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INDIA'S CHOPRA EYES BIGGER RETURNS AFTER SETTLING FOR SILVER IN 2024 PARIS OLYMPICS



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FRANCESCO BAGNAIA OUTPACES JORGE MARTIN TO CLINCH 'INCREDIBLE' AUSTRIAN MOTOGP SPRINT



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Al Sadd trounce Qatar SC for first win of season

Al Somah scores equaliser as Al Arabi secure 1-1 draw against Al Wakrah at OSL

FAWAD HUSSAIN
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Reigning champions Al Sadd registered their first victory of the Ooredoo Stars League (OSL) season, thrashing Qatar SC 5-1 following a second-half onslaught at the Khalifa International Stadium yesterday.

Al Arabi and Al Wakrah remained without a win after both shared points following a pulsating 1-1 draw in other match yesterday.

Al Sadd, who were shocked by Al Shamal in their opening match, were leveled 1-1 at half-time after Qatar SC's Javier Martinez cancelled out Rafa Mujica's second-minute strike with a fine hit following a 14th minute corner.

Al Sadd completely looked a different side after the break as they regained the lead with a stunning goal from Mohammed Waad, who smashed a powerful shot into the right corner from around 20 yards outside the box in 48th minute.

The Wolves continued to hunt for goals and extended their lead six minutes later with Boualem Khoukhi netting their third goal with a left-footed strike after Hashim Ali's superb cross from the left.

Mujica completed his brace picking a brilliant through pass from substitute Yusuf Abdurisag as he broke into the penalty area to beat goalkeeper Motasem Albustami with a powerful hit from a close range, two minutes before time.

An own-goal by Moattaz Bostami in the fifth minute of stoppage time wrapped up a dominant victory for the defending champions.


Al Sadd's Rafa Mujica (second left) celebrates with teammate Boualem Khoukhi after scoring a goal against Qatar SC. PIC: QSL

"We could have taken a comfortable lead in the first half but we missed some good opportunities. We were better in the second half and availed our chances well," Al Sadd coach Felix Sanchez said after the win.

"I am happy with the victory and I am even happier for the players after achieving the first win this season, which I also dedicate to the Al Sadd fans, who supported us a lot during the match," he added.

At Al Thumama Stadium yesterday, Al Arabi's Omar Al Somah headed home the equaliser in 77th minute after Lucas Mendes headed Al Wakrah ahead in 58th minute following a corner. It was second straight draws for both the sides.

Today, Al Khor will meet Al Shahania at Al Bayt Stadium with both the teams hoping to earn their first win after playing goalless draws against Al Gharafa and Al Arabi respectively.

The second match will pit Al Gharafa against Al Ahli at the Al Thumama Stadium.

Al Gharafa will return to action after their win over UAE's Shabab Al Ahli in the AFC Champions League play-off with coach Pedro Martins saying his players are confident after a hard-fought victory.

"The players are ready for the match against Al Ahli and they are really in good condition, as the level of confidence has increased and this is good for us," said Martins.

Slot starts with Liverpool win; Arsenal blank Wolves to launch PL title bid

LONDON: Arne Slot got off to a winning start as Liverpool manager with a 2-0 win at newly-promoted Ipswich yesterday as Arsenal began their Premier League (PL) title challenge by beating Wolves by the same scoreline.

Newcastle defied an early red card for Fabian Schar to edge past Southampton 1-0, while Brighton ran riot under new manager Fabian Hurzeler in a 3-0 victory at Everton.

Slot has huge shoes to fill at Anfield after the departure of Jurgen Klopp, who restored the Reds to the top of the English game.

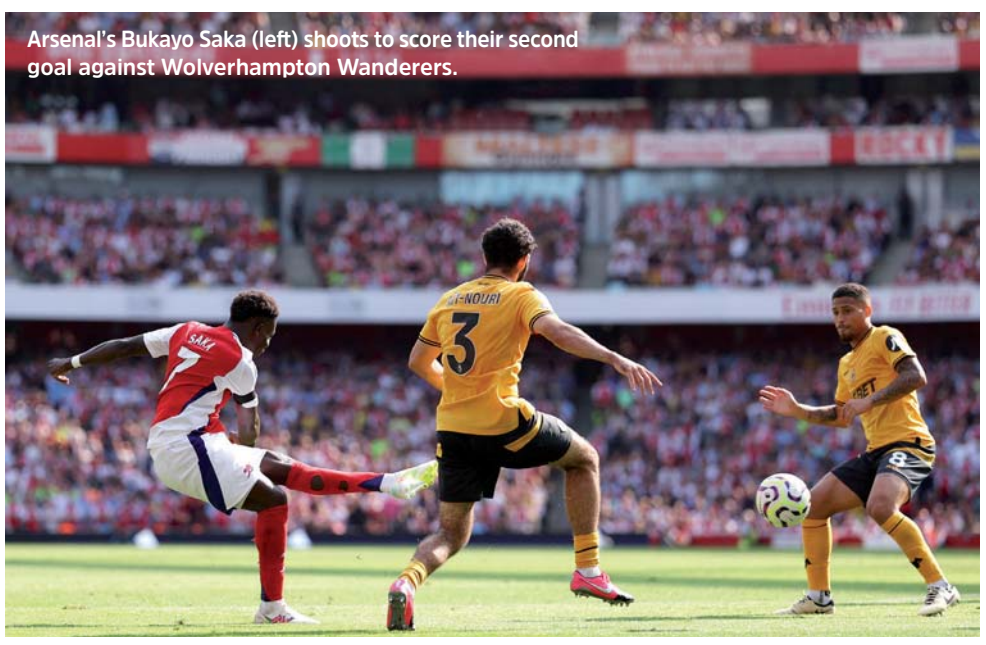
The Dutchman was left less than impressed by his side's first 45 minutes at Portman Road as Ipswich flew out of the traps on their return to the Premier League for the first time in 22 years.

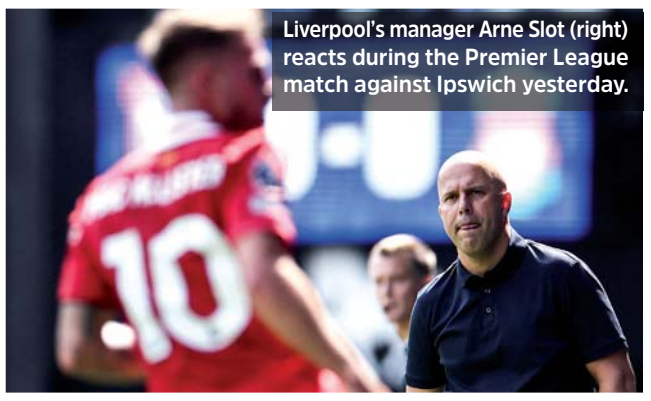
However, Liverpool were a different side after the break as goals from Diogo Jota and Mohamed Salah barely reflected their dominance to get Slot off to the perfect start.

"We as a team made a big change at half-time because we came out totally different to how we had come out in the first half," said the former Feyenoord boss.

"Second half, we won more duels, we won more second balls and we played more balls in behind because if the other team takes the risk of playing one-v-one and you have the likes of Luis Diaz, Mo Salah and Diogo Jota then use them, play the balls in behind."

Arsenal have finished second to Manchester City in each of the past two seasons and are highly-fancied to be the champions' closest challengers again.


Arsenal's Bukayo Saka (left) shoots to score their second goal against Wolverhampton Wanderers.


Liverpool's manager Arne Slot (right) reacts during the Premier League match against Ipswich yesterday.

Kai Havertz opened the scoring at the Emirates from Bukayo Saka's cross to reward the Gunners' early dominance.

However, Mikel Arteta's men needed a vital save from David Raya to deny Jorgen Strand Larsen and Matheus Cunha missed a huge chance to level before Arsenal made the points safe.

The roles from the first goal were reversed as this time Havertz teed up Saka to lash home.

Newcastle's hopes of a winning start to the season looked to have been undone when Schar was sent off after just 28 minutes for what the referee deemed a headbutt on Ben Brereton Diaz despite limited contact between the pair.

Southampton had dominated even the early exchanges against the Magpies' full compliment but failed to convert from 19 shots and nearly 80 percent possession.

By contrast, Newcastle were clinical as Alexander Isak teed up Joelinton for the only goal just before half-time.

Everton's final season at Goodison Park got off to a nightmare start as 31-year-old Hurzeler enjoyed a dream start to life in the Premier League.

Premier League Results

Arsenal 2 (Havertz 25, Saka 74) Wolves 0
Everton 0 Brighton 3 (Mitoma 25, Welbeck 56, Adingra 86)
Ipswich 0 Liverpool 2 (Jota 60, Salah 65)
Newcastle 1 (Joelinton 45) Southampton 0
Nottingham Forest 1 (Wood 23) Bournemouth 1 (Semenyo 86)

Kaoru Mitoma fired Brighton in front on his return from injury that saw the Japanese international miss much of last season.

Danny Welbeck added a second after the break before Everton were reduced to 10 men when Ashley Young saw red.

Simon Adingra made it 3-0 late on and only a VAR review denied Brighton a fourth through Yasin Ayari.

Antoine Semenyo stepped into the void left at Bournemouth by the departure of Dominic Solanke with a late equaliser to salvage a 1-1 draw at Nottingham Forest.

Aston Villa travel to West Ham in Saturday's late match.

City begin their defence of the title in the standout fixture of the weekend at Chelsea today.

Manchester United got their campaign off to a winning start on Friday when debutant Joshua Zirkzee came off the bench to grab a late winner in a 1-0 victory over Fulham. — *AFP*



PSG striker Ramos out for three months

PARIS: Paris Saint-Germain's Portuguese striker Goncalo Ramos **(pictured)** needs ankle surgery and will be sidelined for three months, the French club said a day after their Ligue 1 opening day 4-1 win at Le Havre.

Ramos was signed for the French champions for 90m euros ($99m) last summer and limped out of Friday's game after 20 minutes.

"He has a serious ankle ligament injury that will need surgery in the coming days," the club said of the 23-year-old former Benfica star.

Lee Kang-in gave PSG the lead Friday before Ramos limped off and Le Havre equalised before late goals from a deep well of striking talent in Ousmane Dembele, Bradley Barcola and Randal Kolo Muani gave the Parisians three points.

It was a comfortable win in the end for Luis Enrique's team, with their substitutes ultimately making the difference as PSG's strength in depth proved too much for a team who only just avoided relegation last season.

"It is the first game back and it's a very good start," said PSG's Spanish coach. "The final score disguises the fact that there are things to improve upon. We gave away lots of easy balls and had we gone 2-1 down that might have changed everything." — *AFP*


Marseille's Mason Greenwood celebrates after scoring his team's first goal yesterday.

Greenwood stars on debut as Marseille make winning start

PARIS: Mason Greenwood scored twice on his Marseille debut yesterday as Roberto De Zerbi's new-look side won 5-1 at Brest in their opening game of the Ligue 1 season.

Former Manchester United forward Greenwood struck inside three minutes and added another goal from the penalty spot on the half-hour after Luis Henrique had doubled Marseille's lead.

Luis Henrique netted again after Mahdi Camara's crunching effort pulled it back to 3-1 before half-time, with Greenwood also involved in both of the Brazilian's goals.

Greenwood won a second penalty after going down under a challenge from Jordan Amavi, but it was another of Marseille's new signings Elye Wahi who tucked it away.

The 22-year-old Greenwood arrived last month from Old Trafford, where his career began in promising fashion before he was suspended in January 2022 following allegations of attempted rape and sexual assault. Prosecutors dropped charges in February 2023 and he went on to spend last season in Spain at Getafe. But still, Marseille fans, including the city's left-wing mayor Benoit Payan, have condemned the signing of Greenwood.

He was one of five new faces in the Marseille line-up, joining Argentine goalkeeper Geronimo Rulli, Canada defender Derek Cornelius, Denmark midfielder Pierre-Emile Hojbjerg, and Wahi who was signed from Lens on Tuesday.

Rulli, an unused member of Argentina's triumphant 2022 World Cup and this summer's Copa America squads, also had a debut to remember, saving an early spot-kick from Romain Del Castillo following his move from Ajax last weekend.

Former Brighton boss De Zerbi took over Marseille in June after a chaotic past season at the Velodrome, promising sweeping changes after a campaign in which the club got through three coaches and failed to qualify for Europe.

Brest's third-place finish last term was easily the best in club history, but a number of key players have since left with others missing through injury or suspension, and it was a worrying start for the Champions League newcomers.

Monaco, last season's runners-up, take on Saint-Etienne later on Saturday as the latter return to the top flight after a two-year absence.

Lille, who reached the Champions League play-offs in midweek, kick off their campaign away to Reims. — *AFP*

Bagnaia outpaces Martin to clinch 'incredible' Austrian MotoGP sprint



Ducati Lenovo Team's Italian rider Francesco Bagnaia competes during the sprint yesterday. INSET: Bagnaia celebrates on the podium after winning the sprint.

SPIELBERG bei Knittelfeld: Italian Ducati rider Francesco Bagnaia raced clear to win an "incredible" Austrian MotoGP sprint yesterday and overtake Jorge Martin at the top of the championship standings.

Spaniard Martin of Ducati-Pramac finished second, while compatriot Aleix Espargaro of Aprilia completed the podium.

The reigning two-time MotoGP champion Bagnaia started the grid in second place and completed the 14 laps in 20 minutes 59.768 seconds, 4.673sec faster than Martin.

The Turin-born rider now sits top of the championship standings, but is tied on 250 points with Martin.

"Incredible, but the most incredible thing we did is the best lap time during the battle, a 1:28.7, that's two-tenths lower than the pole position time last year," said 27-year-old Bagnaia of his third sprint win of the season.

"The fight was intense and our pace was incredible... I'm very happy."

Austrian MotoGP Sprint: Top 10

1. Francesco Bagnaia (ITA/Ducati) 20min 59.768sec, 2. Jorge Martin (ESP/Ducati-Pramac) at 4.673, 3. Aleix Espargaro (ESP/Aprilia) at 7.584, 4. Enea Bastianini (ITA/Ducati) at 9.685, 5. Jack Miller (AUS/KTM) at 10.421, 6. Franco Morbidelli (ITA/Ducati-Pramac) at 10.523, 7. Brad Binder (RSA/KTM) at 10.941, 8. Marco Bezzecchi (ITA/Ducati-VR46) at 11.932, 9. Pol Espargaro (ESP/KTM) at 15.101, 10. Pedro Acosta (ESP/GasGaS-Tech3) at 16.611.

Pole-sitter Martin was hit with a penalty early in the sprint after he was unable to get his bike turned in time at turn two of the second lap and was forced through the short-cut.

"It was a difficult race for sure," said the 26-year-old from Madrid.

"I think it would have been a much better show without the long lap penalty because I had something left to try, I was really close to Pecco (Bagnaia). The first two laps were amazing, I really enjoyed that."

Enea Bastianini, fresh off a sprint-GP double at the British MotoGP, finished fourth on his Ducati and KTM's Australian rider Jack Miller raced through in fifth place.

Italian Franco Morbidelli (Ducati-Pramac), South African Brad Binder (KTM) and Marco Bezzecchi of Italy (Ducati-VR46) came in sixth, seventh and eighth respectively.

And the top 10 was rounded off by Spaniards Pol Espargaro (KTM) and Pedro Acosta (GasGas-Tech3).

Six-time world champion Marc Marquez started third but slid off his Ducati-Gresini bike with five laps to go and did not finish.

In today's Grand Prix, Martin will seek to reclaim his championship lead when he again starts on pole after setting a new lap record at the Red Bull Ring earlier in qualifying. — ***AFP***

Nys excels again as Vingegaard holds Tour of Poland lead

PARIS: Belgian Thibau Nys won his third stage on the Tour of Poland yesterday while Denmark's Jonas Vingegaard held on to the overall lead with only today's flat stage remaining.

The 21-year-old Lidl-Trek rider Nys was among the small clutch, along with Vingegaard, on the final climb and stole in at the last in what has been a break-out Tour for him.

The 183-kilometre sixth stage began at Wadowice, the birthplace of Pope John Paul II, and the short final climb ended with the rookie adding to his wins on similar terrain on Monday and Thursday.

In second place overall Diego Ulissi of UAE Team Emirates gained six seconds on Vingegaard of Visma, who leads by a slender 13sec ahead of Sunday's seventh and final stage with another Visma man Wilco Kelderman a further seven seconds off the pace.

Just over three weeks after coming second to Tadej Pogacar on the Tour de France, Vingegaard is poised to clinch the race on Sunday.

The final leaves from the Wieliczka Salt Mine and culminates at Krakow, where three laps of a downtown circuit should produce a sprint finish. — ***AFP***

The 21-year-old Lidl-Trek rider Nys was among the small clutch, along with Vingegaard, on the final climb and stole in at the last in what has been a break-out Tour for him.


Manchester United's Joshua Zirkzee (centre) celebrates after scoring against Fulham on Friday.

Zirkzee relishes 'unbelievable' Manchester United debut

LONDON: Joshua Zirkzee admitted it was an "unbelievable" feeling to mark his Manchester United debut with the late goal that clinched a dramatic 1-0 win against Fulham.

Zirkzee came off the bench in the second half at Old Trafford on Friday and delivered a memorable first impression as his 87th-minute strike gave United the perfect start to the new season.

The Netherlands striker completed his switch from Bologna a month ago, but was among several United players to get an extended break after Euro 2024.

He missed all of United's friendlies and was an unused substitute in last weekend's Community Shield loss to Manchester City.

Zirkzee, 23, finally made his first appearance in United red against the Cottagers, with his winner making it a moment he will never forget.

"A great feeling, it couldn't be any better. What can I say? Debut, winning, scoring in front of the Stretford End, so yeah, it's unbelievable," he said.

"I mean yeah, first game, first goal, it's always a relief to have that off your shoulders, but it goes on and we're just going to work for the next game."

Zirkzee jumped at the chance to join Erik ten Hag's side after shining in Bologna's outstanding Serie A campaign last term.

Asked why he wanted to join United, he laughed and said: "Why Manchester United?

"Some people might be crazy, but, for me, I mean this is the biggest club in the world, so it wasn't a difficult choice to make to be honest."

Zirkzee will be able to hone his craft under former United and Netherlands striker Ruud van Nistelrooy, who returned to Old Trafford as a member of Ten Hag's coaching staff in the close-season. — ***AFP***

World No.1 Swiatek sweats out win to reach Cincinnati Open semis

CINCINNATI: Iga Swiatek had to work to overcome teenager Mirra Andreeva yesterday with the world number one squeezing out a 4-6, 6-3, 7-5 fightback at the Cincinnati Open.

The top-seeded Pole needed a break in the penultimate game of a match lasting more than two and a half hours to finally advance into the semi-finals of the WTA and ATP event, a US Open tuneup that concludes tomorrow.

Swiatek advanced on her first match point as her opponent drove a return long.

"She's 17, but I feel we were playing at the same level," Swiatek said. "It was a tight match. Every point matters at the end. It was not easy for sure."

Swiatek said that after losing the opening set, she needed a change of tactics.

"I knew I could not play in the same way. I needed to put more pressure on her," Swiatek said.

"I played more proactive and had a better idea of what I needed to do. The same rhythm (as the first set) would not be enough.

"I changed things and felt the results right away."

Swiatek was broken in the third game of the 53-minute opening set and was never able to get it back. Andreeva needed two set points to claim the opener, earning the lead with an ace.

Swiatek struck back in the second set with a break for 2-0, which she held throughout to level the sets at one each.


Iga Swiatek plays a backhand during her match against Mirra Andreeva yesterday.

In the third, the top seed secured the last-minute break for a 6-5 lead and raised her hands in victory as Andreeva returned over the baseline a game later on Swiatek's first match point.

Alcaraz says sorry for racquet smash in 'worst' career loss

Carlos Alcaraz made his apologies yesterday, a day after smashing his racquet in fury during a second-round loss to Gael Monfils at the ATP and WTA Cincinnati Open.

The Spaniard, who currently owns both the French Open and Wimbledon titles, erupted in frustration at his game against the French veteran.

The Spanish second seed called his 4-6, 7-6 (7/5), 6-4 defeat the "worst match" of his career.

But he took to Instagram on Saturday to calm the waters as he prepares to make amends on court at the US Open.

"I want to apologise for my attitude yesterday, it was not good and that should not happen on court," he posted.

"I'm human, the nerves had accumulated and sometimes it is very tough to control when there is that tension. I will work so that it doesn't happen again." — ***AFP***

I want to apologise for my attitude yesterday, it was not good and that should not happen on court. I'm human, the nerves had accumulated and sometimes it is very tough to control when there is that tension.
Carlos Alcaraz

Champions Inter held at Genoa after late penalty drama

GENOA: Inter Milan were denied a win in the opening match of their Serie A title defence yesterday as late penalty drama left the champions with a 2-2 draw at Genoa.

Former AC Milan attacker Junior Messias snatched a point for Genoa in the fifth minute of stoppage time after ramming home the leveller from his own saved spot-kick.

Messias' last-gasp equaliser came after Inter defender Yann Bisseck was penalised for handball.

It cost Inter a win which looked to be have been secured by a Marcus Thuram brace following Alessandro Vogliacco's shock early opener for hosts Genoa. France forward Thuram thought he had given Inter a winning start when with six minutes remaining he delicately dinked home Davide Frattesi's pass, a goal which was initially chalked off for offside but then given after a VAR check.


Genoa's Messias (centre) scores his team's second goal against Inter Milan yesterday.

His perfectly placed header from Nicolo Barella's cross had put Simone Inzaghi's side level on the half hour.

Thuram was Inter's most dangerous player as he also forced two super saves from Pierluigi Gollini and won a penalty in the 34th minute which was revoked following a check on his clash with Milan Badelj.

Promoted Parma played out an entertaining 1-1 draw with Fiorentina with each team scoring with brilliant strikes from Dennis Man and Cristiano Biraghi. — ***AFP***

We must help 'extraordinary talent' Mbappe adapt: Madrid's Ancelotti

MADRID: With Kylian Mbappe set to make his La Liga debut for Real Madrid today against Real Mallorca, coach Carlo Ancelotti said the superstar needs to adapt to his new club.

The France captain scored on his long-awaited first Madrid appearance as Los Blancos beat Atalanta to win the UEFA Super Cup on Wednesday.

The 25-year-old striker, who arrived at the end of his Paris Saint-Germain contract, was not at his best but finished lethally after Fede Valverde sent the reigning Spanish and European champions ahead.

"Mbappe is an extraordinary talent, we have to help him adapt as quickly as possible," Ancelotti told a news conference Saturday ahead of the team's opening La Liga clash.

"He has started well in the dressing room, very focussed, with humility."

Mbappe was asked if he was planning to score 50 goals this season after the Super Cup triumph and the forward said there was "no limit" to what he might achieve.

Ancelotti said he was avoiding setting a target for the former PSG hitman, whose arrival at his dream club Madrid was years in the making. "I will never tell a player how many goals he has to score, what I ask of them is to give everything they have for the team, nothing more," added the Italian coach.


Kylian Mbappe

"Everybody has their qualities, whether they are technical, tactical or motivational, and have to harness them for the team."

Ancelotti suggested this season he would give players more time off for holidays during the campaign, with the expanded Club World Cup set to be played next summer. — ***AFP***

Algerian city welcomes home Olympic gold winner Khelif

TIARET: Huge crowds have welcomed home controversial Olympic boxing champion Imane Khelif to her native region of Tiaret southwest of Algiers after her triumphant return from Paris.

Thousands of people turned out late on Friday to greet Algeria's gold-medallist, who was the centre of a gender controversy at the Olympics on her way to the women's 66kg title.

Asked about a complaint that Khelif, 25, had filed with the Paris public prosecutor's office for online harassment, the boxer declined to elaborate.

"This is a day for celebration," she said. "I will address that question at the appropriate time."



Algerian gold medallist Imane Khelif poses for a picture as she sits with relatives in her hometown city of Tiaret on Friday.

> *I was given a warm welcome today. Every Algerian has the right to rejoice and enjoy themselves.*
> ***Imane Khelif***

According to US magazine Variety, billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk and Harry Potter author JK Rowling have been named in the complaint.

Former US president Donald Trump, the Republican party's nominee in the 2024 presidential race, would also be part of the investigation, Variety said, citing Khelif's lawyer. The boxer's coach, Mohamed Chaoua, said on Friday that Algerian President Abdelmajid Tebboune had taken a personal interest in Khelif's case. He said Tebboune "has said we will not give up on our rights".

However, he too underlined that Khelif's return home was "a day and a time for joy" and that legal issues would have to be addressed in their own context.

Khelif won the women's 66kg final against China's Yang Liu in a unanimous points decision, having been the focus of intense scrutiny in Paris during the Olympics.

Together with Taiwan's Lin Yu-ting, who won the 57kg women's final, Khelif was disqualified from last year's world championships after they failed gender eligibility testing.

However they were cleared to compete in Paris, setting the stage for one of the biggest controversies of the Olympics.

Residents of Tiaret, a city of around 200,000 people 340 kilometres (210 miles) southwest of the capital, gave her a rousing welcome when she appeared with relatives aboard an open-top bus escorted by police.

"I was given a warm welcome today. Every Algerian has the right to rejoice and enjoy themselves," she said.

"Even the president is a fan of Imane Khelif, which proves that the state and the people are backers of sport," she added. — ***AFP***



Connections pose for a group photo with Treasure Isle.

Treasure Isle shines at QREC Juvenile Sprint

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: In a thrilling finish, it was the two-year-old Treasure Isle (No Nay Never) who took the QREC Irish EBF Juvenile Sprint Stakes (Listed race) at the Curragh yesterday.

After a good run in the Gr.3 Jebel Ali Racecourse & Stables Anglesey Stakes when last seen, Treasure Isle benefitted from the drop-in trip to land his first black type race. Owned by Mrs John Magnier, Michael Tabor & Derrick Smith, the superb colt is trained by Aidan O'Brien.

With Shamrock Breeze (Ardad) leading the race towards the far side, the Ballydoyle colt was a close second. Inside the final furlong, Treasure Isle was headed by Saratoga Special (Mehmas) but rallied gamely to win by half a length. Saratoga Special went second while Lunigiana (Mehmas) took third.

Bred by Newstead Breeding, Treasure Isle is out of Newton's Night (Galileo), who is a full sister to Gr.3 winner Dress Rehearsal (Galileo) and a half sister to Listed winner Fairy Of The Night (Danehill).



Denny McCarthy of the United States in action during the second round.

McCarthy shares lead with Matsuyama at St Jude's Championship

WASHINGTON: American Denny McCarthy and Japan's Hideki Matsuyama shared the lead on 11-under after the second round of the PGA Tour's St. Jude's Championship in Memphis on Friday.

Despite struggling with a hip injury, McCarthy posted a fine 7-under round of 63 while Matsuyama shot 64 to head into the weekend on top of the leaderboard.

The 31-year-old McCarthy, who has yet to win on the PGA Tour but suffered playoff defeats this year and last, got off to a fine start with four birdies in his opening six holes before a bogey on the par-4 seventh. He recovered with a birdie on the par-3 eighth and showed the same resilience when he bogeyed the 12th and immediately birdied on the next hole.

Matsuyama started with a birdie on the par-4 first hole but then missed a short birdie putt on the second and he bogeyed the par-3 fourth after driving into the water.

From then on though, the 2021 Masters champion was in control, bogey-free and making five more birdies.

England's Justin Rose was a stroke behind Scheffler after a second straight round of 66.

Rose ended his round in style with birdies on the 16th and 17th and he sits level in fifth place with American Nick Dunlap.

It was a disappointing day for Rory McIlroy, fifth in the FedEx Cup standings, who shot a three-over 73 after making a double bogey on the par-5 third where he drove into the water. — ***AFP***

Chopra eyes bigger returns after silver

NEW DELHI: India's javelin star Neeraj Chopra said yesterday that missing out on Olympic gold hurt, but the injury-hit athlete eyes bigger returns in upcoming competitions.

The 26-year-old won silver in Paris after Pakistan's Arshad Nadeem won gold with an Olympic record of 92.97 metres in the javelin final.

Chopra, who made history in 2020 Tokyo Olympics with India's first ever Olympic track and field gold, threw further in Paris with 89.45 metres -- not too far off his personal best of 89.94m.

"There is no comparison with a gold medal," Chopra told reporters by phone from Switzerland, where he is training for upcoming tournaments.

"Winning back-to-back medals for your nation is good and taking a lap of the ground with your country's flag is always a wonderful feeling," he added.

"But the national anthem playing when your flag goes up with you on top of the podium was missing."

However, he said he was pleased with his silver.

"We have to accept what we have," he said.

"I am happy with what I got."

Chopra built on his breakout success in Tokyo by winning world championship gold last year, but missed a few competitions due to a groin injury.



India's Neeraj Chopra competes in the men's javelin throw final at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games in this August 8, 2024 file photo.

But the well-built star, who hails from the northern Indian state of Haryana -- a nursery of athletes including Olympic wrestlers and boxers, remains confident of future success.

"I believed that I could cover more distance," Chopra said on his mindset after Nadeem's monster throw in Paris.

But Chopra said he will not set himself targets of 90 metres and more.

"I leave this to God. Just prepare well, and give it a rip, the javelin will travel," he said.

Chopra became a national hero after his Tokyo gold, earning million-dollar endorsement deals with his boyish charm, changing hairstyles and an infectious smile.

However, Pakistan's Nadeem shot to overnight stardom after his throw gave his nation's their first individual Olympic gold.

Nadeem's father-in-law gifted him a buffalo for the Olympic feat.

But Chopra isn't surprised, saying he had been given a large container of ghee, or clarified butter.

"In Indian villages... gifts such as buffaloes, motorbikes and tractors are common," he said. — ***AFP***

Ghekiere wins penultimate stage of women's Tour

LE GRAND-BORNAND: Belgium's Justine Ghekiere won the penultimate stage of the women's Tour de France after climbing clear for victory on an Alpine mountain yesterday.

Ghekiere finished ahead of France's Maeva Squiban and Dutch rider Demi Vollering after a seventh stage featuring a 167km run over a series of climbs in the Alps to a summit at Le Grand-Bornand peak.

Poland's Katarzyna Niewiadoma came home fourth and kept the race leader's yellow jersey.

It was a second career win for Ghekiere, of the AG Insurance-Soudal team, and she consolidated her grip on the race's best climber jersey.

France's sixth stage winner Cedrine Kerbaol lost some time in the gruelling finish to come in 18th.

She now stands third in the general ranking behind Niewiadoma and the Netherlands' Puck Pieterse, who is 27 seconds behind the Pole.

Defending champion Vollering had been leading the race until a fall Thursday held her up for over a minute.

The Dutch veteran is still a contender in eighth at 1min 15sec.

Niewiadoma said she would not focus on her Dutch rival.

"I won't focus on Demi but only on myself. I'm going to have to relax and recover well this evening to be ready for tomorrow because the stage looks awful," she said.

Sunday's eighth and final stage is another for the climbers: a 149km mountain run from Le Grand-Bornand to Alpe d'Huez with it's 21 shoelace turns.

It features a 13.8km ride to the summit at a gradient of 8.1 percent, the riders also having to crest the Col du Glandon over 19.7km at 7.2 percent. Poor weather is forcast with cloud and rain likely to influence the final day's proceedings. — ***AFP***



Belgian rider Justine Ghekiere wearing the best climber's dotted jersey crosses the finish line to win the 7th stage yesterday.

Hoffenheim sign Hlozek from Leverkusen

LEVERKUSEN: Czech Republic striker Adam Hlozek has joined Bundesliga side Hoffenheim from Bayer Leverkusen, the buying club announced yesterday.

Hlozek, 22, signed a deal with Hoffenheim until 2029, with German champions Leverkusen receiving a reported fee of 20 million euro ($22m).

Hoffenheim were on the lookout for a new forward after selling German international Maximilian Beier to Borussia Dortmund in August.

Striker Hlozek, who won a league title and a German Cup in his two years at Leverkusen, had been on the verge of a reported move to Premier League side Leicester City.

Hoffenheim director of football Frank Kramer called Hlozek "an extremely strong, agile striker who has both the necessary physique as well as the technical skills and tactical understanding to be able to help our team immediately". — ***AFP***

South Africa again overwhelm Australia in Rugby Championship

PERTH: South Africa once again overpowered Australia in the Rugby Championship yesterday with a 30-12 victory in wet and slippery conditions at Optus Stadium.

The two-time reigning World Cup champions scored the game's only four tries in front of 58,197 fans, many supporting the Springboks, with Perth home to a strong South African community.

South Africa made 10 changes after a 33-7 triumph last week in Brisbane and overcame a grittier Wallabies in a ferocious contest with several players forced off due to head injuries.

Neither team was comfortable claiming the ball in either the air or on the ground, which had noticeable damp spots after torrential rains.



South Africa's Lukhanyo Am (top) catches the ball above Australia's Nic White during their Rugby Championship Test match.

The Springboks, who boasted 14 World Cup winners, struggled initially to handle the slippery conditions and only led 11-9 at half-time, before overwhelming the Wallabies with three second-half tries.

Despite running out of gas, it was an improvement from the Wallabies, who played with a harder edge after their physicality had been questioned.

They made five changes, with powerful winger Marika Koroibete proving an inspired inclusion in his first Test since last year's World Cup.

But Australia's record slipped to 3-2 under new coach Joe Schmidt, who had given his team a dressing down after the first Test defeat.

After a slow start in Brisbane, a pumped-up Australia hit the ground running and a breakout penalty was calmly converted by fly-half Noah Lolesio. The Springboks were sloppy in the early exchanges, making uncharacteristic errors.

They were ignited by a dashing Cheslin Kolbe, but his pass was fumbled by Sacha Feinberg-Mngomezulu as a certain try went begging.

South Africa were rewarded for a period of dominance when fullback Aphelele Fassi finished off a chain of slick passes from transition in a spectacular opening try.

The Springboks threatened to pull away but failed to capitalise on several fast break chances.

They also suffered a blow when stand-in captain Salmaan Moerat was forced off the field with a head injury. The Wallabies hit back and could have led at the interval only for Lolesio to spray a penalty from 25 metres to the right.

South Africa came out aggressively after half-time with Marco van Staden barrelling over the line to extend their lead. After heavy rain lashed the ground, the game went into a lull before reserve Max Jorgensen ignited the home team on debut.

But South Africa proved formidable in the maul leading to Malcolm Marx barging over the line for two late tries as their bid to end a five-year title drought in the competition started strongly. — ***AFP***