

## Sports

# LIV Golf rebels allowed to play in British Open

## Koepka - the latest big-name player to defect to LIV circuit

**LONDON:** Players who have signed up to the breakaway Saudi-backed LIV Golf series will be allowed to compete in next month's 150th British Open, organizers the R&A announced on Wednesday. The US PGA Tour has banned those involved in the rebel venture after the inaugural event in Britain earlier this month but organizers of last week's US Open did not follow suit. That stance will be followed at the year's final major, which starts at St Andrews in Scotland on July 14. "The Open is golf's original championship and since it was first played in 1860, openness has been fundamental to its ethos and unique appeal," said R&A chief executive Martin Slumbers.

"Players who are exempt or have earned a place through qualifying for the 150th Open in accordance with the entry terms and conditions will be able to compete in the championship at St Andrews. "We are focused on staging a world-class championship in July and celebrating this truly historic occasion for golf." Four-time major champion Brooks Koepka is the latest big-name player to defect to the LIV Golf circuit, along with Mexico's Abraham Ancer, the world number 20.

Koepka, 32, is expected to make his debut on the money-spinning circuit at its maiden US event in Oregon next week. Koepka's management team did not immediately respond when contacted by AFP on Tuesday. The American, who has removed "PGA Tour" from his Twitter profile, will follow a clutch of stars including Dustin Johnson and six-time major-winner Phil Mickelson by joining LIV. The series, which is bankrolled by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, has plunged the golf world into turmoil since its emergence.

LIV Golf has drawn stinging criticism from human rights groups, which say the series is an attempt to boost the kingdom's image through sport. The PGA Tour has adopted a zero-tolerance stance towards the series, with PGA Tour commissioner Jay Monahan suspending 17 former or current tour players for making the switch after the start of the inaugural event near London. He made it clear that other golfers who signed up would suffer a similar fate.

### PGA Tour revamp

Reports on Tuesday said the PGA Tour was planning to revamp its schedule with a series of lucrative new tournaments—the clearest indicator yet of a strategy to combat the rise of LIV Golf. Monahan is understood to have explained proposed changes to the schedule at a packed meeting of players ahead of this week's Travelers Championship in Connecticut. Plans outlined by Monahan include boosting purses to at least \$20 million in eight existing marquee tournaments and the introduction of three new \$25 million tournaments that would feature no cuts and limited fields. The schedule overhaul could be in place by the 2023 season.

LIV Golf has steadily been luring star names to sign with the upstart circuit that offers \$25 million in prize money for each of its 54-hole tournaments. Other changes proposed by Monahan on Tuesday included a return to a calendar year schedule running from January to December. The current "wraparound" season starts in the North American autumn and is unpopular with some players who complain it does not allow for a clearly defined off-



**BROOKLINE:** Brooks Koepka of the United States and caddie Ricky Elliott walk the 18th green during the third round of the 122nd US Open Championship at The Country Club in Brookline. —AFP

season.

Speaking at the Travelers Championship on Tuesday, defending champion Harris English said he hoped the PGA Tour's proposed revamp could persuade players to remain with the circuit. Patrick

Cantlay described the PGA-LIV confrontation as a fight to attract and retain talent. "If the PGA Tour wants to remain the pre-eminent tour for professional golfers, it has to be the best place to play for the best players in the world," he said. —AFP

### News in brief

#### England sweep ODI series

**AMSTELVEEN:** Jason Roy and Jos Buttler demolished the Netherlands on Wednesday as England coasted to an eight-wicket victory with nearly 20 overs to spare in the third one-day international, sealing the series 3-0. Roy's 101 not out was his 10th one-day international hundred in Amstelveen, with Buttler, standing in for injured captain Eoin Morgan, smashing an unbeaten 86. Earlier, the Netherlands collapsed from 203-3 in the 40th over to 244 all out, a total that never looked remotely enough against power-packed England. The 50-over world champions again underlined the gulf in quality between the two sides after piling up a world-record total of 498-4 in the first ODI before cantering to victory in the second game by six wickets. Roy and Phil Salt (49) scored briskly at the start of England's reply before Salt and Dawid Malan were both dismissed by Paul van Meekeren with the score on 85. —AFP

#### Chelsea names new chairman

**LONDON:** Todd Boehly was Wednesday named as Chelsea's new chairman to replace Bruce Buck and will act as interim sporting director after the club confirmed the departure of Marina Granovskaia. Granovskaia is stepping down from her role as director as part of a shake-up at Stamford Bridge, leaving co-controlling owner Boehly to spearhead Chelsea's negotiations in the transfer window. All the top Boehly-Clearlake Capital consortium figureheads have been added to Chelsea's new board following the purchase of the club from Roman Abramovich. "As custodians of Chelsea FC, we now begin executing our long-term vision and plan for the club, creating an outstanding experience for its passionate, loyal fans, and continuing to challenge for top honors in line with Chelsea FC's dedicated history," said Boehly.

#### Tokyo Olympics cost double

**TOKYO:** The final price tag for last year's Tokyo Olympics was more than double the city's original 2013 estimate after a one-year coronavirus postponement added to the already hefty bill. The organizing committee said Tuesday the Games had cost 1.42 trillion yen, the equivalent of \$13 billion at the time. At today's rates, with the yen at a 24-year low against the dollar, the figure would be \$10.4 billion. Tokyo 2020 was held a year later than planned because of the pandemic—the first Olympics postponed in peacetime—and spectators were banned from nearly all events, which were held under strict Covid-19 countermeasures. The Games cost twice the 734 billion yen that the Tokyo Games organizers had predicted in their bid to the International Olympic Committee in 2013, but less than the final pre-Games budget unveiled in December 2020.

#### Women's PGA doubles prize

**WASHINGTON:** Defending champion Nelly Korda and her rivals will chase a record \$9 million purse at this week's KPMG Women's PGA Championship after organizers announced a doubling of prize money for the event on Tuesday. The third women's major of the year tees off at Congressional Country Club in Bethesda, Maryland on Thursday with Korda attempting to repeat her 2021 Women's PGA victory. A successful title defense could see Korda earn a winner's cheque of \$1.35 million after the hefty boost in prize money announced by organizers on the eve of the tournament. PGA of America President Jim Richerson said the decision to double the purse—from \$4.5 million to \$9 million—was a result of support from sponsors KPMG and a desire to elevate women's golf.

## Djokovic, Nadal lead title chase at Wimbledon

**LONDON:** Novak Djokovic and Rafael Nadal headline the title chase at Wimbledon where eight-time champion Roger Federer, the world's top two players and cherished ranking points will all be missing. Djokovic is bidding for a seventh title at the All England Club to move level with US great Pete Sampras. Nadal, fresh from a 14th French Open victory and a record-extending 22nd major, is halfway to the first men's calendar Grand Slam in more than half a century.

The season's third Slam tournament has already made political waves even before the first ball is served on Monday. The decision to ban Russian and Belarusian players in the aftermath of the invasion of Ukraine means there is no place for world number one Daniil Medvedev or eighth-ranked Andrey Rublev. Both the ATP and WTA, who control the men's and women's tours, retaliated by stripping ranking points from the tournament.

For the first time since his debut

in 1999 - notwithstanding the COVID-cancelled 2020 edition - Federer will be a no-show as the 40-year-old recovers from knee surgery. Also missing is Germany's world number two Alexander Zverev, who suffered serious ankle ligament damage in a horrific injury in his French Open semi-final against Nadal. However, Medvedev and Zverev have never shone at Wimbledon with neither man making it past the fourth round. Djokovic and Nadal, ranked three and four, are the top seeds meaning if they are to face each other for the 60th time, it can only be in the final.

### 'I love Wimbledon'

Djokovic, the champion in 2011, 2014, 2015, 2018, 2019 and 2021, could be playing in his final Slam of the year. His refusal to be vaccinated is likely to rule him out of the US Open later this year. A bruising quarter-final loss to Nadal at the French Open which saw him deposed as champion in Paris will also likely provide extra motivation. Nadal won the last of his two Wimbledon titles in 2010 having captured his first with an epic triumph over Federer two years earlier.

## Serena makes winning return in Eastbourne's doubles after year out

**EASTBOURNE:** Serena Williams made a winning comeback after a year on the sidelines as the American legend teamed with Ons Jabeur to beat Sara Sorribes Tormo and Marie Bouzkova 2-6, 6-3, 13-11 in the Eastbourne International doubles on Tuesday. Williams, a 23-time Grand Slam singles champion, was back in action for the first time since she made a tearful exit from Wimbledon last year. The 40-year-old suffered a leg injury during her Wimbledon first round match against Aliaksandra Sasnovich and had not been seen on court since.

Before Williams made the surprise announcement of her return last week, rumours of retirement had swirled around her for several months. But, with Wimbledon starting on June 27, Williams finally resumed her career, playing with Jabeur at the Wimbledon warm-up event by the Sussex seaside. Williams and Tunisia's Jabeur, who is third in the WTA singles rankings, saw off Spain's Sorribes Tormo and Bouzkova of the Czech Republic in the last-16 tie.

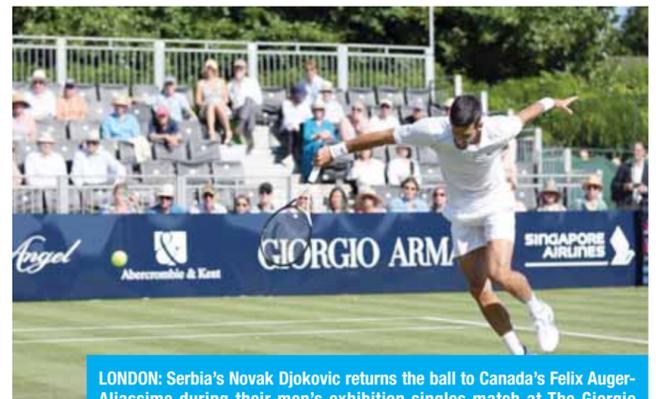
## 'Win for the whole country'; Sri Lanka clinch ODI series

**COLOMBO:** Skipper Dasun Shanaka dedicated Sri Lanka's sensational series victory over Australia to the country's people as the island nation suffers its worst-ever economic crisis. Australia needed 19 off the final over in Colombo but Sri Lanka held their nerve despite David Warner's 99 and some last-minute heroics from Matthew Kuhnemann to win on the last ball of the match by four runs. The victory in front of an ecstatic crowd at the R Premadasa

Stadium gave Sri Lanka an unassailable 3-1 lead in the five-match contest, and their first bilateral series win against Australia since 2010.

It was a rare moment of joy for Sri Lanka's 22 million people who are in the midst of a painful economic crisis with severe shortages of food, fuel and medicines. "Not only for me, my teammates, Sri Lanka cricket, the whole country, this is much needed at the moment," Shanaka said afterwards. "I think this should be celebrated by the whole of Sri Lanka." "Thank you Sri Lanka, Thank you my PEOPLE!" he tweeted on Wednesday.

Put into bat, Charith Asalanka made 110 to guide Sri Lanka to 258 all out. Asalanka rescued Sri Lanka from a precarious 34-3 as he put on 101 runs with Dhananjaya de Silva, who made 60. Australian bowlers kept coming back with crucial wickets but



**LONDON:** Serbia's Novak Djokovic returns the ball to Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime during their men's exhibition singles match at The Giorgio Armani Tennis Classic tournament on June 22, 2022. —AFP

The 36-year-old Spaniard arrives at Wimbledon with the Australian and French Opens secured. He is halfway to becoming only the third man — and first since Rod Laver in 1969 — to complete a calendar Grand Slam. Nadal has endured a bittersweet relationship with Wimbledon. Two titles have been accompanied by three lost finals as well as injury-enforced absences in 2004, 2009, 2016 and 2021.

There remains a question mark over his durability for the two weeks at Wimbledon having played the entire French Open with his troublesome left foot anaesthetised. Nadal has since undergone a course of radiofrequency stimulation, a treatment aimed at reducing nerve pain in his foot. "I love Wimbledon," said Nadal. "I had a lot of success there. A player like me, I am always ready to play Wimbledon." —AFP



**EASTBOURNE:** US player Serena Williams (right) and Tunisia's Ons Jabeur celebrate after winning against Spain's Sara Sorribes Tormo and Czech Republic's Marie Bouzkova at the end of their round of 8 women's doubles tennis match on June 21, 2022. —AFP

A missed smash at the net from Serena allowed her opponents to hold serve in the second game of the match before the Williams-Jabeur partnership fell 3-1 down. With Williams' groundstrokes initially lacking their usual precision, the first set quickly slipped away. Serena was appearing in doubles competition on grass for the first time since 2016, when she won Wimbledon with her sister Venus. The 14-time Grand Slam doubles champion was well short of peak form and Bouzkova and Sorribes Tormo twice led by a break at the start of the second set. —AFP

Asalanka reached his century to the cheers of a raucous home crowd. Wanindu Hasaranga played a useful cameo of 21 not out as he put together 34 runs for the eighth wicket with Asalanka. Asalanka finally fell to Pat Cummins and Australia wrapped up the innings in 49 overs with two run-outs.

In reply, Australia lost skipper Aaron Finch for nought with Chamika Karunaratne trapping the opener lbw. Warner kept his cool and put on 63 runs with Mitchell Marsh who looked good for his 26 before he fell to Dunieth Wellalage's left-arm spin. Australia lost Marnus Labuschagne and wicketkeeper-batsman Alex Carey after they got starts but fell to the Sri Lankan spinners. The usually attacking Warner tried to grind down the opposition attack as he and Travis Head stitched together 58 runs for the fifth wicket. —AFP