

Bahrain Merida conquers Oman



Italian Sonny Colbrelli of team Bahrain celebrates as he crosses the finish line

TDI | Manama

Sonny Colbrelli opened Bahrain-Merida's account at the Tour of Oman yesterday, winning stage four in a bunch sprint.

The Italian was clearly the strongest in the final, with clear air between him and second-placed Greg Van Avermaet (CCC Team). Clément Venturini (Ag2R) was a close third place after what was a tough day in the saddle for the 120-strong peloton.

The Tour of Oman was the shortest stage of the contest at 131km, which had a slightly uphill finish, and was marked by a long break with the last three riders caught in only the final kilometres. However, the Italian cyclist deservedly conquered it, posting a time of 3:17:09.

Commenting after the race, Colbrelli said: "Today was the first time I felt good here," explaining that he'd struggled to adapt to the Middle Eastern heat on the opening three stages. "That's good for the morale ahead of the next races."

Mladenovic stuns Osaka

Halep makes winning start in Dubai, Svitolina boosts hat-trick bid

Naomi Osaka's first match since her Australian Open triumph didn't quite go to plan

AFP | Dubai

Naomi Osaka stumbled badly in her first match since winning the Australian Open as the world number one went down in a flurry of errors to exit the Dubai Championships yesterday.

Dubai-based Frenchwoman Kristina Mladenovic claimed a 6-3, 6-3 victory to reach the third round as Osaka made 25 unforced errors.

The rout, which featured seven breaks of the Osaka serve, took barely an hour, sending Mladenovic into a Wednesday contest with Carla Suarez Navarro.

"This is my home tournament, I live here," world number 67 Mladenovic said. "It's great to get a win like this in front of a big crowd."

"Beating the number one is always special."



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KRISTINA MLADENOVIC



Naomi Osaka of Japan reacts during day three of the WTA Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships

The second set was riddled with seven consecutive breaks of serve before Mladenovic finished off the job with a winner to the empty court on match point.

Osaka stunned the tennis world last week by announcing her split from coach Sascha Bajin despite winning back-to-back Grand Slam titles at the US and Australian Opens.

She said earlier this week that she would not prioritise "success over happiness" when asked about the sacking, and she never looked like winning in Dubai as she also served five double faults.

Earlier yesterday, Simona Halep and Petra Kvitova both won their opening matches, while Elina Svitolina made a strong start to her bid for a third straight title.

Kvitova, the 2013 winner, re-

covered from losing a first-set tiebreak to defeat Katerina Siniakova 6-7 (3/7), 6-4, 6-4 and squeeze into the third round.

Halep, Dubai champion in 2015, saw off 2014 Wimbledon finalist Eugenie Bouchard 7-6 (7/4), 6-4.

The Romanian said she is still feeling the effects of her weekend final defeat in Doha by Elise Mertens.

"It was a good match because I won it. I tried to finish the points faster because I'm a little bit tired," Halep said.

"She played well, the level was pretty good. At some points I really ran very well. I'm confident. I feel good on court even if I'm tired."

A third former world number one also advanced as Angelique Kerber beat Dalila Jakupovic 7-6 (7/4), 6-3.

Kvitova, Wimbledon champi-



Simona Halep of Romania serves in her match against Eugenie Bouchard of Canada

on in 2011 and 2014, said she was unfazed about the early midday start to her match.

"I don't really care if I play the first match," the Australian Open runner-up said. "Now I'm done, so I have a free afternoon."

"I'm not sure what I'm pleased with... maybe with my comeback at the end."

Svitolina benefits from Jabeur injury

Local favourite Ons Jabeur was forced to retire with the Tunisian trailing Svitolina 7-6 (7/4), 4-0.

Jabeur took a fall late in the opening set, rolling her ankle while also hitting her shoulder.

She took a medical timeout out but was only able to carry on in the second set for four games.

Third seed Svitolina is hoping to become the first women to win three Dubai titles.

"That is a big motivation for me here," the Ukrainian said. "Today I didn't really feel in a match mood, I don't know why."

"I was struggling a bit, I had a very slow start. Hopefully tomorrow will be better."

"I told myself that I'm here to make history of the tournament."

Elsewhere, Hsieh Su-Wei defeated Belarusian Aliaksandra Sasnovich 6-1, 6-2 while Viktoria Kuzmova accounted for seventh seed Kiki Bertens, beating this month's St Petersburg champion 6-2, 4-6, 7-6 (8/6).

American Jennifer Brady downed French 14th seed Caroline Garcia 6-4, 7-5 as her compatriot Sofia Kenin defeated Russian 11th seed Daria Kasatkina 6-3, 2-6, 6-4.

A third US player, Alison Riske, advanced 6-2, 6-3 over Alize Cornet.

Leclerc keeps Ferrari on top

Ferrari's new recruit follows Vettel's lead on second morning of testing in Barcelona

Reigning champion Lewis Hamilton completed most laps with 74

Reuters | Barcelona



Ferrari's Monegasque driver Charles Leclerc drives during the tests

New recruit Charles Leclerc kept Ferrari on top of the timesheets with a full race distance before lunchtime on the second day of Formula One's pre-season testing in Spain yesterday.

After team mate Sebastian Vettel led the way on Monday with the fastest time and most laps, Kimi Raikkonen's 21-year-old replacement slotted in seamlessly with a time not far off the German's best.

The Monegasque produced a best time of one minute 18.247 seconds and did 73 laps, compared with Vettel's Monday 1:18.161 and 72 laps, in partially cloudy conditions and an ambient temperature of 14 degrees Celsius.

Five times world champion Lewis Hamilton, working through the Mercedes testing programme, did one more lap than Leclerc however.

Ferrari's times have been quicker than anything from last year's weather-affected first four-day test at the Circuit de Catalunya.

Rule changes, with new aerodynamic regulations, were expected to make the cars around 1.5 seconds a lap slower. But the evidence so far has been that much of the lost time has been regained.

By the time the season starts in Australia on March 17 cars can be expected to be going even faster, but Pirelli's F1 tyre boss Mario Isola cautioned that the picture might be distorted.

He said the asphalt had been new for testing last year, with a very smooth surface that had evolved further.

"I believe the influence of the Tarmac is higher, and the (warmer) temperature is playing a big effect. We know that," he told reporters.



Leclerc got to within a tenth of a second of Sebastian Vettel's time from Monday

Ferrari-powered Haas were second fastest, with Denmark's Kevin Magnussen taking his turn and producing a best lap of 1:19.234.

Alfa Romeo were third with Italian newcomer Antonio Giovinazzi taking over from Raikkonen who tested on Monday and using harder tyres than others.

In terms of mileage, Red Bull

did the third most with Frenchman Pierre Gasly putting in 69 laps in another strong showing for the new partnership with Honda.

Australian Daniel Ricciardo, who has joined Renault from Red Bull, did the least laps of the morning (28) but that was due to his rear wing flying off at speed.

He returned to the pits with the Renault engineers setting to work.

"On-track fun for Daniel. We're testing his reaction skills. They're good," the team said jokingly on Twitter. "Car and driver are back in the garage. Rear-wing assessing is in full flow."

Williams were again absent, with the team hoping to get their car to Barcelona for Wednesday's third day amid speculation that senior heads could roll as a result of the delay.

No chance Icardi going to Juventus, says Inter president

AFP | Milan

Inter Milan's Chinese president Steven Zhang on Monday ruled out selling unsettled Argentine forward Mauro Icardi to Serie A rivals Juventus.

It follows comments from Juventus sporting director Fabio Paratici that the champions would keep an eye on the striker's situation in the summer after he was stripped of the captain's armband during the week.

"Will Icardi ever join Juventus? No, never," said Zhang after a shareholders' meeting at the San Siro on Monday.

"This has been spoken about a lot in the past week and a lot of confusion has been created."

"I would like to put an end to this topic because the club has already made a decision and continuing to talk about it doesn't help us to achieve our goals."

"Icardi is a great player, he's a professional and a very important member of our family."

"We are in negotiations to renew his contract, and he's an important player for this club."

Icardi, who turned 26 yesterday, watched from the stands with his wife and agent Wanda Nara as Inter beat Sampdoria 2-1 on Sunday.

Icardi, whose current contract expires in 2021, arrived from Sampdoria in 2013 and has scored 122 goals in 210 games, winning the award for Serie A's most prolific scorer twice.

Nara, also a regular on Italian television, tearfully revealed on Sunday that the forward had only learned of his demotion on Twitter.

"It was like taking away a leg. It is not our intention to leave," Nara told Mediaset's football talk show Tiki Taka.



Mauro Icardi