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Carl's untimely passing has left a significant void, not just in our business but in the hearts of his colleagues, friends and loved ones.

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# THE WEIRD WORLD OF SPORT

## BEARDED WARRIORS

The New York Yankees baseball side have altered their long-standing and strict facial hair policy, clearing the way for players to have well-groomed beards.

The decision by Yankees owner Hal Steinbrenner changes a policy his father George, who died in 2010, implemented nearly 50 years ago that gave players the choice of being clean-shaven or wearing a mustache.

"Ultimately the final decision rests with me, and after great consideration, we will be amending our expectations to allow our players and uniformed personnel to have well-groomed beards moving forward," Steinbrenner said.

"It is the appropriate time to move beyond the familiar comfort of our former policy."

Steinbrenner said in recent weeks he spoke to former and current Yankees for their feedback on the policy, which he added had been the subject of ongoing internal dialogue dating back several years.

## DOUBLE TROUBLE

Englishman Dale Whitnell may well toast his good fortune at the recent South African Open at the Durban Country Club after sinking not one but two hole-in-ones in his second round.

Whitnell had never made a hole-in-one in tournament play, but aced the second and 12th, both par threes, in a rollercoaster 63 that included an air shot, two bogeys, a double bogey, three eagles.

The United States-based National Hole-in-One Registry says the odds of two in the same round are 67 million to one.

Whitnell, at the time ranked number 545 in the world, is the second player in DP World Tour history to complete the feat after Australian Andrew Dodt at the Nordea Masters in 2013. He eventually finished tied seventh in the tournament.

## LET'S NOT BOTHER

Not even the possibility of a first win of the campaign could tempt relegated Brazilian clubs Colo-Colo and Jacobina to play their final Bahia Championship fixture as they decided to not bother with the 90 minutes.

With nothing to gain from the dead rubber match, Jacobina felt the 1 200 km roundtrip from their coastal city home of Ilhéus into the interior of northeastern state was not worth it. Colo-Colo could have avoided the ignominy but agreed and the Bahia Football Federation (FBF) acquiesced by cancelling the fixture.

"As both teams have already been relegated to Serie B in 2026, and the cancellation of the match does not cause any harm to the other participants in the competition, the FBF accepted the requests," the federation said.



## ODDS & ENDS



# 7

John Marquis was sent off in their League One clash at Peterborough United for an elbow to the face in the first challenge of the game within seven seconds of kickoff, making it one of the quickest ever red cards in football.

# 0-0

Imagine sitting through a full 80 minutes of a Rugby League clash and not seeing a single point? English sides Wigan Warriors and Leigh Leopards played out the first 0-0 stalemate in the Rugby League's 29-year history, before Gareth O'Brien's drop-goal secured a 1-0 golden point win for Leigh in extra time.

# 8

Bournemouth fans had an agonising eight-minute Video Assistant Referee check after they scored what they thought was a good goal against Wolverhampton Wanderers in the FA Cup. It was eventually ruled out, but the length of time it took to make the decision is a record.



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SPORTS SHOTS

# IN FOCUS

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## RIDING THE WAVE

Brazilian surfer Lucas 'Chumbo' Chianca catches a wave at Portugal's famed Nazaré beach. You need huge guts to pull this one off and the power of the ocean is evident in this gripping image. He claimed the Nazaré Challenge in the Men's Big Wave category back in 2017, at the time the best score in the competition's history.



## RUNNING THROUGH THE SNOW

Competing in the World Rally Championship is incredibly tough, but to do it in the snow adds a whole new layer of madness. But as if that was not enough, competitors in the Rally of Sweden spent part of their time driving in the dark! Here is winner Elfyn Evans in his Toyota Gazoo Racing WRT. Madness.







### 'AMAWHEELIES' SHINE

South Africa's Men's Under-23 wheelchair Basketball team, affectionately known as 'AmaWheelies', took the continental crown when they defeated Libya 51-38 to claim the African title. Here South Africa's Khanya Xundu secures a point despite the challenge of Liberia's Nuphor Garwhiyon in an encounter earlier in the tournament.

FA  
Y TOUR**TROPHY HUNT**

The massive new Club World Cup trophy made an appearance at Mamelodi Sundowns' Chloorkop home on its way around the globe visiting the 32 participating teams at this year's expanded event in the United States. Sundowns and Bafana Bafana midfielder Teboho Mokoena could not resist taking a selfie and will hope he can hold the trophy aloft at the 13 July final. He might need some help though, it is big!

# CLUB WORLD CUP 2025

14 JUNE TO 13 JULY 2025



IMAGE: ALCHE GREEFF/BACKPAGEPIX

# NEDBANK CUP FINAL

3

Former Kaizer Chiefs and SuperSport United coach Stuart Baxter and ex-SuperSport and Mamelodi Sundowns tactician Pitso Mosimane each have three wins in the Nedbank Cup competition, the most of any coaches.

6

AmaZulu have appeared in six finals of the Nedbank Cup competitions dating back to its start in 1971 ... and never won! They have only tasted defeat in the decider, the last time in 2010 when they were beaten 3-0 by BidVest Wits.

12

Kaizer Chiefs have now gone 12 years without lifting the Nedbank Cup title, their longest run without success since the competition was first played in 1971. Their previous longest barren run was six years, between 1993-1999 (the tournament was not played in 1997), and 2007-2012. They last claimed victory in 2013, but did make the final in 2019, only to lose 1-0 to second-tier TS Galaxy.

19

Orlando Pirates teenager Relebohile Mofokeng became the youngest ever Nedbank Cup final goalscorer when he netted his stunning winner against Mamelodi Sundowns last year. He was 19 years, 7 months and 10 days.

4

Four teams from outside the topflight have reached the final of the Nedbank Cup since 2008, with one of those, TS Galaxy, going on to lift the trophy. Mpumalanga Black Aces lost 1-0 to Mamelodi Sundowns in the first year, while in 2009 University of Pretoria went down by the same scoreline to Moroka Swallows. And two years after that, in 2011, Black Leopards were in the decider but lost 3-1 to Orlando Pirates. But Galaxy made history by beating Kaizer Chiefs 1-0 in the final in 2019.

7 000 000

This year's winners will collect a cool R7 million first prize for their victory in the 2025 Nedbank Cup.





# 11

Either Orlando Pirates, SuperSport United or Mamelodi Sundowns have appeared in 11 of the last 14 Nedbank Cup finals since 2011. The only years where one of the three clubs did not appear were 2018, 2019 and 2021.



# 9

There have been nine different winners of the Nedbank Cup in the previous 17 seasons played since 2008. Mamelodi Sundowns (four), Orlando Pirates (four) and SuperSport United (three) have 11 wins between them, with Moroka Swallows, BidVest Wits, Kaizer Chiefs, Free State Stars, TS Galaxy and Tshakhuma Tsha Madzivhandila (now Marumo Gallants) the other victors.

# 1

Orlando Pirates coach Jose Riveiro was the first tactician from Spain to lift the Nedbank Cup, something he has now done two years in a row. Since 2008 there have been seven different foreign coaches to have claimed victory – Júlio César Leal (Brazil), Ruud Krol (Netherlands), Stuart Baxter (England), Vladimir Vermezović (Serbia), Luc Eymael (Belgium), Dylan Kerr (England) and Riveiro (Spain).

# 13

Kaizer Chiefs have won the trophy the most times if you include all the years of the Nedbank Cup competition dating back to 1971. They have 13 titles, with Orlando Pirates next on the list with 10 wins. Mamelodi Sundowns have six victories.

# 9

Orlando Pirates hold the record for the most runner-up finishes in the history of the Nedbank Cup competition since 1971 with nine (to go with 10 tournament wins).

# 2025

The winner of the Nedbank Cup this year will be entered into the 2025–26 African Confederation Cup, where they will fly the country's flag on the African continent. Should they have already qualified for the African Champions League, the place in the Confederation Cup will go to the Nedbank Cup runner-up. If both clubs have qualified for the Champions League (as happened in 2024 with Mamelodi Sundowns and Orlando Pirates), then the slot goes to the team that finishes fourth in the Betway Premiership.

# SPORILLT FOR CHOICE



## THE SPRINGBOKS HAVE SOME INCREDIBLE OPTIONS AT CENTRE ALREADY, BUT THERE IS ALSO A NEW WAVE OF TALENT COMING THROUGH

BY **JON CARDINELLI**

**R**assie Erasmus received due plaudits after guiding the Springboks to 11 wins in 13 Tests in 2024, while using as many as 50 players over the course of the season. The Boks finished the year at the top of the World Rugby rankings, and with three or four outstanding options in most positions.

That said, Erasmus did favour one particular combination more than any other. Damian de Allende and Jesse Kriel started eight games together in the midfield, while relatively few pairings (four) and individual centres (four) were used across the 13 Tests. Kriel finished the season with more game minutes (879) than any other Bok player.

Erasmus realised his development objective across most positions in 2024, and even with a couple of seasons to go until the 2027 World Cup, South Africa's depth is looking stronger than ever.

The big question, of course, is whether all of the ageing stars will push on to the next global tournament in Australia. With regards to South Africa's midfield stocks, all four of the more established players will be 33 or older by 2027, while De Allende, the most influential member of the group, will be 35.

With this scenario in mind, Erasmus

may add another layer to the midfield depth in 2025. De Allende and Kriel have to be managed if they are going to peak at the 2027 World Cup, while the younger centres need more exposure at the highest level.

### AWESOME FOURSOME

In a sense, the Boks already boast the most versatile and potent midfield group on the planet. While De Allende and Kriel first played together in 2015,

# 109

The most capped centre in Springbok history is former captain Jean de Villiers, who made 109 appearances in green and gold, although not all in the midfield. His tally would have been higher were it not for crippling injuries. He also scored 27 tries.

it was only at the 2023 World Cup where the pair established itself as the best in the world.

Prior to that, Erasmus and Jacques Nienaber favoured De Allende and Lukhanyo Am as the preferred starting combination, especially in the big matches at the 2019 World Cup and across the 2021 series against the British & Irish Lions.

For a time, Am was touted as the best player in the world, let alone the best centre. But after he suffered a series of injury setbacks, Kriel stepped into the breach and made the No.13 jersey his own.

That is not to say that Am has not added value in recent years. The arrival of new attack coach Tony Brown in 2024 led to a review of Am's role, and he went on to start two Tests at No.12 as well as two at outside centre. His ability to cover both midfield positions as well as wing earned him a spot on the bench on three occasions.

The 'other guy' is no slouch either. André Esterhuizen reinvented himself during a five-year stint with the attack-minded Harlequins in the English Premiership. Since returning to the Bok set-up in 2022, and to the Sharks in 2024, the multi-talented centre has shown that he has the game intelligence to complement his natural power.

## UTILITY FACTOR

All four of those players should be part of the squad that travels to Australia in 2027 (fitness permitting). If Erasmus's past selections are anything to go by, other backline players will double up as midfield options.

South African rugby is enjoying a golden era, and it is fair to say that Kriel and Am are among the best Bok No.13s of all time. In the coming years, however, Canan Moodie will receive more opportunities in that key position and could establish himself as one of the greats.

Moodie made his debut on the wing at the age of 20 in 2022, and continues to be used in the wider channels – albeit as an alternative to regular starters Cheslin Kolbe or Kurt-Lee Arendse.

He was backed to start at No.13 against the All Blacks at Twickenham in 2023, and the Boks went on to rack up a record score against their arch-rivals. The coaches continued to field Moodie at No.13 against Romania and Tonga at the World Cup.

Damian Willemse missed the entire 2024 season due to injuries, but remains a big part of Erasmus' long-term plans. While the Boks prefer Willemse at No.15, the versatile back has featured at flyhalf, centre and as an impact player in past years. Willemse's preferred position at the Stormers is No.12, and in time, he may be handed a similar responsibility with the national side.

The Boks are not short on alternatives in this position. In past seasons, André Pollard moved into the inside centre position towards the end of big matches. Sacha Feinberg-Mngomezulu and Jordan Hendrikse made their Test debuts in 2024, and were used at flyhalf and fullback, but have both featured at No.12 for their respective franchises, the Stormers and the Sharks.

## NEXT GEN

Given the options discussed above, it would appear that Erasmus and the Bok selectors have covered their bases.

One would expect some of the less established players to receive more

## RECORD BREAKERS

Damian de Allende and Jesse Kriel broke the Springbok Test record for the most appearances as a midfield combination when they teamed up for the 30th time in the second Test against Ireland in 2024.

The record was previously held by the legendary centre pairing of Jean de Villiers and Jaque Fourie – who started in tandem for the Boks between 2005 and 2013.

De Allende and Kriel continued to feature for the Boks during the title-winning 2024 Rugby Championship campaign, and on the subsequent tour to United Kingdom, which yielded three consecutive victories. By the end of the season, the pair had stretched their record to 36 matches.

The all-time record is currently held by All Blacks midfielders Ma'a Nonu and Conrad Smith, who started together in 62 Tests between 2008 and 2015, winning 54 games and two World Cup titles.



Check out this video that asked the question - is Lukhanyo Am the best player in the world?



André Esterhuizen offloads away from Mason Grady



Canan Moodie

Suleiman Hartzenberg (22) have already represented the South Africa A side, and will join the senior set-up in the coming years.

As was the case in 2024, Erasmus will select his teams with the 2027 World Cup in mind, and with regard to the strength of the opposition.

The two Tests against Italy this July should provide the senior players with an opportunity to begin the season on a positive note, but don not be surprised if Erasmus includes one or two youngsters across the series. The subsequent game against Georgia should provide further opportunities for fringe players and new blood. ■

game time in the coming season, with elder statesmen such as De Allende and Kriel saving themselves for the bigger matches.

But Erasmus is not one to rest on his laurels, and he may explore further options before the team departs for Australia in two years' time. A young rookie may surpass the more established players to earn a place in the 2027 World Cup squad, just as Herschel Jantjies did in 2019, and Moodie did in 2023.

South African rugby certainly is not short on young midfield talent. Sharks utility back Ethan Hooker (22) was part of the wider Bok squad ahead of the home Tests against Ireland and Portugal last year, and was name-checked by Erasmus as one for the future. Lions No.13 Henco van Wyk (23) and Stormers speedster



Henco Van Wyk leaps to score a try

# EPIC



# SHOWDOWNS

THE FA CUP IS ONE OF THE MOST FAMOUS FOOTBALL COMPETITIONS IN THE WORLD AND HAS SEEN SOME GREAT FINALS DOWN THE YEARS

By **Mark Gleeson**

**T**he latest edition of football's oldest competition will be concluded at Wembley this month with the FA Cup final.

It remains one of the great sporting occasions, always played out close to 100 000 spectators, preceded by a rousing hymn, competed on a surface that looks like a putting green and often in the English summer with the sun shining down on the supporters.

Its longevity makes it a must watch for millions across the world. This year will be the 114th final, going back to 1872 when the first was contested between Wanderers and Royal Engineers, with Wanderers winning 1-0. The last one last year saw Manchester United upset neighbours, and champions, Manchester City 2-1.

These are the top 10 finals of all time:

### 1953 BLACKPOOL 4 BOLTON WANDERERS 3

This was known as the "Stanley Matthews Final", although there was an equally significant contribution from South African Bill Perry. Bolton were 3-1 with 25 minutes left match but down to nine men because of injury in an era before substitutions were allowed. With Matthews dazzling on the wing, Stan Mortensen scored twice more to complete what is still the only hat-trick scored in a Wembley FA Cup final, and draw the Tangerines level in the 89th minute. Extra

time was looming but a 38-year-old Matthews had other ideas, as in the second minute of second-half injury time, his cross was on the money for Perry to net the winner.



Check out this compilation of the best ever goals in FA Cup finals!

### 1923 BOLTON WANDERERS 2 WEST HAM UNITED 0

The newly opened Wembley's first event was the famous 'White Horse' FA Cup Final where more than 200 000 fans flocked in. The defining image of the day is the white horse clearing the crowds pre kick-off not so much the football. The FA, unconvinced the game could fill the capacity of the new stadium, had launched a major advertising campaign. The easy accessibility of the stadium by public transport and the fine weather were also factors which contributed to the enormous crowd.

### 2006 Liverpool 3 West Ham United 3

With Wembley being refurbished, the final was at Cardiff's Millennium Stadium and saw Liverpool and West Ham United share six special goals between them. Own-goal connoisseur Jamie Carragher, Dean Ashton and Paul Konchesky registered for the Irons, but a Djibril Cisse effort and Steven Gerrard brace - including his sizzling volley in second-half injury time - saved the Reds' bacon and forced a penalty shootout. Goalkeeper Pepe Reina, usually full of blunders, stopped three of the four spot kicks to win it for the Reds.

Steven Gerrard lifts the cup after Liverpool beat West Ham 3-1



**1987**

**COVENTRY CITY 3  
TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR 2**

Gary Mabbutt's own goal in extra time won for Coventry their first ever major trophy. Within two minutes of the kick-off, Tottenham took the lead through Clive Allen but the scores were level seven minutes later. Mabbutt restored the lead but midway through the second half, Coventry were level again, with Keith Houchen converting a David Bennett cross with a diving header, which would later be selected as the BBC Goal of the Season.

**1989**

**LIVERPOOL 3 EVERTON 2**

Following the Hillsborough disaster, which occurred in Liverpool's semi-final against Nottingham Forest, both sets of fans chanted "Merseyside" before the kick off as the rivals fans united. Ina Rush scored twice, including the extra-time winner.

**1973**

**LEEDS UNITED 0 SUNDERLAND 1**

A humbling defeat for the top team in England against second division opposition with Sunderland keeping Leeds at arm's length and earning a historic 1-0 victory thanks to a solitary Ian Porterfield goal in the 32nd minute. The goal hero would go onto become manager of Zimbabwe.

**2013**

**MANCHESTER CITY 0  
WIGAN ATHLETIC 1**

Manchester City narrowly lost the title race to neighbours Manchester United, so were expected to make up for it against Wigan. However, in the first minute of second-half additional time, Ben Watson met Shaun Maloney's corner kick to the near post and flicked a deft header over Joe Hart's futile reach and into the side of the net, winning the FA Cup for the Latics for the very first time.



Mesut Ozil and Lukas Podolski celebrate yet another Arsenal success

44

The number of different clubs that have won the FA Cup with Arsenal (14) leading the way



Ricky Villa of Spurs celebrates after scoring the opening goal of the 1981 final

## 1981 TOTTENHAM HOTSPUR 3 MANCHESTER CITY 2

Technically, this was a replay of the final. Back then, draws at the end of extra-time meant the entire game would be replayed - and the initial contest finished 1-1. The winner in the replay came through one of the most iconic goals in the competition's history. Ricky Villa slalomed his way through the City's defence to finally win the trophy for Spurs. It was an all-time great goal in a game labelled 'match of the century' at the time.

## 1988 LIVERPOOL 0 WIMBLEDON 1

Champions Liverpool were expected to take Wimbledon to the cleaners, only to become the victims of one of the competition's most quintessential giant killings. Inspired Wimbledon goalkeeper Dave Beasant denied John Aldridge, becoming the first shot-stopper to save a penalty in the FA Cup final, after Lawrie Sanchez had headed home the only goal of the contest for the Crazy Gang.

# 6

The biggest win in an FA Cup final is 6-0. In 1903, Bury defeated Derby County by that scoreline, a result that was matched by Manchester City in the 2019 final, when they defeated Watford.

## 1979 ARSENAL 3 MANCHESTER UNITED 2

The Gunners started the game in imperious fashion and soon found themselves two goals up through from Brian Talbot and Frank Stapleton. With four minutes left, United pulled one back through Gordon McQueen, and then just a minute later, Sammy McIlroy scored the equalising goal. The game looked set for extra-time, and Arsenal looked like they had just thrown away their chance for a relatively straightforward win, until Alan Sunderland found himself on the end of a pinpoint cross with 30 seconds to go and buried it into the far corner, giving the Gunners their lead back. The cross was missed by Gary Bailey, who had joined Manchester United the previous season from Wits University. •



# TOP 5

SOUTH AFRICAN FEMALE  
TENNIS PLAYERS

## AMANDA COETZER

Nicknamed 'The Little Assassin', Coetzer was known for her grit, determination and ability to beat players ranked above her. A talented player in both the singles and doubles, she accumulated nine titles in each of the formats in her career. Coetzer came close in her efforts to secure Grand Slam success but fell agonisingly short each time. She managed two Australian Open semi-finals, one Roland-Garros semi-final, three US Open quarter-finals, and one appearance in the Wimbledon round of 16. In 1997, Coetzer rose to a career best ranking of third in the world after reaching the semi-finals at the Australian Open and Roland-Garros, whilst also tasting defeat in the US Open doubles final.

## ILANA KLOSS

Kloss was no stranger to winning. She tasted success as a junior, winning the girls' singles championship at Wimbledon in 1972 and the US Open in 1974. Kloss kept the momentum rolling, winning the US Open doubles and Roland-Garros mixed doubles titles in 1976, which saw her rise to the top spot in the doubles rankings and 19th in the ladies singles rankings. She shone on South Africa's Federation Cup side from 1973–1977, winning twelve matches and losing just five. Kloss did not just win at the junior and professional levels, but also captured the US Open doubles and mixed doubles titles on the 35-and-over tour. Kloss retired with 19 career doubles trophies but continued to serve the game as commissioner and CEO of World Team Tennis from 2001–2018.



### **LIEZEL HUBER**

Born in Durban in 1976, Huber would dominate the women's doubles circuit. She forged a strong partnership with Cara Black, as the duo captured four grand Slam titles together (2005, 2008 Wimbledon, 2007 Australian Open and 2008 US Open) and secured WTA Doubles Team of the Year in 2007 and 2008. These achievements propelled Huber to a number one ranking in 2007. She would go on to achieve another US Open doubles title in 2011, this time with Lisa Raymond, and Roland-Garros and US Open mixed doubles titles with Bob Bryan. Huber retired with a staggering 53 WTA and 11 ITF doubles titles.

### **BRENDA KIRK**

From 1968–1971, Kirk dominated domestically in both singles and doubles events. Internationally, she made it to the third round of Wimbledon in 1971 and Roland-Garros in 1972. On the international circuit, she reached 10 doubles finals, winning twice and finishing as runner up on eight occasions. Kirk represented South Africa in the Federation Cup from 1969–1973, racking up 17 wins and 10 losses. Her greatest achievement came in 1972 as she and Pat Walkden claimed the Federation Cup at Ellis Park in Johannesburg, defeating Britain 2–1 in the final. Kirk passed away in 2015.

### **ANNETTE DU PLOOY**

Annette Du Plooy (formerly Van Zyl) proved her pedigree against top competition. She excelled in each format, winning titles in singles, doubles and mixed doubles. Du Plooy won 11 singles titles in her career, boasting an impressive record of 11 victories and two losses in 13 final appearances, and secured four doubles titles. In 1965 she reached a career high singles ranking of sixth in the world. She would come close to singles Grand Slam glory on many occasions, reaching the 1965 Australian Open semi-final, French Open semi-final in 1967 and 1968, the Wimbledon quarter-final in 1966, and the US Open quarter-final in 1967. Despite not managing it alone, she did get her Grand Slam in 1966 as she and fellow South African Frew McMillan won the mixed doubles at Roland-Garros. ■



# AFGHAN OUTRAGE

AFGHANISTAN'S MEN'S CRICKET SIDE IS MAKING GREAT STRIDES IN THE GAME, BUT THE COUNTRY'S WOMEN'S TEAM HAS BEEN FORCED INTO EXILE

BY **FIRDOSE MOONDA**

**A**fghanistan's national men's cricket team know that they represent a country where things are "not correct", according to their English coach Jonathan Trott, but are in a "tricky situation", and feel there is little they can do to make things right for the women and girls who are oppressed in their homeland.

Since the Taliban takeover in 2021, women's rights have steadily declined in Afghanistan, to the point where they are not allowed to participate in almost any aspect of public life. They can no longer work, study, play sport, travel outside their homes without a male guardian or even have their voices heard out loud. The international community offers its shock and horror but has stopped short of completely isolating Afghanistan.



Of the 25 women's cricketers who had been contracted by the Afghanistan Cricket Board, 22 are now living in Australia. They recently played an exhibition fixture under the banner of Afghan Women's XI.

Cricket, in particular, has welcomed Afghanistan as one of its greatest success stories. From Division Five of the World Cricket League in 2008, Afghanistan became Full Members of the International Cricket Council in 2017 (despite not having a women's team but under the assumption they would develop one) and T20 World Cup semi-finalists in 2024.

They are a beacon of hope to countries who did not inherit cricket through colonialism that they can excel at the sport and compete among the best, as Afghanistan have.

In February, they were part of the eight-team Champions Trophy for the first time in their history and in the absence of former World Cup champions Sri Lanka and West Indies.



Afghanistan celebrates during the Men's World Cup India 2023

At the tournament, they beat England for the second time at an ICC ODI event, after also winning their 2023 World Cup match against them.

Though Afghanistan did not qualify for the semi-finals, their performances continue to suggest a major title is on the way, but not without controversy.

There are continued calls from government and civil society for teams not to play against Afghanistan. Australia have refused to honour bilateral engagements against Afghanistan since 2021 while England were hit with a letter from 160 members of parliament asking them to boycott their Champions Trophy fixture.

Here in South Africa, sports minister Gayton McKenzie likened the Taliban regime to an Apartheid one and said that if it was up to him the match against Afghanistan would not go ahead.

Despite all that, Australia, England and South Africa took the field against Afghanistan with Australia and England prioritising the points at an ICC event above their moral convictions and South Africa of the view that a ban against the Afghan men's team will do very little to change the status of women's rights in the country.

It is South Africa's perspective that is the most interesting. They were banned themselves between the 1970s and 1990s as the world shunned the Apartheid regime and ultimately played a part in forcing its fall. Why then, do South Africa not believe the same can be done in Afghanistan? In short, because they do not think the Taliban will listen.

Unlike Apartheid South Africa which sought acceptance from western institutions and economies, the Taliban actively seeks to differentiate itself from them.

A sporting ban is more likely to suit their narrative, especially as more conservative elements of the Taliban have hinted at an outright ban of sport for all its people. There is also the economic reality that when South Africa was banned, World Cups did not exist and now that they do, the ICC's chief consideration is earning substantial television rights fees from its events.

Afghanistan, who play an entertaining brand of cricket and cause their fair share of shocks, doubtless improve the value of the global product.

But where does that leave the women who did and still want to play sport? In 2020, the Afghanistan Cricket Board (ACB) contracted 25 women's players and planted seeds for a national side.

Those women, along with the national football team, sought exile abroad when the Taliban came into power.

**THOUGH AFGHANISTAN DID NOT QUALIFY FOR THE SEMI-FINALS, THEIR PERFORMANCES CONTINUE TO SUGGEST A MAJOR TITLE IS ON THE WAY, BUT NOT WITHOUT CONTROVERSY.**

Most of them now live in Australia where they have learnt English, begun to study and play club cricket. They have also organised themselves to petition the ICC to recognise them as a refugee team, which has yet to happen.

While the ICC has been criticised for ignoring the Afghan women, its hands are tied. As a member-led organisation, the ICC can only acknowledge teams who are appointed by the members themselves. In other words, if the ACB was to present a women's team for ICC approval it would get it but a women's team with no umbrella body cannot be rubber stamped. The ACB, of course, cannot ratify a women's team without approval from the Taliban which leaves all hopes of an Afghan national women's team in limbo.

Those in Australia have the support of Cricket Australia who helped organise a match between an Afghan XI and the charity Cricket without Borders in January and have also launched a crowd-funding campaign to assist the women with further study and sporting equipment.

For the women involved, it is likely this is the ceiling of their sporting ambition and many of them have accepted their role as amateur cricketers and activists for change.

**2010**

The Afghanistan women's side was formed in 2010, but has yet to play an official international. The prospect of it doing so in the future looks bleak.

Crucially, they want the men's team to help them.

Speaking to *ESPNcricinfo* over the course of 2024, two exiled cricketers, Firoza Amiri and Benafsha Hashimi asked their male counterparts to speak for them and help raise awareness of their plight.

"If they can hear my voice from here: Afghanistan, national players, please, be the voice of the girls at the moment," Amiri said. "Please do more for us. Start doing something for women. You are the voice of Afghanistan. They are the most famous people at the moment.

They can be the voice of millions and millions of girls."

In small ways, the men have heard them. Superstar Rashid Khan, former captain Mohammad Nabi and opening batter Rahmanullah Gurbaz have all posted on social media appealing to the Taliban to let women study.

At the Champions Trophy current captain Hashmatullah Shahidi said, "Everyone likes to see everyone play but when it comes to politics, there are those things which we cannot control", as a message of support to the women.

It also sounds like defeat: however wrongly women and girls are treated in Afghanistan, the men and the sport some of them love can do very little to help. ■



Listen to former Australia international cricketer Mel Jones discuss the plight of the Afghanistan women's team



Afghanistan Women's XI players celebrate a wicket



BY  
**GRANT SHUB**

PARALYMPIC BRONZE  
MEDALLISTS LUCAS  
SITHOLE AND DONALD  
RAMPHADI CONTINUE  
TO BREAK BARRIERS  
IN WHEELCHAIR TENNIS

# DOUBLE DE



# LIGHT

**T**he South African wheelchair tennis duo of Lucas Sithole and Donald Ramphadi solidified themselves as local sporting heroes after securing Africa's first wheelchair tennis Paralympic medal. The pair claimed bronze in the quad doubles at the Paris Paralympics last September. Having previously partnered with other players at tournaments, the pair dovetailed effectively to fly South Africa's flag on the global stage.

Both men have defied the odds and navigated significant setbacks in their lives to triumph at the highest level of their sport. The dynamic duo have displayed tenacity in the face of serious adversity and are a credit to themselves and their country. After claiming the bronze in Paris, Ramphadi described it as 'the greatest moment of my life'.

Sithole, 38, tragically lost his legs and right arm in a train accident as a 12-year-old and became a triple amputee as a result.

## 2006

Sithole began competing in wheelchair tennis events from 2006, while Ramphadi was cleared to compete in the quad division in 2018.



Watch Lucas Sithole and Donald Ramphadi's winning moment!



## DID YOU KNOW

South Africa earned a total of six medals at the Paris Paralympics, with prize money for Ramphadi and Sithole said to have been between R40 000 and R50 000 each

However, he would make a name for himself in the singles circuit before turning his attention to the doubles. His partner Ramphadi, seven years his junior, was also able-bodied until the age of 12 and grew up in Limpopo. However, his life changed forever when he was diagnosed with brittle bone disease.

His condition worsened to such an extent that he could barely walk. Nevertheless, he too defied the odds to become a French Open doubles winner, an Australian Open and US Open finalist, with the bronze medal in Paris last year his crowning achievement at this stage.

Sithole, who doubles as a motivational speaker, was born and bred in KwaZulu-Natal and grew up in a small township village. Tragedy struck when he was trying to help his uncle, who worked for a train company, change the railway line. Sithole attempted to jump on the slow-moving train but fell underneath it. After suffering serious bouts of depression while grappling with his 'new normal', Sithole discovered a passion for tennis. In 2005, he first picked up a racquet and channelled his energy into perfecting his craft. He previously partook in wheelchair

Sithole and Ramphadi at the Paris 2024 Summer Paralympic Games



basketball for the national team and wheelchair rugby.

The highs of winning a bronze medal at the 2024 Paralympics were interspersed with previous lows when Sithole was banned from the sport for two years. Sithole was banned by the International Tennis Federation (ITF) in 2019 for failing to avail himself for a drug test. A two-year ban appeared a harsh sanction at the time but players are aware they have to be available one hour every day to allow for random out-of-competition urine tests. Of the matter, Sithole said: “Even before they gave me a ban, they tested me and the

results were negative. I’ve never had a positive drug test.”

For Ramphadi, who once suggested that tennis was a “white person sport”, he has shifted the narrative. As a role model to other tennis players, Ramphadi wants to encourage black youths to pick up the sport and, as a Grand Slam champion and Paralympic medallist, said he wants to change the way young kids are thinking at home.

Ramphadi (*below*), whose nickname is ‘Dona the Warrior’, holds the distinction of being Africa and South Africa’s number one quad player. He has been ranked as high as third in the quad doubles rankings and is currently ranked 13th. He was propelled into the limelight when, at the age of 25, Tennis South Africa reached out to him in relation to qualifying for classification for the wheelchair tennis’ quad division. “I’ve always had big dreams,” he noted: “and, even when times were tough, I felt I would do well in the years ahead.”

After reaching the wheelchair doubles

# 2013

The year Sithole made history, becoming the first African and South African to claim a Grand Slam, which he said “changed the profile of wheelchair tennis in the country”.

quarter-final at the Australian Open, the pair will be chasing more glory as the season unfurls at the Grand Slams.

Knowing their drive and determination, few would bet against them obtaining further success. Personal ambitions aside, Sithole has future plans to open a sports centre for people with disabilities, meanwhile Ramphadi is likely to leave an equally lasting legacy. Both are shining examples to everyone in sports. ■





WORLDWIDE

# KWAME



**DATE OF BIRTH: 8 APRIL 2006**

**BOWLING STYLE: LEFT ARM FAST**

**TEAMS: SOUTH AFRICA,  
PAARL ROYALS, MUMBAI  
INDIANS AND LIONS.**

## **FAST FACT:**

Maphaka is the youngest player to feature for South Africa in all three formats - Tests, One Day Internationals and Twenty20 Internationals. He was still at school when he made his international debut aged 18 years and 137 days against the West Indies in a T20 in August 2024.

IMAGES: RYAN WILKINSKY/BACKPAGEPIX

**SPORTSCLUB**

# MOMENT TO REMEMBER

ARSENAL MIDFIELDER MICHAEL THOMAS SCORED ONE OF THE MOST CONSEQUENTIAL GOALS IN ENGLISH FOOTBALL HISTORY THIS MONTH IN 1989

**M**any contemporary football fans remember Sergio Agüero's last minute goal that handed Manchester City the Premier League title at the end of the 2011/12 season.

Needing another goal to pip rivals Manchester United to the coveted piece of silverware, Agüero scored exactly 100 seconds from the final whistle against Queens Park Rangers in an amazing display of drama and theatre.

But it is not the only occasion where a late, late goal has sealed the English League title.

Roll the clock back to 26 May 1989 and Arsenal went to Liverpool needing to win 2-0 (or more) to pip the Anfield club to the championship trophy.

Victory by two goals would leave both clubs on 76 points and a 37-plus goal-difference, and it would then come down to goals scored, where Arsenal held the advantage.

The first half was goal-less and Liverpool seemed destined for another title.

But Arsenal took the lead on 53 minutes through an Alan Smith header.

John Aldridge and Ray Houghton both had chances to equalise for Liverpool but did not take them, yet with time running down, they seemed in a little danger.

In the second minute of injury time, Arsenal launched their final attack. A John Barnes run was intercepted by Kevin Richardson, and he passed the ball back to his goalkeeper John Lukic.

Lukic bowled the ball out to Lee Dixon, his long ball to Smith was flicked on, finding Michael Thomas charging through the midfield.

Thomas evaded a challenge by Steve Nicol and raced into the penalty area, slipping the ball past the advancing Bruce Grobbelaar to score Arsenal's second.

The goal came 38 seconds from the final whistle, even tighter than Agüero's effort 23 years later.

The commentary of Brian Moore, included the line 'Thomas, it's up for grabs now!', as the midfielder burst into the box with the ball at





Relive Michael  
Thomas' magic  
moment at Anfield!

his feet, is iconic and among best in the history of English football.

"Nobody outside Highbury expected us to do it, but when you lose belief, you might as well get out of football," Arsenal manager George Graham said.

Liverpool manager Kenny Dalglish said simply: "It just wasn't to be."

The events of the night formed the pivotal point of the 1997 film *Fever Pitch*, an adaptation of Nick Hornby's best-selling book of the same name.

But there was another, much weightier legacy from that game. The drama of it all is said to have proven to many the untapped potential of football on television.

Suddenly businesses and broadcasters were more interested and there began talk of a breakaway in English football to capitalise on television revenue ... and that was the start of the Premier League.

One final epilogue, Thomas would go on to play at Anfield again ... many times. The man who destroyed Liverpool's dreams in 1989 signed for the Merseyside club in 1991 and would spend seven seasons there, though he was in and out of the side.

He only won a FA Cup in that time, with both his career league titles coming with Arsenal. ■

# LEAPING INTO THE SKYLINE

FRENCH BASE JUMPER FRÉDÉRIC  
FUGEN RECENTLY TOOK ON  
THE TALLEST BUILDING IN THE  
SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE



Hear from Frédéric  
Fugen after he  
completed his jump  
in Jakarta!



**F**rédéric Fugen completed two consecutive BASE jumps from Jakarta's Autograph Tower, the tallest building in Indonesia and the Southern Hemisphere at 385 metres.

With over two decades of experience in aerial sports, Fugen has achieved numerous records, including a BASE jump from the world's tallest building, the Burj Khalifa, in Dubai in 2014.

This time, he once again proved that courage, determination, and meticulous preparation can push the limits of what is humanly possible.

"The jump was truly extraordinary and unique. Although it wasn't the highest jump I've ever done, this one had its own challenges as it was carried out in the heart of a bustling city like Jakarta," Fugen said.

"With BASE jumps typically done from buildings, cliffs, or mountains, all of which can be found in Indonesia, this country could become a host for BASE jumping events that could foster the growth of this sport in the future."

This historic moment is also a source of immense pride for the management of Autograph Tower and the larger Thamrin Nine complex.

With stringent safety standards in place, including wind speed monitoring and technical support from professional teams, the jump proved Indonesia's ability to host world-class aerial sports events.

As part of the event, Red Bull organised a sharing session featuring Fugen, the TNI AU Aeronautics Development team, and the Indonesian Aero Sport Federation, in hope to advance Indonesian aerial sport.

"BASE jump is undeniably one of the most challenging sports, requiring not only passion and adrenaline but also thorough preparation, planning, courage, and strong mental resilience. The Indonesian Air Force highly appreciates these activities and the opportunity to enrich our personnel's skills through the experience, knowledge, and BASE jump techniques shared," said Air Commodore Tyas Nur



Adi, Head of the Air Force Aerospace Potential Center.

Retired Police Inspector General M Adnas also expressed his appreciation for the event, particularly the coaching clinic session, which he highlighted as an inspiration for young talents and a valuable educational moment for the Indonesian public about aerial sports.

Ardya Rifiantara, a skydiving instructor at the Indonesian Aero Sport Federation (FASI), expressed his enthusiasm, saying, "Witnessing firsthand and even being involved in BASE jump performed by Frédéric Fugen, an icon in this sport, is truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience."

"I have learned so much from my involvement in this project, from the planning and preparation stages to its execution. I sincerely hope that today's success serves as a catalyst to increase the popularity of aerial sports among the Indonesian public."

The BASE jump from Autograph Tower stands as a symbol of Jakarta's evolution as a global megacity and underscores Indonesia's growing prominence in aerial sports. Through a combination of courage, professionalism, and collaboration, this event not only made history but also ignited the spirit of young Indonesians to break boundaries and compete on the world stage. ■

# 7 700

The highest base jump in the world was from 7 700 kilometres, performed by Valery Rozov in 2016 when he leapt from Cho Oyu in Tibet, the sixth-highest mountain in the world. Rozov was a Russian extreme sports star who died in a base-jumping accident in 2017.



# MAGNIFICENT MONACO

THE ICONIC MONACO RACE IS RUN ON 25 MAY AND IT WILL CERTAINLY RE-ENFORCE ITS STATUS AS THE GLAMOUR GRAND PRIX. THIS IS WHAT PRINCE ALBERT OF MONACO HAS TO SAY ABOUT THE TOUR



Check out this video describing a change to the regulations at the Monaco Grand Prix!

## 1. THE STARTING LINE

"The first time my parents took me to the circuit I was seven years old. They thought that if I was younger, it would bore me. So I stayed at home. My first time was not really on the circuit, but in an apartment overlooking the starting line. I was struck by the drivers' overalls that shivered in the wind when they passed at high speed. At the time, the cockpits were wider and from above you could clearly see their silhouettes. This year we will be in this apartment again. Another tradition was to meet up with friends for lunch at the Panorama."

## 2. SAINTE DÉVOTE

"I particularly remember one incident, where Derek Daly's Tyrrell went airborne through the pack and landed on his teammate Jean-Pierre Jarier's car and caused chaos. That was in 1980. From where I was, on the starting line, even though it was at an angle, you could tell that something serious had happened. I have the impression that drivers have been more careful in recent years."

## 3. THE CLIMB OF BEAU RIVAGE

"Across from the course used to be Rosie's Bar. I sometimes went to her place with friends for a drink, but not often enough for my taste. We met the drivers there. They all came there at the time. Graham Hill was a mainstay. When it was decided to demolish the building in 1996, the developer promised to keep the bar, but for financial reasons, it didn't happen. Where her bar used to be, a cardio-thoracic medical centre has been built. Rosie is now 90 years old and I ran into her not long ago in the street. She's a character in the Principality."

## 4. THE FAIRMONT HAIRPIN

"I continue to call it the Loews bend like many others. I know few people who say "the Fairmont bend" from the name given to the hotel since 2005. Before we called it the bend of the old train station. What is incredible is that the slowest bend in the history of Formula 1 is the most famous in the world."

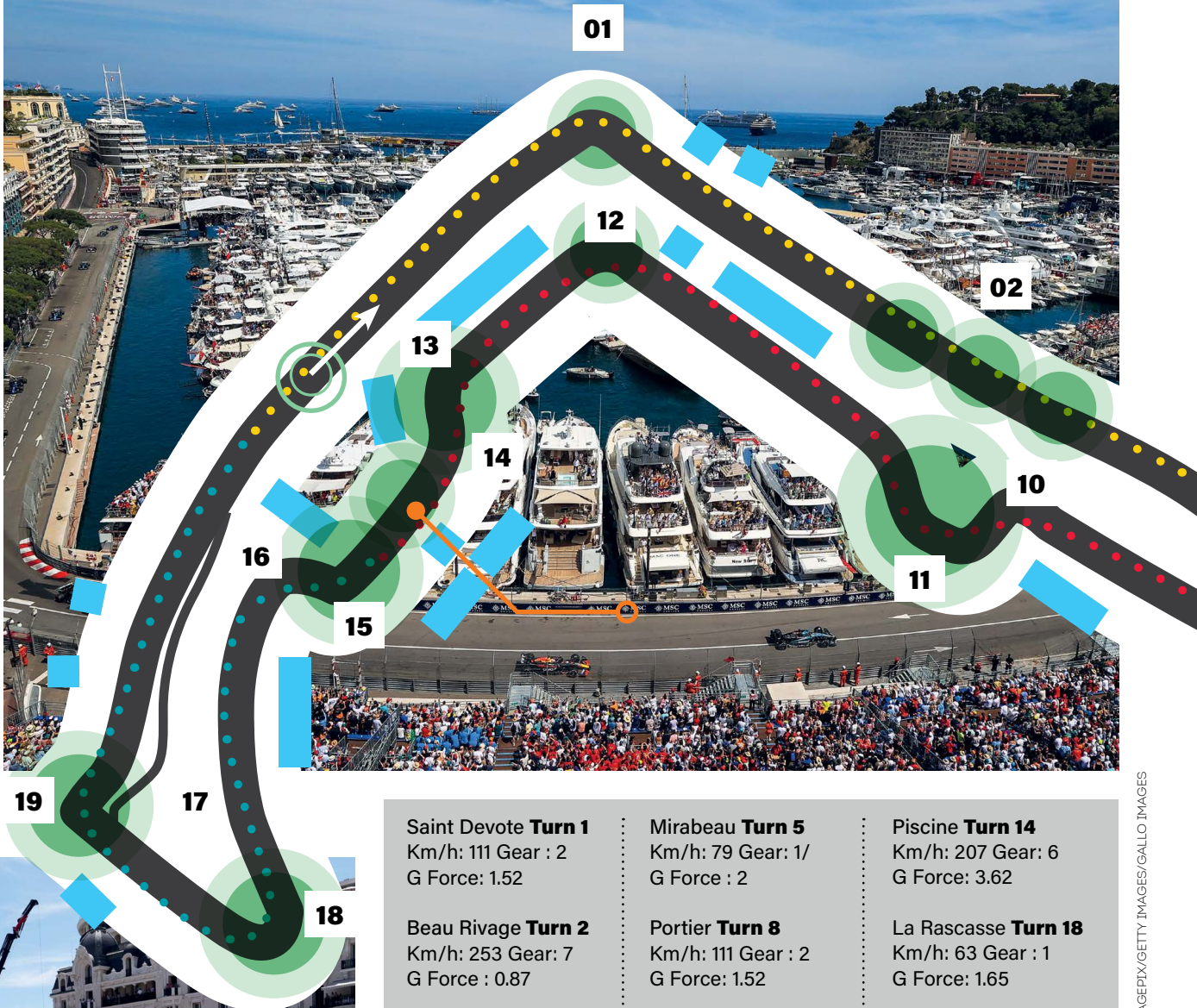
## 5. THE TUNNEL

"As a child, I used to come and swim there. Now, there is the Yacht Club, but before, there was a small restaurant in straw huts, called Le Calypso. It was a very nice meeting place, it overlooked the rocks, and you could swim there. There was a ladder to go down into the water without getting hurt."

# 8

The number of times Brazilian Ayrton Senna has won the Monaco Grand Prix, more than any other driver. Last year's winner Charles Leclerc hails from Monaco.

# MONACO GRAND PRIX



## Saint Devote **Turn 1**

Km/h: 111 Gear : 2  
G Force: 1.52

## Beau Rivage **Turn 2**

Km/h: 253 Gear: 7  
G Force : 0.87

## Massenet **Turn 3**

Km/h: 158 Gear: 4  
G Force : 3.59

## Casino **Turn 4**

Km/h: 126 Gear: 4  
G Force : 3.48

## Mirabeau **Turn 5**

Km/h: 79 Gear: 1/  
G Force : 2

## Portier **Turn 8**

Km/h: 111 Gear : 2  
G Force: 1.52

## Tunnel exit

Km/h: 289 Gear : 7  
G Force: 1.22

## Tabac **Turn 12**

Km/h: 161 Gear: 4  
G Force : 3.31

## Piscine **Turn 14**

Km/h: 207 Gear: 6  
G Force: 3.62

## La Rascasse **Turn 18**

Km/h: 63 Gear : 1  
G Force: 1.65

## Anthony **Turn 19**

Km/h: 95 Gear: 1  
G Force: 1.73

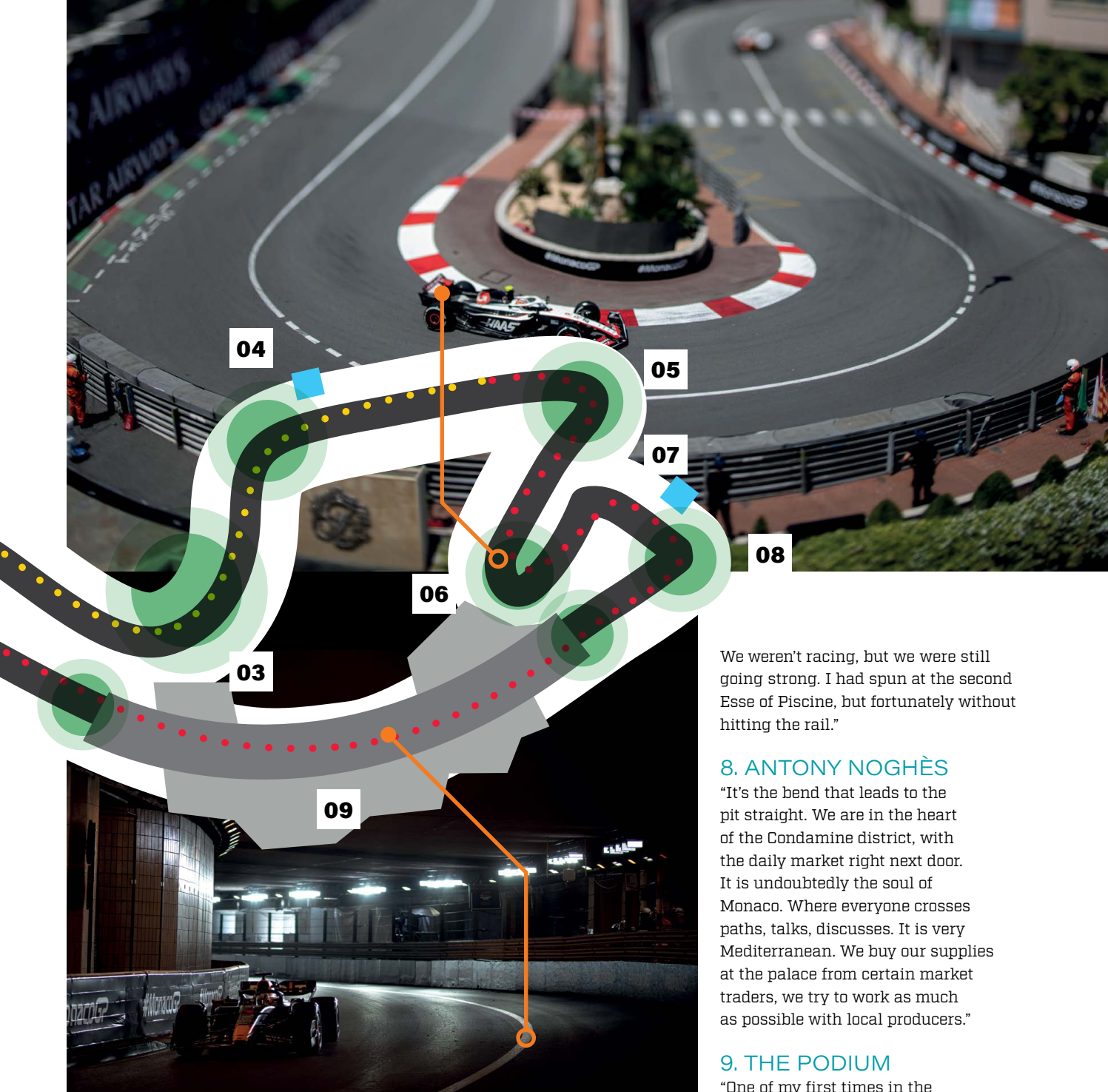
## Pit Straight

Km/h: 169 Gear: 7  
G Force : 0.81

## FAST FACT

The lap record at Monaco is one metre 12.909s set by Lewis Hamilton in his Mercedes in 2021.





04

05

07

08

06

03

09

## 6. THE CHICANE

"I remember Lorenzo Bandini's fatal accident in 1967, I was nine years old. The GP still had 100 laps at the time. From our balcony on the straight with my parents, we saw the smoke rising from the chicane and the flames coloring the sky. It was impressive. I remember a lady who was with us, whose husband had been a car racer. One of their close

friends had been killed in a race. She burst into tears. It had an impact on me."

## 7. THE ESSES OF PISCINE

"I was lucky enough to do quite a few laps of the circuit before the GP, sometimes driving sports cars. One day, my brother-in-law at the time, Stefano Casiraghi, had organised a series of laps with six or seven Maseratis.

We weren't racing, but we were still going strong. I had spun at the second Esse of Piscine, but fortunately without hitting the rail."

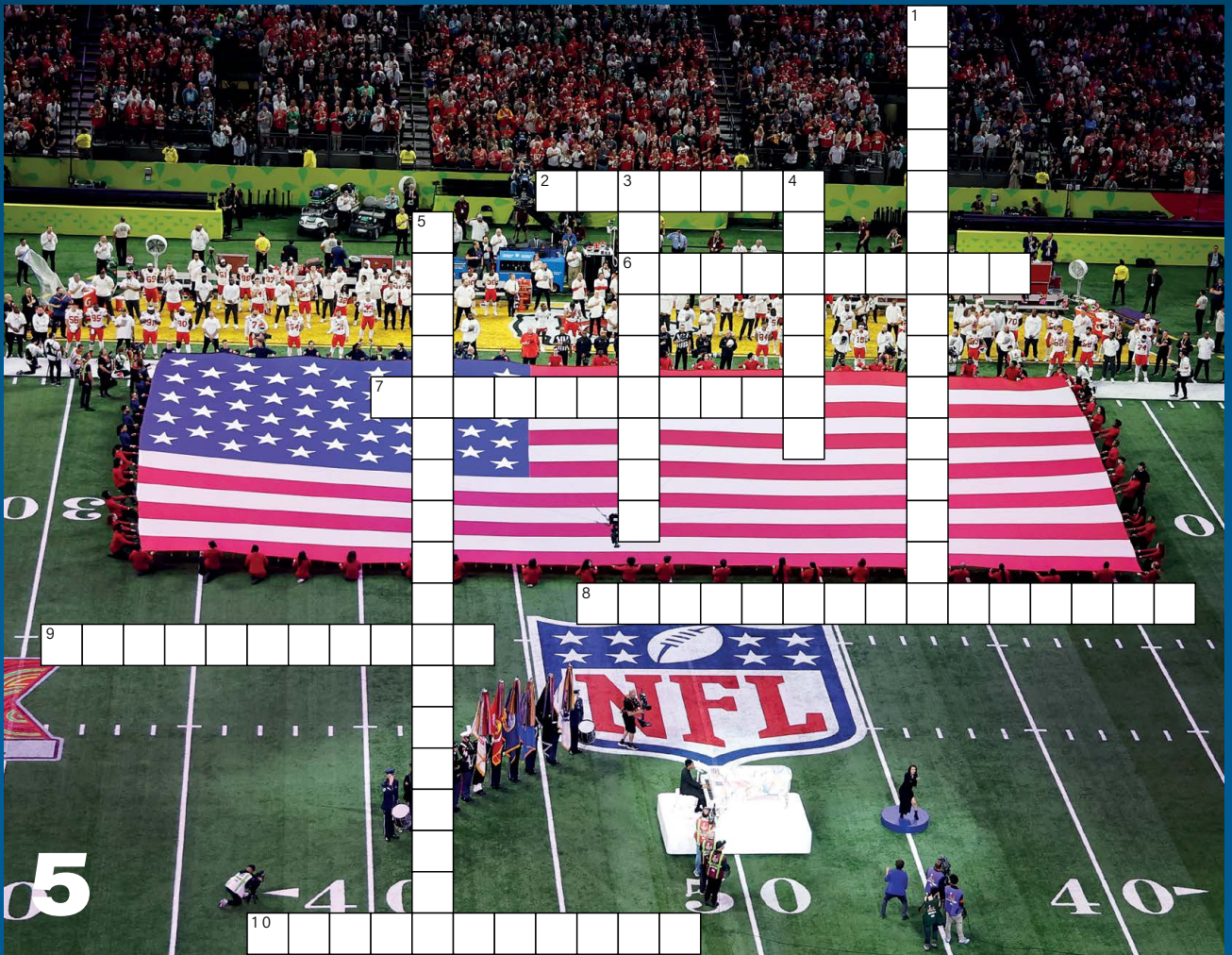
## 8. ANTONY NOGHÈS

"It's the bend that leads to the pit straight. We are in the heart of the Condamine district, with the daily market right next door. It is undoubtedly the soul of Monaco. Where everyone crosses paths, talks, discusses. It is very Mediterranean. We buy our supplies at the palace from certain market traders, we try to work as much as possible with local producers."

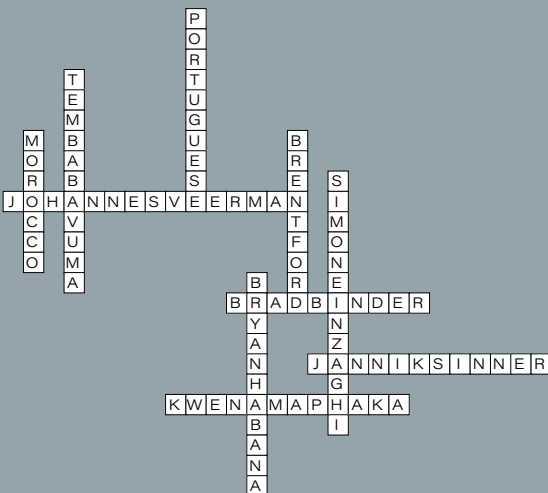
## 9. THE PODIUM

"One of my first times in the box before the start, the president of the Automobile Club, who wanted to please me, asked Graham Hill to come and sign an autograph for me. It was in 1968, I think. I was very impressed when I saw him come into the box before the start. I had seen him before but this time he came for me. I carefully kept his signature. I keep everything. I am accused of keeping too many things." ■

Test your sports knowledge with our crossword



APRIL ANSWERS



ACROSS

2. What is the name of South Africa's only purpose-built Grand Prix racetrack?
6. Who are Newcastle United's great rivals in the North East of England?
7. Which bowler finished as the leading wicket-taker in the 2025 SA20?
8. What is the name of the famous golf course where the US Masters is played?
9. Who has been awarded the rights to host the 2034 FIFA World Cup?
10. Who won the women's singles title at the 2025 Australian Open?

DOWN

1. What is the name of Rulani Mokwena's Moroccan club that will play in the 2025 Club World Cup?
3. Who will South Africa play in the final of the World Test Championship at Lord's in London in June?
4. England, Scotland, Wales and who will make up the 'Lions' rugby team that will tour Australia in June and July 2025?
5. Who won the 2025 Super Bowl by beating Kansas City?

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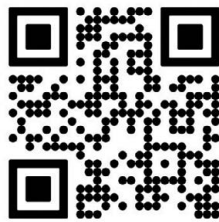
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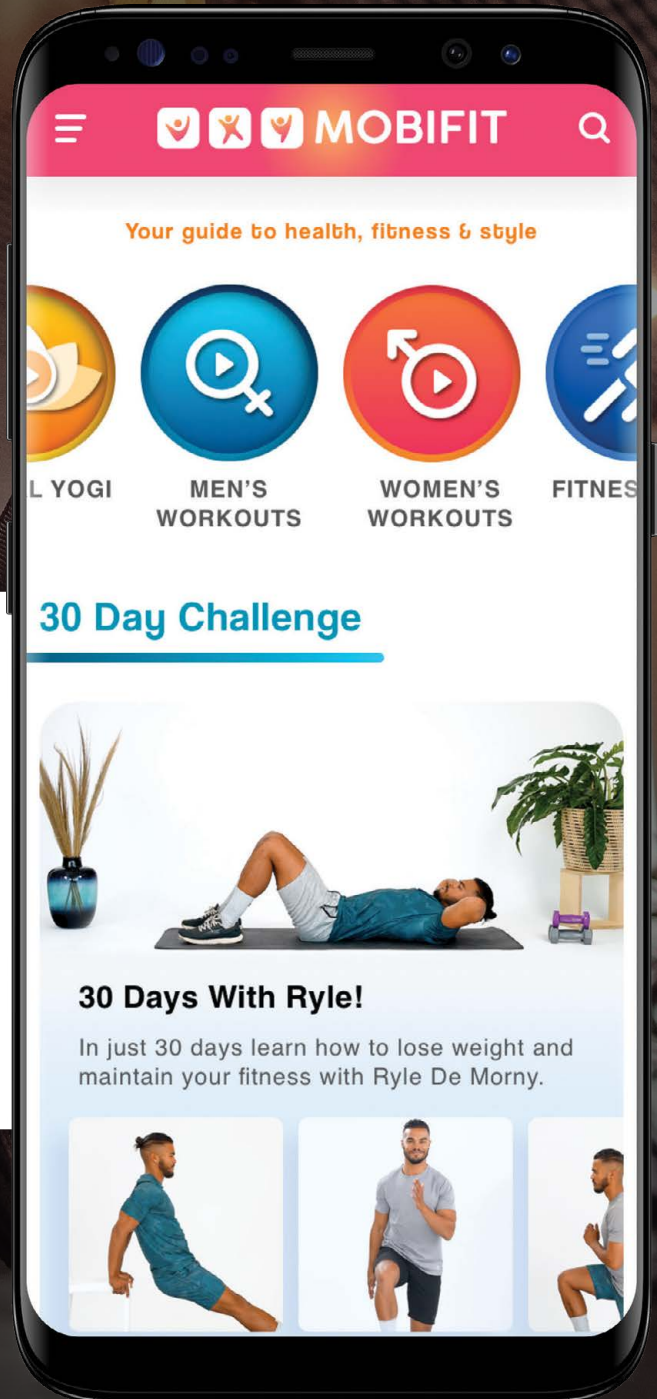
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Intosys

DC

BY **GARY LEMKE**

# PARIS MATCH

MEN'S TENNIS FACES UNPRECEDENTED CHALLENGES THIS YEAR, WHILE IN THE WOMEN'S GAME THE PLAYING FIELD HAS BEEN LEVELLED AHEAD OF THE FRENCH OPEN. WHO CAN COME OUT ON TOP?

**W**e have to address the elephant in the room because it is not going to go away without doing so. When the 2025 French Open swings into view, it will be doing so under the cloud of world No.1 Jannik Sinner (*right*) completing a three-month suspension for testing positive for a banned steroid. Despite his denials of “not-knowingly” ingesting a banned substance, he did, and now suspicion follows other players.

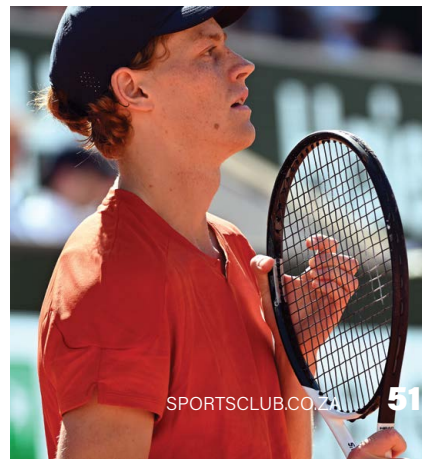
Even Laureus took the decision to remove Sinner from their Sportsman of the Year award list in March, and the rumours grow. Having spent extended time inside the athletes village bubble at the 2024 Paralympics,

it was common discussion about how tennis players - males in particular - were able to play at such a high intensity for days and weeks on end.

Their collective power of recovery was remarkable, and this is where the rumours start. Most doping violations relate to the ability to recover from exertions which would leave the mere mortal on the sofa for days.

Tennis was suddenly being compared with cycling, which is not a compliment given that sport's dark history, but the sport does need to accept questions being asked.

For the women, it is a blessing in disguise that matches are three sets and not best-of-five, even if the prizemoney at the Grand Slams are equal.





Check out this top shot from Coco Gauff at the 2024 French Open!

One of the stumbling blocks to stretching out women to best-of-fives at the majors was that women are not physically wired to cope with the intensity of matches that last that long, and then do it all again 48 hours later (with a day's training in between).

However, here we are, at the second Grand Slam of the year and the only one on clay. It was a bucket list experience for me to be at Roland-Garros when the Olympics were staged at that iconic venue. The outdoor courts seating area is perhaps smaller than one might imagine, and the main stadium courts are a bit more intimate than appears on TV.

Olympic champions were Novak Djokovic, he beat French Open holder Carlos Alcaraz, while the women's gold went to Zheng Qinwen (*below*) of China, who had eliminated French Open champion Świątek in the semi-finals.

It was a huge moment for the sport, with Qinwen becoming the first Asian

singles gold medal for the sport at the Olympics.

At 22 she is the third-youngest player in the WTA top 10, slotting in at No.8 at the beginning of March, with Aryna Sabalenka topping the standings ahead of Świątek and Americans Coco Gauff, Jessica Pegula and Madison Keys.

The latter won her maiden Grand Slam title at the age of 30 when she prevailed at the 2025 Australian Open, after years of promise. She is a previous finalist at the US Open and a semi-finalist at the 2018 French Open, where she fell to Sloane Stephens.

While Keys has not shown the famous red clay of Roland-Garros to be her favourite surface, she has risen to a career high and is playing with renewed zest and confidence.

The obvious favourites are the combusive Sabalenka, as well as Świątek, who was the first tennis player born in the 21st century to win a Grand Slam title, the 2020 French Open. She has won four times in six attempts in Paris, which makes the 23-year-old an obvious candidate on the clay.

By contrast, Sabalenka has won Grand Slams the Australian Open

## FAST FACT

Today the French Open is played on clay, but between 1892 and 1907 it was played on sand! The very first championship in 1891 was the only one played on a grass surface. Clay courts have been used since 1908.

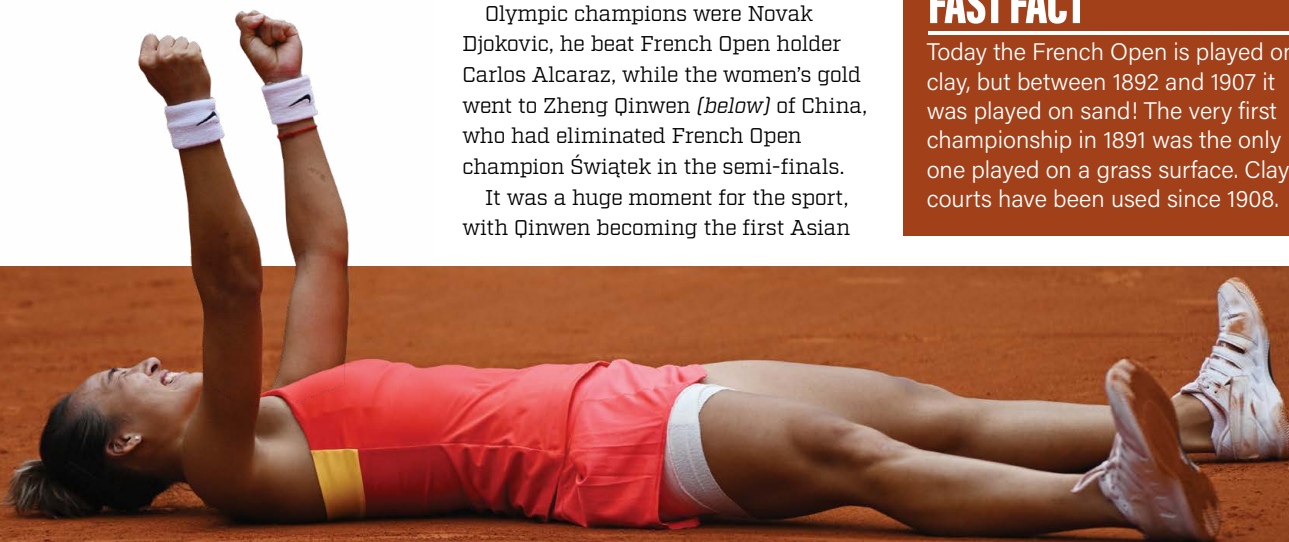


IMAGE: TERESA SUAREZ/CAROLINE BLUMBERG/ YOAN VALAT/BACKPAEPIX



(twice) and Wimbledon, but her best performances at the French Open have been as semi-finalist and quarter-finalist in the last two years. She will be the bookies favourite, given she is No.1 in the world, but she will not be carrying my money given her record at the venue.

My selection will be Gauff, who is a scarcely-believable 21. She has won a lone Grand Slam – the 2023 US Open – but has been a beaten finalist once at Roland-Garros (beaten by Świątek in 2022) and was in the semi-finals last year.

It was during last year's defeat to Świątek that she raised the issue of VAR technology after a Świątek serve was called out by the line judge but the umpire immediately overruled.

Afterwards, Gauff was emotional in talking to the media.

“I think tennis is the only sport where not only we do not have the VAR system, but a lot of times the decisions are made by one person. In other sports, there are usually multiple refs in making a decision.

“It's almost ridiculous that we don't have it [VAR]. As a sport we have to evolve, and we have the technology. They're showing it on TV, so I don't get why the player can't see it.”

Discussions like the subject Gauff raised are healthy for sport to progress. As are discussions about the unmentionable. Transparency is crucial and everyone with an interest in tennis realises that we are at something of a crossroads in the sport as it fights back to regain its credibility after a tough recent period.

When it comes down to the men, we still did not have absolute clarity

as to whether Sinner would be in Paris following his suspension. Alcaraz, the defending champion, will be though, as will three-time champion and for many, the sport's GOAT, Novak Djokovic. The Serb continues to rage against Father Time, but he turns 38 the week of the French Open starts and Father Time is undefeated.

Germany's Alexander Zverev (*above*) will be a popular choice as potential winner, even if he divides fans given his association with domestic abuse violations. Allegations which again shadowed him at this year's Australian Open, where he was beaten by Sinner in a one-sided final.

In his post-match speech, Zverev conceded: “Jannik, you are by far the best player in the world right now. You deserve this title. I hate being so close to the title and not being able to win it, but I will keep trying.”

Then came news of the doping ban. If one has to make some educated calls, and without spreading the net too wide, it might well be that the French Open singles champions come from Świątek and Gauff in the women and Alcaraz and Zverev in the men. Then again, we are ignoring the elephant in the room. ■

# 53 500 000

The total prize money in euros at the 2024 French Open. The winners in the men's and women's singles took home €2.4 million each.

# ESSENTIAL FIXTURES

## STAR TEAMS

Orlando Pirates & Mamelodi Sundowns

# 4

Orlando Pirates and Mamelodi Sundowns each have four title wins in the Nedbank Cup since it was first played in its present guise in 2008. The Buccaneers are going for a third successive trophy this season. The team with the most titles overall is Kaizer Chiefs, who have won 13, but have not lifted the trophy since 2013.

## NEDBANK CUP FINAL

10 MAY

The Nedbank Cup final will take an unusually early date in the South African domestic calendar. It has traditionally brought down the curtain on the domestic season, but will instead be played with two rounds of the Betway Premiership campaign to go. That is likely because the PSL want to avoid any potential clashes with the CAF Champions League and CAF Confederation Cup two-legged finals that are later in May.



## FRENCH OPEN

25 MAY–8 JUNE,  
ROLAND-GARROS,  
PARIS, FRANCE

The only Grand Slam to be played on clay gets under way this month as the European summer tennis season swings into gear. After plenty of controversy in the preceding months around drugs bans and the like, it will be fascinating to see how certain players are received on the court. The French are never shy to air their views.

## STAR PLAYER

Iga Świątek

The Polish player has lifted the trophy for the last three years in a row and is going for her fifth title overall. If she can manage that, it will already put her in the top six women's players of all time in Paris. She served a one-month suspension in November 2024 for, she claims, unknowingly ingesting a banned substance.



# 6

## STAR DRIVER

Ayrton Senna

The late Brazilian star still holds the record for most Monaco Grand Prix wins after collecting six between 1987 and 1993, before his untimely death at the San Marino Grand Prix in 1994. He was 24 at the time and who knows how many titles he might had won has his career reached a natural end.

## OTHER GRAND PRIX IN MAY

04 May	Miami Grand Prix
18 May	Emilia Romagna Grand Prix

## MONACO GRAND PRIX

25 MAY, CIRCUIT DE MONACO, MONACO

Staged since 1929, the Monaco Grand Prix is considered to be the most prestigious Formula One race on the circuit and is one of the races, along with the Indianapolis 500 and the Le Mans 24-hour race, that form the Triple Crown of Motorsport. It is the only Grand Prix that does not adhere to the FIA's mandated 305-kilometre minimum race distance, with its winding circuit through the opulent streets of Monaco.



## BULLS VS CARDIFF RUGBY

10 MAY, LOFTUS VERSFELD, PRETORIA

Cardiff Rugby have vastly improved in 2025 as the Welsh team come to grips with the United Rugby Championship. At this late stage of the season it is all about securing a play-off place and finishing as high up the table as possible to try and ensure a home ground advantage. This clash could be crucial for both teams in terms of that.

# 10

## STAR PLAYER

Willie le Roux

## OTHER URC FIXTURES

09 May, 19:00	Sharks vs Ospreys	King's Park
16 May, 19:00	Stormers vs Cardiff Rugby	Cape Town Stadium
17 May, 20:35	Leinster vs Glasgow Warriors	Aviva Stadium

The old warhorse has had to take over the number 10 jersey this season as the Bulls ran out of options. He has taken to the flyhalf position well, showing his versatility. With Handré Pollard set to return next season, it is not a long-term switch, but he has shown class, experience, and the ability to slip into one of the most challenging positions on the pitch.



# 22

## STAR PLAYER

Ryan Gravenberch

Midfielder Gravenberch has been something of an unsung hero at Liverpool this season. He may not get the goals, or even the assists, but his industry in centre of the park has kept the team on the front foot and been key to their title charge. At just 22 years old, he has a huge future in the game.

## LIVERPOOL VS ARSENAL

10/11 MAY, ANFIELD, LIVERPOOL, ENGLAND

Will there be any semblance of a title-race left by the time this fixture is played, or will Liverpool already be crowned champions? If Arsenal are still in the hunt this clash will be vital as they go to Liverpool with everything on the line. It will be a reminder of their 1989 triumph there when a Michael Thomas goal in injury-time gave them the most dramatic of title wins.

### OTHER EPL FIXTURES

03/04 May, 16:00	Chelsea vs Liverpool	Stamford Bridge
18/19 May, 16:00	Chelsea vs Man Utd	Stamford Bridge
18/19 May, 16:00	Man City vs Bournemouth	Etihad Stadium

## BEACH SOCCER WORLD CUP

1-11 MAY, VICTORIA, SEYCHELLES

A rare World Cup on African soil, Seychelles will have the honour of hosting the 2026 beach soccer global finals for the first time. Beach soccer has grown in popularity over the years since the World Cup was first played in 2005, with Brazil the defending champions after they beat Italy 6-4 in the final of the tournament played in 2024, which had been postponed from the year before.



# 6

## STAR TEAM

Brazil

Brazil have the most gold medals at the beach soccer World Cup with six, double the number of Russia, who are the perhaps surprise second-placed team on the list. Portugal (2) and France (1) are the only other sides to lift the World Cup trophy. Italy have been to three finals but are yet to take gold. Could this be their year?

IMAGES: COURTESY/PETER BYRNE/ALEX DIAZ/NEIL HALL/BACKPAGEPIX

# TEAM OF THE MONTH FERRARI

24%

Ferrari have won 16 of the 67 Formula One Constructors Championships down the years, almost a quarter. But their last success was in 2008.

33%

Of their 15 Drivers' Championships down the years, five were won by Michael Schumacher.



100%

Michael Schumacher won every one of the Drivers' Championships in his Ferrari between 2000 and 2004 as he dominated the sport.

20%

Ferrari have won exactly 20% of the Drivers' Championships over the years, or one every five seasons.

23%

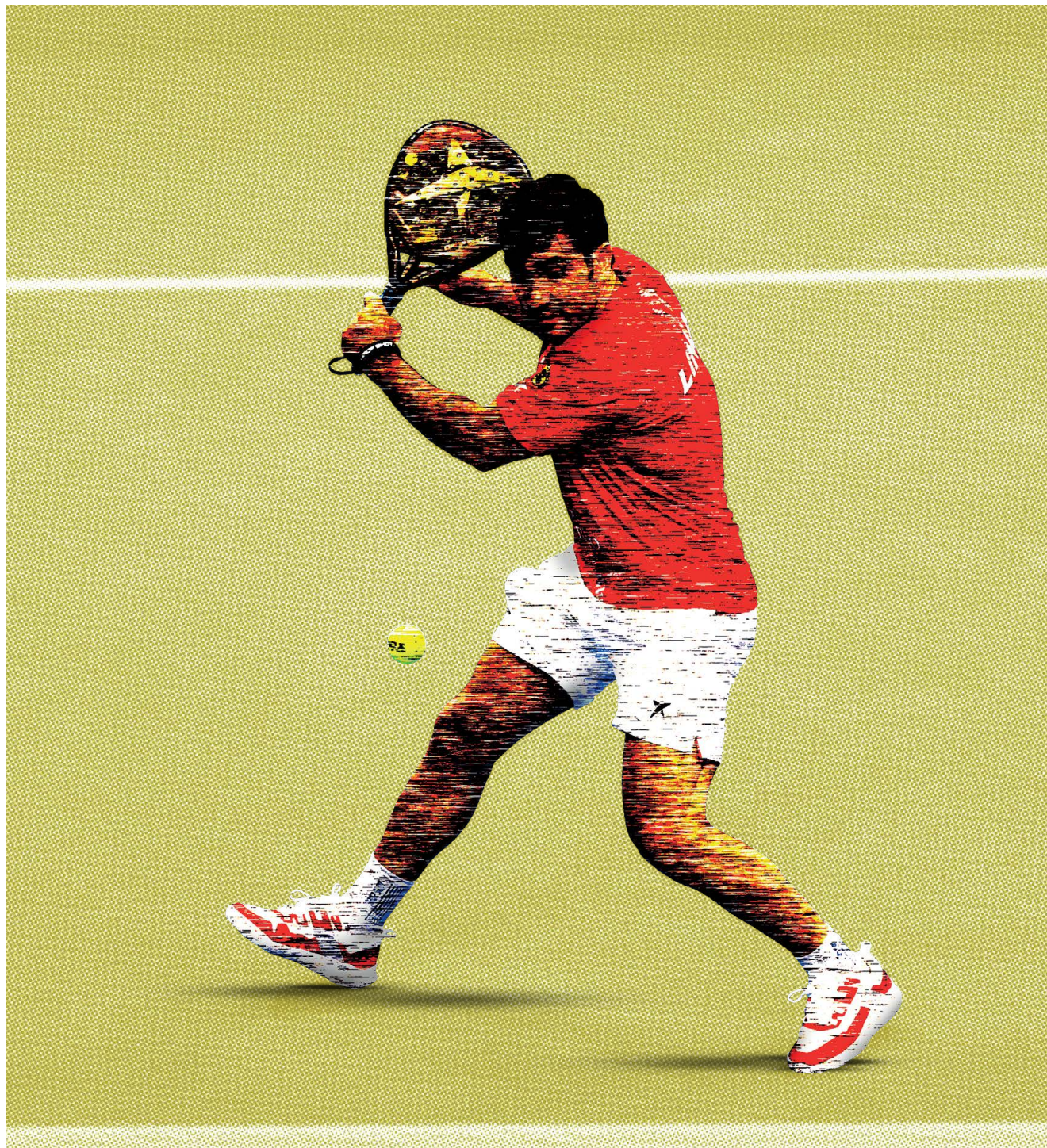
Ferrari had won 247 of the 1097 Grand Prix they had started ahead of the 2025 season.

NICK  
SAID



# PADEL CRAZE FOLLOWS PREDICTABLE PATH

Certain South African sports sadly remain reserved for the privileged few



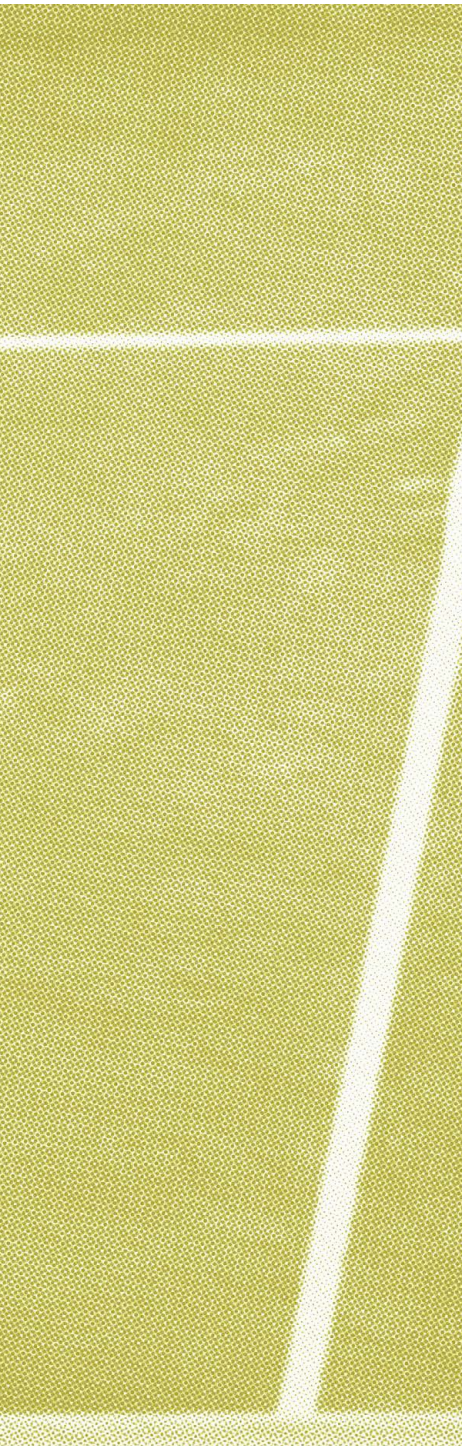


IMAGE: ALI HAIDER/BACKPAGEPIX

**T**here is no doubt that Padel took South Africa's middle- and upper-class suburbs by storm in the last few years, but the game is now facing an all too familiar, and predictable, jolt in its development in the country, held back by its own hubris.

Padel is a mix of tennis and squash and has had a global explosion in the last decade or so. It is easier to play than those two sports, more social and quite a good watch.

It first came to South Africa around 2020 and, perhaps not surprisingly, the first courts were at the exclusive Val de Vie estate in Paarl.

Soon the craze caught on and there were courts popping up all over South African cities, with a reported 600 at 206 clubs to date. There are plans for plenty more too.

But beware where you put your investment Rands, because this trend is also beginning to taper off and the sport will have real issues expanding beyond its estimated 100 000 players in the country.

A few years ago, figures suggest courts in the country were operating at around 70% occupancy and delivering very good returns for those who invested in them.

But that has since dropped to around 30%-50%, depending where they are situated. Yes, there are more of them, but that is a lot of downtime for the courts as the sport struggles to get mainstream pick-up from players in the country.

But is there any real surprise when an hour on the court costs upwards of R400, some as high as R750?

For a small minority, that is an acceptable amount of money, especially when you split it between the four players on the court.

But for others, and a good chunk of the country's population, it is a fortune for an hours' entertainment.

It is a sport that has yet to find a way to go 'mass market' and that means only a small percentage of the country will ever be able to afford to play. And of those who can afford it, the number is likely quite small that actually will take the sport up.

At the moment we are sitting at around 0.17% of the total population (best case scenario), and it is hard to see how it significantly rises above that.

It is a shame because it is a fun sport that is quite easy to play and which would no doubt appeal to a broad range of South Africans given the opportunity.

And therein lies the rub. Opportunity. At the moment it is another sport that is out of reach to the vast majority of South Africans, who are priced out of playing it.

You can pay an annual membership of R2 500 to Padel Africa that will give you access to many courts at 'only' R300-R565 per hour. Oh, and five free racket rentals.

Nowhere have I seen any attempt to take the sport to disadvantaged areas, or try and grow it outside of South Africa's top 5% of earners. And for that reason there is little chance it will grow much in the future.

But I guess the thinking is, if your potential client base in less advantaged areas cannot afford to play, why bother teaching them the game? A lesson that has not been learnt from tennis. ■

Check out this video of 15 great Padel points!

# DEFENSIV

DEFENSIVE MIDFIELDERS ARE EXTREMELY PIVOTAL TO THE SHAPE OF ANY TEAM, BUT THEIR WORK IS USUALLY OVERSHADOWED AND GOES UNNOTICED. WHO ARE THE BEST IN THE WORLD?

BY **DYLAN APPOLIS**



**RODRI** (SPAIN/MANCHESTER CITY)

**2023-24 SEASON STATS**  
**APPEARANCES: 50**  
**GOALS: 9**  
**ASSISTS: 14**  
**MINUTES PLAYED: 4 327**

Rodri is arguably the best in the position in the world and is a complete midfielder in defence and attack. It is an underrated position and is known for doing the 'dirty work' but the Spaniard proved everyone wrong after taking his game to the next level to win the 2024 Ballon d'Or award. His technical abilities, pace and incredible passing have made him a significant influence in the heart of the Manchester City midfield, especially after scoring the winner in 2023, which saw the English giants lift their first Champions League trophy. Rodri continued his form into the Euro 2024, where he played an essential role in helping the Spanish national team secure their fourth Euro title. His exploits at the tournament saw him walk away with the Player of the Tournament award. Much was expected from the 28-year-old going into the 2024/25 season, but due to an ACL injury he sustained against Arsenal in September, Rodri only featured three times before his season-ending injury.

## WHAT IT TAKES

A top defensive midfielder needs good positional awareness, anticipation of the opponent's play, marking, tackling, passing, interceptions, great stamina and strength.

# EMINDED

Since joining Arsenal from London rivals West Ham United, Declan Rice has established himself as The Gunners' leading midfielder, proving that the £105 million transfer was money well spent. The 26-year-old's versatility in the midfield is exceptional, coupled with his physical presence, superb positioning, dead-ball prowess, accurate crisp passes and ability to score clutch goals, making him one of the best duel-winners in the world as a sweeper cover. Rice is one of the best in the game and has been a vital cog in the Arsenal midfield and could be the 'main guy' in helping the Gunners win major titles.



DECLAN  
RICE  
(ENGLAND/  
ARSENAL)

**2023-24 SEASON STATS**  
**APPEARANCES: 51**  
**GOALS: 7**  
**ASSISTS: 10**  
**MINUTES PLAYED: 4 274**



RYAN  
GRAVENBERCH  
(NETHERLANDS/  
LIVERPOOL)

Gravenberch has been a revelation since joining Liverpool from Bayern Munich in September 2023. The Dutch midfielder adapted to the Premier League and quickly showed his exceptional vision and passing range, which allowed him to control the game and the tempo. Gravenberch has taken his game to the next level this season, becoming a key man in midfield under Arne Slot. The 22-year-old will continue to grow and improve his game. His strength and athleticism makes him one of the driving forces in the Reds midfield, playing alongside Alexis Mac Allister and Dominik Szoboszlai.

**2023-24 SEASON STATS**  
**APPEARANCES: 39**  
**GOALS: 4**  
**ASSISTS: 2**  
**MINUTES PLAYED: 1 848**

Granit Xhaka has claimed his place among the best defensive midfielders in the world since leaving Arsenal for Bayer Leverkusen in July 2023. Xhaka has prospered in Germany and his manager Xabi Alonso has been getting the best out of the Swiss international after his role in their unbeaten season, winning three trophies, including the Bundesliga title, German Cup and German Super Cup, while finishing as runners-up in the Europa League. The 32-year-old is a versatile player, cultured and composed on and off the ball and his eagerness to be involved in every phase of play saw him evolve and he can be considered as one of the best midfielders of the modern game.



**GRANIT XHAKA**  
(SWITZERLAND/  
BAYER LEVERKUSEN)

Check out this video on how to play in the defensive midfielder role!

**2023-24 SEASON STATS**  
**APPEARANCES: 50**  
**GOALS: 4**  
**ASSISTS: 3**  
**MINUTES PLAYED: 4 157**



**JOSHUA KIMMICH**  
(GERMANY/  
BAYERN MÜNICH)

**2023-24 SEASON STATS**  
**APPEARANCES: 43**  
**GOALS: 2**  
**ASSISTS: 10**  
**MINUTES PLAYED: 3 503**

Joshua Kimmich is one of the most versatile players in the world and his quality is invaluable to Bayern Munich since making the switch from a right-back to a defensive midfielder. The German midfielder has been a key player for Bayern in both positions for years but has excelled in the defensive midfield role and turned into one of the world's best in that position. Kimmich continues to showcase his playmaking ability, his ability to control the game and most of all, his defensive expertise to break up play as he continues to shine and make history at the club, making him an exceptional asset for the Bavarians.

Thomas Partey has proven himself worthy of being one of the best players in his position and has elevated his game since joining the club from Atlético Madrid back in 2020. The Ghanaian international plays a huge role in Arsenal's success and has been a solid performer for the Gunners in recent years. Partey has always been technically advanced since a young age but has raised his game to greater heights with his defensive strength, tactical intelligence and his knack for disrupting opposition play and ability to regain possession effectively, while significantly contributing in both defence and attack. The 31-year-old looks to be in his prime, but his recent battle with numerous injuries has plagued his progress at the Emirates, but he remains a pivotal figure in the heart of midfield and is still remains an excellent talent for the Gunners.

## THOMAS PARTEY (GHANA/ ARSENAL)

**2023-24 SEASON STATS**  
**APPEARANCES: 16**  
**GOALS: 0**  
**ASSISTS: 0**  
**MINUTES PLAYED: 883**



## OTHER NOTABLE MENTIONS

**Martín Zubimendi**  
(Spain/Real Sociedad)  
**Moisés Caicedo**  
(Ecuador/Chelsea)  
**Marc Casadó**  
(Spain/Barcelona)  
**Manuel Locatelli**  
(Italy/Juventus)  
**Idrissa Gueye**  
(Senegal/Everton)  
**Aurélien Tchouaméni**  
(France/Real Madrid)  
**Eduardo Camavinga**  
(France/Real Madrid)  
**Bruno Guimarães**  
(Brazil/Newcastle United)  
**João Palhinha**  
(Portugal/Bayern Munich)  
**Vitinha**  
(Portugal/Paris Saint-Germain)

Hakan Çalhanoğlu has become known for his versatile range, has proven himself to be more than just a free-kick taker and has become one of the best defensive midfielders in the world. The Turkish international's defensive expertise and creativity in midfield has made him one of the key members of the Inter Milan squad, helping them win the Serie A title, two Coppa Italia trophies and three Supercoppa Italiana, while playing his part in Inter finishing the 2022/23 Champions League as runners-up. Çalhanoğlu is currently enjoying the best form of his career at Inter, especially after reaching his career-best goal tally of 15 while claiming his first title with the club during the 2023/24. The veteran midfielder has demonstrated his ability to be one of the world's best in his position and continues to display his vision and passing range, which allows him to orchestrate play from the midfield and showcase his defensive strength, despite being criticised for his lack of physical attributes and inconsistency of his performances. ■

## HAKAN ÇALHANOĞLU (TURKEY/INTER MILAN)



**2023-24 SEASON STATS**  
**APPEARANCES: 40**  
**GOALS: 15**  
**ASSISTS: 3**  
**MINUTES PLAYED: 3 260**

# PGA MOMENTS

THE 2025 PGA CHAMPIONSHIP WILL BE PLAYED AT THE QUAIL HOLLOW CLUB FROM 15-18 MAY. WE LOOK BACK AT FIVE MEMORABLE MOMENTS FROM PAST TOURNAMENTS

BY **NICK SAID**



## PHIL MICKELSON (2005)

Phil Mickelson was 50 when he claimed the 2021 PGA Championship, one of the most unexpected victories in a Major in recent times, but for a truly magical moment involving the left-hander, we go back to 2005. He was tied for the lead on the 18th on Sunday, a par-five 554-yard hole at Baltusrol's Lower Course in New Jersey, but his 3-wood into the green was misdirected and landed in the rough on the side of the green. It looked as though he may have blown his chances.

"It was a chip shot that I had hit tens of thousands of times in my backyard," he later said, though it still took nerves of steel with a Major on the line. His shot took the ball to within two feet of the hole, and when he putted for a birdie, the title was his.

"If there was anybody in the world you'd back to get up and down from there, it would be Phil Mickelson," said Thomas Bjørn, who tied for second.

Mickelson has won six majors, the PGA Championship twice to go with three US Masters and the British Open.

## TIGER WOODS (1999)

Tiger Woods was already a prodigy on the PGA circuit by the time the century came to an end, but with just a single Major win to his name at the 1997 US Masters, there were some whispers around whether the 24-year-old really 'had it'.

But the PGA Championship would be his launch, as he claimed the crown and then went on to dominate golf, securing 13 more Major triumphs for a tally of 15, most of which came between 1999 and 2008.

In 1999 he led by five shots early in the final round, but there was a teenage Spaniard nipping at his heels in the form of Sergio García, who cut that deficit to one shot.

Woods was in trouble at the 17th and needed a tricky, sloped eight foot putt to hold his par, or the rampaging García would be level with all the momentum.

**5** Jack Nicklaus and Walter Hagen share the record for the most PGA Championship title wins with five each. Nicklaus also finished second on four occasions.



Check out Tiger Woods' magnificent 20-foot putt in 2000!

"I had to keep reminding myself that the putt did not break as much as it appeared, and I was concentrating on keeping my head still. When I did look up, I knew it was perfectly on line," Woods later said.

He would hold off García on a tension-filled 18th and claim his second Major, the start of his incredible run of success.

## BOB TWAY (1986)

The final round of the 1986 PGA Championship had been washed out by rain, so the action moved to Monday.

Greg Norman, who had just won the British Open, led by four shots with eight holes to play, and it seemed a formality ... to everyone except Bob Tway.

That lead whittled away quickly as Tway caught Norman on the 14th hole and by the 18th they were still level, however the former found the bunker and Norman the edge of the green. It was advantage to the Australian.

But Tway chipped in from the sand, one of the best shots ever to win a Major title, and Norman never got close with his birdie putt to tie.

"It's a game in which you must expect the unexpected," Norman lamented later.

It was Tway's only ever Major win, his next best finish was third at the US Open 12 years later. In fact, he only had 13 professional wins in his entire career.

# 20

Jason Day's 20 under-par score in 2015 is the lowest in the history of the PGA Championship, and in fact the lowest in any Major championship.

## JOHN DALY (1991)

There has probably never been another golfer quite like John Daly. Drinking, smoking, you name it, he is the antithesis of a sportsman. But man, he could hit a ball, and out of nowhere he won the 1991 PSG Championship. He was not even in the original field, but when Nick Price withdrew, Daly took his spot and his caddie, having driven seven-and-a-half hours to Indianapolis when he got wind he might be able to play.

There was little talk of tactics between caddie and player, it was just 'hit the ball', and Daly could do that like no other.

"I've never seen anybody hit the ball that far," legend Jack Nicklaus said of the player who became known as 'Long John'.

He claimed the title by three shots and became an instant cult hero for his unconventional style and antics.

"No one has ever stirred the golf world in one week like John Daly," another great, Arnold Palmer, said.

Daly later also won the British Open but it has been a career of unfulfilled promise. His first professional wins came on the Sunshine Tour when he claimed the AECI Charity Classic and Hollard Royal Swazi Sun Classic within weeks of each other in February 1990.



## TIGER WOODS (2000)

It is no surprise perhaps to see the great Woods appear twice on our list, as he retained the title he won in 1999 the following year in even more dramatic fashion.

He had an unlikely foe at the Valhalla Golf Club in the form of the almost unknown Bob May, who he led by a single shot going into the final round. He was expected to race clear, but the latter stuck to him like glue.

May actually took the clubhouse lead in the 18th after sinking a brilliant 15-foot putt, which forced Woods to sink his own nervy six-foot effort.

May carded a par on the first play-off hole, before Woods sunk one of the most famous putts in golf.

Twenty feet from the hole, and with a wicked curve on it, Woods got the pace just right and the ball dropped in as he became the first player since Bob Hogan in 1953 to win three Major titles in a single year.

Woods and May finished a full five shots ahead of the player tied for third, the unlucky Bjørn.

May never got close to winning another major, with his next best finish tied 11th at the 2000 British Open. He only managed one professional win and had just eight Major appearances in his entire career. ■

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**I**n these ailing days for Manchester United, dipping back into the memory bank and recalling past glories is a cathartic exercise for fans.

Few moments stand out more than the 1999 Champions League final, when the Red Devils staged a dramatic comeback to defeat Bayern Munich in stoppage time.

For much of the game at Barcelona's Camp Nou, Alex Ferguson's side were palpably outplayed by Bayern Munich, who had scored an early goal through Mario Basler, and Ole Gunnar Solskjær spent most of the final trying to catch the manager's eye in an attempt to get himself brought on as a substitute.

"At half-time, the manager had a little chat with Teddy Sheringham, to say that he was going to put him on," he recalls. "I was just in the background, hoping he comes over to me, but he didn't."

"In the second half, I was just waiting for him to give me the nod. I was warming up and warming up, waiting and

waiting to catch his eye. I was thinking: 'Why don't you put me on?' because I had come on and scored against Liverpool and Nottingham Forest [four times in 18 minutes] and I had a premonition I was going to do something that night.

"I was never one to complain and sulk though so I just made sure I warmed up in front of him to show I was ready. Finally, when he called me, I definitely was." He eventually came on in the 81st minute and saw Teddy Sheringham equalise three minutes into stoppage time. Extra time was looming.

Then Solskjær forced a corner, David Beckham took it, Sheringham nodded it on and the Norwegian steered the ball into the roof of Oliver Kahn's net from three yards out. "Ninety-nine times out of 100, that would go into the hands of Kahn or on the head of the guy on the line."

But it did not and Manchester United pulled off one of the most incredible comebacks in modern footballing history. ■

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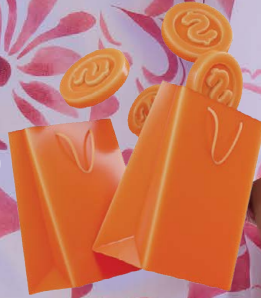
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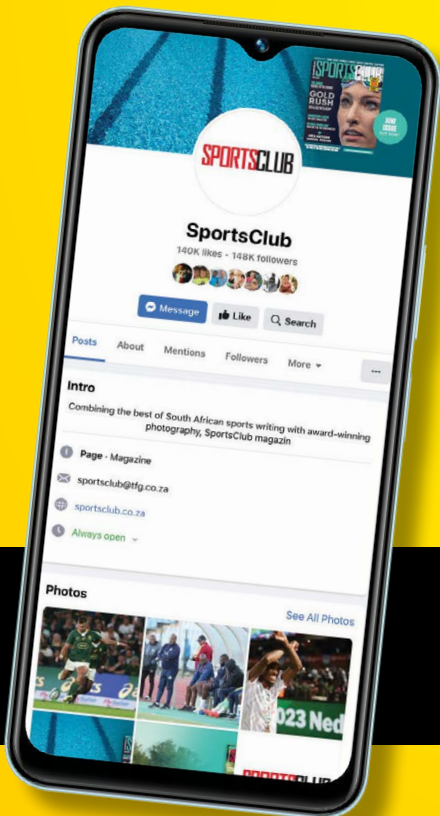
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