

## Sports

## Photo of the Day



CASTLEROCK: Senad Grosic performs at Downhill Castle in Castlerock, Ireland. — Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## Heavyweight champ Joshua hits out at 'virus' of racism

**LONDON:** World heavyweight champion Anthony Joshua told a Black Lives Matter march on Saturday that protesters were the "vaccine" to the "virus" of racism.

"The virus I am referring to is called racism," he said, comparing its effects to the damage done by COVID-19. Meanwhile the British boxer asked: "How long are we going to allow racism to spread through our communities?"

Worldwide protests under the banner of Black Lives Matter took place Saturday in response to the death of George Floyd, a black American man who died in Minneapolis last month while being arrested by police officers.

"You are the vaccine, I am the vaccine," the 30-year-old Joshua told a rally in his home town of Watford. "Killing a person outright is unforgivable, but stripping them of their human rights, oppressing them, mocking them, insulting them, placing glass ceilings above them... is just a slower way of killing them and taking the life out of their soul."

Joshua was on crutches at times on Saturday and was also seen wearing a knee brace, but a spokesperson insisted that was just a "precautionary measure".

Joshua, the reigning WBA, IBF and WBO titleholder, felt a "slight twinge" in his left knee in a training session earlier this week. But his camp insisted there was no cause for alarm.

"Anthony felt a slight twinge in his knee whilst training," the spokesperson said. "The brace is a precautionary measure on the advice of physios. It will be further checked by his doctors but there is no immediate concern." Joshua was due to defend his belts against Kubrat Pulev at Tottenham Hotspur Stadium on June 20 only for the bout to be postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic. — AFP

# Russian tennis player Anna Kournikova's relatively short career is still unparalleled

## Listed among People Magazine's 50 most beautiful people in 1998

**LONDON:** For a tennis player who failed to win even one singles title on the WTA Tour, the frenzy surrounding Anna Kournikova's relatively short career is still unparalleled.

The blonde Russian was listed among People Magazine's 50 most beautiful people in 1998, voted the hottest female athlete on ESPN and her pictures adorned the covers of publications from Forbes to Sports Illustrated.

Kournikova's popularity could be gauged by the fact that a fast-spreading virus, disguised as a digital photo of the tennis star, infected millions of computers in 2001 and slowed electronic mail systems and caused some servers to be shut down.

She earned millions from endorsements and modelling and her celebrity status grew due to her romance with pop star Enrique Iglesias, with whom she has three children.

Having also played a minor role in the 2000 film 'Me, Myself & Irene', Kournikova joined the US television weight loss contest 'The Biggest Loser' as a trainer in 2011.

While her detractors would never consider the Russian as a serious singles player due to lack of titles, Kournikova was widely

acclaimed as a child prodigy.

She picked up a racket and started playing at the age of five in Moscow at a children's sports programme before leaving Russia to train at Nick Bollettieri's tennis academy in Florida.

She made her debut on the WTA Tour in 1995 as a 14-year-old and the following

Slam showing in singles.

Despite a barren trophy cabinet, Kournikova reached a career-high singles ranking of eight in 2000. Recurring injuries, however, forced her to retire early and she did not play on the WTA Tour after 2003.

While she failed to make her mark in singles, Kournikova won 16 doubles titles, including two Australian Open crowns with Martina Hingis, and reached the top ranking in doubles in 1999.

The Swiss, who reigned as world No.1 in both singles and doubles, is among many who consider Kournikova as a trailblazer in Russian tennis.

"She was a great player, a team player, and we had great times for those two years," said Hingis. "She kind of was the one who started this Russian Armada - or Russian generation - along with Elena Likhovtseva.

"She was definitely the one who you could aim for and be like, go around the world and live the 'Russian-American dream.' I loved playing with her." Former French Open and US Open champion Svetlana Kuznetsova said Kournikova would top her list if she penned a book on the history of Russian women's tennis.

"For me, she brought really big popu-



### Hottest female athlete

year she went through the qualifiers to reach the fourth round of the US Open in her Grand Slam debut.

She fell to top-ranked Steffi Graf but did enough at the hardcourt major which earned her the WTA Newcomer of the Year award in 1996. The following year, the Russian made the semi-finals at Wimbledon, which ended up being her best Grand

## F1 driver spent lockdown in Dubai

**DUBAI:** Following the postponement of the season, Scuderia AlphaTauri's Pierre Gasly found himself in lockdown in the United Arab Emirates with an important decision to make.

With travel restrictions swiftly implemented across the world these past couple of months, hundreds, if not thousands, of people have been left wondering when they would be able to return to where they call home.

For Scuderia AlphaTauri Formula One driver, Pierre Gasly, that time has finally come: the athlete is set to return to his home country following a two-month stay in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates.

Gasly, 24, had been in the emirate ahead of his team's scheduled flight to Manama for the 2020 Bahrain Grand Prix, which was slated to take place, sans spectators, between 20-22 March. But following the announcement that the tournament was to be postponed until further notice, the Red Bull athlete found himself in a tricky situation - between trying to fly home with not many flight options, or remain in lockdown at his hotel on the Palm Jumeirah. Gasly opted to stay put in the UAE. So, just what has it been like for the Formula One rising star? Well, when you're an international athlete, the hard work simply doesn't stop.

"I [decided to] stay in Dubai for the last two months, because I have better facilities

here in Dubai than back in France: I've [just] been training hard the last two months," he says. "So that was the good thing; we've been really focused on our training since the first day we arrived. At that time of the year, we're usually travelling every three days... Going to the airports, playing in different countries, in different time zones, and we usually feel quite tired and try [our best] to recover. Now, we've really had a lot of time to work, and try to improve physical conditions - even though I felt like I was ready for this season, I have gotten stronger."

Staying at the FIVE Palm Jumeirah, Gasly recalls how staff did their best to accommodate him and his teammates' needs during their stay. With public facilities, such as hotel gyms being closed, the hotel's team created a special gymnasium in an empty apartment adjacent so he could continue training safely during isolation.

"We'd train six days a week - three days focusing on the cardio, and three days focusing on more gym-like exercises and strength work," he explains. "The hotel gave us the apartment next door with treadmills, weights... everything we needed to train."

As lockdown restrictions relaxed, Gasly was able to get some time on the track, receiving special permission to do some laps around the Dubai Autodrome.

"I managed to go to the karting track, so I had a couple of days doing karting, which is always good for practice, and also for fun!" With flights to selected destinations now being offered this month, Gasly is ready to return to France, before making his way to Italy where he is based.



Pierre Gasly

"Next for me is to go back to France and see the family: after two months I'm missing them! And after that I'll go back home to Italy, and yes, just keep on training!" he says. "We still have quite a bit of time before the first race, so we'll just focus on more preparation, and hopefully we can start the season very soon, because I'm missing racing!"

"I think it's the first time in my life I've been waiting that long between two races. The last one was in Abu Dhabi in December, so I need competition, and I'm looking forward to getting back in the car." While 2020 will be a year in remembrance of these sad unparalleled circumstances, Gasly acknowledges that he has been in a fortunate position during these times, and is grateful that his lockdown experience has been a positive one.

"Honestly, I really enjoyed my time here over the last two months, I'm probably going to miss it when I leave, but I know I'll come back to Dubai [soon], because I really like this place," he concludes.



Enrique Iglesias and his wife Anna Kournikova.

larity to Russian tennis, women's tennis. Everyone after her was just after her. For me, she was a big huge push," Kuznetsova told the WTA Insider in 2017. "I always de-

pend her when they say 'Oh, she never won a tournament'. So what? She was a Top 10 player. It's not just about winning tournaments. I think she was great." — Reuters

## N Zealand's Dixon wins IndyCar opener in Texas

**LOS ANGELES:** New Zealand's Scott Dixon climbed out of his car and donned a white protective face mask after seizing the checkered flag in the delayed IndyCar season-opening race in Texas on Saturday.

Dixon crossed the finish line first ahead of runner-up Simon Pagenaud in the Genesys 300, the first IndyCar race in eight months because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"Such strange times right now," said Dixon immediately after the race. "It was awesome. The power out there. We could just go for it."

After the COVID-19 pandemic led to a postponement of the 2020 IndyCar campaign, the series finally got underway with no spectators in the grandstands at the 1.5 mile (2.4 kilometer) Texas Motor Speedway in Fort Worth. "I am bummed that the fans aren't here," Dixon said. "I wish everybody was here to celebrate."

Former Indianapolis 500 winner Pagenaud finished 4.4 seconds back in second and reigning series champion Josef Newgarden placed third. Organizers decided to run the practice, qualifying and 200-lap race all on the same day to minimize the amount of time the participants would be at the venue.

"Today was compact," he said. "We flew in this morning and we had a hour and 20 minute practice, then straight to qualifying and straight to the race, and then fly back out tonight. That is very different. Normally we

have a couple of days of prep, so that was difficult."

Dixon earned his 47th career win to move within just five victories of Italian-born American Mario Andretti, who is second all-time with 52. He also matched AJ Foyt's record of 18 seasons with a victory.

Dixon led 157 of the 200 laps, and had an earlier six-second lead over Newgarden wiped out by a caution for debris. "We had to make some big bold moves," Dixon said.

"I can't tell you how good it feels to be back in the car. It has been such crazy times for so many people. "I feel very lucky to do what I do. A huge thanks to the IndyCar series and everybody involved to get us back on the track. We had a lot of changes in the offseason with the delay."

Drivers and team members went through temperature screenings when they got to Texas Motor Speedway. Crew members were required to wear face masks, and space was provided for social distancing in the garage areas. Dixon received elbow bumps instead of high fives in the victory lane.

Last year's pole sitter Takuma Sato crashed on his warm-up lap entering turn one. The former Indianapolis 500 winner was checked out at the on site medical facility and released, but then missed the race because he couldn't get his car repaired in time. Felix Rosenqvist was in contention when he crashed with nine laps to go. Rosenqvist was weaving through the field when he got high on the backstretch and lost control. He finished in 20th place.

There will be nearly a month's break before the next race July 4 on a road course at Indianapolis Motor Speedway. The road course race will be the first of five IndyCar races in a 15-day period in July, including a doubleheader weekend at Wisconsin's Road America. — AFP