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# GULF TIMES SPORT



GOLF

## Nicklaus likes Tiger's chances to break major record

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FOOTBALL

# Klopp backing Reds for Premier League miracle

City will retain the title if they win at Brighton but a draw or loss for Pep Guardiola's men would open the door for Liverpool to be crowned champions if they defeat Wolves



Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp (third from left) and his men are upbeat after qualifying for the Champions League final.

AFP  
Liverpool

Jurgen Klopp says Liverpool's astonishing European fightback proves his side will not give up hope of winning the Premier League until Manchester City have the trophy in their hands on the last day of action today.

Klopp's team staged arguably the greatest comeback in Champions League history on Tuesday when they thrashed Barcelona 4-0 to overturn a 3-0 semi-final first-leg deficit.

With an all-English Champions League final against Tottenham set for June 1, Liverpool can pour all their energy into one last push to win their first English title since 1990.

The Reds are one point behind leaders Manchester City heading into their final

game of the season against Wolves at Anfield.

City will retain the title if they win at Brighton but a draw or loss for Pep Guardiola's men would open the door for Liverpool to be crowned champions if they defeat Wolves.

Given Brighton's lowly position, the odds are firmly on a City coronation, but Liverpool boss Klopp says this week's astonishing Champions League drama showed anything can happen when the pressure mounts.

Not only did Liverpool author a fightback for the ages, but Tottenham scored three times in their semi-final against Ajax to go through on away goals after trailing 3-0 on aggregate with just 35 minutes left.

"It's been a week of big football moments. But from our point of view it could be a big football moment on the weekend

— the week is not over yet," Klopp said.

"I think at the start of the week most people expected me to be sitting here and saying 'OK, after not being in the Champions League final, it's difficult to be champions! Well now we are in the final and it is still difficult."

"We are not used to moments of glory but we win from time to time. Focus is not a problem. The only thing we can do is win this game."

In virtually any other season, Liverpool, who have 94 points and have lost only once in the league, would have been champions by now.

Having secured successive Champions League final appearances, the sting of failure will not be quite so sharp if Liverpool do not get a helping hand from Brighton this weekend.

But do not tell that to Klopp and his players.

Reflecting the togetherness and desire fuelling their remarkable season, Klopp revealed Mohamed Salah, Andy Robertson and Jordan Henderson will all play through the pain barrier against Wolves.

Salah missed the Barcelona game with a concussion, while Henderson (knee) and Robertson (calf) both suffered injuries in that match.

"The famous three words of this week in the dressing room is 'It's only pain! Very important for all the young lads to learn,'" Klopp said.

Liverpool fans will be glued to their phones for updates from Brighton as the drama unfolds on Sunday, but Klopp just wants his team to focus on Wolves.

"Maybe our supporters shouldn't celebrate the result before it's 3-0 for Brighton and 87 or 88 minutes played, all the rest is only information, nothing else," Klopp said.

PREVIEW/ AMIR CUP

# Duhail hope to make up for league heartbreak

By Sports Reporter  
Doha

Al Duhail will take on Al Saliya in the second Amir Cup semi-final today at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium in what should be a highly entertaining contest.

Al Duhail have not been at their best this season and finished second behind Al Sadd in the league, while Al Saliya secured their best-ever position with a third place.

Al Duhail coach Rui Faria said it will be a difficult match for his side, having had little time to recover from their trip to Tehran where they drew with Esteghlal to book their place in the AFC Champions League round of 16.

"This is a very important match for us and we are facing a strong team. We began our preparations very late for this match after our return from Tehran. We have assessed Al Saliya's strengths and weakness and we have to take advantage of these points to achieve victory," Faria said.

"We cannot make excuses and we have to prepare well and adapt the pressure of a knockout match. Our players know the importance of this match and will give our best," the Portuguese coach said.

The last time these two teams faced off, Al Duhail scored a narrow win but Al Saliya are a dangerous team under Sami Trabelsi.

The Tunisian, who first took charge of the side in June, 2013, and led them to

the Amir's Cup final that season, has extended his contract with Saliya for three more years.

Al Saliya star striker Rachid Tiberkanine has been brilliant this season, but the Moroccan is doubtful with an injury and, if he is absent then, Abdulkadir Ilyas and Mauricio Junior will have to step up and deliver for the team.

The Peregrines also have the services of players such as Saoud al-Khater, Hamad al-Obaidi, Abdulrahman Mohamed, Nadir Belhadj, Fahd Yousef and Ghanem al-Qahtani.

For Al Duhail, prolific striker Yousef El Arabi will lead the charge with Asian Cup MVP Almoez Ali equally lethal up front. They also have Paolo Edmilson, Mohamed Moosa, Bassam al-Rawi, Sultan al-Breik, making them favourites to reach the final.

Duhail midfielder Ali Afif said playing final at the newly-built Al Wakrah stadium will serve as a huge motivation for the team.

"We lost the league title and Qatar Cup championship is cancelled for this year, so this is the only title we can win. Playing at Al Wakrah stadium in the final match is a big motivation for us," he said.

Saliya defender Mustafa Abdel Hamid echoed Afif's sentiments. "Playing at Al Wakrah stadium, which is a World Cup venue, is something we want to do. Al Duhail are not the team what they were before, but they are still a strong team and it will not be an easy game for us," he said.



Al Duhail coach Rui Faria speaks to reporters during his pre-match press conference.

## Former FIFA boss Blatter says money risks ruining the sport

Vienna: Sepp Blatter, the former boss of soccer's world governing body FIFA who was ousted during a corruption scandal, has said money risks ruining the sport. FIFA's Ethics Committee banned Blatter, who led FIFA for 17 years, from "all football activities" in 2015 after finding him guilty of unethical conduct related to a global corruption scandal which rocked the organisation.

Switzerland's attorney general is still investigating cases of suspected cor-

ruption involving FIFA, which is based in Zurich, dating back to 2014 and Blatter's presidency.

"People already pay a lot to get into the stadium. Prices are getting higher and higher, because clubs need more money," Blatter said in an interview with Swiss newspaper *Schweiz am Wochenende* published yesterday.

The 83-year-old added his belief that viewer numbers are falling this season in the French, Italian, English, Spanish and

German leagues.

"That is a bad sign. Football must remain accessible," he said. Blatter has told various media that he plans to take legal action against his successor Gianni Infantino over damage done to his reputation by the corruption scandal and information FIFA made public about payments to him that he says was inaccurate. Blatter told *Schweiz am Wochenende* that FIFA bodies signed off on all payments made to him, including a bonus of 10m Swiss francs (\$9.9m) he received

for the 2010 World Cup in South Africa.

Asked if he would drop his planned lawsuit against Infantino if his collection of luxury watches, which he left at FIFA's offices, were returned to him, he said: "The watches are of lesser importance. What is important to me is my moral rehabilitation." He also hoped the Swiss attorney general's office will soon decide whether to bring its case to court or drop it.

"When this is done (I) want to write a book — my memoirs, more or less," he added.



## BUNDESLIGA

# Kovacic still 'confident' after Bayern let Dortmund back

Dortmund beat Duesseldorf to return to within two points of Bayern and take the title race to the final day

AFP  
Berlin

**B**ayern Munich coach Niko Kovacic said he is still confident of winning the Bundesliga after his team missed the chance to wrap up a seventh successive title thanks to a goalless draw at RB Leipzig yesterday.

Rivals Borussia Dortmund edged a nervy contest with Fortuna Duesseldorf 3-2 to return to within two points of Bayern and take the title race to the final day, but Kovacic backed Bayern to beat his former club Eintracht Frankfurt next Saturday and clinch the title at home for the first time since 2000.

"I am confident for next week. It will be a league final, and that is something we haven't seen for years," Kovacic said. "It was frustrating today because we were clearly the better team."

Bayern dominated Leipzig for much of the game, and Leon Goretzka's stylish second half scissor-kick briefly sent them into ecstasy before the goal was ruled out by VAR. Serge Gnabry then hit the bar before Robert Lewandowski grazed the post minutes from time. "If we play like that next week, we will be champions," Bayern CEO Karl-Heinz Rummenigge said.

Dortmund, who looked dead and buried after slipping four points behind last week, enjoyed the rub of the green as they stumbled to victory over Duesseldorf. Chelsea-bound US international Christian Pulisic bid an emotional farewell to the Dortmund fans before his last home game, and then opened the scoring on 41 minutes.

A howler from stand-in goalkeeper Marwin Hitz allowed Oliver Fink to equalise within seconds of the restart, but Thomas Delaney restored the lead for Dortmund on 53 minutes. Hitz then gave away a penalty with a foul on Dodi Lukebakio, but the Belgian saved the keeper's blushes by dragging wide from 12 yards. Mario Goetze looked to have sealed the three points when he added a third in stoppage only for Dawid Kownacki to pull one back for Duesseldorf seconds later to make it a nerve-jangling finish for the hosts. "We keep believing," said Pulisic, whose team must win at Borussia Moenchengladbach next Saturday to have any chance to snatch the title. "We can only control what we do, but the coach has always said that everything is possible."

At the other end of the table, Nuremberg and Hanover were finally relegated as Stuttgart secured the relegation



Dortmund's Thomas Delaney (third left) celebrates with teammates after scoring against Fortuna Duesseldorf during the Bundesliga match in Dortmund, western Germany, yesterday. (AFP)

play-off place with a 3-0 win over Wolfsburg. Hanover went down fighting as goals from Waldemar Anton, Ihlas Bebou and Wallace saw them beat Freiburg 3-0.

Yet Anastasios Donis, Gonzalo Castro and Daniel Didavi were on the mark for Stuttgart to condemn Hanover and Nuremberg to the drop. Nuremberg, meanwhile, were hammered 4-0 by Borussia Moenchengladbach thanks

to an own-goal from Lukas Muehl and strikes from Thorgan Hazard, Denis Zakaria and former Nuremberg man Josip Drmic. The thumping win sees Gladbach go fourth, leapfrogging both Eintracht Frankfurt and Bayer Leverkusen, who were held to a 1-1 draw at home to Schalke, Guido Burgstaller cancelling out Kai Havertz's opener. Frankfurt have the chance to break back into the top four with a win over Mainz today.

Werder Bremen also kept their European hopes alive with a 1-0 win at Hoffenheim, and Hertha Berlin snatched a late 4-3 victory away to Augsburg. Johannes Eggstein's first-half goal condemned RB Leipzig-bound coach Julian Nagelsmann to defeat in his last home game in charge of Hoffenheim.

Andre Hahn and Michael Gregoritsch put Augsburg ahead three times but goals from Marvin Plattenhardt and

Marko Grujic kept Hertha in the game before a late brace from Salomon Kalou secured three points.

#### GERMAN BUNDESLIGA RESULTS

Hoffenheim 0 Werder Bremen 1 (Eggstein 39); Borussia Dortmund 3 (Pulisic 41, Delaney 53, Goetze 90+2) Fortuna Duesseldorf 2 (Fink 47, Kownacki 90+5); Bayer Leverkusen 1 (Havertz 31) Schalke 04 1 (Burgstaller 47); RB Leipzig 0

Bayern Munich 0; VfB Stuttgart 3 (Castro 45+1, Donis 55, Didavi 83) VfL Wolfsburg 0; Augsburg 3 (Hahn 10, Gregoritsch 50-pen, 70) Hertha Berlin 4 (Plattenhardt 47, Grujic 66, Kalou 75, 90+3-pen); Hanover 3 (Waldemar 38, Bebou 51, Wallace 81) SC Freiburg 0; Nuremberg 0 Borussia Moenchengladbach 4 (Drmic 56, Muhl 63-og, T. Hazard 65, Zakaria 80)

**Playing today (GMT):** Eintracht Frankfurt v Mainz (1600)

## LA LIGA

## Barca's Valverde to fight on after Champions League woe

Reuters  
Barcelona

**B**arcelona coach Ernesto Valverde has vowed to continue as coach and says he has the backing of the club and president Josep Maria Bartomeu after Tuesday's humiliating 4-0 defeat by Liverpool which knocked them out of the Champions League.

The semi-final loss to Liverpool after winning the first leg 3-0 was Barca's second successive dramatic exit from Europe's elite competition under Valverde after being knocked out by AS Roma last year after winning a quarter-final first leg 4-1.

Those failures in Europe's elite competition, which Barca have failed to win since 2015, threaten to overshadow the coach's enormous achievements in leading them to back-to-back La Liga titles. "I feel strong, I'm ok and I'm looking forward to taking a step forward, I'm not going to hide behind a wall," Valverde told a news conference ahead of his side's league game at home to Getafe today.

"I've spoken to the president and I have always felt supported by him and he has given me his absolute backing. When something like this happens it seems like everything is falling apart but we know what this world is like. Everyone thinks you should burn everything to the ground at moments like this but you have to put things back in their place."

Barca will face their home sup-



porters for the first time since their capitulation at Anfield in today's game against top-four contenders Getafe and Valverde urged them to unite behind the team. "The fans can demonstrate however they wish to, but whenever you have a disaster like this it's an opportunity for everyone," Valverde said.

"We are all affected by this huge setback but this is our last home game and I see it as a chance to help the team to rise again. We should also try and avoid fighting amongst ourselves, which is

what our enemies want us to do."

Barca clinched an eighth title in the last 11 years two weeks ago and in two weeks time they face Valencia in the Copa del Rey final, bidding to win a second successive domestic double. The Catalans will be without striker Luis Suarez for the remainder of the season after the Uruguayan underwent knee surgery and will also be missing Ousmane Dembele who has a hamstring injury. Brazilian midfielder Arthur Melo will also miss the Getafe game due to a hip problem.

## LIGUE 1

## Neymar scores on final game before ban

AFP  
Paris

**N**eymar responded to being handed a three-match ban by scoring as champions Paris Saint-Germain ended their three-game losing streak away from home with a 2-1 Ligue 1 victory at Angers yesterday.

Thomas Tuchel's PSG have seen their season fizzle out since a shock Champions League exit at the hands of Manchester United in March, losing the French Cup final and embarking on a run of just one win in seven matches.

The return of Neymar from a foot problem has been a plus, with the world's most expensive player finding form ahead of his Copa America campaign with Brazil, which starts next month. The 27-year-old's suspension for lashing out at a fan following PSG's penalty-shootout loss to Rennes in the French Cup final comes into effect on Monday, while he will also miss three Champions League games at the start of next season for criticising the referee after the Man United defeat.

But he scored his third goal in four games on his final appearance of the season to give PSG a 20th-minute lead at the Stade Raymond-Kopa, diving to head home Dani Alves' scooped pass. And Neymar turned provider as Angel Di Maria nodded in at the back post just before the hour mark to double the visitors' advantage.

But PSG have conceded 18 goals in eight games, failing to keep a clean sheet, after Florian Tait grabbed a late consolation for mid-table Angers, tapping in the rebound after Gianluigi Buffon had saved his penalty. The French giants will now hope to ensure that the underwhelming win does not prove to be Neymar's final match for the club, ahead of the start of the transfer window next month. "Neymar played well, but these are the things that we expect from him - that he is decisive for us, scores goals and makes assists," said Tuchel. "It's his job, because it's his talent."



Angers' Baptiste Santamaria (left) vies for the ball with Paris Saint-Germain's Neymar during the French Ligue 1 match at the Raymond-Kopa Stadium in Angers. (AFP)

Later last night, 17th-placed Monaco were looking to edge closer to safety as they visit Nimes, before Champions League-chasing Lyon face Marseille today.

Meanwhile, there were bitter tears of regret as Saint-Etienne missed the chance to leapfrog Lyon on Friday when their unbeaten streak was broken in a 1-0 home defeat to Montpellier. Saint-Etienne had been homing in on a first ever appearance in the Champions League and had the chance to go third ahead of Lyon.

But Remy Cabella, who helped Montpellier win the title in 2012 and kept them up in 2017 before his switch to Saint-Etienne, was left in tears as he was sent off just after the hour and then watched from the tunnel as the visitors went ahead with a thundering left footed drive from Gaetan Laborde.

The goal came on 64 minutes as tempera-

tures rose in a typically passionate Saint-Etienne stadium with a red card for either side followed quickly by the winning goal. Lille are second on 69, Lyon third on 63 and Saint-Etienne fourth on 62 having played a game more. Saint-Etienne, who had won six and drawn one of their last seven outings, are France's most decorated club with 10 league titles and six French Cups but their last major trophy came way back in 1981, when - led by Michel Platini - they last finished top of the pile.

Elsewhere on Friday, Brest were promoted to Ligue 1 thanks to a 3-0 win at Niort, and will join Metz, already assured promotion, in the top flight next season. Authorities also revealed that the final day of Ligue 1 action would be moved forwards from Saturday, May 25, to the Friday evening so as to avoid clashing with possible demonstrations by the so-called 'Yellow Vests'.

PREMIER LEAGUE

# Pressure a privilege as Man City look to close out title

With victory today, City will hit 98 points, two less than the last season

AFP  
Brighton, United Kingdom

Manchester City manager Pep Guardiola wants his side to embrace the “privilege” of being in pole position to retain the Premier League title when they travel to Brighton today. City go into the final day of the season one point ahead of Liverpool after a title race that has raised the bar from anything the Premier League has seen before.

Liverpool’s long wait to win the title could unbelievably stretch into its 30th year despite posting the third highest points tally in Premier League history. With victory on England’s south coast today, City will hit 98 points, two less than their record-breaking campaign last season, but arguably even more impressive having come from seven points behind in January and refusing to budge in a 13-game winning run as the finishing line approaches.

“It’s a privilege,” said Guardiola on Friday. “Is a dream to be here, honestly I didn’t expect months ago when we were seven points (behind) against this Liverpool to be in the position that we are now. We have the chance to become champion if we win our game and that is what we have to do.”

The scale of the achievement in holding off Jurgen Klopp’s charging Reds was amplified when Guardiola saw his old side Barcelona thrashed 4-0 at Anfield on Tuesday as Liverpool reached a second consecutive Champions League final.

City could make history by becoming the first side to ever win the English domestic treble as long as they match Liverpool’s result at home to Wolves this weekend and defeat Watford in the FA Cup final next Saturday.

But despite all they have achieved this season to this point, Guardiola believes City must finish the job if they are to avoid being “destroyed” by their critics. “We saw in the Champions League (Barcelona and Ajax) lost once but everybody destroyed the teams, destroyed the managers, destroyed the clubs,” added Guardiola. “Doing incredible, doing well, we know in which world we live and you have to win.”

City have racked up 157 goals in all competitions this season, but have had



A wonder strike from captain Vincent Kompany (right), his first goal from outside the box in 12 years, was needed for Manchester City to see off Leicester 1-0 on Monday. (AFP)

to grind it out in recent weeks, winning three of their last four games 1-0. A wonder strike from captain Vincent Kompany, his first goal from outside the box in 12 years, was needed to see off Leicester 1-0 on Monday, while Sergio Agüero’s winner at Burnley the week before crossed the line by 30 millimetres.

Brighton’s survival in the Premier League was guaranteed by Cardiff’s relegation last weekend and the Seagulls showed they have not switched off for their summer holidays by holding Arsenal to a 1-1 draw at the Emirates a day later.

“In one game anything can happen. One mistake from our side, one incredible performance from the other side, one mistake from the referees can decide the title,” warned Guardiola. “That’s why we have to be more precise, be better and try to win the game.” City could be boosted by the return of Kevin de Bruyne from injury, but fellow midfielder Fernandinho misses out.

CHAMPIONSHIP

# Derby fume as Leeds survive play-off penalty drama

AFP  
London

Keemar Roofe gave Leeds a 1-0 win at Derby in the first leg of a feisty Championship play-off semi-final that saw the hosts angered after a controversial penalty reversal. Roofe slotted home early in the second half for his fourth goal against Derby this season to reward a dominant display from Marcelo Bielsa’s side.

But Leeds were left breathing a huge sigh of relief when referee Craig Pawson overturned his decision to give Frank Lampard’s men a penalty with 12 minutes to go after Jayden Bogle and Jack Harrison collided in the box.

Derby’s furious protests were in vain and they now need a second leg comeback at Elland Road on Wednesday, with no side ever reaching the Championship play-off final having lost at home in the first leg. “If we all looked at it in this room some would say yes and some would say no. I get that. I’m just surprised a referee in a game of this magnitude has decided to play second fiddle to his assistant,” Lampard said.

Bielsa said he didn’t see the penalty call, adding: “I think it was a deserved win. We dominated the ball, we defended well and we created danger.”

It was the latest controversy involving Leeds and Derby this season. Leeds’ win over Derby in January was overshadowed by the ‘spygate’ affair after Bielsa’s admission that he had sent a member of his staff to “spy” on

the Rams training the day before the game.

Bielsa later admitted that he had sent staff to watch “the training sessions of all opponents”, with Leeds fined £200,000 by the Football League for their part in the incident. Leeds are looking to return to the Premier League for the first time in 15 years and they are on course for a Wembley final against Aston Villa or West Bromwich Albion on May 27. Villa lead 2-1 after their first leg earlier yesterday.

Derby, who have been promoted just once in eight play-off attempts, started brightest, with Tom Lawrence curling a sixth-minute effort wide. But Leeds grew into the game and Roofe sent an overhead kick wide in the 19th minute, before Luke Ayling failed to make the most of a back-post header three minutes later.

Stuart Dallas volleyed narrowly wide in first-half stoppage time as the visitors ended the half strongly. And the pressure finally told in the 55th minute when Roofe met Harrison’s superb low cross with a cool finish.

Kelle Roos pulled off a superb full-stretch save to deny Roofe a second a minute later as Derby were left rocking. It should have been 2-0 when Pablo Hernandez missed the ball with the goal at his mercy in the 63rd minute.

Pride Park erupted when Derby had their penalty withdrawn after the referee initially ruled Harrison had fouled Bogle, a decision made following consultation with assistant referee Eddie Smart.



Derby County’s Richard Keogh (left) clashes with Leeds United’s Liam Cooper during the Championship play-off semi-final first leg at Pride Park in Derby, Britain, yesterday. (Reuters)

SERIE A

# Barrow, Castagne fire Atalanta to third

AFP  
Milan

Musa Barrow and Timothy Castagne’s second-half goals fired Atalanta third in Serie A yesterday as a 2-1 win kept the unheralded Bergamo side’s push for a first-ever Champions League campaign firmly on track.

Castagne and Duvan Zapata both had goals ruled out for offside in the first 20 minutes of the game, which was played at Sassuolo’s Mapei Stadium because of work on Atalanta’s home ground.

But 20-year-old Gambian Barrow broke through immediately after being substituted on at the break for his first goal this season, with Belgian Castagne adding a second on 53 minutes, finishing off Berat Djimsiti’s low cross.

Goran Pandev pulled a goal back for Genoa one minute from time, but the fight-back came too late as Atalanta extended their unbeaten run to 11 matches. Atalanta overtake Inter Milan to move third with two games left this season – against champions Juventus in Turin and back at the Mapei Stadium against Sassuolo on May 26.

“Today’s win was really important, as the closer we get to the finish line, the more decisive each point becomes,” said coach Gian Piero Gasperini. “Mathematically, we have only a few points left to go, but it also puts us in a better state of mind going into the Coppa Italia final. The team has been extraordinary in terms of mentality.”

The victory is a boost for Atalanta who head to Rome on Wednesday to play the Coppa Italia final against Lazio, who beat Cagliari 2-1 in Sardinia yesterday, to sit seventh in Serie A, five points adrift of Inter Milan and the top four.

Juventus and Napoli have already qualified for next season’s Champions League, but behind them the scramble is frenetic in the chase for the two remaining berths. Behind Atalanta, now on 65 points, are Inter Milan (63), AC Milan (59) and Roma (59). Atalanta’s and Lazio’s wins piles the pres-



Atalanta’s players celebrate after their win over Genoa in Italian Serie A match at the Mapei Stadium in Reggio Emilia, Italy, yesterday. (AFP)

sure on both AC Milan and Roma, who need a result this weekend to keep their dream alive. Inter Milan, desperate for a win after three draws, host relegated Chievo, with AC Milan at Fiorentina and Torino at home against Sassuolo.

Roma have a tough task as they host champions Juventus, who have been held in their last two games, since wrapping up the title. Napoli play at SPAL after Carlo Ancelotti’s side secured second place in the league last weekend. Genoa, with just one win from their last 11 games, are four points above the relegation zone with their final matches against Cagliari and Fiorentina.

LECCE BACK IN SERIE A AFTER SECOND STRAIGHT PROMOTION

Meanwhile, Italian club Lecce have been promoted to Serie A after their 2-1 win over Spezia on the final day of the Serie B season yesterday. Lecce – a town in the heel of Italy – last played in Serie A in the 2011-2012

season and were promoted from Serie C last season.

Serie B champions Brescia had already secured their place in the top flight next season. The final ticket for Serie A will be won during a play-off involving six teams – Palermo, Benevento, Pescara, Verona, Spezia and Cittadella.

The position of Palermo, however, remains uncertain with the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) requesting that the team be demoted to Serie C next season for financial irregularities.

ITALIAN SERIE A RESULTS

Atalanta 1 (Barrow 46, Castagne 53) Genoa 1 (Pandev 89); Cagliari 1 (Pavoletti 90+1) Lazio 2 (Alberto 31, Correa 53)  
Play today (GMT): Torino v Sassuolo (1030), Frosinone v Udinese, Sampdoria v Empoli (both 1300), SPAL v Napoli (1600), Roma v Juventus (1830)

SPOTLIGHT

# Allegri denies exit rumours

Reuters  
Milan

Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri is amused by talk that he will leave the club at the end of the season, he said yesterday, adding that he still had to meet club president Andrea Agnelli to discuss plans for the future.

There has been media reports that Allegri wants a greater role over transfers if he is to continue, but the talk was water off a duck’s back for the phlegmatic coach who has led Juventus to the Serie A title in each of his five years in charge. “I enjoy reading and hearing everything,” he told a news conference.

“It’s amusing. This morning, I

thought about what they might have done to me if I hadn’t won any trophy in these years. But I have fun, it’s part of the game and brings some bit of movement as we finished the championship a month ago.”

Allegri, whose side wrapped up the title with five games to spare and visit AS Roma today, said he had already told the president he would stay after their Champions League quarter-final defeat to Ajax Amsterdam. “During the week we will meet with the president and talk about everything,” he added.

Despite the Serie A title, this season was widely regarded as a disappointment for Juventus, partly because expectations rose greatly with the signing of Cristiano Ronaldo and partly because

their performances sometimes lacked sparkle.

“I’ve had my ideas for six months on how to proceed. Now I’ll share those ideas with the president and, together, we’ll see if they work,” he said. “I won’t tell you what those are, but I plan ahead, I can assure you.”

One of the disappointments of the season has been the form of playmaker Paulo Dybala, who has struggled to adapt his role following Ronaldo’s arrival. “His position has always been the same, from the beginning to the present,” said Allegri.

“Last year he played with Mario Mandzukic and Gonzalo Higuain, but Ronaldo is a different player and the combination isn’t the same, but Dybala’s position has not changed.”

FOCUS

# Beckham cheers Salford to Football League promotion

AFP  
London

David Beckham cheered Salford into the English Football League as the club he co-owns with Manchester United’s famous ‘Class of 92’ clinched a 3-0 win against AFC Fylde in the National League play-off final yesterday.

United legend Beckham was joined by former team-mates Phil Neville and Gary Neville, Ryan Giggs and Nicky Butt in the stands at Wembley to watch

Salford reach League Two for the first time. Graham Alexander’s side took the lead through Emmanuel Dieseruwwe and Carl Piergianni’s second-half header was followed by Ibou Touray’s decisive third. Salford, who finished the regular season in third place in the fifth tier, beat Eastleigh on penalties to book their place in the final.

They have now achieved four promotions in five seasons since the Nevilles, Butt, Giggs and Paul Scholes took a 60 per cent stake in 2015 in conjunction with a 40 per cent share owned by their as-

sociate Peter Lim.

When Scholes had to give up his stake during a brief spell as Oldham manager this season, former England captain Beckham took on his old team-mate’s share in Salford – a club based just 3.5 miles from United’s Old Trafford stadium.

Former England defender Gary Neville said Salford’s rise to the professional ranks had come well ahead of schedule. “Four promotions in five years, we said we would do it in eight, and we thought that was quite aggressive,” he said.

ODI

# Buttler's daddy ton sets up dramatic victory for England

New father Buttler's 110 not out was the cornerstone of England's 373 for three

AFP  
Southampton

**J**os Buttler's stunning 50-ball century just about proved the difference as England beat Pakistan by 12 runs in a thrilling second one-day international at Southampton yesterday.

New father Buttler's 110 not out was the cornerstone of World Cup hosts England's 373 for three.

But Pakistan, thanks mainly to opener Fakhar Zaman's 138, stayed in the game before a target of 19 off the last over, bowled by Chris Woakes, proved beyond them as they finished on 361 for seven.

Following Wednesday's no-result washout at The Oval, victory left England 1-0 up in this five-match series. Man-of-the-match Buttler's innings — played in front of a crowd that included his wife and baby daughter Georgia — featured nine sixes, including a straight drive off Hasan Ali that took him to three figures.

"It was great to have her (Georgia) here and I'm delighted to play that way back in an England shirt this summer," said Buttler. "It was a fantastic game of cricket and great to come out on the right side."

England captain Eoin Morgan had the best view while making 71 not out in an unbroken partnership of 162 with Buttler after winning the toss.

"He's very good. He really is," Morgan said. "I was in prime position to see the whole innings and his freakish knocks seem to be getting closer and closer together. He seems to have a gear that not many of us have. I certainly don't have it."

Pakistan, chasing a national record 374 for victory, saw Fakhar and Babar Azam (51) put on 135 for the second wicket. But when both batsmen fell in successive overs, it seemed their chance of an improbable win had gone with them.

Asif Ali, however, ensured Pakistan stayed in the game with 51 before he was caught in the deep off David Willey, who held his nerve well to take two wickets for 57 runs in 10 overs. Pakistan captain Sarfraz Ahmed, 41 not out at the finish, praised his side for the way they so nearly reached a winning total.

"It's definitely hard to take, getting so close, the way my team responded because it was not an easy target to chase," he said. "I'm very proud of the team, the way Fakhar Zaman, Imam ul-Haq and Babar Azam played, especially as the way they're playing is a great sign for upcoming matches."

Earlier, such was Buttler's command his second fifty took a mere 18 balls, with the wicket-keeper making a 'rocking the baby' gesture — after the birth of his daughter two weeks ago — to celebrate his century. This was the 35th time since their miserable first-round exit at the 2015 World Cup that England had posted a total in excess of 300 — a feat they had achieved only 34 times in total prior to that tournament — an encouraging sign just weeks away from this year's edition.

Yet at one stage England's decision to rest fast bowler Jofra Archer look like it might backfire. Fakhar, the century-making hero of Pakistan's 2017 Champions Trophy final win over India at The Oval,



England's Jos Buttler plays a shot during the second one-day international against Pakistan in Southampton yesterday. (Reuters)

was soon driving the recalled Woakes for six and later twice struck the fast-medium bowler for cheeky scooped fours.

He also swept and drove Adil Rashid for

two fours in the leg-spinner's first over.

But the wicket England needed came when Fakhar chased a wide delivery from Woakes and edged to Buttler, although it

needed Morgan's review to confirm the dismissal. In total, Fakhar faced 106 balls including 12 fours and four sixes. The series continues at Bristol on Tuesday.

## Scoreboard

ENGLAND INNINGS		PAKISTAN INNINGS	
J. Roy c Imad b Hasan	87	69-0 (2w); Imad 10-0-63-0 (5w); Hasan 10-1-81-1 (2w); Yasir 7-0-60-1; Sohail 3-0-16-0;	Extras (b2, lb4, w10) 16
J. Bairstow c Zaman b Afridi	51	Imam-ul-Haq c and b Ali 35	<b>Total</b> (7 wks, 50 overs) 361
J. Root c Sohail b Yasir	40	Fakhar Zaman c Buttler b Woakes 138	<b>Did not bat:</b> Yasir Shah, Shaheen Shah Afridi
E. Morgan not out	71	Babar Azam c and b Rashid 51	<b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-92 (Imam), 2-227 (Fakhar), 3-233 (Babar), 4-274 (Sohail), 5-323 (Asif), 6-345 (Imad), 7-353 (Faheem)
J. Buttler not out	110	Asif Ali c Stokes b Willey 51	<b>Bowling:</b> Woakes 9-0-72-1 (2w); Willey 10-0-57-2 (2w); Ali 10-0-66-1 (1w); Plunkett 9-0-64-2 (2w); Rashid 10-0-81-1 (2w); Stokes 2-0-15-0
Extras (b1, lb3, w10)	14	Haris Sohail c Bairstow b Plunkett 14	<b>Result:</b> England won by 12 runs
<b>Total</b> (3 wks, 50 overs)	373	Sarfraz Ahmed not out 41	<b>Man-of-the-match:</b> Jos Buttler (ENG)
<b>Did not bat:</b> B Stokes, M Ali, C Woakes, D Willey, A Rashid, L Plunkett		Imad Wasim c Buttler b Willey 8	<b>Series:</b> England lead five-match series 1-0
<b>Fall of wickets:</b> 1-115 (Bairstow), 2-177 (Roy), 3-211 (Root)		Faheem Ashraf c Stokes b Plunkett 3	
<b>Bowling:</b> Afridi 10-0-80-1 (1w); Ashraf 10-0-		Hasan Ali not out 4	

## BOTTOMLINE

### 'Humble' Aussies head to Gallipoli for inspiration

AFP  
Sydney

**A**ustralia's cricketers were headed yesterday to the battlefields of Gallipoli for inspiration to kick off a gruelling four-month tour taking in the defence of their World Cup crown and an Ashes series.

The team, led by Justin Langer, flew out of Australia late Friday for a multi-day stop in Turkey before arriving in England for three warm-up games ahead of their opening World Cup clash on June 1.

"Where we are right now, on the way to England for a long campaign representing our country, hopefully it will be a real catalyst for gelling together and success," Langer said about

visiting the World War I site. Australia and New Zealand lost more than 10,000 men in 1915 when British and French troops landed on the Gallipoli peninsula in the Dardanelles Strait in Germany-allied Ottoman Turkey.

It became a defining event for both nations, marking the first time these newly independent countries fought under their own flags. The Steve Waugh-led 2001 Ashes-winning side made a similar pilgrimage, but Langer missed the trip, something he has called "one of the regrets of my career".

Last year, he took the squad to the WWI battlefields of northern France ahead of his first series in charge following the ball-tampering scandal that rattled Australian cricket. He said the players learned

about "humility and perspective, and understanding how lucky we are". "It's very sobering, and it was an incredible life experience for the boys, and also it gelled the team together with different experiences and interpretations of our history," he said. "We talk a lot about our history and the humility of times before."

Since his appointment, Langer has worked hard in restoring faith in Australian cricket after the "Sandpaper-gate" affair in South Africa that led to bans for then captain Steve Smith, his deputy David Warner and opener Cameron Bancroft. Cricket Australia on Thursday hailed the team's once-notorious behaviour as significantly improved as Langer's new less-abrasive attitude beds in.

## FOCUS

### Bangladesh unlikely to tour Sri Lanka

AFP  
Dhaka

**B**angladesh cricket authorities said yesterday they are unlikely to proceed with a planned tour to Sri Lanka in July citing fears that the country could be hit by another attack after last month's devastating Easter bombings.

Bangladesh's one-day international series in Sri Lanka was scheduled to take place in July, having been brought forward from December. But the fate of the series has been thrown into doubt following the April 21 Easter Sunday attacks in Sri Lanka churches and hotels that killed more than 250 people.

"There is only one problem about Sri Lanka: the kind of situation is there, there's no question

of going there. Not only Bangladesh, I don't think any team will play there," Bangladesh Cricket Board president Nazmul Hassan told reporters in Dhaka.

"If the situation calms down, they assure us and our security team gives clearance, we will see. At the moment we don't have any plan to go there," he added.

The Bangladesh national team narrowly avoided being caught in the New Zealand mosque attacks of March 15 that killed 51 people.

Bangladesh's players and officials came within 50 metres (yards) of the Al Noor mosque in Christchurch in March before a suspected white supremacist began indiscriminately shooting Muslim worshippers.

They were in the city to play a Test match, which was promptly cancelled.

## IPL PREVIEW

### Dhoni's 'Dad's Army' fight on for one more final

AFP  
Hyderabad, India

**M**S Dhoni's Chennai Super Kings shrugged off their 'Dad's Army' label to reach today's IPL final against the Mumbai Indians with both teams looking to clinch a record fourth title.

Chennai hammered Delhi Capitals, the kid stars of the Indian Premier League, by six wickets on Friday to reach a record eighth final in the Twenty20 tournament. The 37-year-old Dhoni is one of 11 members of the 25-man Chennai squad aged over 30.

Australian Shane Watson is 37 and fellow opener Faf du Plessis, a relative team youngster at 34. Both plundered fifties off the Delhi bowling as Chennai powered past the 147 target with an over to spare and just four wickets lost.

Dhoni, winner of three IPL titles and still a key member of India's World Cup squad, is not bothered by questions about his age. "I don't mind that because all this increases the anticipation," Dhoni said at the start of the game against Delhi, who were referred to as the 'Kid's Army'.

Their captain Shreyas Iyer is 23 and wicketkeeper-batsman Rishabh Pant, the likely successor to Dhoni in the national side, just 21. Dhoni has reliable old warhorses on every front to take on the Mumbai Indians, who beat Chennai last Tuesday to secure their place in the final. The 35-year-old West Indies paceman Dwayne Bravo, returned figures of 2-19 to restrict Delhi to 147 for nine.

Leg-spinner Imran Tahir, the eldest member of the squad at 39, has 24 scalps and is just one away from overtaking fellow South African Kagiso Rabada of Delhi as the IPL's top wicket-taker.

"We know what to do in different situations, we've made the most of our experience," Watson said after his team's 100th IPL win. "Mumbai Indians have a great team, not too many holes in their team," he acknowledged.

Mumbai, led by India's star batsman Rohit Sharma, will be counting on their rivals' fatigue to help them win. Dhoni's side will get only 48 hours to get to Hyderabad for the final and recover to take on a side with what appears



to be the right mix of youth and experience. With stand-out 20-year-old Ishan Kishan in the middle-order and the Pandya brothers — Hardik and Krunal — as well as big-hitting Kieron Pollard, Mumbai finished top of the table after a slow start to the season.

"They are a superstar team. If anyone does anything of repute anywhere in the world of cricket, they buy him," cricketer-turned-analyst Pommie Mbangwa said on an online chat show. "Yet somehow after a certain period of time they have managed to settle on some sort of formula that gets them winning games," said the former Zimbabwe paceman.

Mumbai, owned by Nita Ambani — who is married to India's richest man, Mukesh Ambani — has the bragging rights against Chennai this season after beating them three times, in the league and playoffs. They have also met in three IPL finals, with Mumbai winning two.

Mumbai won their finals in 2013, 2015 — both against Chennai — and again in 2017 when they beat Rising Pune Supergiant. Chennai won theirs in 2010 against Mumbai, in 2011 and again in 2018 after coming back from a two year ban over an illegal gambling scandal involving one of the owners of the franchise.

## SPOTLIGHT

### Sri Lanka analyst charged by ICC

AFP  
Colombo

**T**he International Cricket Council (ICC) said yesterday it has charged a Sri Lankan team adviser with trying to bribe the country's sports minister to influence an international match.

The move against Sanath Jayasundara, a performance analyst for the national team, came after minister Harin Fernando said in January that a Sri Lanka cricket employee had offered him inducements to change the national squad.

"Recently someone tried to bribe me as well," Fernando said, without naming who approached him. "I was offered a bribe to get some players into the team. I reported the incident to the ICC."

Cicket's world body said Jayasundara had two weeks to respond to two charges brought against him.

He was accused of "offering a bribe or other reward to the Sri Lankan sports minister to contrive in any way or otherwise influence improperly the result, progress, conduct or any other aspect of an international match."

On Friday, two former Sri

Lankan Test players, Nuwan Zoysa and Avishka Gunawardene, were charged with match-fixing and given two weeks to respond.

The charges against the two relate to a T10 league played in the United Arab Emirates in December, the ICC said.

Sri Lanka has been hit with a series of match-fixing controversies in recent months.

In February, the ICC banned former skipper and ex-chief selector Sanath Jayasuriya from the game for two years for failing to cooperate with an anti-corruption investigation.

Last month, ex-Sri Lanka fast bowler Dilhara Lokuhettige was suspended over three match corruption accusations. And last year, a match-fixing controversy blew up over a sting operation carried out for a TV documentary.

Fernando said in December the country had been rated as the most corrupt cricket nation by the ICC, after the ICC charged former Sri Lanka batsman Avishka Gunawardene with match-fixing. Meanwhile, Jayasundara was provisionally suspended with immediate effect yesterday, the sport's governing body said.

Jayasundara has 14 days to respond to the charges.

NBA

# Floodgates open for Curry in second half as Warriors oust Rockets

‘Obviously, we just wanted to win the series, but this is ideal. Probably give the players the weekend off to recuperate. We’ll have at least the next few days to prepare and recover’

Reuters  
Los Angeles

Stephen Curry and Klay Thompson combined for 60 points, and the visiting Golden State Warriors pulled away late in Game 6 to claim their Western Conference semi-final series with a 118-113 victory over the Houston Rockets on Friday.

The Warriors prevailed in the finale of the best-of-seven series despite playing without their leading scorer this postseason, Kevin Durant, sidelined due to a calf injury.

Durant’s status is uncertain ahead of Game 1 of the Western Conference finals in Oakland, Calif., on Tuesday against the Portland Trail Blazers or the Denver Nuggets.

“Obviously, we just wanted to win the series, but this is ideal,” said Warriors coach Steve Kerr. “Probably give the players the weekend off to recuperate.”

“We’ll have at least the next few days to prepare and recover, so this was a huge one for us tonight, especially considering the minutes (the starters played this series).”

Curry, scoreless on 0-for-5 shooting in the first half, sank a pair of dagger 3-pointers down the stretch of the fourth quarter and posted 33 points.

He was 8-for-8 from the foul line in the final 30.4 seconds, and he finished with 23 points in the fourth.

“I’ve had games like this before, just not as drastic going from zero to 33,” Curry said.

Thompson said of Curry’s late-game resurgence, “It did not surprise me one bit. The man is a competitor, a champion, and on top of that, he plays with such heart. He’s our leader.”

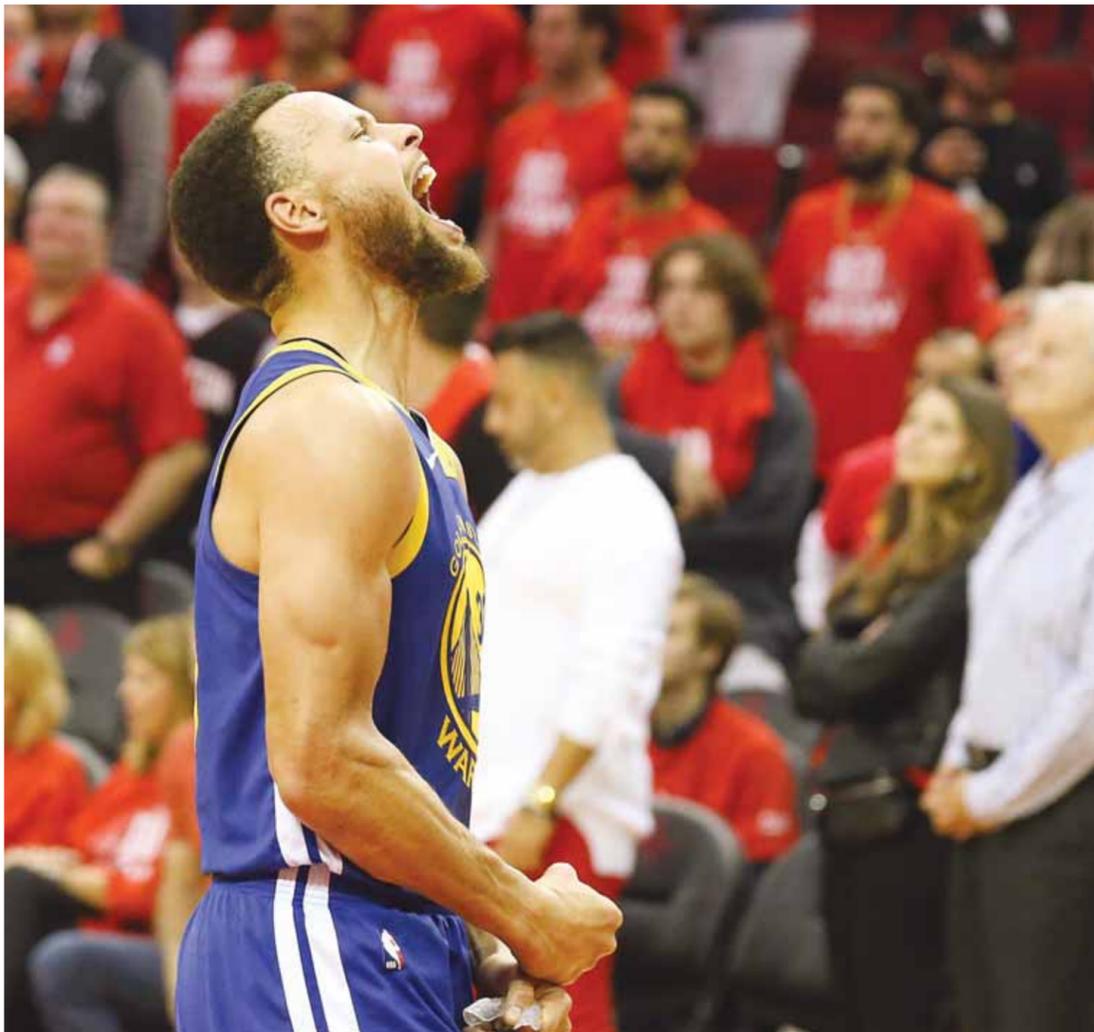
With Durant out, Golden State’s Draymond Green said the team played a style they used to have before Durant joined the team.

“There were some times it felt like that, a lot of pace, a lot of movement just trying to push the tempo,” he said after putting up eight points, 10 rebounds and seven assists.

“With Kevin, you can kind of be lazy knowing you can throw the ball to K and he’ll get that bucket. It definitely was a little throwback for us, for sure.”

With the Rockets trailing 107-104 following a driving layup from James Harden, Thompson nailed a 3-pointer with 36.1 seconds remaining to clinch the series for the Warriors.

Thompson added 27 points on 7-of-13 3-point shooting, and the Golden State bench, largely absent



Golden State Warriors guard Stephen Curry reacts after defeating the Houston Rockets in game six of the second round of the 2019 NBA Playoffs at Toyota Center. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

throughout the series, contributed 33 points, with Kevon Looney (14 points) and Shaun Livingston (11) both scoring in double figures.

The Warriors finished 16 of 38 from behind the arc, with Andre Iguodala going 5 of 8 on 3-point attempts while contributing 17 points.

Harden paced the Rockets with 35 points and added eight rebounds and four steals. Chris Paul produced his best game of the series with 27 points and 11 boards, but it wasn’t enough.

The Warriors also eliminated the Rockets last postseason, winning

Game 7 of the conference finals in Houston.

“We had to scrap and fight for everything the last two years against them, and we’ve been fortunate to come out on top,” Kerr said. “But we’re thrilled to be moving on and excited to have this one in our rearview mirror.”

As was the case throughout the series, neither team could maintain a lead once one was established. The Rockets forged a 37-33 edge on a Paul pull-up in transition at the 9:26 mark of the second quarter only for the Warriors to reel off a 17-5 run that featured a Livingston

dunk, an Iguodala trey and back-to-back threes from Thompson that lifted Golden State to a 50-42 advantage.

The Rockets responded with a 15-5 spurt that included successive 3-pointers from Austin Rivers, Harden and Gerald Green, but the Warriors pulled even at the break with a jumper from Thompson, who had 21 points by the intermission. In the third quarter, whenever the Rockets pushed ahead, the Warriors clawed back.

Early in the fourth, when Iguodala drained a 3-pointer immediately after the Rockets squandered

a three-on-one transition opportunity, the Warriors were within 89-85. That’s when, finally, Curry arrived and led Golden State back to the Western Conference finals.

Game 7 of the Nuggets-Trail Blazers series is scheduled for Sunday afternoon in Denver.

As for the Rockets, Harden was asked what’s next after losing to the Warriors for the fourth time in five postseasons.

“Keep fighting, man,” he replied. “They’re a great team. We’re not losing to some scrubs. We’ve got to find a way to keep getting better. Keep growing.”

SPOTLIGHT

## NHL notables pay respects to hockey legend Red Kelly

Red Kelly, an eight-time NHL champion who died at 91 on May 2, was remembered by former teammates, colleagues and executives at Friday’s funeral in Toronto for his contributions to the game and his community.

Born Leonard Patrick Kelly, the native of Simcoe, Ontario, made his mark with both the Detroit Red Wings and Toronto Maple Leafs during a 20-year NHL career from 1947-67. Each organization won four Cups with Kelly, who switched from defense to centre midway through his playing days and went on to be named one of the NHL’s top 100 players.

“It was the ability to be the person he was that was so important,” former Toronto teammate Bob Baun said in a Toronto Star article. “Red never did change, always such a great guy, very thoughtful and caring. He was as honest as the day is long.”

Other former Maple Leafs players, serving as honorary pallbearers with Baun at the funeral, included Eddie Shack, Frank Mahovlich, Darryl Sittler, Lanny McDonald, Dick Duff, Ron Ellis, Dave Keon and Jim Gregory.

“One of the all-timers,” said Shack, another former Toronto teammate of Kelly’s. “One of the greatest.”

Said McDonald, who played in the 1970s for Toronto when Kelly was the coach: “He was a hero to us all. We all looked up to him ... how he lived his life. He showed us the way.”

Also among those in attendance at Holy Rosary Roman Catholic Church were NHL commissioner Gary Bettman, Maple Leafs president Brendan Shanahan and general manager Kyle Dubas, Detroit GM Steve Yzerman and team president Christopher Ilitch, and former Toronto captain Wendel Clark.

“As much as he loved the game and he gave great service to the game and to this country ... family was always first,” Bettman said. “That’s something I always respected about him. Great, great man.”

Kelly retired after the 1966-1967 season, collecting career totals of 281 goals and 542 assists in 1,316 regular-season games, and 33 goals and 59 assists in 164 playoff contests.

He was inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame in 1969.

### Ansah officially signs with Seahawks

Defensive end Ezekiel Ansah officially signed with the Seattle Seahawks on Friday. Ansah, who has 48 career sacks, reportedly received a one-year, \$9 million contract. “I’m super excited,” Ansah told the team website after signing his contract.

“This is a great team. The calibre of players who have been through here, they have a great coach out here, the environment, the organisation, it’s just great. I’m just happy to be a part of it.”

The signing of Ansah figures to help make up for the departure of Frank Clark, who was recently dealt to the Kansas City Chiefs after leading the team with 13 sacks last season.

Coming off of shoulder surgery after missing nine games in 2018, Ansah is expected to be cleared by mid-August, according to the NFL Network.

Ansah, who will turn 30 on May 29, had four sacks and seven quarterback hits in seven games (two starts) while playing on the franchise tag (\$17.1 million) for the Detroit Lions last season, after posting 12 and 17, respectively, in 2017. His best season came in 2015, when he had 14.5 sacks and 34 QB hits while earning his only Pro Bowl nod.

Drafted fifth overall by Detroit in 2013, Ansah has 110 quarterback hits in six NFL seasons.

The change of scenery appeals to Ansah. “I am really motivated right now,” Ansah said. “Not that I wasn’t motivated before, but I’m just super excited to be part of the Seahawks.”

Defensive end Nate Orchard was released to open a roster spot for Ansah.

The four-year veteran was signed by Seattle last month. Orchard has five sacks in 38 NFL games for the Cleveland Browns (2015-17), Buffalo Bills (2018) and Kansas City Chiefs (2018).

FOCUS

## Bickerstaff speaks with Lakers’ brass

By Broderick Turner  
Los Angeles Times

While the Los Angeles Lakers continued their search for a new coach by interviewing JB Bickerstaff on Friday, according to several people with knowledge of the situation, about two dozen fans gathered at Staples Center to protest the team’s direction.

Bickerstaff, the former Memphis Grizzlies coach, became the second candidate the Lakers have interviewed at their training facility in El Segundo this week after reaching an impasse in talks to hire former Cleveland Cavaliers coach Tyrone Lue.

Former Indiana Pacers and Orlando Magic coach Frank Vogel interviewed with the Lakers on Thursday, according to those people, who were not authorized to speak publicly on the matter. Bickerstaff met with Lakers

owner Jeanie Buss, general manager Rob Pelinka, co-owners Joey Buss and Jesse Buss, president of business operations Tim Harris, director of special projects Linda Rambis and senior adviser Kurt Rambis, according to the people. Meanwhile, around noon at Staples Center, Lakers fan Charlie Rivers of Phoenix assembled with approximately 30 others to voice their displeasure with the state of the franchise after missing the playoffs for the sixth consecutive season.

He organised the group this week through Reddit, a social news aggregation site. The protest featured fans chanting and holding signs. At one point, the protesters broke out a chant of “Fire Rambis!” in reference to Linda Rambis, a close friend and confidante of Jeanie Buss.

“This is about the direction they’re taking their basketball operations at the moment,” said Rivers, who was born in Anaheim and was interacting with

other fans on Reddit when it was suggested he organise a protest.

“It’s an impromptu protest. It happened on Wednesday evening” on Reddit.

“It’s Friday noon, it’s about a day and a half, and here we are. Apparently the news covered it.”

There appeared to be more media and onlookers than actual protesters. At one point, Clippers super fan Clipper Darrell showed up and mocked Lakers fans, shouting out, “The Laker era is over!” The Lakers have been trying to hire a coach since they and Luke Walton mutually agreed to part ways on April 12. The next coach the Lakers hire will be their fifth in eight years. Walton’s departure came after Magic Johnson held an impromptu news conference before the team’s final game of the season to announce he was stepping down as president of basketball operations.

Bickerstaff, 40, was fired on April 11 by the Grizzlies after the team missed the playoffs with

a record of 33-49. He had been hired by Memphis as the associate head coach in 2016, but was promoted to interim head coach on Nov. 27, 2017, after head coach David Fizdale was fired.

Bickerstaff was named the head coach of the Grizzlies on May 1, 2018.

He was also the interim coach of the Rockets after Houston fired Kevin McHale on Nov. 18, 2015. Bickerstaff led the Rockets to the playoffs, but they lost in the first round to the top-seeded Golden State Warriors and he withdrew his name from the head-coaching search with Houston.

Bickerstaff, who is the son of former NBA coach Bernie Bickerstaff, has an overall record of 85-131 as a head coach.

Vogel, 45, had his best moments as coach of the Pacers for five-plus seasons, leading them to the playoffs five out of the six seasons he was there, including a postseason berth when he took

over as the interim coach in 2011.

Under Vogel’s guidance, Indiana advanced to the Eastern Conference finals in 2013 and 2014 before losing to the LeBron James-led Miami Heat. Vogel spent two seasons with the Magic before being fired after the 2018 season.

Other candidates the Lakers are considering include former Atlanta Hawks and New York Knicks coach Mike Woodson and former Memphis Grizzlies and Brooklyn Nets coach Lionel Hollins. The team also will continue to consider Miami Heat assistant Juwan Howard and former Brooklyn Nets and Milwaukee Bucks coach Jason Kidd, both of whom were interviewed in April.

Lue, 42, was offered a three-year, \$18-million contract, which was two years and \$7 million short of what he was willing to accept, according to people familiar with the offer. Lue and the Lakers ended negotiations on Wednesday.



Houston Rockets interim head coach JB Bickerstaff on the sidelines during action against the Orlando Magic at the Amway Center in Orlando, Florida, on December 23, 2015.

## GOLF

# Nicklaus likes Tiger's chances to break major record

'If his body holds together and he doesn't have any issues, I'd say the chances of him breaking my record are very good'



In this file photo taken on June 3, 2012, Tiger Woods (left) shares a laugh with Jack Nicklaus following the Memorial Tournament presented by Nationwide Insurance at Muirfield Village Golf Club in Dublin, Ohio. (AFP/GETTY IMAGES)

AFP  
Bethpage, United States

Jack Nicklaus says Masters winner Tiger Woods has a "very good" chance of setting the record for all-time major golf titles, while even the usually cautious Woods calls overtaking Nicklaus "a possibility."

By winning his 15th major title last month at Augusta National, Woods put what was once the burning question in golf back on the lips of fans - "Can Tiger beat Jack?"

Nicklaus won a record 18 career major titles, the last of them at age 46 at the 1986 Masters, and 43-year-old Woods can boost his total at next week's 101st PGA Championship at Bethpage Black.

Woods ended an 11-year major win drought by capturing his fifth green jacket, having strug-

gled with knee and back injuries since winning the 2008 US Open.

"If his body holds together and he doesn't have any issues, I'd say the chances of him breaking my record are very good," Nicklaus told KXAS-TV in Dallas this week.

"He has certainly created a huge big spark back into the game again. I think he's swinging better than he has ever swung before."

Spinal fusion surgery in 2017, a last-chance move by Woods just to avoid back pain and have a normal life, allowed him to return to elite golf last year and contend for major titles at the British Open and PGA.

Woods managed his major breakthrough last month at the Masters, using his knowledge of Augusta National, mental game and formidable skills to full advantage.

"Before the Masters, I didn't

know if the five inches between his ears was calmed down, or giving him confidence again, or not," Nicklaus said. "I think they have now. I don't think there's any question of that."

"I'll be watching him very closely."

And the next two majors are on courses where Woods has won major titles - Bethpage, where he took the 2002 US Open, and Pebble Beach, site of his 2000 US Open triumph.

"He has got me shaking in my boots," Nicklaus said.

Nicklaus, 79, was the boyhood idol of Woods, his achievements becoming targets for the golf superstar.

Injuries robbed Woods of prime years for gaining ground on Jack's 18, but once again Tiger is on the prowl.

"I always thought it was possible," Woods told GolfTV.

"It took him an entire career to get to 18.

"Now that I've had another extension to my career, one I didn't think I had a couple years ago, if I do things correctly and everything falls my way, it's a possibility."

"I'm never going to say it's not, except for a couple years ago when I couldn't walk."

"I just need to have a lot of things go my way. Who is to say that it will or will not happen. That's what the future holds. I don't know. The only thing I can promise you is this - I will be prepared."

#### 'WHO IS BETTER?' DEBATE

American Webb Simpson, the 2012 US Open champion, has watched the Tiger versus Jack debate for years.

"He has long been compared to Jack. 'Who is better?' And I think the debate continues," 20th-ranked Simpson said.

"You think of '86 Masters when Jack won and then Tiger in

2019. And they're different but yet very comparable to kind of how big the moment was."

Woods would be among the 10 oldest major winners should he claim another top-tier title, but Nicklaus says Woods could have another decade or more of challenging for major crowns.

"Tiger is going to be well into his 50s with what he has got, plus the physical conditioning guys do today," Nicklaus said. "We didn't do any of that stuff."

Another major win would put Woods among the 10 oldest major winners, with a victory at Bethpage putting him two days beyond the 10th-place win by Ted Ray at the 1920 US Open at 43 years, 4 months and 16 days.

Woods will have annual Masters chances at Augusta National and two 2021 majors will be on courses where Woods has won majors - St. Andrews for the British Open and Torrey Pines for the US Open.

## BASEBALL

## Verlander, 3 Astros homers enough to drop Rangers

Reuters  
Houston

Justin Verlander allowed one hit over seven strong innings, and the Houston Astros belted three solo homers while overcoming an injury to star Jose Altuve to beat the visiting Texas Rangers 3-0 on Friday night for their third consecutive victory.

Verlander, who improved to 6-1 with a 2.51 ERA, struck out eight and yielded only Asdrubal Cabrera's single to lead off the fifth inning as the American League West-leading Astros (24-15) won for the sixth time in seven games. It's the third time in Verlander's career that he has allowed just one hit in a start against the Rangers (17-19).

Houston's Ryan Pressly pitched a perfect eighth to extend his scoreless-inning stretch to 35 innings dating to last season. Roberto Osuna allowed Texas' only other hit to Shin-Soo Choo, but closed out the ninth for his 10th save.

However, Houston's latest victory might have come with a price as Altuve exited with left hamstring discomfort in the bottom of the first after beating out an infield hit. The team listed him as day-to-day.

For the rest of the night, the Astros were just fine without Altuve. Jake Marisnick clubbed his third homer of the season, a deep shot to right-center in the third inning. In the seventh, with two outs and Texas starter Lance Lynn in a nice groove, Yuli Gurriel and Robinson Chirinos delivered back-to-back home runs to pad the Astros advantage.

Gurriel is batting .407 (11 of 27) with two homers during a seven-game hitting streak.

Lynn (4-3, 5.48), who retired 11 straight Houston batters at one point, allowed those three homers and three other hits while also fanning eight in seven innings to fall short of a third straight winning start.

The Rangers have dropped the first two of this four-game

set after winning four of the first six meetings against Houston this season - all of which were at home. Former Astros player Hunter Pence's streak of a home run in three consecutive games ended with an 0-for-3 night on Friday.

#### MAEDA, DODGERS SHUT OUT NATIONALS

Kenta Maeda pitched six innings of one-hit ball, and Joc Pederson hit a pair of home runs as the Los Angeles Dodgers rebounded for a 5-0 victory against the visiting Washington Nationals on Friday.

## RESULTS

Astros	3-0	Rangers
Red Sox	14-1	Mariners
Athletics	4-3	Indians
Brewers	7-0	Cubs
Yankees	4-3	Rays
Twins	6-0	Tigers
Mets	11-2	Marlins
Blue Jays	4-3	White Sox
Pirates	2-1	Cardinals
Royals	5-1	Phillies
Angels	8-3	Orioles
Rockies	12-2	Padres
Braves	2-1	D'backs
Reds	7-0	Giants
Dodgers	5-0	Nationals

Maeda walked two and struck out six one night after the Nationals rolled to a 6-0 victory to end Los Angeles' 10-game home winning streak. David Freese added a two-run home run in the seventh inning.

Pederson homered leading off for the Dodgers in the first inning, but Nationals starter Anibal Sanchez seemed to settle down from there. He gave up another run in the fourth inning on a Chris Taylor triple, which was aided by an Adam Eaton misplay in right field.

Pederson's home run in the first inning was his 14th as his team's first batter of the game.

In the fifth inning, Pederson delivered another solo shot off Sanchez, driving a ball to the back of the Nationals' bullpen in right field.

It was 12th home run of the season for Pederson, who also has 11 career multi-homer games, three of which have come this season.



Houston Astros starting pitcher Justin Verlander delivers a pitch during the first inning against the Texas Rangers at Minute Maid Park. PICTURE: USA TODAY Sports

## SPOTLIGHT

## Kang fires 61 to grab PGA Byron Nelson lead

AFP  
Washington

South Korea's Kang Sung-hoon fired six birdies in a row on his way to a bogey-free 10-under par 61 Friday to grab a four stroke lead in the second round of the US PGA Byron Nelson tournament.

Kang, seeking his first US PGA title, stood on 16-under 126 after 36 holes at Trinity Forest Golf Club in Dallas, four strokes ahead of Matt Every and Tyler Duncan, who shot a 65 and 66 respectively. Aided by cool early conditions, the Dallas resident opened with a birdie, his approach at the par-five first landing inches from the cup.

"It was perfect and awesome," Kang said. "I live in Dallas, about 30 minutes from the golf course, and I've never seen weather like this in May. I knew it was going to be cold and windy so I really tried to prepare for how far the ball was going to go this morning and it worked out great."

Kang began his run of six birdies in

a row at the par-four fifth, landing his approach inches from the cup. He sank a six-foot birdie putt at the sixth and one half as long at the par-five seventh. He followed with a birdie from seven feet at the par-three seventh, another from six feet at the ninth and capped the run by sinking a 21-foot birdie putt to begin the back nine.

"I just tried to keep it in play," Kang said. "There are some par-fives so we can make some birdies and some short par-threes. I just tried to take advantage of those holes and miss it in the right spots. I missed it in the right spots where I needed to miss it and it worked out great."

Kang, who fired a 60 at Pebble Beach in 2016, added birdie putts from 18 feet at the par-four 13th, 12 feet at the par-five 14th and 11 feet at the par-four 16th. But he wasn't thinking about finishing with two more birdies to shoot 59.

"I hadn't thought about 59," he said. "I thought it was pretty far away until I finished."

Kang was just short on a 25-foot

birdie putt at the par-three 17th and needed to sink a 14-footer to save par at 18.

American Brooks Koepka fired a 66 and is alone in third while Rory Sabbatini has sole possession of fourth after shooting a 65. Former Dallas Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo shot a three-over 73 in the second round and missed the cut. Romo played better on Friday than the first round when he stumbled to a five-over 76.

## LEADING SCORES

126-Kang Sung-hoon (KOR) 65-61  
130-Matt Every 65-65, Tyler Duncan 64-66  
131-Brooks Koepka 65-66  
132-Rory Sabbatini (SVK) 67-65  
133-Martin Laird (SCO) 67-66, Beau Hossler 67-66, Roberto Diaz (MEX) 66-67  
134-Michael Thompson 66-68  
135-Jordan Spieth 68-67, Matt Jones (AUS) 65-70, Jonas Blixt (SWE) 65-70, Sebastian Munoz (COL) 69-66, Stephan Jaeger (GER) 69-66, Doug Ghim 69-66, Zack Sucher 67-68



Sung Kang of Korea with his caddy on the 15th hole during the second round of the AT&T Byron Nelson at Trinity Forest Golf Club in Dallas. (Getty Images/AFP)

TENNIS

# Bertens' triumph in Madrid halts Halep push for top spot

'I'm really happy to win this trophy. It means a lot to me after last year getting to the final here'

AFP  
Madrid

The Netherlands' Kiki Bertens pulled off a surprise 6-4, 6-4 victory over Simona Halep to win the Madrid Open yesterday, denying the Romanian a return to the top of the world rankings. Halep could have knocked Naomi Osaka off the number one spot with a triumph in the Spanish capital but instead it was Bertens who made history, becoming the highest-ranked Dutchwoman ever by climbing to world number four.

Bertens secured her ninth WTA singles title, as well as a cheque for 1.2 million euros, while her success should make amends for last year's disappointment in Madrid, when she lost in the final to Petra Kvitová.

Halep was chasing her third success in four years in this tournament but delivered the sort of patchy, disgruntled display that has hindered her before with a trophy in sight.

But Bertens more than played her part, a deserving winner and the first woman ever to win the title without even dropping a set. On this evidence, she will be a serious contender at the French Open later this month, where Bertens reached the semi-finals in 2016 only to be stopped by Serena Williams.

Halep is the reigning champion at Roland Garros but has struggled at major tournaments since her debut victory last year. The 27-year-old has failed to go past the fourth round in any of the three Grand Slams since.

She was gracious in defeat, high-fiving Bertens as she made her way to collect the trophy.

"I'm really happy to win this trophy," Bertens said. "It means a lot to me after last year getting to the final here."

Halep said: "It's an amazing tournament for me, very special. I'm sad I didn't win but Kiki deserved to win, she played the better tennis and all week the best tennis, so congratulations." After an early exchange of breaks, Halep moved 4-2 clear in the opening set only to lose her rhythm as Bertens came storming back.

Four games won in a row, including a booming backhand down the line for 5-4, helped Bertens claim the first set before a brilliant lob set up a break in the opening game of the second.



Netherlands' Kiki Bertens celebrates with the trophy after winning the Madrid Open final against Romania's Simona Halep (left) yesterday. (Reuters)

Halep finally stemmed the tide by winning her first game in seven, a curling forehand clipping the line, and then she broke for 2-2 as a Bertens backhand drifted wide. A more aggressive approach was paying

dividends for Halep but it was high-risk too and when the Romanian blasted out in the very next game, Bertens was back up a break. Halep battled back to 4-3 but looked beaten when a series of gutsy retrievals saw

Bertens fluff her smash, only for the ball to smack Halep full on the thigh, three feet behind the baseline. Bertens survived a tight game to lead 5-3 but was made to serve out after Halep held. A big serve set up one

match point, which Halep saved with a diving volley.

A second came and went too but Bertens finally converted the third, Halep failing to reach a drop-shot and giving her opponent the chance to celebrate.

MADRID OPEN

## Djokovic edges past Thiem to reach final

AFP  
Madrid

Novak Djokovic enhanced his credentials as the greatest threat to Rafael Nadal winning a 12th French Open title next month after he beat Dominic Thiem yesterday to reach the Madrid Open final.

If Nadal overcomes the talented Stefanos Tsitsipas later on Saturday, it will be the Spaniard and Djokovic in Sunday's final, in what could prove a dress rehearsal for the title match at Roland Garros too.

World number one Djokovic's 7-6 (7/2), 7-6 (7/4) win over Thiem was far from comfortable, the Madrid crowd treated to two exhilarating sets of baseline tennis, but the Serb found his best in both tie-breaks.

In those pressure moments, Thiem, who saved two match points in beating Roger Federer in the quarter-finals, was unable to respond, even if he ran the top seed close enough to suggest he will be a serious contender again in Paris, where he was runner-up to Nadal last year.

Since taking a month off after winning the Australian Open, Djokovic has stuttered, enduring early exits in Indian Wells, Miami and then Monte Carlo.

But Thiem met the 31-year-

old close to his best, delivering a timely reminder of why he has won the last three Grand Slam titles and will hold all four concurrently by winning his 16th at the French Open.

Djokovic conceded an early break when a short forehand hit the tape but struck back for 3-3, matching a Thiem drop-shot in kind before his opponent patted wide. Thiem had a break point at 4-4 but it was Djokovic who stormed clear in the tie-break, winning the point of the match with, perhaps, the shot of the tournament.

Scrambling left into his backhand corner, Djokovic not only retrieved Thiem's approach but turned it into a brilliant lob that landed on the opposite baseline.

Disorientated, Thiem hit long to fall 4-1 behind and then again at 6-2 to hand Djokovic the set.

Thiem came again early in the second and broke in the sixth game, only to fail again to consolidate, Djokovic responding immediately for 3-3.

There was nothing in it until Thiem blinked again at 5-5 but this time Djokovic wavered, broken when serving for the match after coughing up a double fault.

Djokovic recovered his nerve in the tie-break, however, earning two match points and converting the first, when a tired Thiem framed a final backhand long.



Serbia's Novak Djokovic celebrates after defeating Austria's Dominic Thiem in their ATP Madrid Open semi-final in Madrid yesterday. (AFP)

### Sagan looking for Tour of California reboot

Peter Sagan is aiming to reboot his season when the Tour of California gets under way today following a disappointing start to the year for the experienced Slovak rider.

The three-time world champion has a history of success in California, winning the event in 2015 and holding the record for stage victories in the race with 16.

However, the 29-year-old will line up for today's opening stage in Sacramento after a frustrating start to 2019, which has seen him fail to win since a stage victory at the Tour of Down Under in Australia in January. He failed to finish in his two most recent outings, last month's Amstel Gold Race and La Fleche Wallonne. Prior to that, he settled for a fifth-place finish in the Paris Roubaix.

In March, he placed fourth in the Milan-San Remo a few days after a ninth place in the classification for the Tirreno-Adriatico. Sagan, however, believes the results don't tell the full story of his season, noting his training regime had been disrupted by illness.

"After being sick in the spring, I was rather weak, and when I was better I immediately returned to racing, which didn't do me any good," Sagan said. "I lost a few weeks of training and it was what it was."

"I come to give my best and achieve the best result possible," Sagan said. "To extend my record of stage wins will be an additional motivation."

While the elite of cycling will be competing in the Giro d'Italia, Sagan will be battling a Tour of California peloton which sees Richie Porte make his debut in the race.

British sprinter Mark Cavendish will also race for Dimension Data.

CYCLING

# Roglic takes Giro d'Italia lead with opening time trial win

Reuters  
Bologna

Primoz Roglic lived up to the hype as he smashed the competition to win the opening time trial of the Giro d'Italia and take the overall leader's pink jersey yesterday.

The Slovenian, one of the race favourites after winning all three races he has entered this season, clocked 12 minutes 54 seconds over eight kilometres from Bologna to the top of the San Luca hill.

He beat Briton Simon Yates by 19 seconds after the Mitchelton-Scott rider, who had warned that his rivals should be scared of him, looked impressive in the final two kilometre climb.

Home favourite Vincenzo Nibali was third, 23 seconds off the pace as the Team Bahrain leader got off to a decent start in his quest for a third Giro title after triumphing in 2013 and 2016.

Dutchman Tom Dumoulin, a time trial specialist, put up a slightly disappointing display to finish fifth, 28 seconds behind

Team Jumbo-Visma's Roglic and on par with fourth-placed Miguel Angel Lopez, of Colombia.

Team Ineos's Tao Geoghegan Hart finished a promising seventh, 35 seconds off the pace.

Sunday's second stage is a mostly flat 205km ride from Bologna to Fucecchio.

### Results and overall standings after the opening stage

- Stage 1**  
1. Primoz Roglic (SLO/Jumbo) 12min 54sec., 2. Simon Yates (GBR/MIT) at 19sec., 3. Vincenzo Nibali (ITA/BAH) 23., 4. Miguel Angel Lopez (COL/AST) 28., 5. Tom Dumoulin (NED/SUN) same time., 6. Rafal Majka (POL/BOR) 33., 7. Tao Geoghegan Hart (GBR/INE) 35., 8. Laurens De Plus (BEL/JUM) same time., 9. Bauke Mollema (NED/TRE) 39., 10. Damiano Caruso (ITA/BAH) 40.

Slovenia's Primoz Roglic celebrates on the podium after winning the first stage of the 2019 Giro d'Italia, an 8-kilometre individual time trial in Bologna. (AFP)



## FORMULA ONE

# Mercedes fear collision as Bottas takes pole in Spain

Wolff winced at the memory of the crash that saw both Mercedes men out of the race three years ago

AFP  
Montmelo, Spain

Mercedes team chief Toto Wolff admitted yesterday that he fears a possible reprise of Lewis Hamilton's spectacular 2016 opening lap collision with Nico Rosberg in this Sunday's Spanish Grand Prix. Wolff winced at the memory of the crash that saw both Mercedes men out of the race three years ago.

"I hope we will not be coming back to 2016," he said. "These guys (Hamilton and Valtteri Bottas) are in a totally different place with each other and they know how important it is to stay out ahead. Barcelona is a track where it is so difficult to overtake."

But, he admitted, he was concerned. "A bit nervous is probably the right way to describe my state of mind," he said. Hamilton and Rosberg's crash in 2016 gifted a maiden victory to Max Verstappen on debut with Red Bull.

Bottas yesterday grabbed pole position by beating Hamilton by six-tenths of a second in final qualifying, leaving them with a Mercedes front row lock-out. Wolff's anxieties were raised by seeing the battle in Baku last month, when the pair fought for the lead on the opening lap at the Azerbaijan Grand Prix. "We might have a little chat about that," said Wolff, of his plans for Sunday's pre-race briefing. "But they know exactly what to do and not do."

Bottas completed a hat-trick of pole positions yesterday when he outpaced Hamilton in a tightly-contested qualifying. The Finn, who leads defending five-time champion Hamilton by a single point in this year's title race, completed a treble after taking the prime grid position in both China and Azerbaijan.

Bottas clocked a stunning track record lap in 1min 15.406sec to finish six-tenths clear of his teammate in the top 10 shootout on a dry and gusty day at the Circuit de Catalunya. Four-time champion Sebastian Vettel of Ferrari



Mercedes' Valtteri Bottas (right) and teammate Lewis Hamilton pose after taking the top two positions following the qualifying session at the Circuit de Catalunya in Montmelo in the outskirts of Barcelona yesterday ahead of the Spanish Formula One Grand Prix. (AFP)

was third ahead of Max Verstappen of Red Bull, Charles Leclerc in the second Ferrari and Pierre Gasly in the second Red Bull.

Romain Grosjean was seventh ahead of his Haas teammate Kevin Magnussen, Russian Daniil Kvyat of Toro Rosso and Daniel Ricciardo in his Renault. "I really enjoyed that," said Bottas. "The

adrenaline rush you get from laps like that is great so I am really pleased. The season has started well, the way I hoped for, and I feel better in the car."

Hamilton congratulated Bottas and conceded that he had been unable to extract the maximum from his car on a circuit where he was hoping to land his own hat-trick of three straight Spanish

poles. "My final laps in Q3 just weren't strong enough. Ultimately, I didn't do the job," Hamilton said. "It's great to have another Mercedes 1-2, but I can reverse it tomorrow that would be great."

Vettel was also disappointed as Ferrari failed to deliver the pace that could bring an end to Mercedes domination. "The car doesn't feel too bad, but ob-

viously we are not quick enough," he said. "It seems to be more than an achilles heel here... I spoke to Valtteri and they were happy with their car."

In cooler conditions than on Friday, the opening Q1 session saw several cars struggling for grip, not helped by a gusty wind. Nico Hulkenberg ran off track in his Renault at turn four and af-

ter traversing a gravel-trap hit the barriers.

He managed to recover and, after pitting for a new front wing, rejoined the fray. His efforts were in vain, however, and he was eliminated in 16th place along with Lance Stroll of Racing Point, Antonio Giovinazzi of Sauber and the two Williams men, British rookie George Russell and Robert Kubica.

"Thanks again everyone for getting the car ready and apologies for FP3," said Russell on team radio, referring to his final practice crash that required a gearbox change and will land him a grid penalty. As if to signal his intentions, Hamilton was first out for Q3, but it was Bottas who showed the way in 1:15.406 to take pole on his first run, six-tenths ahead of his Mercedes teammate.

## SPANISH GRAND PRIX STARTING GRID

Front row: Valtteri Bottas (FIN/Mercedes)  
Lewis Hamilton (GBR/Mercedes)

2nd row: Sebastian Vettel (GER/Ferrari)  
Max Verstappen (NED/Red Bull-Honda)

3rd row: Charles Leclerc (MON/Ferrari)  
Pierre Gasly (FRA/Red Bull-Honda)

4th row: Romain Grosjean (FRA/Haas-Ferrari)  
Kevin Magnussen (DEN/Haas-Ferrari)

5th row: Daniil Kvyat (RUS/Toro Rosso-Honda)  
Lando Norris (GBR/McLaren-Renault)

6th row: Alexander Albon (THA/Toro Rosso-Honda)  
Carlos Sainz Jr (ESP/McLaren-Renault)

7th row: Daniel Ricciardo (AUS/Renault)  
Kimi Raikkonen (FIN/Alfa Romeo Racing-Ferrari)

8th row: Sergio Pérez (MEX/Racing Point-Mercedes)  
Nico Hulkenberg (GER/Renault)

9th row: Lance Stroll (CAN/Racing Point-Mercedes)  
Antonio Giovinazzi (ITA/Alfa Romeo Racing-Ferrari)

10th row: Robert Kubica (POL/Williams-Mercedes)  
George Russell (GBR/Williams-Mercedes)

## ASIAN BEACH VOLLEYBALL

## Qatar's Ahmed and Cherif storm into final



Qatar's Ahmed Tijan and Cherif Younousse beat third seeds Wu Jiaxin and Ha Likejiang of China in the semi-finals of the Asian Senior Beach Volleyball Championships in Maoming, China, yesterday.

By Sports Reporter  
Maoming, China

Qatar's Ahmed Tijan and Cherif Younousse entered the final of the Asian Senior Beach Volleyball Championships in Maoming, China, yesterday. The second seeds had little problem in defeating third seeds Wu Jiaxin and Ha Likejiang 2-0 (21-16 21-12) of China in the semi-finals.

Ahmed and Cherif, who have not lost a set in the tournament, had played exceptionally well against Yan Tingyang and Li Jie to thrash the Chinese team 2-0 (21-13 21-12) in the quarter-finals

earlier. The defending champions will take on another Chinese pair Gao Peng and Li Yang, who are looking to win China's first gold medal in five years.

The top seeds Gao and Li made a strong start yesterday with a convincing 2-0 (21-15 21-13) win against Li Zhuoxin and Zhou Chaowei in the all-Chinese quarter-final. In the semi-finals Gao and Li defeated Aussies Cole Durant and Damien Schumann 2-0 (21-13 21-14).

The match between Gao/Li and Ahmed/Cherif is expected to turn into a highly-anticipated showdown as both teams stand an equal chance of winning this top-tier competition. Gao and Li

captured the crown at the 2018 Asian Tour Samila Open in Songkhla, Thailand and successfully defended their title last month. The Chinese duo also claimed gold medal at the 2018 FIVB World Tour 2-star in Singapore aside from the 9th place at the World Tour 4-star in Xiamen, China last month.

Ahmed and Cherif had better performances in major competitions having won gold at last year's Asian Games in Indonesia. The Qataris also took bronze medal at the last month's FIVB World Tour 4-star in Xiamen and finished fifth place at home in the World Tour 4-star in Doha earlier in March.

## SPOTLIGHT

## Battery problem affected Hamilton's car

Reuters  
Barcelona

Lewis Hamilton's Spanish Grand Prix qualifying was affected by a battery problem, Mercedes principal Toto Wolff said yesterday after the reigning champion lost out to teammate Valtteri Bottas in the battle for pole position.

Championship leader Bottas beat the Briton, who had been on pole at the Circuit de Catalunya for the past three seasons, by a hefty 0.634 seconds. "In Q2 (the second phase of the session) on the second lap, there was a yellow (flag) and he aborted the lap and pitted," explained the Austrian. "Normally you need the cool down lap to recharge the battery, that's why he ended up in the garage with a battery that wasn't full."

Wolff said Hamilton was then sent out early in the final phase, which put him on "the wrong foot" because he came across other slower cars who had just left the pits when it came to doing his flying lap. "That obviously compromised his lap massively," he added.

Hamilton told reporters he had just not done very good laps, although he was still quick enough to secure a Mercedes front-row lockout for today's race. Mercedes have had one-two finishes in the first four races of the season and look likely to make it five, providing they avoid any coming together.

Bottas is a point ahead of Hamilton in the championship, thanks to a fastest lap in Australia, and the Briton said after the previous race in Azerbaijan that he had been too



Mercedes' British driver Lewis Hamilton gets out of his car after the qualifying session at the Circuit de Catalunya in Montmelo on the outskirts of Barcelona. (AFP)

nice to the Finn on track.

In 2016, a dominant season for Mercedes with Hamilton fighting an ultimately losing battle with then teammate Nico Rosberg for the title, the two Silver Arrows collided on the opening lap in Spain and retired.

Wolff recognised that was a concern but said the situation was very different now. "Everybody knows that lap one is very important and in Barcelona can be race-decid-

ing," he said.

"But the two have been so respectful with each other, on and off track, that we are in a very different place than we were in 2016. We completely acknowledge there is rivalry between the two of them, and that will intensify the longer the championship goes if it is between them," he added. "We will chat tomorrow morning and talk about scenarios and play a few videos. They know."

## FOCUS

## 'I need something daring to beat Mercedes'



AFP  
Barcelona

Sebastian Vettel hopes that a daring approach to race set-up will enable Ferrari to make up for their disappointment in qualifying at the Spanish Grand Prix. The four-time world champion qualified third on the grid behind championship leader Valtteri Bottas and his Mercedes teammate and defending five-time champion Lewis Hamilton.

"We tried a lot of stuff yesterday and again today and we ended up getting the best out of the car today, which wasn't

enough," said Vettel. "We are certainly not satisfied, but I am very happy with the approach, with the chance that we took in terms of trying something daring — something that will pay off ultimately. Maybe not today, but hopefully in terms of pace tomorrow."

He added that he was surprised by Mercedes advantage. "Coming here we did not expect it, but I think also we seem to lose quite a big amount of time in the last sector," he said. "There is definitely some homework to do. We know this track very well, as everybody does, but with the conditions today we were just unable to match them. We need to dig deep."