

# Martin returns for Czech MotoGP

World champion returns from 11 broken ribs as Brno circuit makes grand prix comeback

● Martin returns after 7 missed races

● Confirmed 2026 Aprilia deal

AFP | Brno

Reigning world champion Jorge Martin of Spain will return to racing at the Czech MotoGP this weekend as the Brno circuit hosts its first grand prix since 2020.

Marc Marquez is threatening to run away with the title after four straight wins, which have allowed the Spaniard to open up a sizeable gap at the top.

The 32-year-old factory Ducati rider has 344 points after 11 of 22 races, and he has won both the sprint and the main race on seven occasions.

His younger brother Alex, on a Gresini Ducati, is second with 261 points, ahead of Marc's Italian teammate Francesco Bagnaia -- the 2022 and 2023 world champion -- with 197.

But it is Martin, who has yet to score his first point this season, that will likely steal the limelight on the circuit in the second Czech city of Brno.

Martin sat out the first three races following two pre-season crashes and when he returned at Qatar in April, he crashed heavily again and missed the next seven races.

"I feel prepared. In terms of the physical condition, I feel better than any time in my life for sure," the 27-year-old Martin said having recovered from 11 broken ribs.

"I took profit of this time off



Aprilia Racing's Spanish rider Jorge Martin prepares to ride (file photo)

to work on my performance, and I feel I am a better and more prepared rider now," he added.

"I don't want to speculate on results... What I can say is that I'm here to compete, I'm not here to make laps. I'm here to do my best."

Martin also said on Thursday he would stay with Aprilia for the 2026 season, dispelling doubts about his future.

He had been at odds with the Italian manufacturer after initially saying he intended to activate a release clause in his contract at the end of the season.

**"I feel prepared. In terms of the physical condition, I feel better than any time in my life for sure. I took profit of this time off to work on my performance, and I feel I am a better and more prepared rider now"**

JORGE MARTIN

Brno is returning to the MotoGP calendar for the first time

BETTER YOU KNOW

Martin missed 10 of 11 races this season but used the time to transform his fitness - claiming he's "in better shape than ever"

Marquez has won three MotoGP races at Brno, in 2013, 2017 and 2019, but he sat out the last edition in 2020 with a broken arm as Brad Binder stunned the pack to take his maiden MotoGP win.

Marquez holds the fastest lap time of 1min 54.596sec from 2016 and will be looking to improve it on the resurfaced 5.4-kilometre track as forecasters promise a mostly sunny weekend.

"It looks like some manufacturers tested two or three weeks ago and yeah, it looks like they were already two seconds faster," Marquez said.

He is eyeing his seventh MotoGP world title -- and first since 2019 -- that would put him level with the legendary Valentino Rossi.

Maverick Vinales, recovering from a shoulder fracture, will be replaced by Pol Espargaro at Brno, while Franco Morbidelli is also out following a bone-crunching crash in Germany.

The MotoGP circus will take a summer break after this weekend and resume with the Austrian GP on August 15-17.

## Fraud probe opened into Mbappe payments to police officers

AFP | Paris

An investigation has been opened into potentially fraudulent payments made by Kylian Mbappe to five police officers assigned to protect the French national football team, the public prosecutor's office said.

The probe comes after a tip-off from the French finance ministry's anti-money laundering unit, which reported "unusual financial transactions" benefiting the five police officers.

"Investigations, which are

by their very nature complex in the case of financial transactions, are underway in order to establish whether any criminal offences have been committed," the public prosecutor's office said.

French investigative weekly Le Canard Enchaîné on Wednesday reported that the France national team captain's money was used to "pay under the table for private services", to the tune of 180,300 euros (\$209,000).

The Real Madrid striker's entourage issued a statement saying "everything was done in compliance with the rules".

It added that Mbappe had "always chosen to donate in full his bonuses" for playing

BETTER YOU KNOW

Mbappe previously donated his entire 2022 World Cup bonuses - suggesting a pattern of financial generosity now under scrutiny

for France at international level.

"It's what he did after the 2022 World Cup, with complete transparency," the statement continued, saying the money went to charitable organisations and security personnel that accompanied the team.

## Ons Jabeur announces break from tennis 'to rediscover joy of living'

AFP | London

Former world number two Ons Jabeur announced on Thursday she was going to "take a step back and finally put myself first", after two



difficult years on the circuit.

"For the last two years, I've been pushing myself so hard, fighting through injuries and facing many other challenges. But deep down, I haven't felt really happy on the court for some time now," the 30-year-old three-time Grand Slam finalist explained on social media.

"Tennis is such a beautiful sport. But right now, I feel it's time to step back and finally put myself first: to breathe, to heal, and to rediscover the joy of simply living," added the Tunisian world number 71.

Ons Jabeur



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