



Al Rayyan part ways with coach Cordova



Nicolas Cordova.

QNA
DOHA

AL Rayyan Club on Monday announced the departure of Chilean coach Nicolas Cordova, the coach of their first football team, with the expiry of his contract with the club.

In a statement, the club thanked the Chilean coach for the time he spent with the team.

Al Rayyan management is currently conducting numerous consultations with some coaching names to take over the leadership of the team in the new football season 2023/2024.

For his part, Cordova expressed his happiness with his stint during which he took charge of Al Rayyan team during the past two seasons, saying: "It was wonderful unforgettable moments, and undoubtedly they were not without difficulties and for me I cannot forget this wonderful experience here in Al Rayyan as well as with the young players who have become part of the Qatari national team, and I

wish all the best to Al Rayyan Club in the next stage."

Al Rayyan had sought the help of the 43-year-old Cordova at the end of the 2021/2022 season to succeed former French coach Laurent Blanc, despite his supervision at the time of the Qatari national under-23 training after the approval of the Qatari Federation.

The former Chilean youth coach Cordova led Al Rayyan to reach the finals of the AFC Champions League for the first time in the history of the team's participation in the continental championship since the introduction of its new system in 2003, before losing to Al Duhail by a penalty shootout (6-7) after a 1-1 draw.

And with the renewal of his contract in June 2022, the former coach of the Palestine, Santiago Wanderers clubs in Chile and Universitario de Bolivia did not succeed in leading Al Rayyan locally as the team suffered and remained in the danger zone and threatened with relegation to the second division until the last round of the 2022/2023 season of QNB Stars League before occupying the 9th place with 20 points from 5 wins, 5 draws, and 12 defeats.

Cordova was also unable to pass the group stage in the AFC U-23 Championship with the Qatari national team and surprisingly exited the group stage, after defeating Turkmenistan (2-0) and drawing with Iran (1-1) and suffering a heavy loss against Uzbekistan (0-6).

AGCFF General Assembly to be held in Doha on 24th

QNA
DOHA

THE Ordinary General Assembly of the Arab Gulf Cup Football Federation (AGCFF) will be held at the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Doha on Wednesday, May 24.

The meeting will be chaired by President of the AGCFF Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa bin Ahmed Al Thani and will be attended by AGCFF Vice President Salem bin Saeed Al Wahabi, and members of the heads of the Gulf Football Associations.

The General Assembly will vote on the host nation for the Arab Gulf Cup and will elect president and vice president for the next session.

During the General Assembly, the topics on the agenda will be discussed, including the approval of the minutes of the meeting of the General Conference, which was held in Basra on the sidelines of the Gulf 25 tournament, in addition to discussing the administrative report and the activities that have been implemented.

Quick read

Hazlewood "fit and available" for WTC final against India: Cricket Australia

Melbourne: Australia fast-bowler Josh Hazlewood might appear to have recovered from his injury, which is a positive sign for the Australian Cricket team as they will be facing India in the final of the World Test Championship starting on June 7. In a major relief for the pacer, scans have revealed no damage and he has now returned to bowling as the Australian squad prepares to depart for the UK. A Cricket Australia spokesperson, giving an update on Hazlewood, stated as per ESPNcricinfo, "Josh Hazlewood returned home from the IPL last weekend after experiencing minor side soreness after the completion of his most recent IPL match. "After a brief and precautionary rest period, Hazlewood returned to high-intensity bowling last week and will continue to increase his bowling workloads in preparation for the WTC and Ashes series. Hazlewood is considered fit and available for the WTC and Ashes Series" added the spokesperson. (ANI)

Javelin throw star Neeraj Chopra is now World No. 1

ANI
NEW DELHI

TOKYO Olympic gold medalist Neeraj Chopra is the World No. 1 in the latest men's javelin throw rankings, issued by World Athletics on Monday.

Neeraj tops the charts with 1455 points, 22 ahead of Grenada's Anderson Peters.

The Indian javelin throw ace rose to World No. 2 on Au-

India's Neeraj Chopra in action during the season-opening Doha Diamond League at the Suhaim Bin Hamad Stadium in the first week of May.



IPL



Chennai Super Kings captain Mahendra Singh Dhoni (R) gestures after winning the Indian Premier League match against Delhi Capitals at the Arun Jaitley Stadium in New Delhi on Friday. (AFP)



Gujarat Titans' Hardik Pandya (L) speaks with his teammate Noor Ahmad during the Indian Premier League match against Royal Challengers Bangalore at the M Chinnaswamy Stadium in Bengaluru on Sunday. (AFP)

Dhoni's CSK to face defending champs GT for a spot in final

ANI
CHENNAI

AS four-time champions Chennai Super Kings (CSK) meet defending champions Gujarat Titans (GT) in Qualifier-1 of the Indian Premier League (IPL) 2023 in Chennai on Tuesday, the savvy tactician Mahendra Singh Dhoni will reach deep into his reserves to challenge Hardik Pandya's GT.

The league stage is done and dusted, the business end is here. Gujarat Titans take on the Chennai Super Kings at the MA Chidambaram Stadium in Qualifier 1 on Tuesday. For the second season running, Gujarat finished with 10 wins in the league stage and topped the table. They have won four out of our last five matches and have played some great cricket.

Since the beginning of our IPL journey last year, Gujarat's bowling attack has scalped 186 wickets in 30 matches, the most by any team in this time period. This season too, they have been a pillar of Gujarat's success. Leading the wicket-takers list in IPL this time are Rashid Khan and Mohammad Shami, picking up 24 wickets each. Mohit Sharma and Noor Ahmad have taken important wickets too, with 17 and 13 wickets respectively.

Defending champion's batting department too, led by the talismanic Shubman Gill, has been fantastic. Their record run-chase in Bengaluru was a testament to our terrific record batting second, which now accounts for 14 wins in 17 matches.

Chennai Super Kings, the four-time champions, turn up at their home ground, where they get fervent support. MS

Dhoni and his troops picked up eight wins in the league stages, five of which came at Chepauk.

MS Dhoni's leadership qualities have been fully reflected by his opposite number, Hardik Pandya, over time. Supporting misfiring seniors, handholding junior players, motivating uncapped guys, and increasing bench morale are all traits of a popular leader for whom the squad will go the additional mile.

Qualifier 1 on Tuesday will pit these two comparable, yet very different teams against each other in what promises to be a thrilling match.

CSK will have more than a modest advantage because they will be playing at home. Chennai fans will have one more opportunity to celebrate their larger-than-life hero, their talismanic leader, as a spot in the final is just a step away.

Chennai Super Kings Squad:

Ruturaj Gaikwad, Devon Conway, Ajinkya Rahane, Ambati Rayudu, Shivam Dube, Moeen Ali, Ravindra Jadeja, MS Dhoni(w/c), Deepak Chahar, Tushar Deshpande, Maheesh Theekshana, Matheesha Pathirana, Mitchell Santner, Subhanshu Senapati, Shaik Rasheed, Akash Singh, Sissanda Magala, Dwaine Pretorius, Ben Stokes, Ajay Jadav Mandal, Prashant Solanki, Simarjeet Singh, RS Hangegekar, Bhagath Varma, Nishant Sindhu

Gujarat Titans Squad:

Shubman Gill, Wriddhiman Saha (wk), Hardik Pandya(c), Dasun Shanaka, David Miller, Rahul Tewatia, Rashid Khan, Mohit Sharma, Noor Ahmad, Mohammed Shami, Yash Dayal, Vijay Shankar, Srikar Bharat, Shivam Mavi, Ravisrinivasan Sai Kishore, Abhinav Manohar, Odean Smith, Alzarri Joseph, Matthew Wade, Darshan Nalkande, Urvil Patel, Sai Sudharsan, Jayant Yadav, Pradeep Sangwan.

Ferrari set to offer \$49.74 mn deal to sign Hamilton: Report



Seven-time Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton.

DPA
BERLIN

FERRARI are set to offer seven-time Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton of Mercedes a Euro 46 million (\$49.74 million) deal to join the Italian racing giants, the Daily Mail newspaper reported on Monday.

Hamilton has a contract with Mercedes until the end of this season and has repeatedly said that he's not thinking about a move to other team and wants to take a new deal with the Silver Arrows.

However, according to the Daily Mail, talks over the extravagant signing are not only

advancing at the highest level at Ferrari, but company president John Elkann is already in close contact with the driver.

The first and favoured option is to partner Hamilton with current Ferrari driver Charles Leclerc from next season, the report said.

That means Ferrari would dismiss Carlos Sainz, something they are prepared to do.

The second option is to sacrifice Leclerc to sign Hamilton, leading to a swap. In this scenario, Hamilton would partner with Sainz at Ferrari, while Leclerc would be paired with George Russell at Mercedes.

Hamilton has previously said he would love to race for Ferrari one day, but always stressing his commitment to Mercedes.

While the British driver is seeking a record-breaking eight title, Ferrari are trying to put an end to a title drought: their last drivers' title came in 2007, while they last won the constructors' championship a year later.

'Rashid Khan will be GT's trump card'

ANI
NEW DELHI

AHEAD of the Qualifier 1 between Gujarat Titans and four-time champions Chennai Super Kings, former India cricketer Virender Sehwag reckons the Afghanistan spin sensation Rashid Khan will play the role of trump card for the defending champions.

The defending champions Gujarat Titans will be relying heavily upon their star spinner Rashid Khan on the spin-friendly Chepauk track. The IPL 2023 is all set to host the highly-anticipated Qualifier 1 at MA Chidambaram Stadium.

Speaking on Star Sports, Sehwag said, "Rashid Khan is the trump card for Gujarat. If they want wickets, they bring him. And then the way Hardik has used Rashid, it is commendable. Rashid likes to break partnerships and now he has become the most successful bowler of this season on the basis of his excellent performance."

gust 30, 2022, but was stuck behind Peters, the reigning world champion, since then.

Neeraj won the Diamond League 2022 finals in Zurich in September of last year, making him the first Indian athlete to do so. However, he was sidelined with an injury following his victory in Zurich.

Neeraj the Indian national record holder in men's javelin throw, competed in the season-opening Doha Diamond League on May 5 and finished first with a throw of 88.67m.

Anderson Peters finished third in Doha with a distance of 85.88m.

The No. 1 ranking will come as a boost for Neeraj Chopra, who will next compete at the FBK Games 2023 on June 4 in the Netherlands.

He also confirmed his participation at the Paavo Nurmi Games 2023 in Turku, Finland, on June 13.

With the Paris 2024 Olympics approaching, the 2023 season promises to be a crucial one for Neeraj.

Neeraj will compete in the World Athletics Championships in Budapest in addition to defending his Diamond League title, and Asian Games javelin gold medal in Hangzhou.

Mbappe brace moves PSG to brink of Ligue 1 title



Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe (L) celebrates after scoring his team's second goal during the French L1 match against AJ Auxerre at Stade de l'Abbe-Deschamps in Auxerre, central France, on Sunday. (AFP)

STATS PERFORM/DPA PARIS

KYLIAN Mbappe scored twice as Paris Saint-Germain closed in on the Ligue 1 title with a close-fought 2-1 win over Auxerre on Sunday.

The France captain struck a brace inside the opening eight minutes at Stade de l'Abbe-Deschamps, with the hosts responding through Lassine Sinayoko in the second half.

Reigning champions PSG

subsequently regain their six-point cushion at the Ligue 1 summit, and require just one point from their final two games to successfully defend their crown.

Meanwhile, 16th-place Auxerre remain just a point above the relegation zone after suffering their first defeat in eight home matches.

Mbappe broke the deadlock in the sixth minute, latching onto Fabian Ruiz's pass and exquisitely twisting and

turning away from his marker before poking a shot into the top corner.

The France captain doubled his side's advantage two minutes later, bending in a brilliant first-time effort from 20 yards after Hugo Ekitike neatly dumfied Lionel Messi's pass.

Messi also went close for the visitors when he shot straight at Ionut Radu, but it was not all one-way traffic as the hosts threatened through Rayan Raveloson, who rattled

the crossbar from 25 yards out.

Auxerre pulled a goal back seven minutes after the restart. Nuno da Costa flicked Radu's long goal kick into the path of Sinayoko, who raced away from the defence before drilling past Gianluigi Donnarumma.

Mbappe looked to have found his hat-trick late in injury time, only for VAR to overrule his finish, but PSG side clung on regardless to move closer to another triumph.

City's Guardiola says Arsenal 'took us to our limits'

PA MEDIA/DPA MANCHESTER, ENGLAND

PEP Guardiola insisted Manchester City's latest Premier League title success should not be demeaned by suggestions Arsenal 'bottled it' in the run-in.

Yet the City boss conceded his side would need to go on to win the Champions League to be regarded among the greats.

City were confirmed as English champions for a fifth time in six years and a third season in succession after Arsenal lost to Nottingham Forest on Saturday.

The Gunners had led City by eight points as recently as last month but their form deserted them at a crucial stage.

Guardiola, however, paid tribute to his former assistant Mikel Arteta's team after City celebrated their triumph with a 1-0 victory over Chelsea on Sunday.

Guardiola said: "There's a tendency to underestimate. They are winners.

"We pushed Arsenal but they are exceptional. They should be proud of where they have come from. They have to sustain it, that is the reality, but for me they are winners.

"They made me think a lot what I had to do to beat them, and they did it to us. Our relentlessness and not giving up, and having the feeling that we had to win otherwise it would not be possible, helped us a lot.

"With the relationship I have with Mikel - congratulations for what they've done. He's brought them back to what Arsenal was in the past.

"Similar to Liverpool in previous seasons, they took us to our limits." City hope the Pre-



Pep Guardiola

mier League will prove the first leg of a glorious treble, with the FA Cup and Champions League finals to follow next month.

Guardiola, who won the European competition twice as Barcelona manager, said: "We have the feeling we have done something exceptional in terms of the Premier League, but of course to be considered one of the greatest in Europe we have to win the Champions League.

"Otherwise people will say our time here is not complete." City have now won 12 Premier League games in succession in their charge to the title but Guardiola denied that would make their latest title win more special than the others.

He said: "I'd not say it is more important. The Premier Leagues have been so tight, so this is not more special than the others. Every one is." Chelsea's interim manager Frank Lampard, whose side were beaten by an early Julian Alvarez strike, believes his side can learn a lot from the champions.

The Stamford Bridge side's season has been a huge disappointment, with a top-10 finish beyond them, but Lampard admits a huge amount has to change for them to even get close to their rivals.

Sports psychologist joins Indian men's football team camp

ANI NEW DELHI

IN a first, the senior men's national team have been joined by sports psychologist Shayamal Vallabhjee, in the National camp, as they prepare for the Intercontinental Cup, in Bhubaneswar, followed by the SAFF Championship in Bengaluru and other international commitments lined up till the AFC Asian Cup 2023.

Vallabhjee has previously worked on the ATP Tour, with IPL franchises and professional golfers across the world. A renewed focus on mental health is among the Federation's driving objectives to not just maximise potential and performances, but also create an environment of trust and togetherness among players. The addition of a sports psycholo-

gist will also address situations of burnout among players and ensure that they have recovery mechanisms available to them to work through it.

Head coach Igor Stimac is hopeful that Vallabhjee's addition to the staff will help the team in the longer run by 'creating a stronger team culture and a sense of belonging within the locker room', in addition to helping them develop strategies to deal with self-confidence, concentration, and nerves under pressure, as individuals and a team.

"We will start with understanding how each player's personality type responds to pressure and then go on to create a coaching mechanism that helps them become emotionally resilient to external pressure," AIFF.com quoted Igor Stimac as saying.

Stones wants Man City to 'make some more history' as they chase treble

PA MEDIA/DPA LONDON

JOHN Stones is determined not to ease up as Manchester City chase the treble.

City claimed the first of a potential three trophies in the coming weeks as they wrapped up the Premier League title over the weekend.

They now have their sights on the FA Cup final against Manchester United on June 3 and the Champions League final in Istanbul the following week, in which they will face Inter Milan.

Defender Stones, now a five-time Premier League winner, said: "We're back in training on Monday and we'll go from there. We've got to keep



the rhythm.

"The hunger is there and we know what's ahead of us now, that we can try and make some more history." City were presented with the Premier League trophy after celebrating their success with a comfortable 1-0 win over Chelsea, cour-

tesy of a Julian Alvarez goal, at the Etihad Stadium on Sunday.

Their title triumph - their fifth in six seasons and a third in succession - had been confirmed the previous evening when second-placed Arsenal lost at Nottingham Forest.

City trailed the Gunners by eight points last month but have surged past their closest rivals on a run of 12 straight wins.

Stones said: "I don't think I had time to doubt what we can do. I think it was just focusing on what was ahead of us, focusing on winning.

"We've done it so many times now. We just came on this run, and it's just incredible what kind of team we've got.

"The titles that we've won

- I think it speaks for itself." Stones has been one of City's key players during their strong run throughout the spring, playing in a hybrid defence-midfield role.

The England international has been part of the back line, at either centre-back or right-back, when opponents have been attacking but has stepped into midfield when City have been in possession.

Consequently he has made a big impression at both ends of the field.

"I absolutely love it," he said. "It's something new for me that I'm learning, giving my everything, every game.

"I don't know if it's my best football but I'm absolutely loving playing."

Real file hate crime complaint after Vini Jr targeted by racist abuse

PA MEDIA/DPA LONDON

REAL Madrid say racism directed at Vinicius Junior constitutes a "hate crime" and have filed a complaint with the Spanish State Attorney General's Office.

Brazil forward Vinicius was the subject of an alleged racist attack during Real's 1-0 La Liga defeat at Valencia on Sunday.

The game was paused after the break as Vinicius pointed out to the referee those who were allegedly abusing him in the stands at the Mestalla - and the 22-year-old later took to social media to say racism is "normal" in La Liga.

"Real Madrid CF shows its strongest revulsion and condemns the events that took place yesterday against our player Vinicius Junior," the club said in a strongly-worded statement on Monday.

"These facts constitute a direct attack on the coexistence model of our social and democratic state of law.

"Real Madrid considers



Real Madrid's Brazilian forward Vinicius Junior (C) leaves after being sent off the pitch by the referee during the Spanish league match against Valencia in Valencia on Sunday. (AFP)

that such attacks also constitute a hate crime, for which reason it has filed the corre-

sponding complaint with the state attorney general's office, specifically with the prosecu-

tor's office against hate crimes and discrimination, so that the facts can be investigated

and clear responsibilities."

In a statement on Instagram, Vinicius - who was sent off for violent conduct in added time of Real's defeat following an altercation with striker Hugo Duro - said: "It wasn't the first time, not the second and not the third. Racism is normal in La Liga.

"The competition thinks it's normal, so does the Federation and the opponents encourage it. I am so sorry.

"The championship that once belonged to Ronaldinho, Ronaldo, Cristiano (Ronaldo) and (Lionel) Messi, today belongs to the racists.

"And unfortunately with everything that happens on a weekly basis, I have no way to defend. I agree. But I'm strong and will go to the end against the racists. Even though it's far from here." La Liga president Javier Tebas responded to Vinicius' post on Sunday by accusing the forward for "criticizing and insulting" the league.

In another tweet on Monday, Tebas said: "Neither Spain nor La Liga are racist. It

is very unfair to say this.

"How La Liga we denounce and fight racism with all rigidity within our competences. This season there were 9 cases of racist insults (8 of them for insults against Vinicius Junior) "We always identify the violators and take the complaint to the legislating bodies. It doesn't matter that they are few, they are relentless.

"We cannot allow the image of a competition that is about the symbol of peoples union to be tarnished, where more than 200 players are of black origin in 42 clubs that receive in each round the respect and affection of the fans, being the racism an extremely specific case (9 complaints) that we are going to eliminate."

Valencia released a statement on their club website condemning what happened and confirming they will investigate what happened.

Former England and Manchester United defender Rio Ferdinand took to Instagram in support of Vinicius and questioned player protection.

Cycling star Mark Cavendish to retire at the end of the year



Great Britain's Mark Cavendish. (AFP)

PA MEDIA/DPA
LONDON

MARK Cavendish will retire from professional cycling at the end of the current season.

Cavendish, who celebrated his 38th birthday on Sunday, made the announcement at a press conference on the rest day of this year's Giro D'Italia.

The Manxman boasts 53 Grand Tour stage victories and a world title, and is still set to compete at the Tour de France in July, where he could break the record of 34 stage wins he currently shares with Eddy Merckx.

Cavendish said: "I've absolutely loved racing every kilometre of this race so far, so I feel it's the perfect time to say it's my final Giro D'Italia and 2023 will be my final season as a professional cyclist.

"Cycling has been my life for over 25 years. I have lived an absolute dream and the bike has given me the opportunity to see the world and meet some incredible people.

"It's taught me so much about life - dedication, loyalty, companionship, teamwork, sacrifice, humility and perseverance - all things that now, as a father, I can show my chil-

dren." British Cycling performance director Stephen Park paid tribute to Cavendish, saying in a statement: "On behalf of British Cycling, I would like to congratulate Mark on a truly outstanding career.

"Cav is without doubt the sport's greatest sprinter and will be remembered by fans across the world for his 53 Grand Tour stage wins, and I'm sure that we will all be cheering him on as he looks to add to that total in his final months of racing." Cavendish won his first world title in the Madison in 2005 in Los Angeles, and within three years had claimed four Tour

de France stage wins, as well as two at the Giro d'Italia, to become Britain's leading Grand Tour cyclist at the age of just 22.

As well as his Grand Tour exploits, Cavendish won a silver medal in the omnium at the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, and gold in the scratch race at the 2006 Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, representing the Isle of Man.

Park added: "Professional and passionate, Cav has been a real asset to our team over the years and will be remembered as both a peerless rider and a fantastic teammate with time for everyone.

Koepka puts Augusta agony behind him with US PGA win



Brooks Koepka of the United States celebrates with the Wanamaker Trophy after winning the 2023 PGA Championship at Oak Hill Country Club in Rochester, New York, on Sunday. (AFP)

PA MEDIA/DPA
ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

SIX weeks after feeling he "choked" in the final round of the Masters, Brooks Koepka held his nerve to overcome a spirited challenge from Viktor Hovland to win the US PGA Championship at Oak Hill.

Koepka carded a closing 67 to finish nine under par and claim his third US PGA title, his fifth major overall and the first for a player on the Saudi-funded LIV Golf League.

Hovland traded blows with Koepka until a costly double bogey on the 16th, but a birdie on the 18th deservedly gave the Norwegian a share of second place with Scottie Scheffler on seven under.

Koepka took a one-shot lead over Hovland and Corey Conners into the final round, having enjoyed double that advantage following 54 holes of the Mas-

ters in April.

The 33-year-old carded a closing 75 at Augusta National to finish second to Jon Rahm and felt he had choked under pressure, but exorcised those demons at the first opportunity.

The former world number one made a flying start with a hat-trick of birdies from the second and was momentarily four shots clear before Hovland matched his birdie on the fourth.

Hovland also birdied the fifth to close the gap and was within a single stroke when Koepka pushed his drive on the sixth into Allen's Creek and was unable to save par.

Koepka doubled his lead with a birdie on the 10th, only to then see his approach to the next plug in a greenside bunker.

After blasting out to 12 feet, Koepka saw his par attempt lip out and although he bounced back immediately to birdie the

12th, he could not shake off a resolute Hovland.

The 25-year-old, who was in contention for the third consecutive major, took advantage of the par-five 13th to keep the pressure firmly on and both men birdied the short 14th to effectively turn it into a two-horse race.

However, in a carbon copy of what happened to Conners in round three, Hovland drilled his second shot into the face of a fairway bunker on the 16th to run up a double bogey.

Koepka's birdie gave him a four-shot lead and he could afford to bogey the 17th and par the last to complete an impressive victory.

Scheffler had got within two of the lead thanks to birdies on the 10th, 13th and 14th, but had to wait until the 18th to pick up another shot and complete a superb 65.

World number one Rahm,

commentating for CBS following a closing 71 which left him seven over par, had been full of praise for Koepka after his blistering start.

"He is a player that, when he gets in contention, is like a shark in the water," Rahm said.

"He smells blood, especially on these types of courses. It suits his mentality of being even keel, plodding along and taking opportunities when they come.

"He came out aggressive and I don't think people realise how dangerous some of these hole locations are. To be that precise (on the second) to give yourself three feet straight up the hill is incredible."

Open champion Cameron Smith recorded the joint lowest round of the week to date with a closing 65 and insisted no one should be surprised that he and fellow LIV players like Koepka were able to compete at the highest level.



Russia's Daniil Medvedev (AFP)

Medvedev admits he 'hated' clay before claiming first Rome title

DPA
ROME

DANIIL Medvedev has conceded that he previously "hated" playing on clay but now feels he can compete with the best after sealing his first senior title on the red dust in Rome.

The third seed beat 20-year-old Dane Holger Rune 7-5, 7-5 to win the Italian Open on Sunday, his sixth Masters crown.

The 27-year-old Russian, who triumphed on the US Open hard-courts two years ago, had never won in three previous visits to the Eternal City.

But he has beaten heavyweights Alexander Zverev and Stefanos Tsitsipas over the last two weeks and twice rallied from a break down in the second set to overcome seventh seed Rune, who was aiming to win his second Masters title in

a final long delayed by rain.

"I didn't think I could win a Masters 1000 on clay in my career because usually I hated it, I hated playing on it. I didn't feel good on it and nothing was working," Medvedev said.

"Then when I came here I felt so good in practice and I told my coach, 'I don't know what is happening but I am feeling amazing, so let's see how it goes'. But then you have to play the toughest opponents in the world to try to make it."

Rafa Nadal's injury withdrawal from the French Open clay grand slam, which starts next Sunday, has opened up part of the draw but Medvedev is not looking too far ahead after his maiden clay triumph.

He will though go above Novak Djokovic into second in the world rankings, with Roland Garros favourite Carlos Alcaraz leading the pack.

Quick read

French Open to offer players AI protection against online abuse

LONDON: French Open organizers are offering a way to protect all players at the tournament from social media abuse. In the first initiative of its kind, the French Tennis Federation is using AI technology Bodyguard, which filters out abusive comments on social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter and TikTok. Tennis players have frequently highlighted the horrific messages they receive after losses, often from gamblers who have lost money betting on them. Caroline Flaissier, director of the FFT, said: "The mental health of the players is a priority for the Roland Garros tournament. We will not accept any form of violence at our tournament. "We are very proud to be the first grand slam tournament to offer players a solution that efficiently protects them against cyberbullying. "We want to protect the players from this damaging behaviour, to enable them to be in peak mental condition when they compete in the tournament." (PA MEDIA/DPA)

McIlroy proud of gritty effort at US PGA

PA MEDIA/DPA
ROCHESTER, UNITED STATES

RORY McIlroy believes having lower expectations paid dividends as he battled to a top-10 finish in the US PGA Championship.

McIlroy had cut a subdued figure before play got under way at Oak Hill, a legacy of his dispiriting missed cut in the Masters as his latest attempt to complete a career grand slam ended prematurely.

The 34-year-old was also feeling under the weather and struggling with his long game, but followed an opening 71 with three straight 69s to finish two under par, seven shots behind winner Brooks Koepka.

"I'll look back on this week as proud of how I hung in there and I guess (proud of) my attitude and sticking to it, not having my best stuff," McIlroy said.

"I guess I just came in here trying to play a golf tournament,



Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland during the final round of the 2023 PGA Championship in Rochester, New York on Sunday. (AFP)

honestly not thinking about getting myself in contention. I honestly didn't feel like I had a chance of winning this week.

"I feel sort of close but also so far away at the same time. It's hard to explain. I feel like sometimes it was the worst I could have played, but then at

the same time it's like the best I could have done.

"It's weird. It just doesn't feel quite where it needs to be and I just need to go back home and work on some stuff. I guess just try to figure it out."

Asked if having lower expectations had worked in his

favour, McIlroy added: "Yeah, 100%.

"I was more accepting of things out there and I think it's hard. The previous major championship at Augusta, all I think about is winning, winning, winning, to try to win that green jacket.

"I then don't really think about just playing a tournament and the cadence that goes along with getting into rounds and whatever.

"I go to the second tee on Friday afternoon and I see I'm already 10 back of Brooks or whatever. So then I'm thinking, 'oh, geez, I have no chance of winning', and things sort of crumble.

"It's just like being a bit mentally fragile because you're so focused on the one thing you're trying to do when, in essence, you just need to play a golf tournament and see where the chips fall at the end of the week."

Heat blow out Celtics to take 3-0 lead in East final

STATS PERFORM/DPA
BERLIN

THE Miami Heat are now one win away from the NBA Finals after routing the Boston Celtics 128-102 on Sunday to take a commanding 3-0 lead in the Eastern Conference finals.

Gabe Vincent scored a career-high 29 points and Duncan Robinson added 22 off the bench as the duo led a torrid shooting display that propelled the Heat to the lopsided victory. Miami shot 54.3% (19 of 35) from 3-point range for the game, with Vincent going 6 of 9 from beyond the arc and Robinson 5 of 7.

After rallying in the second half to win Games 1 and 2 in Boston, the Heat led virtually from start to finish in this one to go on the verge of joining the 1999 New York Knicks as

the only No. 8 seeds in league history to reach the Finals. Miami can wrap up the series at home on Tuesday.

No team in NBA history has lost a seven-game playoff series when leading 3-0.

Miami put together a 9-0 run late in the first quarter to build a 30-20 lead in the final minute of the period, then later outscored the Celtics 25-10 over a 5 1/2-minute stretch in the second quarter to extend the margin.

Vincent scored the first five points of the surge, which Robinson capped with a 3-pointer that put the Heat up 59-37 with under four minutes left in the half.

The Celtics never got their deficit out of double digits the rest of the way as Miami's lead grew to as much as 33 points in the third quarter.