quarter-finals on Sunday with a 6-0, 6-0 demolition of Anastasia Potapova in just 40 minutes on the same Court Philippe Chatrier.

Despite his reluctance to play late into the night, Djokovic's stamina and tenacity were widely praised.

"Djokovic is like LeBron James at 39, he fights until the end, he gives everything and he loves it, it's incredible to see," John McEnroe told NBC.

"I'm not kidding, this guy looked better physically than he did at the start of the match."

The Australian Open in Melbourne holds the Grand Slam record for the latest finish – in 2008, Lleyton Hewitt and Marcos Baghdatis played a match until 4:34am. At the US Open in New York, the record is 2:50am in 2022 when Carlos Alcaraz defeated Jannik Sinner. Wimbledon operates a strict 11pm curfew with the 2012 clash between Andy Murray and Baghdatis ending at a more gentle 11:02pm.

Serbia's Novak Djokovic reacts during his French Open match against Italy's Lorenzo Musetti at the Roland Garros Complex in Paris yesterday. (AFP)





FOCUS

# T20 party finally commences in the US

AFP  
Dallas

“Cricket? Erm, is it a team game?” asked the slightly puzzled Uber driver taking his passenger towards the Grand Prairie Cricket Stadium in Texas on Saturday.

Had the driver been one of the curious American-born spectators who ventured inside the venue and witnessed the USA's first ever T20 World Cup game - a pulsating seven-wicket victory over Canada - he would have had the answer.

Yes, team game it is, but in the shortest form it is also one that can be largely won by the brilliance of an individual.

For the USA's maiden victory, in front of a passionate crowd inside the purpose built, 7,000 capacity home of Major League Cricket, that individual was Aaron Jones.

Jones' unbeaten 94 of 40 balls, featuring 14 boundaries, 10 of them sixes, with the stadium PA blasting out Miley Cyrus's "Party in the USA" after the biggest hits, transformed what could have been a very low key American debut in elite cricket into a spectacular celebration.

"Especially because America is not really a 'cricketing' country! I wanted to win the first game of the

tournament for our fans and we did that," a smiling Jones said after the game.

Now the USA must prepare for a much bigger test of their credentials in the sport's elite, when they take on Pakistan, at the same venue, on Thursday.

#### Converting Americans?

But there is a bigger context to this tournament for the co-hosts because as much as organiser's play down the attempt to convert American sports fans to the pleasures of the old game, part of the whole idea of holding the biennial tournament in the USA is to establish some firmer roots for the sport here.

There were two things to note about the crowd at Grand Prairie - as expected the majority of spectators were drawn from the Indian community in Texas but as they showed throughout, they are fervent backers of the national team of their adopted country.

Every one of New York born but Barbados-raised Jones' sixes was greeted with a massive roar and the final one, to seal victory, set off wild celebrations in the stands.

The second element was that, scattered among those Indian-heritage fans were local Americans who have, to a greater or lesser degree, been won over by the game.



General view inside the stadium during the ICC Men's T20 Cricket World Cup match between USA and Canada at Grand Prairie Cricket Stadium in Dallas, Texas. (AFP)

Sean Fortner, who drove three hours from Houston with his family and friends, was attending his first ever match but said he had watched many games on television after studying Indian society and culture at University.

"I watched it for a long time, trying to figure it all out," he told

AFP, "Finally I got one of my Indian friends to explain all the rules to me and I just got hooked on it".

So much so that Fortner even made a seven-minute video explainer that he shared with his companions before they made the trip to the game.

Another Texan first-time fan

Ryan Ubl from Dallas, was also at his first game.

"I got into it really during the ODI World Cup in India. I worked with a bunch of people from India and they were very enthusiastic about it all and so I watched a bit of it and tickets weren't so expensive, so here I am," he said.

Ubl is a baseball fan and knows there are limits to how far cricket could go in the USA but thinks there is a future beyond this tournament.

"Obviously I don't think it'll ever eclipse baseball but it could carve out its own little niche," he said.

Fortner agrees even if he knows the sporting mainstream remains far away.

"Just watching how hard it has been for soccer to get a (foothold) when half the people that live here love soccer already, it's a hard hill to climb. But it can catch on, we know fandom and we get loyal," he said.

"We're not going to get a lot of fans but we'll get loyal fans," he said.

Jones, still buzzing from his spectacular innings was understandably in no mood for measured considerations even with Pakistan and top-ranked India to come.

His accent may be Bajan but the attitude and rhetoric was all-American.

"We want to play fearless cricket. We want to play hard cricket. We want to play smart cricket and I think we're going to go into the Pakistan game with the same mindset. We want to play fearless cricket regardless of who we play against," he said.

## MATCH REPORT

# Jones blasts USA to debut T20 World Cup win

A SUPERB KNOCK BY AARON JONES AS HOSTS BEAT CANADA

AFP  
Dallas

Aaron Jones struck an explosive unbeaten 94 from 40 balls as the USA beat Canada by seven wickets in the opening game of the T20 World Cup yesterday.

Jones, born in New York but raised in Barbados, bludgeoned the Canadian attack, smashing ten sixes as he totally changed the momentum of the game in a superb 131-run third wicket partnership with Andries Gous.

Jones took full control in the 13th over when he went on the attack against the slow left-arm of Canada captain, Saad Bin Zafar, smashing three sixes in one over.

Then the game shifted decisively towards the Americans when Jeremy Gordon's medium-fast seamers went for 33 off one disastrous over, with the Canadian adding to his misery with three wides and two no-balls, including a no-ball that cancelled out a potential dismissal of Gous.

Former South Africa Under-19 batsman Gous made 65 off 46 balls before he holed out to deep midwicket off Nikhil Dutta, ending a partnership that had taken the Americans from struggling at 42-2 in the seventh over to close to their finish line at 173-3 in the 16th.

Corey Anderson, the former New Zealand all-rounder, came in to accompany Jones who fittingly ended the contest with his 10th sixth of the night.

It was the perfect start to the tournament for the co-hosts, with the crowd at the compact Grand Prairie Stadium roaring with delight as Jones smashed the Canadian attack around the



Aaron Jones of USA celebrates winning the ICC Men's T20 Cricket World Cup match against Canada at Grand Prairie Cricket Stadium in Dallas, Texas. (AFP)

ground. "I don't think it is easy to put it into words," said Jones, whose 10 sixes are the second most in a T20 World Cup innings behind West Indian Chris Gayle's 11 against England in 2016.

"With our batting line-up, we knew anything under 200 is chaseable.

"I go through my processes and I like my power hitting. I know if I get it in the middle, it will go for sure.

"I like to come in when the team is under pressure, it brings out the best in me," he said.

Canada, also making their T20 World Cup debut, had set what appeared a challenging target

with Navneet Dhaliwal making a well-paced 61 off 44 balls, including six four and three sixes after opener Aaron Johnson had set the early pace with an aggressive 23 off 16 balls.

Nicholas Kirton maintained the momentum in the back half of the innings with 51 off 31 balls and Shreyas Movva's 32 off 16 was crucial in getting Canada to what looked to be a strong total in the Group A match before Jones wreaked havoc.

"We started well, But Jones and Gous batted exceptionally. Our bowlers had no chance," said skipper Bin Zafar.

"Our bowlers missed their lines

and lengths, and we shouldn't have given away the no-balls and extras. We played an exceptional game overall. Nothing to be sad about, the effort from the boys was good. This is just the start and hope we can do well in the next game," he said.

#### BRIEF SCORES

**Canada 194-5 in 20 overs** (Navneet Dhaliwal 61, Nicholas Kirton 51; Harmeet Singh 1-27) **v United States 197-3 in 17.4 overs** (Aaron Jones 94 not out, Andries Gous 65; Dillon Heyliger 1-19) **Toss:** United States **Result:** United States won by 7 wickets

## SPOTLIGHT

# Edgy West Indies beat Papua New Guinea by five wickets in Guyana



West Indies player Roston Chase bats against Papua New Guinea during their T20 World Cup match in Guyana yesterday.

AFP  
Providence, Guyana

West Indies stuttered and stumbled before eventually scrambling a five-wicket win with an over to spare over minnows Papua New Guinea in the opening Group C encounter of the T20 World Cup at the Guyana National Stadium yesterday.

Set a modest target of 137, the two-time former champions were undone by clever, disciplined PNG bowling, slumping to 97 for five with only four overs left when all-rounder Roston Chase's unbeaten 42 off 27 balls (four fours, two sixes) stole the spotlight from the power-hitting Andre Russell (15 not out) to take their team to victory at 137 for five off 19 overs.

Their unbroken sixth-wicket partnership of 40 came off just three overs and denied PNG one of the biggest shocks, not just in the eight editions of this tournament, but in all international cricket given that this was just their second appearance in a world tournament, having lost all three matches in their debut appearance at the 2021 T20 World Cup.

"Based on what we saw when PNG batted, it was always going to be hard for batsmen now coming in, so I gave myself some time to have the best chance possible and back my skills to get the ball away once I got in," said "Man of the Match" Chase, who conceded 26 runs from four overs of off-spin and also held a brilliant catch at backward point to remove PNG captain Assad Vala. Vala led the way with the ball for

the underdogs in taking two for 28 from four overs of spin after seamer Alei Nao struck at the start of the West Indies chase with the wicket of Johnson Charles first ball.

That early success fired up the Papuans despite the shot-making of Brandon King (34) and Nicholas Pooran (27).

When both fell within 11 deliveries of each other and captain Rovman Powell followed, PNG sensed an upset of monumental proportions before Chase redressed the balance when joined by Russell following the swift demise of Sherfane Rutherford.

"We were 10-15 runs short of what would have been a more competitive target but after losing so many early wickets it was still a good effort," said Vala in reflecting on the narrow loss. "We are happy with the fight we showed in trying to defend that total. This is an opportunity for us and we look forward to the challenge to play our best cricket in tournaments and against teams like this."

Earlier, Sese Bau's belligerent 50 off 43 balls (six fours, one six) represented the only meaningful contribution from PNG in totalling 136 for eight after they were put in to bat.

#### BRIEF SCORES

**Papua New Guinea 136-8 in 20 overs** (Sese Bau 50, Kiplin Doriga 24 not out, Assad Vala 21; Andre Russell 2-19, Alzarri Joseph 2-34) **v West Indies 137-5 off 19 overs** (Roston Chase 42 not out, Brandon King 34; Assad Vala 2-28, Alei Nao 1-9) **Toss:** West Indies **Result:** West Indies won by 5 wickets

## BOTTOMLINE

# Pakistan will look to be positive at the World Cup, says captain Babar



Pakistan captain **Babar Azam** called on his side to stay in high spirits as they begin their Twenty20 World Cup campaign off the back of a poor run of form.

Pakistan, T20 World Cup champions in 2009, have performed well in the past two editions of the competition, reaching the semi-finals in 2021 and losing to England

in the final in 2022. However, their preparations for this year's tournament in the United States and West Indies has been far from ideal, with a sobering defeat by Ireland in an eventual 2-1 series victory followed by a 2-0 defeat by England in a rain-affected series.

"Effort is in our hands, but results, we do not know," Babar said in an episode of the Pakistan

Cricket Board (PCB) podcast released yesterday.

"How we present ourselves on the ground, our body language and how we communicate with each other will matter. We must be positive, so results will come... Conditions in the USA may pose challenges as we are going there as a national side for the first time.

"We are in the process of col-

lating various cricket and match-related information from players who have played there, which can help and assist us in our preparations."

Pakistan are in Group A of the World Cup and begin their campaign against hosts US on June 6. They will then take on arch-rivals India in one of the event's highly-anticipated matches three days

later. "An India-Pakistan match is always the most talked about; it is discussed too much wherever you go in the world," Babar said.

"The players get different vibes and excitement. What will happen is that everyone supports their country, so the focus is on that match. The whole world is focused on the day when the India-Pakistan match is held."



ITALIAN GRAND PRIX

# Bagnaia masters Mugello to lead Ducati one-two

Bagnaia was a man on a mission to seal the sprint and race double



Ducati Italian rider Francesco Bagnaia celebrates with fans after winning the Italian Grand Prix at Mugello yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters  
Scarperia San Piero, Italy

**R**eigning MotoGP champion Francesco Bagnaia won the Italian Grand Prix in style yesterday at the Mugello Circuit, while his teammate Enea Bastianini overtook Pramac Racing's Jorge Martin on the last turn of the final lap to take second place.

Ditching Ducati's traditional red livery for the Italian 'Azzurri' blue on their home circuit, Bagnaia was a man on a mission to seal the sprint and race double at Mugello as he closed the gap on championship leader Martin.

The world champion – now 18 points behind Martin – celebrated his victory by strumming

an imaginary guitar before he was handed an electric guitar by the fans to go with his helmet and racing suit inspired by the rock band KISS.

A sprint winner on Saturday, Bagnaia had been demoted to the second row due to a three-place grid penalty from Friday's practice which allowed Marc Marquez – fourth-fastest in qualifying – to start on the front row.

But Bagnaia could not have dreamed of a better start as he overtook four riders and raced into the lead on the opening lap, drawing a huge roar from the Ducati fans in the stands as Bastianini also slotted into third place.

"It wasn't easy starting from P5 but I had a strategy to go on the outside," Bagnaia said.

"To win today after a week like this is fantastic."

Marquez found overtaking Bastianini difficult while the Spaniard also had to look over his shoulder with Tech3's Pedro Acosta hot on his heels and waiting for the six-times MotoGP champion to make a mistake.

There was less than a second's gap in each battle for the top four spots but overtaking attempts were difficult to come by for the riders on the fast circuit until the final stages of the race.

Marquez finally saw an opening with six laps to go when Bastianini went slightly wide at the San Donato bend and the Spaniard duly capitalised, using the slipstream and cutting inside to move up to third place.

But with two laps left, Bastiani-

ni rediscovered his pace and with Marquez struggling, he nudged the Gresini rider out of the way to reclaim third place while Martin looked set to challenge Bagnaia for top spot.

Bastianini, who is in danger of losing his seat on the factory team at the end of the current season, then stole second place from Martin on the last sector of the final lap to spark wild celebrations in the stands and the Ducati pit garage.

"It feels incredible. Something was wrong but we resolved the problem and today we pushed really hard," Bastianini said.

"After Marc overtook me I realised I had to push. In the last lap I saw Jorge and thought it was possible to take second place and I overtook him in the last corner."

ATHLETICS

## Seville sets world-leading time to beat Lyles in the 100m at Kingston meet



AFP  
Kingston, Jamaica

**J**amaica's **Oblique Seville** ran the fastest 100 meters in the world this year, 9.82 seconds, to defeat reigning world champion Noah Lyles on Saturday at the Racer Grand Prix meet.

The 23-year-old shocked himself with the effort, aided by a tailwind of 0.9m/sec, to break his prior personal best of 9.86 and dominate American star Lyles, who crossed the line next in 9.85, just off his best of 9.83.

"I feel good," Seville said. "I'm a little surprised. It's special to be able to run so fast without too much specific work. It shows that I can still do better."

The Jamaican is coached by Glen Mills, former mentor of legend Usain Bolt, for whom Jamaica has been looking for an heir since his 2017 retirement.

Seville collected places of honour during the last major championships: fourth in the 4x100m relay at the Tokyo Olympics and in the 100m at the Worlds in 2022 and 2023.

His clear race allowed him to tame Lyles, to whom he gave a defiant look at the line. The two sprinters ran significantly faster than the best prior 2024 time, 9.93 by Americans Christian Miller and Kendal Williams.

Lyles won titles in the 100, 200 and 4x100 relay in last year's Worlds at Budapest and is considered a major favourite for the Paris Olympics. Saint Lucia ath-

lete Julien Alfred, 22, also achieved a 2024 world-best performance in the women's 100m in 10.78 with a 1.3m/s wind.

The 60m indoor world champion showed her ability to contend for gold in France.

Jamaican 19-year-old Jaydon Hibbert, the junior world record holder, soared 17.75m to win the triple jump (-0.7m/s wind) to establish the best world mark this year.

World 60m hurdles indoor champion Devynne Charlton of the Bahamas won the 100 hurdles in 12.64 (1m/s wind) and American Trey Cunningham took the 110m hurdles in 13.12 (0.8m/s).

Trinidad and Tobago's Jereme Richards won an entertaining men's 200m, powering past NCAA champion Udodi Onwuzurike in the home straight. Richards clocked a season's best 20.13 with the Nigerian trailing in his wake with 20.27.

"I haven't settled on an event yet," said Richards, the 2022 world indoor 400m champion. "I am going to run both the 200m and 400m throughout the season and see whichever event is the best one closer to the Olympics."

Lanae-Tava Thomas won the women's 200m in a lifetime best of 22.36, while Stacey-Ann Williams delighted the home crowd with her come-from-behind victory in the women's 400m in 50.86.

Nigeria's Emmanuel Bamidele clinched victory in the final few metres of the men's 400m, catching hurdles specialist Roshawn Clarke just before the line to win in 45.49 to the Jamaican's 45.57.

MOTORSPORT

## Tanak wins Rally Italia as Ogier suffers blow-out



Estonian Hyundai's Ott Tanak (right) and Martin Jarveoja celebrate after winning the Rally of Sardegna in Alghero. (AFP)

AFP  
Paris

**S**ebastien Ogier suffered a late puncture which allowed Ott Tanak to come from behind to steal a late and narrow victory from the Frenchman in the Rally Italia yesterday.

Leading by 6.2 seconds going into the 16th and final special stage in Sardinia, the blow-out in Ogier's Toyota allowed Tanak's Hyundai to edge past and ultimately claim the win by just 0.2sec.

The Estonian's teammate Dani Sordo completed the podium, finishing 2min 25.8sec off the pace with Welshman Elfyn Evans fourth in his Toyota.

Another Hyundai driver Thierry Neuville, who finished a distant 19th in the overall standings following a mistake on Saturday, won that final stage and still leads the championship standings after six rounds with 122 points, 18 ahead of Tanak and Evans.

Ogier has only contested a handful of events this season and had won two in a row in Croatia and Portugal.

Yesterday morning, before the last four stages, he held a 17-second lead over the Estonian and still

appeared on course for his third consecutive win of the year at the start of the final stage.

"Puncture. Not much I can do," he said disconsolately at the end of the race.

"It's not rally, it's like cross country. Not much I can do. That's life."

"I think we deserved more than that but at least Ott has done a good rally as well."

The next leg in the calendar is Rally Poland at the end of the month.

**Rally Italia final standings yesterday**  
1. Ott Tanak/Martin Jarveoja (EST/Hyundai) 3hr 6min 5.6sec, 2. Sebastien Ogier/Vincent Landais (FRA/Toyota) at 0.2sec, 3. Daniel Sordo/Candido Carrera (ESP/Hyundai) 2min 25.8sec, 4. Elfyn Evans/Scott Martin (GBR/Toyota) 2:37.8, 5. Gregoire Munster/Louis Louka (LUX-BEL/M-Sport Ford) 6:42.9, 6. Sami Pajari/Enni Mäkkönen (FIN/Toyota) 7:13.4

**Championship standings**  
1. Thierry Neuville (BEL/Hyundai) 122 points, 2. Ott Tanak (EST/Hyundai) 104, 3. Elfyn Evans (GBR/Toyota) 104, 4. Sebastien Ogier (FRA/Toyota) 92, 5. Adrien Fourmaux (FRA/Ford) 74, 6. Takamoto Katsuta (JPN/Toyota) 52

GOLF

## India's Aditi eyes consistency ahead of Games

Reuters  
New Delhi

**A**diti Ashok's consistency over four rounds at the Tokyo Olympics nearly proved enough to clinch an unlikely podium spot, and the 26-year-old believes she needs to rediscover it if she hopes to go a step further and win a medal at this year's Paris Games.

Ashok came fourth and missed out on a medal in Tokyo by a stroke after being in contention right to the finish.

She has gone from strength to strength since then and had a promising 2023, recording five top-10 finishes on the LPGA circuit to rise to a year-end ranking of 42.

"I feel I've gotten better with all aspects of my game," Ashok said in an interview with Sports Authority of India (SAI) media.

"2023 especially was a great year performance wise and that's



India's 26-year-old golfer Aditi Ashok in action in one of the events she played last year. (@aditigolf)

because I managed to pick up some distance in the off season last year. I would say winning a medal is pretty high up there in terms of career achievements...

In 2024, Ashok's form has been more mixed, but with several events left on the calendar before

the Aug. 7-10 women's Olympic golf tournament begins at Le Golf National, Ashok still has time to find her groove.

"My results have been average. I have played good in streaks but not for all four days. I do feel I'm playing well so I'm looking for-

ward to the summer events leading up to the Olympics..." Ashok said.

"I'm looking at each event with the same importance and trying to do my best for all four days each week."

"That should get me in a good frame of mind and routine before the games and hopefully that will be enough at Paris."

Ashok will also be keen to bury the disappointment of missing out on a gold medal at last year's Asian Games, in which she lost a seven-shot lead in a final-day meltdown to finish second behind Thailand's Arpipchaya Yubol.

"I think I played some of my best golf in Tokyo. I gained a lot of confidence I would say and not much learning," Ashok said.

"With the Asian Games I played one of my worst rounds of the year on the final day. Which was after the best round of my life on the third day."

"So sometimes you fail and there's no reason as to why"

BADMINTON

## World No. 1 An Se-young gets Olympics boost



AFP  
Singapore

**W**orld number one **An Se-young** received a timely confidence boost ahead of the Olympic Games by beating China's Chen Yufei to retain her Singapore Badminton Open women's singles title yesterday.

With the Paris showpiece starting next month, the South Korean was delighted to have found winning form again after a right-knee injury had sidelined her for more than a month.

"This is indeed a timely boost for my confidence before the Olympics," An said after beating Chen 21-19, 16-21, 21-12.

"There were a lot of question marks raised over my form when I went through those hard times."

"But I'm very grateful to my team for also believing in me and our efforts have paid off," she said.

The match was a repeat of last year's Asian Games final, where An also prevailed against the Olympic gold medalist, and the 22-year-old again met stiff resistance from Chen.

An clinched the first game in 25 minutes but Chen fought back to win the second, before the defending champion's aggression and deft cross-court play sealed another victory.

World number two Shi Yuqi fought back after dropping the first game to defeat Chinese compatriot Li Shifeng 17-21, 21-19, 21-19 in the men's singles final.

"I'm simply delighted with this victory. Li put up a great fight and is a worthy opponent," Shi said.

"We are glad to have set up an all-China final and provided the fans with an entertaining match in Singapore."



## HORSE RACING

## Look de Vega wins QREC-sponsored Qatar Prix du Jockey Club



President of the Asian Equestrian Federation and Vice-Chairman of QREC Hamad bin Abdulrahman al-Attiya presents the trophy to the connections of Look de Vega which won Qatar Prix du Jockey Club Gr 1 in Chantilly, France, yesterday. **PICTURE:** Zuzanna Lupa

**Agencies**  
Chantilly, France

**L**ook De Vega emerged as the classy winner of a wide open QREC-sponsored Qatar Prix du Jockey Club, also known as the French Derby, at Chantilly yesterday.

Trained by father and son Carlos and Yann Lerner, Look de Vega pulled clear in the final furlong to add his name to a roll of honour that includes his sire, Lope de Vega, winner of the Prix du Jockey Club in 2010.

President of the Asian Equestrian Federation and Vice-Chairman of QREC Hamad bin Abdulrahman

al-Attiya crowned the winners.

"This is fantastic, towards the end of my career to do this with my son Yann," said France-based Carlos Lerner, who landed the 2001 Prix du Jockey Club with Anabaa Blue.

"We've never never had a horse like this, he's a crack."

Yann Lerner added: "I was con-



French jockey Ronan Thomas and his horse Look de Vega cross the finish line to win the 184th Qatar Prix du Jockey Club at the Chantilly Race Course in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

fident. The horse as you can see is made for that."

Aidan O'Brien was on hand to saddle Diego Velazquez 24 hours after training City of Troy to land his record-extending 10th Epsom Derby.

Ridden like City of Troy by Ryan Moore, Diego Velazquez held every chance but faded in the closing

200 metres to come in eighth.

The 5-1 winner was ridden by Ronan Thomas who said: "I'm enormously proud. Whatever happens now to leave a little trace in racing history and to win a home Derby is something to savour."

Look De Vega pulled clear of the field in a race run in the heaviest ground since 2000 to win by two

lengths from First Look, trained by Andre Fabre who had trained the winner's sire.

"Look De Vega is the best horse I've ever bred," said breeder and co-owner Lucien Urano.

Fabre's Sosie finished third, a further neck away with the fancied English challenger Ghost-writer in fourth.

## MOTORSPORT

## Al-Hajri, al-Khelaifi shine as al-Qubaisi secures a double

Third round of QMMF's QSTK and QTCC concludes at Lusail Circuit

**By Sports Reporter**  
Doha

**A**bdulla al-Qubaisi secured a dominant double in the Qatar Superstock (QSTK) 600, while Mansour al-Hajri and Abdulla Ali al-Khelaifi won top podium spots in the Qatar Touring Car Championship (QTCC), in the third round of the popular series.

At the Lusail International Circuit, al-Qubaisi clocked a time of 24 minutes 55.813 seconds to win QSTK Race 1. He was closely followed by Mashel al-Naimi at 25:15.406, and Saeed al-Sulaiti who concluded his session at 25:30.847.

The results of Race 2 were not any different, with al-Qubaisi again securing the top position on the podium, followed by al-Naimi and al-Sulaiti, clocking in at 25:02.701, 25:21.687, and 25:41.792, respectively.

In the sub-category of the QSTK 600 Trophy, Alexian Macary led the grid in Race 1, clocking in at 25:58.262, followed by Alexander Qabazard at 26: 04.218 and Emmanuel Geoffrey at 26:20.386. In Race 2, the results were similar, with Alexian Macary again clocking the fastest time at 25:46.789, followed closely by Qabazard at 25:46.822 and Geoffrey at 26:11.918. The Qatar Supersport 300 (QSSP 300) witnessed intense competition for the top position on the podium. Marton Bellelli led the grid with a time of 32:33.278 in race 1, followed closely by Mahmoud El Banna at 32:33.640. Aaron Robinson secured third place at 32:41.592.

However, in Race 2 which saw the number of laps reduced, El Banna took the lead, securing a time of 18:47.996 seconds, followed by Marton Bellelli at 18:48.053. Robinson secured the third position at 18:53.148.

Meanwhile, in the QTCC Race 1, drivers fiercely competed for the top spot on the podium with al-Hajri leading the battle at 31:33.386, followed closely by Ghanim al-Madheed and Ahmed al-Asiri at 31:33.481 and 31:33.719, respectively. However, the results in Race 2 were very different, with al-Khelaifi clocking the fastest time at 31:19.588, followed by AbAdulaziz al-Sayed at 31:22.900,



Winner Mansour al-Hajri (centre), second-placed Ghanim al-Madheed (left) and third-placed Ahmed al-Asiri celebrate on the podium of QTCC Race 1 at Lusail International Circuit.



Action from QSTK race at the Lusail International Circuit.

and Omran Karama at 31:24.230.

A total of 52 drivers and riders were in action during the third round of the QSTK 600 and QTCC championship, organised by the Qatar Motor & Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) and Lusail International Circuit. The fourth round of the QSTK and QTCC is scheduled to take place in October.

Winner Abdulla al-Qubaisi (centre), second-placed Mashel al-Naimi (left) and third-placed Saeed al-Sulaiti pose on the podium of Qatar Superstock (QSTK) 600 yesterday.



## FOOTBALL

## Southgate pleased with progress of injured Maguire, Shaw before Euros

**AFP**  
London

**G**areth Southgate is encouraged by the progress of Harry Maguire and Luke Shaw as the injured England defenders aim to prove their fitness for Euro 2024.

Maguire and Shaw missed Manchester United's FA Cup final win against Manchester City last weekend as they recover from muscle problems.

Southgate included both players in his provisional squad for the Euros, but the England boss needed to see signs of improvement in their health before next week's deadline to finalise his 26-man group for the tournament in Germany.

Maguire, a key figure at centre-back given England's lack of options in that position, has been out for a month, while left-back Shaw has spent three months on the sidelines.

The pair will miss today's friendly at St James' Park against Bosnia and Herzegovina and are unlikely to feature in Iceland's visit to Wembley on Friday.

But Southgate said Maguire and Shaw, along with Newcastle forward Anthony Gordon, who was also absent from training, are all showing good signs in their recoveries. "We're pleased with the progress they've made. None of them will be involved tomorrow," Southgate told reporters yesterday.

"I think Anthony has a good chance to be available for Friday. The other two a bit more unlikely, but we will just see how quickly they can go really.

"Same tomorrow for Bukayo (Saka), probably the same with John Stones. Everybody else will be involved. John because he reported a bit later, so he hasn't worked with us for the number of days so better for him to follow an individual programme for the next couple of days.

"Bukayo is fine, he's progressing well but the periodisation we've taken from his injury is to rest tomorrow and then he should be available for Friday."

Manchester United's FA Cup final goalscorer Kobbie Mainoo and Manchester City duo Kyle Walker and Phil Foden are yet to link up with the squad.

Real Madrid star Jude Bellingham will be another late arrival to the pre-tournament camp following his club's Champions League triumph. The 20-year-old's dream first season at Real climaxed on Saturday as the Spanish club beat his former team Borussia Dortmund 2-0 in the Champions League final at Wembley. Bellingham, who set up Vinicius Junior to score Real's second goal in the final, will be vital to England's bid to win their first major trophy since the 1966 World Cup.

And Southgate saluted the midfielder's superb form, which saw him named the La Liga Player of the Season after scoring 23 goals in all competitions.

"He's had a fantastic season. To join the biggest club in the world and perform the way he has throughout the season has been an incredible year for him," he said.

"Absolutely delighted for him to win last night. You saw him with his family and they have to take enormous credit, he is as he comes across in his interviews.

## Mourinho unveiled as new Fenerbahce manager

Jose Mourinho was unveiled as the new manager of Turkish Super Lig club Fenerbahce in front of thousands of enthusiastic fans yesterday. Mourinho, 61, has been out of a job since he was sacked by Serie A side AS Roma in January. The Turkish club held a signing ceremony for Mourinho in Fenerbahce's Ulker Stadium in Istanbul as thousands of supporters cheered the Portuguese coach's name and sang songs. "Normally a coach is loved after victories, in this case I feel that love before victories. And that for me is a big responsibility that I feel and I promise you that from this moment I belong to this family, this shirt is my skin," Mourinho said in his address to the fans, waving a Fenerbahce jersey.

"Since the moment I met president Ali Koc and understood his ideas and projects, I wanted to play for you, I want to be the coach of all of you... From the moment I signed my contract, your dreams are now my dreams," Mourinho added. "I welcome our coach Mourinho on behalf of our fans. He is one of the best coaches of world football history. I'm sure he'll be the winner coach here, as he had been in other clubs in the past," club chairman Ali Koc said. Mourinho will replace Turkish boss Ismail Kartal, who Fenerbahce parted ways with on Friday after only one loss in the league last season. The team were involved in a tight title race with Galatasaray but six draws proved costly as their Istanbul rivals won the league by three points.