

# Messi ‘likely’ to leave PSG as Al Hilal prepare €400m mega offer: Report

Argentina’s World Cup hero Lionel Messi could leave Paris Saint-Germain at the end of the season with a massive offer from Saudi club Al Hilal on the table, according to reports. Messi is “much more likely” to leave the Parisians at the end of the season than sign a new deal, AFP quoted an official at PSG as saying. The National reported. “The dynamics have completely changed with PSG less pushing to renew (his contract),” the official said, adding that there was “no deal, no exit yet. But exit is much more likely”. Messi, who will turn 36 in June, joined in 2021 on a two-year deal which expires at the end of this campaign. Despite his international success and stature, Messi was on Sunday jeered by some PSG fans as the teams were announced prior to their 1-0 home defeat against Lyon. Club supporters are unhappy with the team since they were eliminated from the Champions League in the last 16 by Bayern Munich last month. Amid the disquiet, Saudi club Al Hilal

have tabled a mega offer of €400 million per year, which would be much higher than Al Nassr made for Portuguese star Cristiano Ronaldo, according to journalist Fabrizio Romano. While Messi is keen to continue in Europe, ESPN stated that he is unlikely to remain in Paris. Barcelona also remain on the periphery. The Spanish giants have been openly courting Messi, hoping to persuade the Argentine to return to the Camp Nou two years after he left the club where he won four Champions League titles. He left Barcelona when the club could not afford to renew his contract. PSG have lost eight times in 18 games in 2023, a run which has seen them go out of the French Cup prematurely, but they remain six points clear at the top of the French table. Messi has scored 29 goals and set up 32 more in 67 appearances for PSG in all competitions. Yet his form has dipped since he led Argentina to glory at the World Cup in Qatar at the end of last year.



● AFP

# Nadal remains French Open doubt after Monte Carlo withdrawal



● CLIVE BRUNSKILL/GETTY IMAGES

Defending champion Rafael Nadal remains a doubt for the French Open after pulling out of next week’s Monte Carlo Masters with an ongoing hip injury. The Spanish world number 14 has won the tournament in Monaco 11 times but is not fit to return to action, BBC Sport reported. The 36-year-old has not played since his straight-set second-round defeat by American Mackenzie McDonald at the Australian Open in January. World number two Carlos Alcaraz is also out of Monte Carlo through injury. The Spaniard, who is chasing Novak Djokovic for the number one ranking, has hand and back problems. “After two months abroad I am happy to return home, but sad because I finished my last match in Miami with physical discomfort,” said Alcaraz, who lost to Jannik Sinner in the last four of the Miami Open, on Twitter. “I will not be able to go to Monte Carlo to start the clay-court tour. I

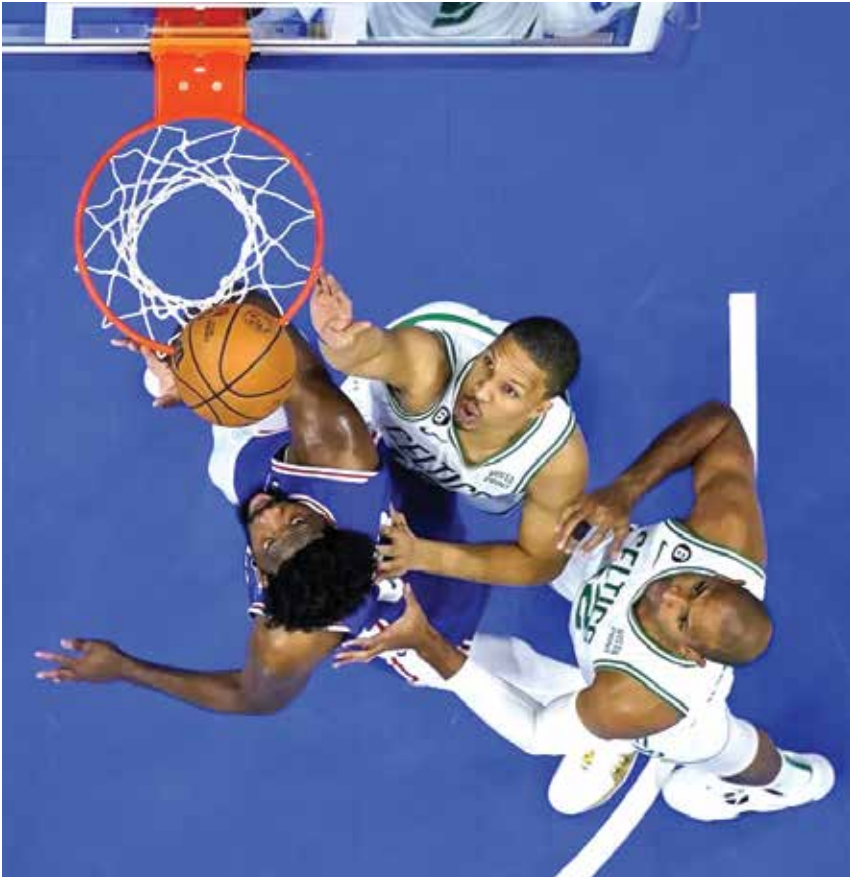
have post-traumatic arthritis in my left hand and muscular discomfort in the spine that needs rest to prepare for everything that is to come.” Nadal had expected to be out for six to eight weeks after an MRI scan following his Melbourne loss showed a tear in his left psoas muscle. But missing the start of the European clay-court season leaves him short of match practice before the Roland Garros event he has won a record 14 times, which begins on 28 May. “I’m still not ready to compete at the highest level,” Nadal said on Twitter. “I will not be able to play in one of the most important tournaments of my career, Monte Carlo. “I am not yet in a position to play with the maximum guarantees and I continue my preparation process, hoping to return soon.” Canada’s world number seven Felix Auger-Aliassime will also miss next week’s event with a left knee issue, but has said he hopes to be back for the Madrid Open which starts on 26 April.

# Embiid scores 52 as 76ers top Celtics

Joel Embiid scored 52 points on 20-of-25 shooting and added 13 rebounds, six assists and two blocks to lead the host Philadelphia 76ers to a 103-101 win over the Boston Celtics on Tuesday in a showdown between Eastern Conference contenders. It was Embiid’s fifth career 50-point game. James Harden added 20 points and 10 assists for Philadelphia, which has won three of four and avoided a four-game season sweep in the head-to-head series, Reuters reported. Six Boston players scored double-digit points, led by Derrick White’s 26 on four 3-pointers. Jayson Tatum had 19 points, six assists and three steals. P.J. Tucker (11 points) scored back-to-back 3-pointers during a 12-1 run that ultimately swayed the game in the Sixers’ favor. White

sliced the deficit to 103-101 with two seconds left. After Williams drew an offensive foul on an inbound play, Tatum’s tough 3-point attempt from the corner at the buzzer clanked off the rim. Elsewhere, LeBron James scored 37 points and hit a game-winning layup in overtime to help Los Angeles Lakers edge Utah Jazz 135-133 in Salt Lake City. Austin Reaves added 28 points and Anthony Davis totaled 21 points, 14 rebounds and six assists as the Lakers won their fourth straight and moved a step closer to clinching a playoff spot. Despite having three starters sidelined, the Jazz rallied in the final 1:36 of regulation, outscoring the Lakers 10-0 to force overtime. Former Laker Talen Horton-Tucker and Kelly Olynyk each scored 23

points and Ochai Agbaji contributed 22 for the Jazz, which lost for the seventh time in eight games. Devin Booker scored 27 points as Phoenix Suns jumped to a big 115-94 lead against visiting San Antonio Spurs on the way to securing a playoff spot with a sixth straight win. Chris Paul added 22 points for the Suns, Deandre Ayton tallied 19 points and 11 rebounds, and Kevin Durant scored 18 points. Malaki Branham led the Spurs with 21 points and Tre Jones added 20.



76ers’ Joel Embiid (blue) goes up for a basket during an NBA victory over the Celtics in Philadelphia, PA, US, on April 4, 2023. ● AP

# Ex-world champion Khan handed two-year doping ban



● ANDREW COULDRIDGE/REUTERS

Former light-welterweight world champion Amir Khan said he would “never cheat” after being handed a two-year ban from all sport for testing positive for a prohibited substance. UK Anti-Doping said on Tuesday that Khan, 36, returned a positive result for the anabolic agent ostarine following his loss to Kell Brook in Manchester in February 2022, AFP reported. Khan, who announced his retirement in May last year, accepted a violation of anti-doping rules but said he had not intentionally ingested the substance, an argument accepted by an independent panel. “I would never cheat. I’m a retired fighter. I’ve got a two-year ban now which is quite strange and funny that they banned me. I’ve already retired. I’ve no comeback plans at all,” Khan told Sky News. Khan was first notified of his own positive result in April 2022 and given a provisional suspension, with charges following in July after he had announced his retirement with a 34-6 professional record. Following the hearing in January this year, the National Anti-Doping Panel accepted Khan’s submission he had not taken the substance intentionally but imposed the ban on the basis of strict liability. Ostarine is a drug designed to have similar effects to testosterone. “You can see by my performance against Kell Brook wasn’t the best. I lost the fight. If I went in there and knocked Kell Brook out it’s different,” added Khan. “I’ve never cheated in my life. I’m the one that wanted testing on that fight. Also, the amount that was in my system could have been by shaking people’s hands. I don’t know the drug that was in my system.” The ban is deemed to have commenced on 6 April 2022, when his provisional suspension was imposed, and will expire on 5 April 2024. UKAD chief executive Jane Rumble said: “This case serves as a reminder that UKAD will diligently pursue anti-doping rule violations in order to protect clean sport.” Khan became a household name in Britain after claiming a silver medal at the 2004 Athens Olympics, aged just 17. He made his professional debut in July 2005 and four years later won the WBA light-welterweight title with victory over Andreas Kotelnik in Manchester.