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Arsenal aiming to dethrone dynasty-chasing PSG

BUDAPEST: Arsenal seek to finally conquer Europe by wresting the Champions League crown from holders Paris Saint-Germain, who are themselves targeting back-to-back titles in Budapest today.

Luis Enrique's French champions are favourites to defend the trophy and establish an era of dominance in their post-superstar age, with heavyweight attackers Lionel Messi, Neymar and Kylian Mbappe departed.

Homing in on a career third Champions League trophy as a coach, the Asturian cleaned house after arriving in 2023, and created a cohesive, hard-working and brilliant PSG side in his image.

Luis Enrique took them to the semis in his first season, then past Arsenal last year in the final four before crushing Inter Milan to claim the Parisians a first European Cup -- 14 years since Qatar Sports Investments took over the club.

By contrast Arsenal's team has been slow-cooked over nearly seven years by Mikel Arteta, without the overwhelming financial muscle of PSG or domestic rivals Manchester City.

Last summer they recognised their developing team was finally ready to triumph and the Gunners reinforced in key areas. It brought a first Premier League title in 22 years and a return to Europe's grandest stage after two decades away, following their 2006 final defeat by Barcelona in Paris.

Both teams arrive in Hungary with different reputations in the eyes of the world for the way they play. PSG are the tournament's top scorers with 44 goals, while Arsenal are the team that has conceded fewest, shipping just six and are unbeaten.

Ballon d'Or winner Ousmane Dembele, likely to be fit after a calf problem, Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and Desire Doue lead a



Paris Saint-Germain's players and coaching staff take part in a training session.

PSG more 'hungry' for Champions League after first taste of glory

BUDAPEST: Paris Saint-Germain stars Ousmane Dembele and Marquinhos insisted their team are ravenous for European glory ahead of today's Champions League final clash with Arsenal after tasting success last season.

The French side claimed the trophy for the first time and are defending their crown in Budapest against Mikel Arteta's side, who are yet to win the trophy.

PSG captain Marquinhos said after thrashing Inter Milan 5-0 in last year's final, the Ligue 1 side had gained a taste for success which had to be sated.

"Once you win the Champions League, once you taste that title, once you taste that moment, you want so badly to relive moments like that again," the Brazilian defender told reporters at the Puskas Arena.

"I still remember today the feeling and emotion in the dressing room after that final. And for us, as competitors, we always want to feel that emotion. And again, we have to be hungry, we have to have motivation."

Dembele said winning again and again is what makes players truly great.

"We have a young squad, incredible staff and incredible players who want to win trophies," said the France international.

"We're hungry to win every trophy, whether it's the Champions League, the league, or the cup.

"We're competitors -- if we want to be great players, we have to win this kind of trophy several times. We're hungry, and we hope everything goes well tomorrow."

Arsenal boast the strongest defence in the competition and are unbeaten on their run to the final. Arteta's side also pose a potent threat from dead ball situations.

"We know their strength, we know how hard and difficult it is to come up against this Arsenal side," added Marquinhos.

Dembele won the Ballon d'Or last year after starring in French champions PSG's run to European glory and if they triumph again could be in line for another. "(Winning that) hasn't really changed the way I am or the way I play. I do know, though, that I've had a lot more responsibility since I arrived at Paris Saint-Germain," said the former Barcelona and Borussia Dortmund forward. — AFP



the underdog role, keeping the champions at bay and leaning on their superior set-piece quality.

Despite their contrasting styles, both sides have emerged as the competition's outstanding teams this season, shaped by two of the game's most demanding coaches.

Luis Enrique showed his tactical flexibility in the second leg against Bayern and never likes his team to be predictable.

"I think we're talking about two great teams -- along with Bayern Munich, the three best teams in Europe," the Asturian coach told UEFA.

"We'll have to adapt to play and defend in a different way compared to how we usually do if we want to get the better of them." Along with Dembele the PSG right-back Achraf Hakimi is also expected to win his fitness battle for the game, while Arsenal defender Jurrien Timber is doubtful with a groin problem.

The French side's regular starters have largely played far fewer minutes than their Arsenal counterparts this season.

PSG play fewer matches in general and despite that, Luis Enrique has rotated and rested players regularly.

Arsenal were pushed to the limit to claim the English title, while PSG were often able to leave their European starters on the bench domestically.

PSG matches against Nantes and Lens were also moved to suit the French club's European campaign.

Former Arsenal great Thierry Henry agrees his team enter the clash at the Puskas Arena as underdogs to a PSG side aiming to become the only side in the modern Champions League era to win the competition back-to-back, besides record 15-time winners Real Madrid.

"We're not at the level of those guys yet so you've got to be humble," Henry told CBS Sports.

"Paris Saint-Germain have the experience of knowing what it is to win it." The Frenchman finished as a runner-up with Arsenal in 2006, but later won the trophy elsewhere, with Barcelona in 2009. — AFP



Arsenal's players attend a training session at the Puskas Arena in Budapest.

thrilling attacking cast for a PSG side that edged Bayern Munich 6-5 in the semi-finals.

Beyond the class of winger

Bukayo Saka, Arsenal stand out more for their grit and defensive discipline, with centre-back pairing Gabriel and William

Saliba their regular stand-out performers, as well as midfield powerhouse Declan Rice.

Arteta's team will embrace

Messi to captain Argentina at World Cup

BUENOS AIRES: Lionel Messi will captain Argentina at the World Cup, national coach Lionel Scaloni announced as he unveiled his 26-man squad.

Messi, 38, had not previously confirmed he would play in what will be a record-breaking sixth tournament for the Argentine superstar.

But it had been widely assumed the eight-time Ballon d'Or winner would again lead Argentina, four years after lifting the trophy in Qatar.

As well as confirming Messi's presence, Thursday's announcement notably excluded Real Madrid's Franco Mastantuono from the Argentina squad.

Eighteen-year-old Mastantuono is considered one of the brightest prospects in Argentine football. The largest ever World Cup, co-hosted by the United States, Canada and Mexico, kicks off June 11. Argentina's first match will be five days later against Algeria in Kansas City.

Messi has been at the heart of an injury scare in recent days, with his club side Inter Miami this week saying medical tests diagnosed him with muscle fatigue in his left hamstring.

The Major League Soccer club had provided no clear timetable for Messi's return after his abrupt exit from Miami's



Argentina's head coach Lionel Scaloni (right) with Lionel Messi during a training session, in this March 30 file photo.

6-4 victory over Philadelphia in the 73rd minute on Sunday.

Center-back Cristian Romero, who suffered a knee injury last month and has not played since, was also named in the squad.

Argentina's roster retains 17 of the 26 players who won the title in Qatar.

Young players who received call-ups include 21-year-olds Nicolas Paz and Valentin Barco.

Palmeiras forward Jose Manuel Lopez, who only made his international debut last year, also features.

Other notable absentees include Emiliano Buendia -- currently in excellent form at Aston

Villa -- and Roma star Paulo Dybala.

The South American giants will journey to the United States for pre-World Cup friendlies against Honduras on June 6 and Iceland on June 9. Argentina's World Cup group also contains Austria and Jordan.

Along with Messi, Portuguese forward Cristiano Ronaldo and Mexican goalkeeper Guillermo Ochoa are also expected to appear in their sixth World Cups this summer.

ARGENTINA SQUAD

Goalkeepers: Emiliano Martinez (Aston Villa, ENG), Geronimo Rulli (Marseille, FRA), Juan Musso (Atletico Madrid, ESP)

Defenders: Gonzalo Montiel (River Plate, ARG), Nahuel Molina (Atletico Madrid, ESP), Lisandro Martinez (Manchester United, ENG), Nicolas Otamendi (Benfica, POR), Leonardo Balerdi (Olympique Marseille, FRA), Cristian Romero (Tottenham Hotspur, ENG), Facundo Medina (Marseille, FRA), Nicolas Tagliafico (Lyon, FRA).

Midfielders: Leandro Paredes (Boca Juniors, ARG), Rodrigo de Paul (Inter Miami, USA), Exequiel Palacios (Bayer Leverkusen, GER), Enzo Fernandez (Chelsea, ENG), Alexis MacAllister (Liverpool, ENG), Giovanni Lo Celso (Real Betis, ESP), Valentin Barco (Strasbourg).

Attackers: Lionel Messi (Inter Miami, USA), Nicolas Paz (Como, ITA), Thiago Almada (Atletico Madrid, ESP), Nicolas Gonzalez (Atletico Madrid, ESP), Julian Alvarez (Atletico Madrid, ESP), Giuliano Simeone (Atletico Madrid, ESP), Lautaro Martinez (Inter Milan, ITA), Jose Manuel Lopez (Palmeiras, BRA). — AFP



Qatar's Ahmed Tijan (right) shoots to score a point.

Younousse and Tijan reach Ostrava Elite16 Round of 16

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Qatar's beach volleyball stars Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan advanced to the Round of 16 at the Ostrava Elite16 in the Czech Republic after recording their second victory of the tournament yesterday.

The Tokyo Olympic bronze medalists defeated France's Elouan Chouikh and Jodelle Genevieve-Gardoque in straight sets, 21-15, 21-17, in their final Pool B match to secure a place in the knockout stage of the Beach Pro Tour event.

Earlier in the day, the Qatari duo suffered a narrow three-set loss to Americans Taylor Crabb and Andrew Benesh. Younousse and Tijan won the opening set 21-16 before their opponents edged the next two sets 22-20 and 15-11.

The Qataris had launched their campaign with a convincing 21-18, 21-14 victory over Latvia's Ardis Bedritis and Arturs Rinkevics.

Younousse and Tijan will now take on Sweden's Jacob Hølling Nilsson and Elmer Andersson in today's Round of 16 clash.

Deschamps guards against World Cup over-confidence

CLAIREFONTAINE-EN-YVELINES, FRANCE: France coach Didier Deschamps warned against being over confident ahead of his side's bid to win a second World Cup in three editions.

Deschamps' team have reached the final of the last two tournaments, lifting the trophy in 2018 before losing on penalties to Argentina four years ago.

Led by star forward Kylian Mbappe, they are one of the favourites for victory in North America for the World Cup from June 11 to July 19.

"It's a major event. Some people think we're already at July 19, I don't much like that, in fact not at all," Deschamps told reporters yesterday at France's Clairefontaine base near Paris.

"Yes, we're one of the best teams, but I know all too well that there are some important steps to take before thinking about the those heights.

"We'll do everything to get there." To start with, France must come through a group which includes Senegal, Iraq and Norway.

France's coach Didier Deschamps (centre) speaks with players during a training session.



Back in 2002, when France were the defending champions for the first time, they lost to former colony Senegal and crashed out at the first

hurdle after finishing bottom of their group. Deschamps, 57, is bidding to bow out in style after 14 years at the France helm.

He guided France to the World Cup quarter-finals in his first tournament as head coach, and two years later they reached the Euros final on home soil.

Since then, France have reached two World Cup finals and a Euros semi-final, making Deschamps one of the most successful coaches in the national team's history.

He was without eight members of his World Cup squad for training on Friday as six players will play in Saturday's Champions League final between Paris Saint-Germain and Arsenal, while two more lined up for Crystal Palace in their Europa Conference League success on Wednesday.

France will play two friendly internationals before the World Cup, against Ivory Coast in Nantes on June 4 and at home to Northern Ireland in Lille four days later.

They begin their Group I campaign against Senegal on June 16 in East Rutherford. — **AFP**

Sooryavanshi's 96 in vain as Gujarat down Rajasthan to reach IPL final

INDIA: Fifteen-year-old Vaibhav Sooryavanshi's 96 was in vain as Gujarat Titans beat Rajasthan Royals by seven wickets yesterday to set up an IPL final against defending champions Royal Challengers Bengaluru.

Chasing 215 for victory after Sooryavanshi's second successive 90-plus score in the last play-off, Gujarat skipper Shubman Gill's 104 saw them chase down their target with eight balls to spare in New Chandigarh.

Gill put on 167 runs with opening partner Sai Sudharsan, who made 58, as Gujarat, who lost the first play-off to Bengaluru, reached their third final in five seasons since their title-winning debut in 2022.

Teenage sensation Sooryavanshi bowled out at the top of this season's batting chart with 776 runs after his 47-ball knock laced with eight fours and seven sixes.

Gill -- India's Test and ODI captain -- is behind the boy wonder with 722 runs but has a chance to move ahead of him in the final in Ahmedabad tomorrow.

Gill reached his first century of this season with a four but soon departed as Archer trapped him lbw before Jos Buttler (9) and Rahul Tewatia, with a winning six in his 17, steered the team home.

Earlier Sooryavanshi's partnership with Ravindra Jadeja, who hit an unbeaten 45, stood out in Rajasthan's 214-6.

Sooryavanshi, who hit a blistering 29-ball 97 in the eliminator, missed out on his ton for a second straight game after he miscued a shot to deep thirdman off Kagiso Rabada. Donovan Ferreira made Rajasthan finish with a flourish in his unbeaten 11-ball 38 but the effort was not enough.

BRIEF SCORES
Gujarat Titans 219 for 3 (Gill 104, Sai Sudharsan 58) **beat Rajasthan Royals** 214 for 6 (Sooryavanshi 96, Jadeja 45*, Ferreira 38*, Holder 2-27, Rabada 2-35) by seven wickets. — **AFP**

Djokovic knocked out by Fonseca; Swiatek advances

PARIS: Brazilian teenager Joao Fonseca knocked Novak Djokovic out in the third round of the French Open yesterday to scupper the Serbian great's latest quest for a record 25th Grand Slam.

The 19-year-old Fonseca rallied from two sets down for the second straight match to stun Djokovic, winning 4-6, 4-6, 6-3, 7-5, 7-5 after four hours and 53 minutes.

Fonseca, the 28th seed, is through to the last 16 of a major for the first time. He will next play two-time Roland Garros runner-up Casper Ruud or American 24th seed Tommy Paul.

Asked how he kept believing after falling behind, Fonseca replied: "I actually didn't."

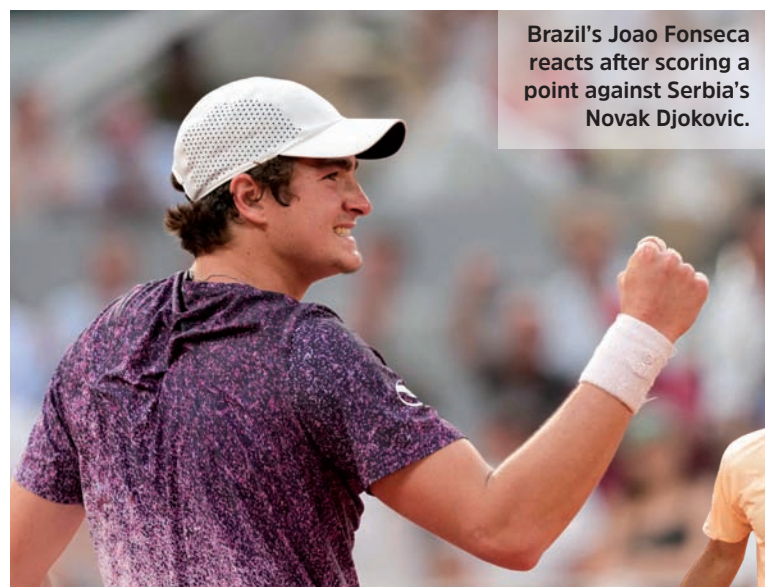
"I just kept playing. I just enjoyed being on court. What a pleasure it was stepping on court with him (Djokovic) for the first time.

"I was trying to hit the ball as fast as I could. Djokovic, he does not miss."

Djokovic's exit comes a day after the shock elimination of world number one and red-hot title favourite Jannik Sinner.

It means there will be a first-time men's Grand Slam champion this year at the French Open, ending a run of nine successive majors won by Sinner or Carlos Alcaraz.

Earlier, Iga Swiatek



Brazil's Joao Fonseca reacts after scoring a point against Serbia's Novak Djokovic.

booked her place in the last 16.

Four-time women's champion Swiatek beat Magda Linette 6-4, 6-4 to begin play on Court Philippe Chatrier, with temperatures set to climb to 35 degrees Celsius (95 degrees Fahrenheit) later in the day.

Third seed Swiatek dug herself out of an early 2-0 hole against the 35th-ranked Linette, who won their most recent meeting at Miami in March.

Swiatek broke three times in the opening set to nose ahead, and then surged into a 4-1 lead in the second set.

She overcame a stumble as she tried to close it out, before

sealing victory to set up an intriguing match-up with the in-form

Marta Kostyuk. "It was a good match. I played much better than Miami," said Swiatek, who moved to appoint Francisco Roig, a longtime coach of Rafael Nadal, in the wake of her loss to Linette two months ago.

Kostyuk, the 15th seed, continued her fine run with a 6-4, 6-3 win over Switzerland's Viktorija Golubic.

FRENCH OPEN RESULTS

MEN - THIRD ROUND
Joao Fonseca (BRA x28) bt Novak Djokovic (SRB x3) 4-6, 4-6, 6-3, 7-5, 7-5
Rafael Nadal (ESP x27) bt Alex Michelsen (USA) 7-6 (7/2), 6-7 (5/7), 4-6, 6-3, 6-3
Andrey Rublev (RUS x11) bt Nuno Borges (POR) 7-5, 7-6 (7/2), 7-6 (7/2)
Pablo Carreno Busta (ESP) bt Thiago Tirante (ARG) 7-6 (7/0), 7-5, 3-6, 6-4
Jakub Mensik (CZE x26) bt Alex de Minaur (AUS x8) 0-6, 6-2, 6-2, 6-3

WOMEN - THIRD ROUND
Elina Svitolina (UKR x7) bt Tamara Korpatsch (GER) 6-2, 6-3
Marta Kostyuk (UKR x15) bt Viktorija Golubic (SUI) 6-4, 6-3
Iga Swiatek (POL x3) bt Magda Linette (POL) 6-4, 6-4
Mirra Andreeva (RUS x8) bt Marie Bouzkova (CZE x27) 6-4, 6-2
Jil Teichmann (SUI) bt Karolina Muchova (CZE x10) 6-1, 7-5
Sorana Cirstea (ROM x18) bt Solana Sierra (ARG) 6-0, 6-0
Wang Xiyi (CHN) bt Yulia Starodubtseva (UKR) 6-3, 7-5

She is unbeaten in 15 matches on clay this season following titles in Madrid and Rouen.

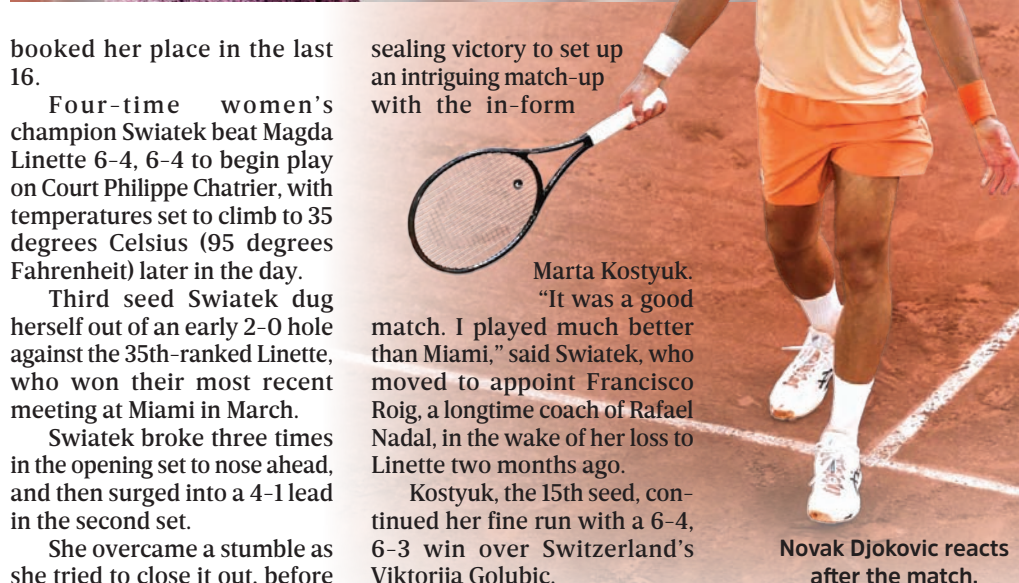
"Marta is having a great season. She always had a game to play well," said Swiatek.

"So good for her. But I'm going to focus on myself, prepare tactically, as before any other match, and we'll see."

Russian teenager Mirra Andreeva swept into the last 16 with a 6-4, 6-2 victory over Czech 27th seed Marie Bouzkova.

The eighth-seeded Andreeva goes on to face either 2023 French Open runner-up Karolina Muchova or Jil Teichmann on Sunday for a place in the quarter-finals.

Andreeva's best Grand Slam run came at Roland Garros in 2024 when she reached the semi-finals. — **AFP**



Novak Djokovic reacts after the match.

Di Giannantonio fastest in Italian MotoGP practice, Marc Marquez returns

MUGELLO: Fabio Di Giannantonio was fastest in yesterday's main practice session for the Italian MotoGP, as world champion Marc Marquez made his return to action.

Italian Di Giannantonio, who won the Catalan MotoGP last time out, clocked a top time of one minute 44.808 seconds in Mugello, 0.91sec ahead of countryman Francesco Bagnaia.

The 27-year-old rides for Ducati satellite team VR46 and was one of four Italians in the top four alongside former world champion Bagnaia, Enea Bastianini and Franco Morbidelli.

He was also fastest in the morning's free practice which

has no bearing on Saturday's qualifying sessions.

Di Giannantonio currently sits 26 points behind championship leader Marco Bezzecchi ahead of qualifying and the Sprint race on Saturday, and Sunday's Grand Prix.

Marc Marquez was sixth fastest after being cleared to compete despite suffering a broken foot in a spectacular crash at the French MotoGP earlier this month.

The injury kept him out of the main race at Le Mans as well as the last race weekend in Barcelona where his brother Alex Marquez suffered a horrific crash which keeps him out of the grand prix in Italy and Hungary. — **AFP**



Pertamina Enduro VR46 Raging Team's Italian MotoGP rider Fabio Di Giannantonio reacts after the second practice session.

New Zealand crush Ireland ahead of England series

LONDON: Blair Tickner took his first five-wicket haul in Test cricket as New Zealand hammered Ireland by an innings and 79 runs in a one-off match in Belfast yesterday.

The comprehensive victory saw New Zealand win with more than a day to spare in a match that was only scheduled for four days -- rather than the standard five of most Tests.

It was also a confidence-building success for the Black Caps ahead of next week's clash against England at Lord's, the first match in a three-Test series.

Ireland, dismissed for 179 in the first innings, started the third day at Stormont on 65-2.

New Zealand had declared on a commanding 490-8 featuring Tom Blundell's 186, Rachin Ravindra's 121 and debutant Dean Foxcroft's 98, with captain Tom Latham later enforcing the follow-on.

Tickner's haul, albeit against a fledgling Test nation in Ireland, was an encouraging sign for New Zealand in the

absence of the injured Matt Henry and came on the same day as England coach Brendon McCullum -- a former New Zealand captain -- said the Black Caps possessed "one of the most exciting bowling line-ups in the world".

Ireland rarely looked like making New Zealand bat again, but they did at least manage an improved 232 in their second innings.

The 32-year-old Tickner, in his fifth Test, did the bulk of the damage with the medium-fast bowler's return of 5-76 including all of Ireland's top three.

Ireland opener Stephen Doherty -- one of four top-six batsmen dismissed for a duck by paceman Nathan Smith in the first innings, a record in Test cricket -- made 57 and wicketkeeper Lorcan Tucker exactly 50, with all-rounder Mark Adair 44 not out. The match ended with Ireland nine wickets down following Reuben Wilson's dismissal as Curtis Campher had retired hurt with a hand injury before lunch. — **AFP**

Vingegaard nears Giro triumph as teammate Kuss takes stage 19

ALLEGHE: Jonas Vingegaard took another step towards his first Giro d'Italia victory yesterday after emerging unscathed from a brutal 19th stage won by his teammate Sepp Kuss.

Pre-race favourite Vingegaard has one more stage to get through to ensure his triumph in the Italian Grand Tour, with Sunday's finale a procession around Rome.

The Visma-Lease a Bike rider stuck in the main peloton all day until the final, punishing climb to Alleghe after 151 kilometres of energy-sapping riding through the Dolomite mountains.

He then made sure that he stayed close to nearest rival Felix Gall, who remains just over four minutes off the pace. Former Giro champion Jai Hindley climbed to third overall after overhauling Thymen Arensman, who

slowed over the final two kilometres and lost a minute on his rival.

Attention now turns to Saturday's penultimate stage, which features two huge climbs to Piancavallo, with Vingegaard knowing that he will reign supreme if he holds out.

Vingegaard did concede the lead of the Mountains standings to Italian Giulio Ciccone, who was first over four of Friday's six classified climbs but was denied a stage win by American Kuss.

Lidl-Trek rider Ciccone trailed Vingegaard by 81 points in the Mountains classification ahead of Friday's stage but more than made up that gap.

Ciccone had been battling with Einer Rubio on the climbs and when he was pipped by his Movistar rival on the penultimate Passo Falzarego ascent, he shot off angrily down the

Team Visma Lease a Bike rider Jonas Vingegaard (left), and teammates compete during the 19th stage of the Giro d'Italia 2026.



long descent. He built up a lead of over a minute but his legs went on his way up to Alleghe and finished third, behind both Kuss -- now a stage winner on all three Grand Tours -- and Derek Gee-West.

Paul Magnier is poised to claim the points jersey after his closest rival Jhonatan Narvaez dropped out early in the stage.

The Frenchman now has a whopping 92-point lead over Jonathan Milan with two stages remaining, including the finale around Rome which will give him a chance for another sprint victory.

Narvaez's team UAE said that the Ecuadorian, who won three stages in this year's Giro, was forced to abandon the race after a "small crash on the transfer back to the bus" on Thursday left him unable to compete on a punishing day. — **AFP**