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VOLLEYBALL BEACH PRO TOUR

Cherif and Ahmed enter semi-finals at Ostrava Elite16

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The return of Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan to the Volleyball Beach Pro Tour continues to go well for the Qataris, who won a pair of matches yesterday to advance to the semi-finals of the Elite16 event that's being held in Ostrava, Czech Republic.

The Tokyo Olympic bronze medalists will face American qualifiers Andy Benesh and Miles Partain in one of the semifinals today, while the home team of Ondrej Perusic and David Schweiner will battle Olympic champions Anders Mol and Christian Sorum of Norway on the other side of the bracket, in a rematch of last year's gold medal match in Ostrava.

The medal matches will be held in the afternoon, with the contest for bronze and the final starting one hour later.

Cherif and Ahmed haven't competed on the Beach Pro Tour since the Elite16 event held in Tepic, Mexico, in March. The two decided to skip the tournaments held in Brazil between April and May as Cherif prepared for the birth of his first daughter, but are now back at it.

The Qataris paid a toll for their long absence, dropping two of their three pool play matches in Ostrava, but still made it to the elimination rounds. The pair found their rhythm yesterday, topping Brazilians Pedro Solberg and Gustavo Carvalhaes 2-1 (19-21, 21-17, 15-12) in the Round of 12 and Italians Adrian Carambula and Alex Ranghieri 2-0 (21-17, 21-17) in the quarter-finals to make their first semi-final appearance in the season.

Of the four semifinalists, Partain and Benesh had the longest route to the semis, having played as many as seven matches since they started their campaign in Ostrava, on Wednesday, on the qualifier. The Americans had two

matches yesterday and overcame Poland's Michal Bryl and Bartosz Losiak 2-0 (21-19, 21-19) in the Round of 12 and Swedish David Ahman and Jonatan Hellvig also in two sets (21-18, 21-0) in the quarters - Hellvig was forced to withdraw from the match at the end of the first set after he sustained a wrist injury.

The winners of last year's Ostrava Elite16 event, Mol and Sorum are in the semis again with a very consistent campaign. After winning their three pool play matches, the reigning Olympic and world champions got on the court once yesterday and eliminated Germans Nils Ehlers and Clemens Wickler with a two-set (22-20, 22-20) victory in the last eight.

Perusic and Schweiner, who took silver in Ostrava last year, also remain undefeated in the tournament, now having four wins earned in three days. Yesterday, they dominated French Youssef Krou and Arnaud Gauthier-Rat to a 2-0 (21-18, 21-12) win in the quarters.



Qatar's Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan in action at the Volleyball Beach Pro Elite16 event in Ostrava, Czech Republic.

TENNIS/FRENCH OPEN

Swiatek stars in 51-minute blitz as Gauff ends Andreieva run

World No. 1's path to the final was made easier earlier by the withdrawal of Wimbledon champion Rybakina

AFP
Paris

World number one and defending champion Iga Swiatek took just 51 minutes to reach the French Open fourth round yesterday as Coco Gauff ended 16-year-old Mirra Andreieva's memorable Paris debut.

Swiatek blitzed 80th-ranked Wang Xinyu of China 6-0, 6-0 on the back of 21 winners as the 22-year-old Pole took another step closer to becoming the first woman since Justine Henin in 2007 to win back-to-back titles at Roland Garros. Of the six sets she has played so far, four have been to love. In all she has dropped just eight games through three rounds. "It was a really solid performance from me. It's not easy to stay disciplined and keep your focus," said Swiatek, who also won the title in 2020.

Swiatek will face Ukraine's Lesia Tsurenko, who breezed past 2019 US Open champion Bianca Andreescu for the loss of just two games, for a quarter-final berth. Her path to the final was made easier earlier yesterday by the withdrawal of Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina, a possible last-four opponent, due to illness.

Rybakina had been due to face Sara Sorribes Tormo of Spain in the third round in the opening match on Court Philippe Chatrier but said she was suffering with a fever. "I was not feeling good yesterday and the day before. I didn't sleep last night," said the 23-year-old Kazakh. "I had fever and a headache and it's difficult to breathe. I tried to play in the warm-up but I feel it's the right decision to withdraw."

Sorribes Tormo, ranked 132 in the world, will be playing in the second week of a Grand Slam for the first time. She will face Beatriz Haddad Maia, the first Brazilian to make the last 16 in Paris since 1979, for a place in the last eight. Haddad Maia secured a come-back victory over Ekaterina Alexandrova, saving a match point. The 14th seed clinched a 5-7, 6-4, 7-5 win. Patricia Medrado was the last Brazilian to reach the women's last 16, which was then the third round, 44 years ago.

Haddad Maia was ranked 83rd in January last year but has since flown



Poland's Iga Swiatek plays a double-handed backhand during her French Open third-round match against China's Xinyu Wang in Paris. (Reuters)

up the rankings, winning two WTA titles. She is now into the second week of a Grand Slam tournament for the first time, having never previously passed the second round. Haddad Maia let a 4-1 lead with a double break slip in the third set, before surviving a match point when serving at 5-4 behind. She took advantage of that switch in momentum, breaking again in game 11 and

serving out the match.

World number six Gauff, the runner-up to Swiatek last year, came back from a set down to defeat Andreieva 6-7 (5/7), 6-1, 6-1. Andreieva, ranked a lowly 143, had come through qualifying and was the youngest player to make the third round since 2005. "Mirra is super young and has a big future," said Gauff.

Gauff said that despite her first set



Norway's Casper Ruud celebrates after his win over China's Zhang Zhizhen at the French Open yesterday. (AFP)

problems, she was confident she could pull through. "I was a little undisciplined in the tiebreak but I knew what the game plan was so I just tried to execute that in the second and third sets."

Gauff, 19, will face Anna Karolina Schmiedlova of Slovakia for a quarter-finals spot. Andreieva was fortunate to avoid a default for petulantly hitting a ball into the Court Suzanne Lenglen crowd during the first set. "Right after I thought that it was a really stupid move from me," she admitted.

Casper Ruud, the runner-up to Rafael Nadal in 2022, dropped the first set before easing to a 4-6, 6-4, 6-1, 6-4 win against China's Zhang Zhizhen. The 26-year-old Zhang was bidding to become the first Chinese man since 1936 to reach the fourth round in Paris. "It was very tough in the first set, he was hitting many winners and I couldn't find a hole in his game," said fourth-ranked Ruud.

Ruud will next face in-form Nicolas Jarry after the Chilean edged out Marcos Giron of the United States 6-2, 6-3,

6-7 (7/9), 6-3. Jarry arrived in Paris having claimed the Geneva clay court title and will be making a maiden appearance in the last 16 of a major. Also featuring in the second week for the first time will be 49th-ranked Tomas Martin Etcheverry of Argentina who stunned 15th seed Borna Coric 6-3, 7-6 (7/5), 6-2.

Etcheverry will next face Japanese 27th seed Yoshihito Nishioka who edged a dramatic five-set battle with qualifier Thiago Seyboth Wild to reach the fourth round for the first time. Nishioka battled back to win 3-6, 7-6 (10/8), 2-6, 6-4, 6-0 against the Brazilian who had knocked out world number two Daniil Medvedev in the first round.

Francisco Cerundolo of Argentina joined the list of South American first-timers in the second week by seeing off US ninth seed Taylor Fritz 3-6, 6-3, 6-4, 7-5. Cerundolo next meets Danish world number six and 2022 quarter-finalist Holger Rune who eased past 231st-ranked Argentinian qualifier Genaro Alberto Olivieri 6-4, 6-1, 6-3.

THIRD ROUND RESULTS
(x denotes seeded player)

Men: Holger Rune (DEN x6) bt Genaro Alberto Olivieri (ARG) 6-4, 6-1, 6-3; Francisco Cerundolo (ARG x23) bt Taylor Fritz (USA x9) 3-6, 6-3, 6-4, 7-5; Nicolas Jarry (CHI) bt Marcos Giron (USA) 6-2, 6-3, 6-7 (7/9), 6-3; Casper Ruud (NOR x4) bt Zhang Zhizhen (CHN) 4-6, 6-4, 6-1, 6-4; Tomas Martin Etcheverry (ARG) bt Borna Coric (CRO x15) 6-3, 7-6 (7/5), 6-2; Yoshihito Nishioka (JPN x27) bt Thiago Seyboth Wild (BRA) 3-6, 7-6 (10/8), 2-6, 6-4, 6-0

Women: Iga Swiatek (POL x1) bt Wang Xinyu (CHN) 6-0, 6-0; Lesia Tsurenko (UKR) bt Bianca Andreescu (CAN) 6-1, 6-1; Anna Karolina Schmiedlova (SVK) bt Kayla Day (USA) 6-1, 6-3; Coco Gauff (USA x6) bt Mirra Andreieva 6-7 (5/7), 6-1, 6-1; Sara Sorribes Tormo (ESP) bt Elena Rybakina (KAZ x4) - walkover; Beatriz Haddad Maia (BRA x14) bt Ekaterina Alexandrova (x23) 5-7, 6-4, 7-5; Bernarda Pera (USA) bt Elisabetta Cocciaretto (ITA) 6-4, 7-6 (7/2)

CRICKET

Five-star Tongue strikes as England down gutsy Ireland

‘I think it gives us a good insight into the conditions, what we might get against Australia’

AFP
London

Julian Guyer England debutant fast bowler Josh Tongue marked his call-up to the Ashes squad with a five-wicket haul as England beat Ireland by 10 wickets in their warm-up match at Lord's yesterday.

After Tongue's return of 5-66, it took England just four balls to score the 11 runs they needed for victory, with Zak Crawley hitting three fours off Mark Adair.

Ireland, yet to win any of their seven Tests, did well to take the match beyond tea on the third day of four as they avoided an innings defeat with a score of 362.

The tourists produced their own version of England's aggressive 'Bazball' batting style during a record Ireland stand of 163 between the seventh-wicket duo of Andy McBrine (86 not out) and Adair (88).

England's win was built on an imposing first-innings total of 524-4 declared featuring player of the match Ollie Pope's 205 and Ben Duckett's 182.

Victory meant England had now won 11 of their 13 Tests under captain Ben Stokes - who didn't bat or bowl in this match - and coach Brendon McCullum.

"I think it gives us a good insight into the conditions and what we might get against Australia in the summer coming up," England captain Ben Stokes told the BBC.

Ireland resumed on 97-3, a deficit of 255 runs, with opener James McCollum unable to bat again having retired hurt Friday after twisting his right ankle trying to pull Tongue.

Ireland lost just one wicket in Saturday's opening hour, with Lorcan Tucker (44) and Harry Tector (51) in the runs.

But they were 162-6 when Curtis Campher miscued a sweep off Root to short fine leg where England captain Ben Stokes, who has been battling a longstanding knee injury, hobbled after taking a simple catch.

The dismissal was Stokes's first direct involvement in a match where he has yet to bat or bowl. England want to protect



England's Josh Tongue celebrates his five wicket haul with teammates after taking the wicket of Ireland's Fionn Hand during the day four of the Test at Lord's Cricket Ground in London yesterday. (Reuters)

the all-rounder's fitness ahead of the Ashes, while still benefiting from his leadership skills.

But there was not much he could do tactically as McBrine and Adair played shots worthy of top-order batsmen on a placid pitch against an attack missing James Anderson and Ollie Robinson, both rested ahead of the first Test against Australia at Edgbaston which starts on June 16. Adair took Ireland to 200 by hoisting Root for six.

And the fast bowler, whose previous highest Test score was 32 against Bangladesh in Mirpur in April, went to fifty with a four off Stuart Broad. Left-hander McBrine's fifty kept included 10 boundaries, with Broad and Leach taking the brunt of the as-

sault. But number nine Adair was eventually bounced out by Matthew Potts for a 76-ball 88 that included 12 fours and two sixes.

With Ireland nine wickets down after Fionn Hand's exit, England were able to extend the afternoon session by 30 minutes in a bid to force victory before tea. England were denied an innings win, however, when tailender Graham Hume hit two fours off successive deliveries from part-time off-spinner Joe Root - shots greeted by huge cheers from a sun-drenched crowd. With McBrine 85 not out at tea, the question was whether Hume could stay in long enough to get his partner to a hundred and a coveted place on the Lord's honours board. But McBrine was

left stranded when Hume was bowled by Broad.

SCOREBOARD

Ireland 1st Innings 172 (S Broad 5-51, J Leach 3-35)

ENGLAND 1st Innings 524-4 dec (overnight: 97-3)

Ireland 2nd Innings (target 11)

P. Moor lbw b Tongue 11
J. McCollum ret hurt 12
A. Balbirnie c Bairstow b Tongue 2
H. Tector c Brook b Tongue 51
P. Stirling c Bairstow b Tongue 15
L. Tucker b Leach 44
C. Campher c Stokes b Root 19
A. McBrine not out 86
M. Adair c Bairstow b Potts 88
F. Hand c Crawley b Tongue 7
G. Hume b Broad 14
Extras (lb8, nb5) 13

Total (all out, 86.2 overs, 395 mins) 362

Fall of wickets: 1-16 (Moor), 2-18 (Balbirnie), 3-63 (Stirling), 4-126 (Tucker), 5-162 (Tector), 6-162 (Campher), 7-325 (Adair), 8-340 (Hand), 9-362 (Hume)

Bowling: Broad 14.2-62-1 (3nb); Potts 21-3-77-1; Tongue 21-2-66-5 (1nb) Leach 20-4-90-1 (1nb); Root 10-0-59-1

ENGLAND 2nd Innings (target 11)

Z. Crawley not out 12
B. Duckett not out 0

Extras 0

Total (0 wks, 0.4 overs, 2 mins) 12

Bowling: Adair 0.4-0-12-0

Result: England won by 10 wickets

Player of the match: Ollie Pope.

CYCLING

Injured Pogacar preparing to race in Tour with a brace

Reuters
Paris

Slovenian Tadej Pogacar said his wrist may not recover fully in time for next month's Tour de France and he could race with a brace as he looks to win cycling's most prestigious crown for a third time.

Pogacar fractured his wrist in a crash during the Liege-Bastogne-Liege one-day race in April and underwent surgery to treat a scaphoid fracture. The UAE Team Emirates' medical director said at the time his recovery would take six weeks.

However, the 24-year-old said he had been a "bit stupid" and "disobeyed the doctor's orders" by jumping back on the bike but added that he was getting more mobility in his wrist.

"I pushed the team and tried to go on the bike, but I knew that I couldn't put too much pressure on the scaphoid," Pogacar told reporters.

"Obviously, I'm riding with a plastic cast that I can take off and on. I have a few different casts - one for normal life, one for the bike and then one

for when I'm almost at the end for a bit of support. I'm taking care every day.

"We'll see if we can start to put more pressure on the hand. For the Tour, maybe I'll still need some soft brace around the wrist, just for a bit of support. I hope that I get the mobility to get out of the saddle and for sprinting before the Tour."

Pogacar won the Tour in 2020 and 2021 but failed to complete a hat-trick of wins last year when he was beaten by Jonas Vingegaard.

Pogacar is training in the Sierra Nevada mountains and will head into the July 1-23 Tour de France with just two days of racing at the Slovenian National Championships, opting not to defend his Tour of Slovenia title later this month.

"Unfortunately, I lost some training and couldn't do much on the road in the last four weeks," he said.

"Normally, I really like to have a race before the important race. But a Grand Tour is 21 stages and sometimes it's good to be a little bit fresher.

"You can always do some good training behind the motorbike to simulate races, so I'm not so worried this year."



Tour de France anti-Covid protocol to keep riders in hotels

PARIS: Tour de France organisers have set up an anti-Covid protocol for this year's race, with riders and team staff banned from signing autographs and eating out of their hotels, a source with direct knowledge of the matter told Reuters yesterday. Riders and staff members were allowed out of their hotels last year. Access to the paddock at the start of the stages was open to reporters until midway through the race, when organisers decided to close it to "fight against the propagation of Covid-19". Access to the paddock will be allowed when the Tour starts in Bilbao, Spain on June 29, with everyone required to

wear a mask. "For all the team members: Respect a confinement - Limit the interactions outside the race bubble. No eating out. Respect social distancing at the hotel," the chart, seen by Reuters, said. "Do not get too close to the spectators - Social distancing, no selfies, no autograph." On Friday, France reported 3,204 Covid-19 cases in the country. At this time last year, there were about 25,000 reported daily cases in France. Giro d'Italia organisers last month set up an anti-Covid protocol near the halfway point of the race after overall leader Remco Evenepoel pulled out after testing positive for coronavirus. (AFP)

FOCUS

Warner wants to play his last Test in Sydney next Jan

Reuters
London

Australia opener David Warner said he will call time on his test career after playing against Pakistan at the Sydney Cricket Ground (SCG) next January, if he is still in the team by then.

When available, Warner has been a fixture at the top of the Australian order since his debut in 2011 but his place in the side for the World Test Championship final and Ashes series has been called into question after a run of poor form.

The 36-year-old said yesterday that he wanted to play on until the 2024 Twenty20 World Cup but would call time on his Test career after the third Test against Pakistan, before the two-match series against West Indies that follows.

"You've got to score runs. I've always said the World Cup will be my final game," Warner told reporters in Beckenham, England.

"I think I probably owe it to myself and my family, if I can score runs here and continue to play back in Australia, I can definitely say I won't be playing that West Indies series.



"If I get through this and I can make the Pakistan series, I will definitely finish up then."

Warner was born in a hospital a few hundred metres from the SCG and raised in the nearby eastern suburbs of the city, where he still lives.

Apart from a defiant 200 against South Africa in Decem-

ber, Warner has struggled for runs in recent Tests, making a total of 26 in three innings in the recent tour of India before returning home injured.

He had a dire series in England during the last Ashes tour, averaging 9.50, the worst ever by an opener to play 10 innings in a series, with paceman Stuart Broad

taking his wicket seven times. He had a better time of it in 2015, scoring 418 runs at an average of 46.44. Australia coach Andrew McDonald last month backed Warner to deliver at the top of the order in next week's WTC Final against India at the Oval and the Ashes series starting at Edgbaston on June 16.

Greater stability will boost Australian hopes: Labuschagne

LONDON: Batsman Marnus Labuschagne believes Australia will benefit from increased stability in their Ashes squad as they prepare to face England in the first Test of the series later this month. The Australians take on India in a one-off match in the world test championship at the Oval in London on Wednesday before beginning the latest five-Test Ashes series against the English at Edgbaston on June 12.

The series comes four years after the old rivals shared a 2-2 draw on English soil, when the Australian team was in a state of flux following the return of former captain Steve Smith, David Warner and Cameron Bancroft to the squad.

The trio had been banned due to their involvement in a ball-tampering scandal in South Africa in 2018 and, with those distractions behind them, Labuschagne is confident Australia will be better prepared.

"In 2019, we weren't as set on the team and there was probably a lot more questions about people coming back in," Labuschagne said.

"That was Steve, Dave and Cameron's first entry back into Test cricket, there wasn't that much stability, even with our bowlers.

"We played three or four different bowling attacks in three games, so there's a lot more clarity around our team which I think creates that consistency ... It creates the preparation instead of people playing for spots and thinking that they're vying for a position.

"Everyone knows where they sit, so we can prepare and get ourselves ready." Labuschagne's Test career sparked to life during

the 2019 series when he was introduced in the second test at Lord's as a concussion replacement for Smith, going on to score 59 runs in a drawn match. He helped the Australians retain the Ashes before playing a prominent role in the 4-0 series victory over the English in Australia in 2021/22.

"In 2019, I felt like I almost had to prove to people I was good enough," he said.

"For me now, it's just about making sure I do my role in the side and work out ways to score runs, it doesn't matter what the conditions are.

"Mentally I'm as hungry as ever and want us to win this series ... I really feel like we let one slip last time we were here, and hopefully we can amend that."

(Reuters)



DUHAIL, RAYYAN WIN AT ASIAN MEN’S CLUB HANDBALL CHAMPIONSHIP



AI Duhail and AI Rayyan won their respective matches at the 25th Asian Men's Club League Handball Championship in Isfahan, Iran, yesterday. At the Naghsh-e-Jahan Arena, two-time champions Duhail edged past AI Kuwait SC 38-35, while, Rayyan outplayed India's T-Sports Club 35-15. The winner of the competition will qualify for the 17th IHF Men's Super Globe, to be held from October 17-23 in Saudi Arabia.

FORMULA ONE

Verstappen claims maiden Spanish pole as Perez, Leclerc flop

‘I have a lot of great memories here and hopefully tomorrow we can add another one’

AFP
Montmeló, Spain

Defending double world champion Max Verstappen said his Red Bull car felt so good it was ‘running on rails’ yesterday as he claimed his maiden pole position at the Spanish Grand Prix.

The 25-year-old Dutchman, who leads Red Bull team-mate Sergio Perez by 39 points in the title race, was able to ease off in the final minutes of a topsy-turvy qualifying session that saw the Mexican and Ferrari’s Charles Leclerc both unexpectedly knocked out of the first session. He was able to rely on his earlier fastest lap in one minute and 12.272 seconds to beat nearest rival Carlos Sainz of Ferrari by nearly four-tenths in changeable conditions at the Circuit de Catalunya.

“That was nice,” said Verstappen. “The car was really good.”

“The qualifying session started tricky with the weather, but as it started to dry out, the car was on rails!”

“I love coming here in general. I have a lot of great memories here and hopefully tomorrow we can add another one.”

His qualifying success brought him his first Spanish pole and the 24th of his career at a track where he claimed his maiden victory as a teenager in 2016 and won last year.

With title rivals Perez, Leclerc and Aston Martin’s Fernando Alonso all suffering disappointing qualifying sessions, he will have an ideal opportunity to increase his commanding lead in Sunday’s race.

Sainz, who usurped two-time champion and fellow-Spaniard Alonso to be Spain’s best qualifier at his home race, said: “Yes, I needed that - it was super-tight



First-placed Red Bull’s Max Verstappen flanked by second-placed Ferrari’s Carlos Sainz Jr (right) and McLaren’s Lando Norris pose on the podium at the end of the qualifying session for the Spanish Formula One Grand Prix in Montmeló, Barcelona, yesterday. (AFP)

and very tricky in those tricky conditions out there today.

“Just getting out of Q1 and Q2 without issues was tricky so putting in a good lap with only one set of tyres made it so difficult here, but we did it.

“Now we are in the best position for tomorrow to focus on getting a podium finish... I pushed everything today. I didn’t leave anything on the table.”

Lando Norris was third for McLaren with a thrilling late lap

to go ahead of Pierre Gasly of Alpine and Mercedes’ seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton.

Gasly faces a stewards’ investigation into two blocking incidents and may face a grid penalty, but Norris was delighted and surprised at his success.

“I’m surprised but we did an amazing job and almost took P2, but it’s a home race for Carlos so I thought I should give him a couple of tenths! The new track layout suits us with a lot of high-

speed corners. I’m very happy.”

Lance Stroll was sixth for Aston Martin, the first time this year that he had out-qualified two-time champion Fernando Alonso, ahead of Esteban Ocon of Alpine and Haas’s Nico Hulkenberg. Alonso was ninth and Oscar Piastri 10th in the second McLaren.

“That was fun,” said Stroll, who has endured a difficult run of results.

“It is always exciting at this

track and I think it will be a tough race tomorrow.” Team-mate Alonso, who has reeled off five podiums in six races to take third place in the championship, said he was sorry “for the team and for the fans, but will do my best for them again tomorrow.”

He went off track into a gravel trap during Q1 and damaged his car. “It cost a couple of tenths, no more than that,” he said. “But we have good pace and let’s see what we can do.”

ATHLETICS

World record-setter Kipyegon warns of more to come

AFP
Florence

Faith Kipyegon warned there is more to come after adding the women’s 1,500m world record to a stellar career path that has already seen her bag two world and two Olympic golds over the distance.

The 29-year-old Kenyan clocked 3:49.11 in Florence on Friday to shatter the previous record of 3:50.07 set by Ethiopia’s Genzebe Dibaba in Monaco in 2015.

Kipyegon, considered the greatest ever woman in the discipline, crushed the rest of the field in Tuscany, finishing more than eight seconds ahead of reigning European champion Laura Muir, while Jessica Hull set an Australian and Oceania record of 3:57.29 in third.

Coming into the Golden Gala meeting, Kipyegon had said that the world record was in her heart and on her mind.

And she duly delivered at the third leg of the Diamond League circuit in a city that last saw a world record when World Athletics president Sebastian Coe broke the 800m mark there in 1981.

“I said yesterday that I wanted to run a beautiful race, run my race, and see what is possible, and this was possible,” said Kipyegon, who came agonisingly close to breaking the record at the Monaco Diamond League meet last year.

Aided by wavelight technology, whereby lights light up around the track to show world record pace, the race’s pace-makers had been asked to take the field through in 3:54 pace.

It looked ambitious on a damp track after early rain, but that pace merely left Kipyegon full of running when she took the lead in the penultimate lap, as she blazed through the final 600m at unprecedented speed.

“When I crossed the finish line, I knew I broke the world record because I had a good finish and felt very strong at the end,” she said.

“After 1km, when the pace-maker went out, I just pushed myself towards the finish line. And that was what my manager told me - anything is possible - after the pacemaker, just run your race.

“And that is what I did. I am excited - my family was watching. I told them that this would be an amazing day for me, I am well prepared and I really trusted in me.”

Kipyegon added: “I am going back to celebrate with my daughter. This was really important because this was something I was still missing in my career. Getting this, it will really motivate me and I left the legacy for the next generation - they can say she broke the world record, she was the Olympic and the world champion. It was amazing.”

Kipyegon was enveloped by the rest of the field after the enormity of having set a world record dawned on her, posing for photos on the track.

“We have really come along as 1,500 women,” Kipyegon said. “They are really special. We come along together, cheer one another.

“This is sport, we have to love each other and celebrate one another at our lowest moments and highest moments, and I really thank the ladies for coming along and running together and celebrating this world record together. We were part of this together.”

While the Kenyan will race over 5,000m at the Paris Diamond League on Friday, a return to training in Kenya will be followed by another potential record attempt over 1,500m at the Monaco Diamond League meet on July 21.

“There’s still more to come. I’m still working on running faster than that, faster than 3:49,” she warned.

“This was special so let’s celebrate it now and we will see what happens in Monaco.”

Kipyegon’s coach Patrick Sang told AFP that “we are very happy for her. She’s worked so hard towards what we witnessed last night!”

Marathon legend Eliud Kipchoge, who is also coached by Sang, said his training partner was an inspiration to many young girls and women across Africa. “It was only a matter of time. Faith has shown a great focus and determination to attack the world 1,500 record since coming back from maternity,” Kipchoge said.



Kenya’s Faith Kipyegon reacts as she wins the women’s 1,500m event, setting a new world record of 3:49.11, during the Diamond League in Florence, Italy. (AFP)

South Korea’s An cruises to Thailand Open final

BANGKOK: Badminton women’s singles world number two An Se-young sailed into the final of the Thailand Open yesterday, comfortably upstaging Carolina Marin.

The 21-year-old South Korean - who won the All England Open as well as tournaments in India and Indonesia this year - was electric on the court, claiming the semi-final in straight games 21-16, 21-12.

An looked dangerous early in the first game with clever net work and lethal

smashes, while Marin was sent diving across the court and struggled to hit winners.

Marin, 29, tried to mount a comeback in the second but the Spaniard quickly ran out of steam. An has made the final of every tournament she has played in this year and said she was feeling confident heading into Sunday.

“I will do my best to make a great match,” she told reporters.

World number six Marin, the Rio Olympic gold medallist, has faced a long road to recovery from a

devastating knee injury that ruled her out of the Tokyo Olympics and denied her the chance to defend her title.

A disappointed Marin said she had made too many mistakes and her opponent had controlled the shuttle and on-court drift better.

An will meet world number five He Bingjiao in the final after the Chinese powerhouse beat Mia Blichfeldt from Denmark 21-13, 21-18.

“In the first set, I played more boldly because I had the advantage of playing against the wind. After switching

sides, Mia played with great precision,” He told reporters.

In the men’s singles draw, Hong Kong’s Lee Cheuk-yiu booked a finals berth after outpacing Frenchman Toma Junior Popov 21-14, 21-16 in 35 minutes.

Meanwhile, the crowd went wild as local hope and world number five Kunlavut Vitidsarn came from one set down to beat India’s Lakshya Sen in a cliffhanger 75-minute match.

Vitidsarn triumphed 13-21, 21-17, 21-13.

(AFP)

FOOTBALL

Gundogan double secures FA Cup for Manchester City

City can complete a treble if they beat Inter Milan in Champions League final



Manchester City players celebrate with the trophy after winning the FA Cup at the Wembley Stadium in London yesterday.

AFP
London

Manchester City are one game away from a historic treble after Ilkay Gundogan scored twice to beat Manchester United 2-1 in the FA Cup final yesterday.

Pep Guardiola's men completed a domestic double at Wembley and can become just the second side, after United in 1998/99, to win the Premier League, FA Cup and Champions League in the same season should they beat Inter Milan to become European champions for the first time on June 10.

"We are in a position we will probably never be in again," said Guardiola.

"To win the FA Cup, the emotions are so special and to celebrate it with our people is really great."

Gundogan scored the fastest goal in FA Cup final history after just 12 seconds.

United levelled on 33 minutes through Bruno Fernandes' penalty after Jack Grealish was harshly penalised for handball.

But the City captain, in what could be his final game for the club on English soil with his contract expiring at the end of the season, volleyed home the winner six minutes into the second-half.

"Everyone knows the FA Cup is the most beautiful domestic club competition in the world, so to win this trophy again and complete the double is amazing for us," said Gundogan. "We have a chance to do something special and win the treble and we do not want to let this opportunity pass us by."

The first major final between the Manchester giants had the most explosive of starts. Most of the 83,000 crowd were still taking their seats from the pre-match festivities when Victor Lindelof's headed clearance sat up perfectly for Gundogan to volley home a stunning strike. That appeared to set the tone for the Premier

League champions as United were barely able to get across the halfway line in the first half hour.

But Erik ten Hag's men got the slice of luck they needed to get back into the game. Aaron Wan-Bissaka's header back across the City box brushed the arm of Grealish and referee Paul Tierney awarded a penalty after a VAR review. Fernandes coolly sent Stefan Ortega the wrong way, but the Portuguese's celebrations in front of the City fans were met with a flurry of objects thrown from the stands, one of which struck Lindelof.

Having fought so hard to gain a foothold, United were made to pay for another slow start in the second-half. Gundogan was the goalscorer again as he fired home from De Bruyne's free-kick. But more questions will be asked of whether David De Gea remains the right man to be United's number one goalkeeper after the 32-year-old Spaniard's sluggish attempt to keep it out.

"They were tough goals, they were so soft and avoidable," said Ten Hag. "When you play against City and you don't concede almost nothing from open play, it is a big credit for the team, but if you concede goals like this it is disappointing."

De Gea did at least make big saves to keep United in the game from De Bruyne and Haaland, while Gundogan was denied a rare FA Cup final hat-trick by the offside flag. United rallied in a tense finale as Marcus Rashford and Alejandro Garnacho flashed efforts inches off target.

The ball came back off the City bar in a goalmouth scramble deep into stoppage time. However, the Red Devils could not find the goal to deny Guardiola an 11th major trophy as City boss and protect the unique legacy of Alex Ferguson's great side 24 years ago.

Only Inter in Istanbul in a week's time now stand between City and matching the greatest achievement English club football has ever seen.

Easy wins for Rayyan, Wakrah



Al Rayyan and Al Wakrah registered victories in the Amir Cup basketball Group 'B' matches at the Al Gharafa Indoor Hall yesterday. With the help of Brandon Spearman 22 points, Rayyan defeated Al Arabi 91-79. Brian Halums' match-high 27 went in vain as Wakrah beat Qatar SC 89-81.



Messi to leave PSG at end of season after two years at the club

Paris: Lionel Messi will leave Paris St Germain at the end of season after two years at the Ligue 1 club, Paris St Germain said yesterday. PSG were hosting Clermont in the final round of Ligue 1 late last night.

"After two seasons in the French capital, Leo Messi's adventure with Paris St Germain will come to an end at the conclusion of the 2022-23 campaign," PSG said in a statement. Messi's future at PSG had been the subject of much speculation recently, with a source close to the Argentina captain saying that he had received a formal offer to join Saudi Arabian club Al Hilal next season. He has also been linked in the media with a move back to boyhood club Barcelona, with the United States' Major League Soccer club Inter Miami also being touted as a possible destination. "I would like to thank Leo Messi for his two seasons in Paris. To see a seven-time Ballon d'Or winner

in the Rouge & Bleu and at Parc des Princes, winning back-to-back Ligue 1 titles and inspiring our younger players has been a pleasure," PSG president Nasser al-Khelaifi said in the club's statement. "His contribution to Paris Saint-Germain and Ligue 1 cannot be understated and we wish Leo and his family all the best for the future."

While he has 21 goals and 20 assists for PSG in all competitions this season, Messi failed to have a big impact at PSG and in his two seasons at the club, could not help them go past the last 16 in the Champions League.

On Friday, Spanish defender Sergio Ramos said he was leaving PSG. The 37-year-old arrived at Parc des Princes on a free transfer before the 2021-22 season after failing to reach an agreement to extend his 16-year stay at Real Madrid. The experienced centre-back will leave the French capital, with his contract expiring.

SPOTLIGHT

Barca clinch women's Champions League with comeback victory



Barcelona players after winning the Women's Champions League final against Wolfsburg. (AFP)

AFP
Eindhoven, Netherlands

Patri Guijarro struck twice as Barcelona produced a stunning comeback to beat Wolfsburg 3-2 and clinch a second Women's Champions League trophy yesterday. The Catalans were two goals down at the break but hit back strongly to triumph in Eindhoven, with Fridolina Rolfo stroking home the winner with 20 minutes remaining. Jonatan Giraldez's side have now won two of the last three finals after earning their first triumph over Chelsea in 2021, continuing to establish themselves as the main rivals to record eight-time winners Lyon.

Barcelona secured victory with two-time Ballon d'Or winner Alexia Putellas on the bench until the final stages, as she continues to find form after the knee injury which sidelined her for most of

the season.

Wolfsburg took the lead after just three minutes, when Ewa Pajor picked Lucy Bronze's pocket on the edge of the box and rammed past Sandra Panos. The England international last played in April, having surgery on her knee after the semi-final first-leg win over Chelsea, and that rust showed. Goalkeeper Panos might have done better too, getting a hand on top scorer Pajor's effort but not doing enough to thwart her ninth strike of the tournament.

Barcelona defender Irene Paredes should have equalised but sent a free header wide at the far post from Mapi Leon's sweetly-delivered corner. Caroline Graham Hansen, who scored in both legs of the semi-final win over Chelsea, also spurned a fine chance from point-blank range, failing to make solid contact on a cross.

Soon Barcelona paid the price

for their profligacy, with Wolfsburg netting the second on the counter-attack. Veteran forward Alexandra Popp outmuscled Leon off the ball before darting into the box to head home from Pajor's cross. The Germans deserved their advantage, with Barcelona lacking sharpness and not matching their opponents' energy levels.

Guijarro netted twice in the space of 109 seconds early in the second half to pull the game level. First she finished well from Graham Hansen's cut-back, with the Norwegian winger blazing into the box and teeing up her team-mate. Then Guijarro headed home after Aitana Bonmati skinned Pajor and whipped in a cross from the right.

Wolfsburg were rocking and Barcelona's third felt almost inevitable, arriving after defender Lynn Wilms blasted the ball at team-mate Kathrin Hendrich in her own six-yard box.

Ibrahimovic to leave Milan at season's end

Milan: Zlatan Ibrahimovic's time at AC Milan is coming to an end after the Serie A club announced that he would say his farewells following their last match of the season against Verona. "Tomorrow (Sunday) evening after the final game of the season... AC Milan will say goodbye to Zlatan Ibrahimovic with a brief ceremony," Milan said in a statement. "AC Milan would like to thank Zlatan for the magnificent time that we have spent together."

The veteran striker's representatives would not comment when asked if he would retire once leaving Milan. However Italian media report that Ibrahimovic could join Monza next season, which would reunite him with former Milan owner Silvio Berlusconi and his right-hand man Adriano Galliani. Former Italian prime minister Berlusconi, who sold Milan for 740 million euros in 2017 after three decades of glory and bought Monza for a relative pittance the following year, took Ibrahimovic to Milan on loan from Barcelona in 2010.

The Swede won Serie A that campaign, which had been Milan's most recent league title until pipping local rivals Inter Milan on the final day of last season. Ibrahimovic was a key figure in Milan's resurgence to the top of Italian football after his return to the club as a free agent in late 2019, helping to bring them back from the doldrums and eventually win the Scudetto last season.

He has hardly featured for Stefano Pioli's side this term after being plagued with injuries, returning in February following surgery on his left knee in May.

ROUND-UP

Madrid has no doubts about Benzema staying: Ancelotti

Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti indicated yesterday he expected Karim Benzema to stay at the club despite recent links to a Saudi Arabia move.

"Benzema is ready to play tomorrow (against Athletic Bilbao in the final league game of the season), he has recovered very well, he has a year on his contract, so we have no doubts here," Ancelotti said. "The club's legends have to retire at Real Madrid. I think that's what all the fans and the club think, but then there's the thinking of the player."

Reports emerged during the week about Benzema being set to move to a Saudi club, but the player himself dismissed them on Thursday when speaking at an awards ceremony. However Ancelotti said there will be some departures and arrivals at the Santiago Bernabeu this summer. "It's going to be a squad with some different players, but it's going to be competitive," he said.

The Italian coach would not go any further, beyond confirming the arrival of Rayo Vallecano defender Fran Garcia, as reported months previously. Ancelotti avoided talking about Madrid's alleged interest in England and Tottenham striker Harry Kane.

ASENSIO TO LEAVE MADRID IN SUMMER

Real Madrid forward Marco Asensio confirmed he is leaving the Spanish giants at the end of his contract in June. The Spain international did not confirm his next destination but has reports have linked him to French champions Paris Saint-Germain.

The 27-year-old winger signed from Real Mallorca in 2014, spending a season on loan at Espanyol before making his Madrid debut in August 2016. Asensio won La Liga and the Champions League three times each with Madrid, as well as the Copa del Rey this season for the first time, scoring 61 goals in 285 appearances. The forward offered an explosive impact from the bench but never managed to establish himself as a key starter for Los Blancos.

CELTIC WIN SCOTTISH CUP TO COMPLETE DOMESTIC TREBLE

Celtic shrugged off speculation over manager



Ange Postecoglou's future to complete a domestic treble by beating Inverness Caledonian Thistle 3-1 in the Scottish Cup final yesterday. Postecoglou, who has been linked with the vacant managerial position at Tottenham, won his fifth trophy in two seasons at Celtic thanks to goals from Kyogo Furuhashi, Liel Abada and Jota. A treble of Scottish Premiership, League Cup and Scottish Cup is the eighth in Celtic's history, five of which have come in the last seven seasons.

INTER WIN CHAMPIONS LEAGUE FINAL WARM-UP AT TORINO

Inter warmed up for the Champions League final with 1-0 win at Torino yesterday which provisionally pushed them up to second in Serie A on the final weekend of the season. Marcelo Brozovic struck the only goal of the game in the 37th minute in Turin when he turned on the edge of the area and lashed in his third of the season.

Simone Inzaghi's side, who face Manchester City in Istanbul next weekend, are a single point above Lazio who are at Empoli in one of the day's two late games. Inter are already sure of competing in next season's edition of Europe's top club competition as they are 11 points above fifth-placed Atalanta.

Ivan Juric's Torino sit ninth and three points behind Fiorentina who will finish eighth, which could offer a spot in Europe if seventh-placed Juventus are barred from continental competition by UEFA for financial irregularities.