

Rossi secures front row start



Movistar Yamaha MotoGP's Spanish rider Maverick Vinales (C), Ducati Team's Spanish rider Jorge Lorenzo (L) and Movistar Yamaha MotoGP's Italian rider Valentino Rossi pose

Alcañiz, Spain

Valentino Rossi stole the Aragon MotoGP qualifying headlines yesterday by securing a front row seat on the grid a mere three weeks after double leg fracture surgery.

The wounded nine-time champion, wearing a surgical stocking, defied medical experts and gritted his teeth through the pain to post the third fastest time for today's race behind his Yamaha teammate Maverick Vinales and Ducati's Jorge Lorenzo.

World champion Marc

Marquez appeared set for pole only to crash on his Honda two minutes from the end of the session, having already taken a tumble in final practice.

The Spaniard starts on the second row in the company of Cal Crutchlow and Dani Pedrosa.

Seconds after Marquez's premature exit Rossi was topping the timesheets, only to be bettered as the session drew to a dramatic close by first Vinales with a 1min 47.635 lap and then Lorenzo at .100s.

Rossi, placed fourth in the world championship standings,

broke his leg in two places in a training accident on August 31. Operated on the following day his medical team had initially forecast a return for the next race in Japan.

But that was without counting on the 38-year-old veteran's remarkable resilience as he targets a tenth world title and eighth in the top category.

"It's a big

surprise for me, one week ago I started to think I could race but I didn't know what to expect," a beaming Rossi, told *BT Sport*. (AFP)



Movistar Yamaha MotoGP's Italian rider Valentino Rossi rides

Axelsen faces Lee in Japan Open final

Tokyo

Denmark's Viktor Axelsen defeated world number one Son Wan-Ho in the men's singles semi-finals at the Japan Open yesterday.

Axelsen, who beat two-time Olympic champion Lin Dan of China to clinch the world title in Glasgow last month, overpowered South Korea's Son with a 21-16, 21-16 win.

He now faces Malaysian Lee Chong Wei who has won the Japan Open six

times. Lee booked a spot in the final after a 21-19, 21-8 win over China's Shi Yuqi.

In the women's singles, Spain's Carolina Marin, Olympic gold medallist last year, reached the final as Japan's Nozomi Okuhara dropped out from the semi-finals due to knee trouble.

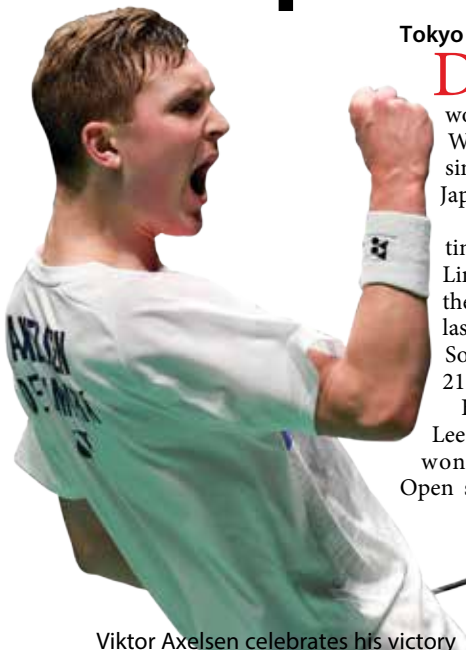
Marin faces China's He Bingjiao who beat Chen Yufei 21-14, 25-23.

Okuhara, newly crowned women's world champion, was aiming to reclaim the trophy on home soil after winning it in 2015.

Home fans at the Tokyo Metropolitan Gymnasium expressed disappointment when the organisers announced her withdrawal.

"I did my best (to recover) but this morning, I wasn't in the condition to play," Okuhara, 22, told reporters, according to Sankei Sports.

"I was ready for a battle mentally but my body was telling me I couldn't," she said in tears. (AFP)



Viktor Axelsen celebrates his victory



Peter Sagan

Sagan uninterested in worlds recon

Bergen, Norway

Reigning champion Peter Sagan admitted yesterday he hasn't yet ridden the world championship circuit in Bergen, Norway and has no intention of doing so before today's race.

World champion in Richmond two years ago and Doha last year, the 27-year-old Slovak can equal the record number of rainbow jerseys won by the likes of Belgian great Eddy Merckx if he triumphs on today's 276.5km race.

And if he does, he'll be the first person to win three world titles in a row.

But Sagan was typically laid back when meeting the press yesterday, insisting he has no intention of checking out the 19km circuit that will be ridden 12 times following an initial 40km ride from Rong to Bergen.

"We have to do the lap 11 times or 12," quipped Sagan. "That's a lot of time to see it."

Asked if he still had a chance to ride the circuit before today's race, Sagan

added: "It's a possibility, yes, but I don't want (to)."

As for the tactics he would employ, whether to try to get away in a break or wait for a bunch sprint finish, Sagan simply shrugged.

"I don't think about this scenario, you can see just in the last lap or the last two laps what's going to happen, not before.

"I don't expect anything, I don't prepare anything, I just see in the moment."

Following several drizzly days in Bergen, though, Sagan did express one sentiment.

"For sure it's better if it's sun, who wants to ride in the rain for 270km?"

In his typically deadpan manner, Sagan also dismissed any talk about potential history-making.

"I don't like to speak about the future or history. What's going to happen will happen.

"I'm like last year -- I've got nothing to lose. I'm here to enjoy, I'm very happy already with what I did the last few years and I want to enjoy tomorrow." (AFP)

Blaak wins world title despite crash

Bergen, Norway

Dutch champion Chantal Blaak overcame a painful crash to take a surprise victory in the women's world championship road race in Bergen yesterday.

The 27-year-old used her more illustrious team-mates Anna van der Breggen, the Olympic champion, and Annemiek van Vleuten, the time-trial world champion, as foils to escape to a solo victory at the end of the 152.8km street circuit course.

Australia's Katrin Garfoot took silver with last year's champion Amalie Dideriksen of Denmark in bronze.

"No, I can't believe it.

Everything happened in the race: I crashed, it took a pretty long time to get back up, I was in a lot of pain -- in that moment I thought my race was over," said Blaak about her crash with around 65km to ride.

"(Then) I thought I can come back and see what I can do. The plan was not that I should win the race but to do my best possible for the team.

"After that (attack) I just followed my heart and stayed away."

Blaak had instigated an attack with 23km left that saw Briton Hannah Barnes and Audrey Cordon of France join her. (AFP)