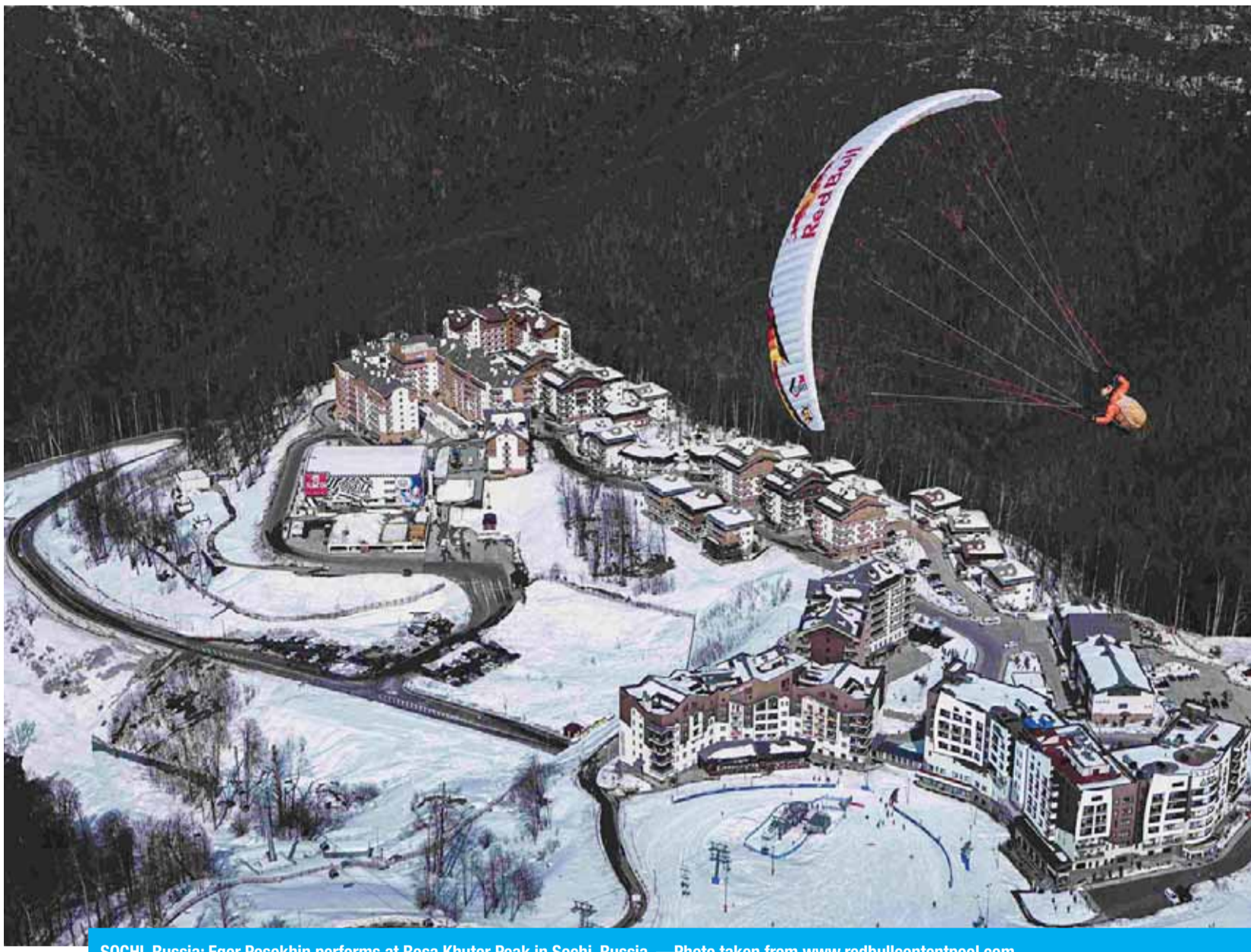


## Sports

Photo of the day



SOCHI, Russia: Egor Posokhin performs at Rosa Khutor Peak in Sochi, Russia. —Photo taken from www.redbullcontentpool.com

## N Zealand gives sports sector \$157m boost

**WELLINGTON:** New Zealand's struggling sports sector has received a NZ\$265 million (\$157 million) injection from the government to help it mitigate some of the worst financial effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, Sports Minister Grant Robertson said yesterday.

Robertson, who is also New Zealand's finance minister and delivered the national budget on Thursday, said funding and revenue had dried up for nearly all sports organisations and that they were under "immense strain".

"We are providing the support needed to sports at all levels to remain viable, get stronger and adapt," Robertson said in the post-budget statement.

"We have also seen many of our professional sports and athletes struggle as competitions have been cancelled or suspended. Budget 2020 will provide some assistance, so they can keep competing."

The funding would be spread over four years, with NZ\$83 million made immediately available for "short-term support". A further NZ\$104 million would be available in the medium term to help the sector rebuild, while the remaining NZ\$78 million would be for the development of new programmes that help communities get back into activity and recreation.

All levels of organised sport have been on hold since March when New Zealand went into a national lockdown to attempt to contain the spread of the disease, restricting exercise to walking, running or cycling alone.

The government loosened restrictions in April and then eased them further on Thursday, allowing the resumption of professional sport, although fans will not be able to attend matches. Community and club sports competitions are still on hold, with organisations told by government body Sports NZ to enter a "get ready" phase to prepare for a return.

Health officials reported one new coronavirus infection yesterday, bringing the total to 1,499, of which 1,149 are confirmed. Only 45 are still considered active cases. There have been 21 deaths from COVID-19, the disease caused by the new virus. —Reuters

## Jordan memorabilia soars in value amid 'Last Dance' nostalgia

## Will we ever crack the \$1 million mark?

**NEW YORK:** The immense global success of the documentary "The Last Dance" amid the coronavirus lockdown has boosted sales of collectibles related to NBA icon Michael Jordan, some of which are trading in the hundreds of thousands of dollars.

"Timing is everything," says Jordan Geller, a collector who will be richer by at least \$240,000 thanks to the sale at Sotheby's of a pair of Air Jordan 1 sneakers — the first model created especially by Nike for Michael Jordan, who made his NBA debut in 1984.

The game-worn pair could set an auction record for sneakers set last year by Nike's Moon Shoe, a pair of which sold for \$437,500.

The various Air Jordans have been popular with collectors for 30 years, along with jerseys and trading cards featuring Jordan — who won six NBA titles with the Chicago Bulls and is widely considered the greatest player in league history.

Many specialists consider Jordan a key figure in creating the market for collectible sneakers, with only non-sports personalities such as Kanye West or Travis Scott able to compete with him today.

But ESPN's 10-part documentary "The Last Dance" which weaves details of Jordan's entire career through the narrative of the Bulls' pursuit of a sixth NBA title, has ramped up interest in all things Jordan.

## 'ICONIC, MYTHICAL'

"I think this is a game-changer," Chris Ivy, director of sports collectibles at Heritage Auctions, said of the documentary series that was carried globally by Netflix. Ivy predicted the interest fueled by "The Last Dance" will continue.

On the StockX shoe resale platform, the Air Jordan 1 Chicago model now sells for up to \$1,500, compared to \$900 in March. The first episode of "The Last Dance" aired on April 19.

"That could be largely attributable to the documentary because that's a sneaker that's been on the market for years," says StockX economist Jesse Einhorn. Likewise, a 1986 Fleer collector's card sold for \$96,000 in early May at Heritage, an item that was worth \$20,000 to \$30,000 at the beginning of the year.

"A lot of people who had a sports cards collections as a kid have been frantically going through their attics to find those boxes and those binders," laughs Geoff Wilson, founder of the Sports Card Investor platform.

"I haven't seen anything like this, where it's well past his career," Ivy said, noting Jordan retired in 2003. The excitement extends beyond Jordan himself.

Sales of Bulls-branded items are up 400% in May compared to last year on the sports merchandise site Fanatics. "For a lot of people my age between 40 and 50

years old, Michael Jordan was the Babe Ruth of our generation," Ivy said. "People in that age range are starting to get in a point in their lives where they're starting to collect again."

Even younger fans, weaned on the exploits of the late Kobe Bryant and LeBron James, are feeling the allure of Jordan. "The majority of our customers are millennials and Gen Z, many of whom were not necessarily alive when Jordan played," Einhorn said. "It's a testament to Jordan's staying power as an iconic, almost like mythical, cultural figure."

And the market for basketball shoes is maturing, with support from a new generation of enthusiasts

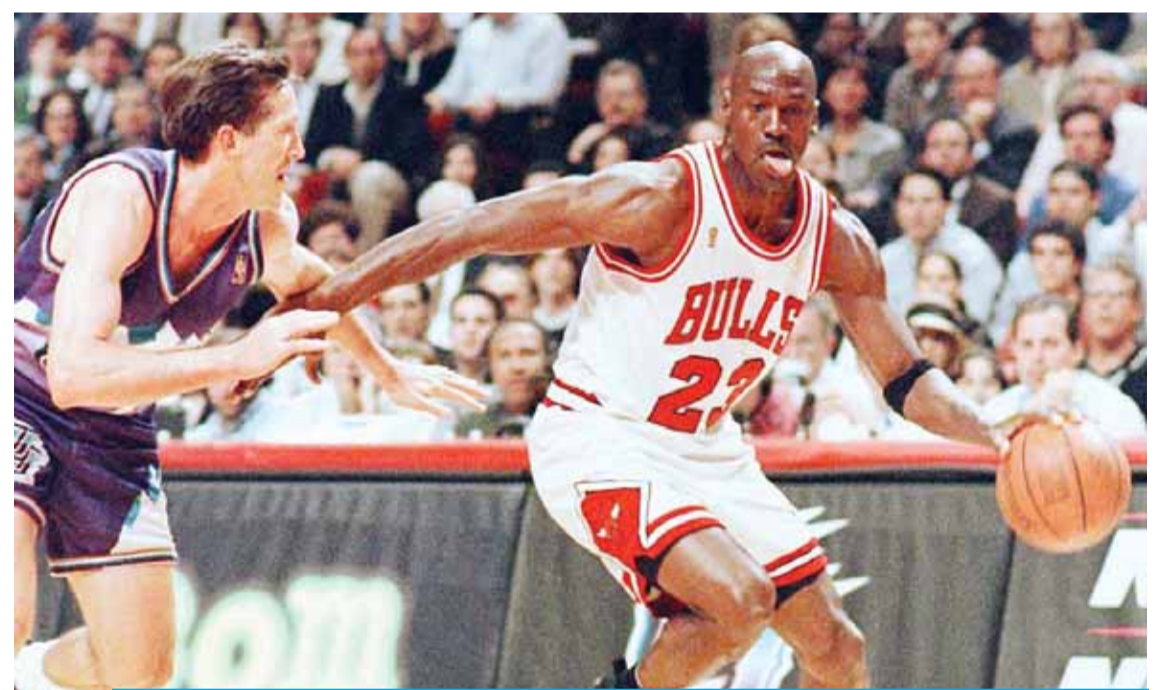
so dead'. And he was like, 'mate, look around — if I gave him out, I won't make it back to the hotel.'"

Steyn, however, was full of admiration for Tendulkar, international cricket's all-time leading run-scorer and century-maker, saying he had "everything covered, he's got every shot in the book."

"He was so good, and very rarely got out lbw," added Steyn of the 'Little Master', who retired in 2013. "And, like Jimmy said, you just didn't want to bowl a bad ball to him. Especially in a place like India."

"You bowl a bad ball, and he hits you four — he's on nought and he hits you for four in Mumbai (Tendulkar's home town), it feels like the world is closing in on you. He's only on four not out, he may as well have been on 500!"

"You feel like, 'maybe I could bring the pace down a little bit and really focus on getting the ball in the right place for as long as I possibly can'. You just didn't want to bowl a bad ball. 'You just hope one will do something off the seam or he's got an off day, and it goes in your favour.' —AFP



CHICAGO: File photo taken shows Chicago Bulls player Michael Jordan sticks out his tongue as he goes past Jeff Hornacek of the Utah Jazz during game two of the NBA Finals at the United Center in Chicago. The immense global success of the documentary "The Last Dance" amid the coronavirus lockdown has boosted sales of collectibles related to NBA icon Michael Jordan, —AFP

as evidenced by the emergence of trading platforms and the prices realized at auctions over the last three years.

"Sneaker collecting and reselling used to be underground activities that were enjoyed by a few sneaker heads," Geller said. "It's much more mainstream now."

The change has not escaped the notice of manufacturers, who have adapted their marketing and promotional strategies accordingly. "Sneaker brands are catering to sneaker collectors by releasing more and more limited edition sneakers, so with

smaller quantities demand goes through the roof."

But in Geller's opinion, nothing can compare to the original Air Jordans, especially those that can be linked to the great man himself. "I think the Game Worn Air Jordan 1s are the most iconic sneakers of all time," Geller said. "The fact that these shoes were Game-Worn by Michael Jordan takes them to a whole other level."

Will we ever crack the \$1 million mark? "I think so," said Ivy. "I'm working towards a consignment in the future that I think has the potential to get to a million dollars." —AFP

## Steyn says worried umpire refused to give Tendulkar out

**LONDON:** South Africa fast bowler Dale Steyn is convinced he had Sachin Tendulkar lbw as he approached the first individual double century in one-day internationals only to be denied by umpire Ian Gould's fear he wouldn't make it back to his hotel if he gave the India great out.

The historic innings took place in front of a lively India home crowd at Gwalior in 2010. Discussing how tough it was to dismiss Tendulkar with England paceman James Anderson during a Sky Sports cricket podcast, Steyn said: "He scored the first double-hundred in ODI cricket, and it was against us in Gwalior."

"And I actually remember — I think I got him out lbw when he was about 190-odd. Gouldy was the umpire, and he gave him not out. "And I was like, 'why, why did you give him not out!? That's

## Stefanidi wins women's pole vault contest

**PARIS:** Olympic pole vault champion Katerina Stefanidi beat American Katie Nageotte and Canadian Alysha Newman in a competition carried out on two continents on Saturday.

The showdown was the second round of the so-called 'Ultimate Garden Clash', a response to the cancellation of meets caused by the coronavirus pandemic. On May 3, male pole vaulters Armand Duplantis, Renaud Lavillenie and Sam Kendricks staged a highly successful competition, broadcast live online.

Between them the men cleared a bar fixed at 5.0 metres, 98 times in 30 minutes, with Lavillenie and Duplantis tying with 36 successful vaults. Since, unlike the men, the women did not have back-yard jumping pits, they com-

peted at their training bases with the help of a few relatives: Greek Stefanidi in the sweltering heat of an Athens afternoon, Katie Nageotte in the morning before Marietta, Georgia, heated up and Alysha Newman in the cool of the Toronto area.

The bar was set at 4.0 metres, some distance off the world record of 5.06 metres, but the women failed in their goal of recording more "makes" than the men, finishing with a total of 85. Stefanidi, following a metronomic rhythm, was on course to record more clearances than any of the men but lost time in the final minutes as she struggled to put the bar back on her own, as the rules require, after a failure and finished with 34 successful vaults.

Nageotte managed 30 and Newman 21. "Renaud said he was very sore for a long time and I can imagine, I can already feel it," Stefanidi said. But, she added, the exhausting race against the clock is "a great way to shut our brains, and sometimes you need to just do that in pole vault instead of thinking too much". —AFP