

Sports

Viviani wins second Giro stage in a row as Dennis keeps pink

Italian survived a near-brush with safety barriers

EILAT: Elia Viviani made it a double delight in Israel yesterday as he won his second Giro d'Italia stage in a row in a bunch sprint finish at Eilat. The Italian survived a near-brush with the safety barriers on the side of the road as he sprinted to the stage three finish in the Red Sea resort, edging out compatriot Sacha Modolo with Irishman Sam Bennett third. Australia's Rohan Dennis kept the race leader's pink jersey. Viviani was perfectly placed on Bennett's back wheel as the sprinters launched their charge to the line but just as he tried to dart out from behind the Irishman, Bennett lurched across the road.

He went from the far left to the far right, almost barging Viviani into the barriers. But the experienced Italian kept his cool and leant his shoulder into Bennett, who veered back to the left, leaving a channel for Viviani to burst through and win. Viviani, 29, wasn't best pleased with Bennett but his victory proved ample compensation. "I won and so don't want to start a polemic. He moved big time. We made contact but I went through," he said.

"He went on the left and so I went on the right but then he moved across the road." The fast-finishing Modolo pipped Bennett for second at the end of the long, straight 229-kilometre stage through the barren

Negev desert. Race favourite Chris Froome and last year's winner Tom Dumoulin both enjoyed an uneventful day riding safely in the peloton to finish in the same time as the winner.

Dumoulin remains in second, one second behind Dennis with Portugal's Jose Goncalves up to third at 13sec after Belgian Victor Campenaerts lost time at the finish. "It was a very long day and a little stressful with the wind," said Dennis. Froome remains in the top 20 with a 38sec deficit to Dennis ahead of Monday's rest day before the fourth stage begins in Catania following the transfer from Israel to Sicily.

After three days racing in Sicily, the Giro will move onto the Italian mainland, although not before the overall contenders have had a chance to test themselves on a summit finish at Mount Etna, the highest active volcano in western Europe.

Sunday saw a three man breakaway go clear almost right from the start with Canadian Guillaume Boivin making it into the escape group for the second day in a row. He and Italian Marco Frapporti lasted almost 225km in the lead in scorching temperatures well over 30 degrees Celsius before they were swallowed up by a charging peloton. — AFP



Dumoulin remains in second



EILAT: Italy's rider of team Quick-Step Elia Viviani (R) celebrates as he crosses the finish line to win the 2nd stage of the 101st Giro d'Italia, Tour of Italy, on Saturday, 167 kilometers between Haifa and Tel Aviv. — AFP

Marquez wins in Spain and takes MotoGP lead

JEREZ: Marc Marquez won his home Spanish Grand Prix and took the overall MotoGP lead yesterday after the reigning champion's main rivals collided spectacularly. The Honda rider was in a race of his own for the last eight laps after the Ducati pairing of Andrea Dovizioso, the previous championship leader, and Jorge Lorenzo collided with Honda's Dani Pedrosa while fighting for second place.

Pedrosa, who had wrist surgery less than a month ago, was thrown high over his bike after trying to go past the two Ducatis on the inside. Lorenzo came across into the corner as Dovizioso went wide, colliding with Pedrosa and sending the two Ducatis into the gravel. All three riders walked away from the crash.

French Tech3 Yamaha rider Johann Zarco was gifted the runner-up slot, 5.241 seconds behind, and is now Marquez's closest rival in the championship. Four times world champion Marquez, who started the race from fifth place, now has 70 points after four races to Zarco's 58. Dovizioso dropped to fifth overall with 46.

Italian Andrea Iannone finished third for Suzuki. "I was convinced before the race that I was able to win," said Marquez, who had a big wobble when he ran over gravel left on



JEREZ DE LA FRONTERA: First placed Repsol Honda Team's Spanish rider Marc Marquez celebrates on the podium after the MotoGP race of the Spanish Grand Prix at the Jerez Angel Nieto racetrack in Jerez de la Frontera yesterday. — AFP

the track by an earlier off.

"Ok, we started on the second row but anyway today I was clever. I pushed...here the race is very long and you must manage many things." Compatriot Valentino Rossi was fifth at the Jerez circuit in southern Spain in a race that saw him reach a career milestone by completing the circumference of the

planet in race kilometres.

Rossi has now covered 40,075km in competition over 23 seasons, starting at the 1996 Malaysian Grand Prix. Britain's Cal Crutchlow started on pole position for the LCR Honda team but failed to finish, crashing out at turn one after nine laps and while in fourth place. — Reuters

Justify wins Kentucky Derby despite record rain

WASHINGTON: Undefeated Justify won the 144th Kentucky Derby on Saturday, ignoring the wettest conditions in race history to become the first Derby champion since 1882 who didn't race as a two-year-old. Trainer Bob Baffert won the Derby for the fifth time, one shy of the record owned by 1940s legendary trainer Ben Jones, while jockey Mike Smith captured his second victory in the 1 1/4-mile classic at Louisville's Churchill Downs. "It took a great horse to do what he did today," Baffert said. "I rank him up there with my top ones."

We knew we had something special." Favored Justify, who went off at 5-2 odds, unleashed the third-fastest half-mile pace in Derby history and went on to win in 2mins 4.20 secs with Good Magic second by 2 1/2 lengths, edging third-place Audible at the line. Mendelsohn, trained by Ireland's Aidan O'Brien and hoping to become the first Europe-based horse to win the Derby, was last in the 20-horse field before 157,813 spectators.

Justify, who improved to 4-0, became the first horse since Apollo some 136 years ago to win the showdown for three-year-olds without running the

year before. "It would take a horse like him to break that curse," said Smith, whose other Derby win came in 2005 aboard 50-1 longshot Giacomo. "Wow, I don't have the words to describe what makes this horse so special."

He is just so big and talented. He has got the mind for it." Justify captured the opening leg of US flat racing's Triple Crown, which continues in two weeks at the Preakness in Baltimore, Maryland, and concludes with next month's Belmont Stakes in New York.

Only 12 horses in history have swept the triple, Baffert-trained American Pharoah being the most recent in 2015. "I think this horse is as special as American Pharoah to win a race like this, especially the way he did it," Baffert said. Despite a muddy track that absorbed a Derby-day record three inches of rain and intense downpours as horses were loaded into the starting gates, Justify broke well, starting seventh from the rail and settling into second behind early leader Promises Fulfilled.

Justify took the lead on the far turn and charged into the backstretch. Good Magic chased in pursuit but never had a move to prevent him from becoming the sixth consecutive favorite to win the Derby. Baffert admitted the wet conditions had him concerned. "This track had me worried but we saw something special," Baffert said. "When he got away I knew we had a chance." Justify's dazzling outings this year included a superb three-length victory at last month's Santa Anita Derby. While O'Brien found misery in Kentucky, there was some comfort. O'Brien-trained Saxon Warrior won the 2,000 Guineas in England on Saturday. — AFP

'Stadium surfing', a sneak preview of Olympic future?

LEMOORE: A perfect wave, again and again, made to order? It's the sort of thing that surfers all over the world might dream of as they bob about in the ocean, waiting in vain for the next foaming ticket to ride.

But while Mother Nature may be unreliable, a machine on display in this sun-baked corner of rural California this weekend, more than 100 miles (160 kilometers) from the Pacific Ocean, will serve up wave after wave for an elite-level surfing competition.

The Surf Ranch is the brainchild of legendary 11-time world champion Kelly Slater, a prototype of the giant wave pool that might one day be used to stage surfing competitions at the Olympics.

With surfing set to make its bow at the 2020 Tokyo games, the venue for the competition-natural waves or man-made-is still to be formally confirmed. The Slater-inspired facility on show in this sleepy California town aims to present itself as a viable option for competition.

The center-piece of the Surf Ranch is a giant 640-meter long pool, where a huge metal hydrofoil is pulled along a track at one edge of the water, churning out consistent barrels and tubes. "I always thought that if surfing is to grow it would have to be in a controlled environment," Slater told AFP.

"I like to think that this could be part of the future. I don't know if it THE future," the 46-year-old added. "I think the ocean can't be replaced. I think big waves can't be replaced. I think the randomness of what



LEMOORE: Johanne Defay of France, turns off the lip during team practice, before the WSL Founders' Cup of Surfing, at the Kelly Slater Surf Ranch in Lemoore, California. The two-day event brings twenty-five of the world's top surfers to compete on perfect machine-created waves in a half-mile long wave pool situated 100 miles inland from the Pacific Ocean. — AFP

happens in the ocean and in mother nature is a big part of why we love surfing."

Unlike conventional surfing competitions, where the timetable is often at the mercy of the elements, at the Surf Ranch, waves are delivered more or less to order. For a competition like the Olympic Games, ever mindful of television audiences, that makes it an attractive proposition.

OLYMPIC FUTURE?

The World Surf League (WSL) has bought the California facility and the concept from Slater. Construction on a similar site in Japan is set to begin later this year, and will be available to Tokyo 2020 if required, accord-

ing to WSL chief executive Sophie Goldschmidt. "So we are going to be building one in Tokyo and we hope that if it's built and tested in time then the Olympics will consider using it because the waves at that time of year are not the best," Goldschmidt said. "Ultimately it is not our choice."

This weekend, Slater will captain a United States team in a WSL exhibition tournament which also includes Brazil, Australia, Europe and a team from the rest of the world. Brazil's Gabriel Medina and Australian veteran Mick Fanning and women's stars Stephanie Gilmore (Australia) and Lakey Peterson (USA) are just some of the surfers who will be taking to the water. — AFP

Higgins sets sights on fifth world snooker title

LONDON: John Higgins powered into the World Championship final on Saturday and immediately set his sights on joining snooker's all-time greats. Higgins has won the world title four times and will make his seventh appearance in the sport's showpiece match after defeating Kyren Wilson 17-13.

The Scot is just one title behind Ronnie O'Sullivan's haul of five and Higgins admitted it would be a great feeling to emulate his old rival. "Of course it would, it would be amazing. He's the best player ever in my eyes and if I got to the same amount of world titles it would be an amazing feeling," Higgins said.

Only Stephen Hendry and Steve Davis have lifted the trophy more times at Sheffield's Crucible theatre than O'Sullivan. Higgins will face Mark Williams in the two-day final, which starts on Sunday, after the Welshman, himself a two-time former world champion, overcame Barry Hawkins 17-15 in a tense last-four clash. "He'll be going for a third one, I'll be going for a fifth," said Higgins.

"He's bald and I'm grey so it'll be a mental final." Higgins first won the world title in 1998, and has twice lost in the final in 2001 against O'Sullivan and last year against Mark Selby.

Asked if he sees himself as the favourite to take this year's title, the 42-year-old said: "No. I know it's going to be another mammoth final. It'll be a great match I'm sure. "I keep using the word 'proud'. I'm proud 20 years later, after I won my first one, that I'm sitting here ready to compete in another one. It's a fantastic feeling." Higgins was 10-4 ahead against Selby yet lost in their second world final meeting 12 months ago. Determined to make amends, he said: "I felt that was probably my best ever chance to win it (for a fifth time)."

"It might still be my best ever chance. I don't know how the next game's going to transpire." Williams' appearance in the final is the latest stage in a remarkable late-career revival. He did not even qualify in 2017, and last reached the final 15 years ago, when he defeated Ken Doherty. — AFP