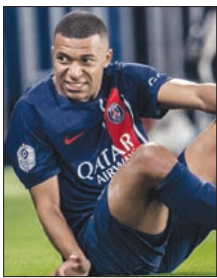


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Mbappe comes off hurt as PSG demolish Marseille

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SPOTLIGHT

QOC hosts reception for over 500 guests at Hangzhou Asiad

A reception hosted by the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), with the presence of Team Qatar athletes, for over 500 guests, including many VIPs and friends from across the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) and Olympic Movement, was a resounding success.

Held during the Asian Games Hangzhou 2022, the Team Qatar Reception featured several of Qatar's exceptional athletes who held an inspirational panel to share their aspirations for the Asian Games while offering guests the opportunity to ask questions or share their well wishes.

The reception was attended by QOC leadership, as well as esteemed guests, including OCA Acting President Raja Randhir Singh and Acting Director General Vinod Kumar Tiwari. They were joined by IOC Vice-Presidents Ser Miang Ng and Juan Antonio Samaranch, and Executive Board Member Prince Feisal al- Hussein, in addition to Chinese Olympic Committee Vice-President, Hangzhou 2022 Organising Committee Secretary-General and IOC Member Li Lingwei. Association of National Olympic Committees Secretary-General and IOC Member Gunilla Lindberg also joined the celebrations.

Also in attendance at the high-profile, vibrant celebration were a number of Asian NOC Presidents, as well as various Asian and International Federation Executive Board Members. Welcoming the esteemed guests, QOC Secretary-General Jassim bin Rashid al-Buainain stated: "We must reiterate our thanks once again to our Chinese colleagues for organising this excellent Games and bringing the best of Asia back together again. Just three days in, we have already witnessed so many fantastic races, matches and more.

He added: "We are honoured to host the 2030 Asian Games, and through Project Legacy, we are committed to working with all Asian NOCs to ensure they can send their best possible teams. We are confident in our ability to host a fantastic event, but we also look forward to learning from Hangzhou and China, who consistently host excellent sporting events."

"There is of course a long way to go at these Games and a lot more sport to be



Qatar Olympic Committee's Second Vice-President Dr Thani bin Abdul Rahman al-Kuwari and Secretary-General Jassim bin Rashid al-Buainain with Olympic Council of Asia's Acting President Raja Randhir Singh and Acting Director General Vinod Kumar Tiwari and other officials at a reception hosted by QOC in Hangzhou, China, yesterday.

played. But I wish you and all your teams the very best of luck over the coming days and weeks."

In particular, the Team Qatar Athletes' panel featured Qatari athletes Abdulla al-Tamimi, the squash star player ranked 29 in the world, and tennis player Hind al-Mudhaka. Notably, al-Mudhaka is the daughter of chess Grandmasters and former Qatar champions, Mohamed al-Mudhaka and Zhu Chen.

Her father, Mohamed al-Mudhaka, also serves as the President of the Qatar Chess Federation. The reception also saw guests immerse themselves in a vibrant array of cultural activities and performances, which showcased the diverse cultures of both Qatar and China.

These captivating activities were not just entertainment; they were powerful reminders of the profound bond between sport and culture, a bond that lies at the very heart of the Asian Games.



Qatar athletes' Abdulla al-Tamimi and Hind al-Mudhaka speak at a panel discussion moderated by Director of the Marketing and Communications Department of QOC Sheikha Asma al-Thani yesterday.

QATAR ROUND-UP

Tijan and Younousse cruise into beach volleyball semis

Qatar's volleyball team to face Japan for bronze today after going down to Iran in semi-finals

By Sports Reporter
Hangzhou, China

Qatar tasted mixed fortunes at the Hangzhou Asian Games yesterday. The beach volleyball pair Ahmed Tijan & Cherif Younousse cruised into the semi-finals but the volleyball team's gold medal hopes were cut short ruthlessly by Iran.

Tijan and Younousse, the defending champions and bronze medallists at the Tokyo Olympics, had a comfortable 21-17, 21-9 win over Iran's Bahman Salemi and Sina Shoukati 21-17, 21-19 at Ningbo Banbianshan Beach Volleyball Centre in the quarter-finals.

The Qatari duo will meet Kazakhstan's Sergey Bogatu and Dmitriy Yakovlev today in the semi-finals, which is scheduled at 12pm Qatar time.

But the spikers were in for a rude awakening yesterday, as the two-time defending champions Iran swept past them 3-0 (25-20, 25-20 and 25-22) at the Linping Sports Centre. Iran's Amirhossein Esfandiari had 14 kills, two blocks and three aces to top the scoring chart with 19 points. Iran reaped 41 points from attacking, compared to 32 for Qatar. Iran, who will meet China in the final, also led in aces at six to Qatar's one. FIVB Challenger Cup silver medallists Qatar still will have a shot at a medal though as they face off against World No.



Qatar's Ahmed Tijan (right) and Cherif Younousse celebrate after winning their beach volleyball quarter-finals against Iran's Bahman Salemi and Sina Shoukati at the Hangzhou Asian Games yesterday.

3 Japan in the bronze medal play off. The second string Japan side slumped to a straight-sets loss to China 25-15, 25-20, 25-21.

There was disappointment elsewhere as Qatar swimmers,

shooters and tennis players put up below-par performances, while Judoka Khalil Rebahi was knocked out in the last 16 by South Korea's Joonhwan Lee 10-0. In the 10m Running Target, Mohamed



Qatar and Iran volleyball players in action during the semi-final match at the Linping Sports Centre in Hangzhou yesterday.

Haq finished 15th while Mohamed Abouteama was 17th out of 18 competitors. In the 25m Rapid Fire Pistol Men's qualification, Abdullah al-Obaidli shot 545 to finish in 27th place.

SHOOTERS IN ACTION TODAY AS AL-ATTIYAH GUNS FOR GOLD

Today, London Olympics bronze medallist Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah will be in action in the skeet event along with his fellow shooters Rashid al-Athba and Masoud al-Athba. Al-Attiyah was optimistic of returning with a medal, with the final of the skeet event slated for

tomorrow. Al-Attiyah has won two gold medals in team skeet at the 2002 Busan and 2010 Guangzhou Asian Games. The 52-year-old – also a rally legend – now wants to clinch his third gold in Hangzhou.

"The competition will be strong, and the most prominent competitors are Kuwait, China and Chinese Taipei. But we are strong at the team level and we hope that we will be successful," said al-Attiyah yesterday.

"The weather seems to fluctuate between humidity and rain, but that will not affect the focus of our team members," he added.

The women's shooters will also be in action today. Reem al-Sharshani, Sarah Ghulam, and Hajar Ghulam will hope for a medal in the skeet event, while Noora al-Mutawa and Nasra Mohamed are competing in the 25m pistol. In the 10m Air Rifle Mixed Team event, Ali al-Muhammadi and Matara al-Aseiri carry Qatar's hopes.

Meanwhile, Abdulla al-Tamimi is targeting a medal as he spearheads Qatar's squash team's challenge. They face Pakistan and India in their Group A matches today. "It has always been a dream of mine to stand on the podium at the Asian Games. I have worked hard over the past few years and I hope to make everyone in Qatar proud," al-Tamimi, who reached a career-high 17 on the world rankings before injury cut short his season last year.

The basketball team faces a tough opening fixture against Japan today. Qatar are in Group D in basketball, with South Korea and Indonesia their other opponents. The 3x3 basketball team begins its campaign today by facing Thailand, with matches against Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan slated in the coming days.

Tomorrow, Qatar's U-23 football team will face off against China in the last 16 match.

The Al Annabi were poor in the group stages, losing to Japan and were held by Palestine, but have managed to squeeze through to the knockout stage.

SPOTLIGHT

India gets ready to stage seven-week ICC World Cup

48 MATCHES WILL BE PLAYED OVER THE COURSE OF 46 DAYS AT 10 DIFFERENT VENUES

AFP
New Delhi

India target a third World Cup triumph when the country hosts cricket's seven-week global showpiece, buoyed by an economic boom and growing, international self-confidence.

India shared hosting with Pakistan in 1987, then Pakistan and Sri Lanka in 1996 before another three-way split with Sri Lanka and Bangladesh in 2011.

This time India goes it alone with 48 matches scheduled to be played over 46 days at 10 different venues.

However, the build-up has been far from smooth after arch-rivals Pakistan reportedly considered a boycott when India refused to travel across the border for the Asia Cup.

As a result, the announcement of the schedule for the World Cup was delayed until just three months before the first ball was to be bowled.

Fears over security for the India-Pakistan blockbuster clash in Ahmedabad then saw the match moved back a day, sparking a domino effect of nine rescheduled fixtures.

Pakistan's visit to India will be their first since the 2016 Twenty20 World Cup.

The opening match on October 5, between champions England and New Zealand, as well as the



final on November 19 are being staged at Ahmedabad's Narendra Modi stadium, the world's biggest cricket arena boasting a capacity of over 130,000.

India will face Pakistan at the mega-venue on October 14.

The city which independence hero Mahatma Gandhi called home for 15 years is tipped as a potential host city should India bid for the 2036 Olympics.

The gathering of the best players of India's favourite game will be the sporting culmination of a year that saw India overtake China as the world's most populous country, after displacing former coloniser Britain as its fifth-biggest economy in 2021.

India are two-time champi-

ons having added the 2011 title on home soil to their 1983 triumph, a Kapil Dev-inspired breakthrough performance.

They boast superstar Virat Kohli who has made more than 13,000 runs in the ODI format.

Second on the current active list is skipper Rohit Sharma with just over 10,000.

Fiercely seamer Mohamed Siraj recently became the world's top ranked ODI bowler while Kuldeep Yadav is likely to thrive with his leg-spinning box of tricks.

'Create new memories'

"The memories of past World Cup victories, especially the iconic 2011 win, are etched in our hearts, and we want to create new memories

for our fans," said Kohli who featured in the 2011 victory.

Pakistan, the 1992 champions, have lost seven times out of seven to India at past World Cups.

However, skipper Babar Azam will be key to turning around that run as he leads the way in the batting rankings.

His average of over 58 better than even that of Kohli.

Despite the loss of fast bowler Naseem Shah to injury, Pakistan can call on Shaheen Shah Afridi, the sport's most imposing opening quick bowler.

Still just 23, Afridi has 86 ODI wickets at a meagre average of 23.36.

Defending champions England, who triumphed in a nail-biting

2019 World Cup final against New Zealand at Lord's, can harness the destructive firepower of Ben Stokes who smashed 84 in that game which went to a Super Over conclusion.

In the build-up to the World Cup, Stokes struck the highest score by an England batsman in an ODI, his 182 setting up a thrashing of New Zealand at The Oval earlier this month.

The tournament will likely see the farewell ODI performances of Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan and Kiwi opening bowlers Trent Boult and Tim Southee.

Shakib is the top-ranked all-rounder in ODI cricket.

The 36-year-old has made more than 7,000 runs in the format with

55 half-centuries and 308 wickets.

Southee and Boult, both 34, have claimed a combined 409 wickets in the format.

Australia are five-time champions, comfortably the most successful nation at the World Cup, but preparations were hit when opener Travis Head fractured his hand.

However, they still boast veteran run-getter David Warner who has amassed over 6,300 ODI runs.

South Africa, who have endured a roller-coaster relationship with the World Cup, undone by rain rules in 1992 and 2003, have also been hit by injuries, losing key pacers Anrich Nortje and Sisanda Magala.

For Afghanistan, slow bowlers Rashid Khan, Mohamed Nabi, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, who made his international debut at 16, and Noor Ahmad will be key on welcoming Indian pitches.

Sri Lanka, the 1996 winners, will be fired up by the indignity of being bowled out for just 50 and losing the Asia Cup final to India by 10 wickets.

Matheesha Pathirana, just 20, and thriving in his role as a 2023 version of Lasith Malinga with his deceptive, slinging action, is likely to be Sri Lanka's go-to fast bowling surprise.

Netherlands complete the line-up and are match-tough after negotiating the qualifying round in July where two-time champions West Indies crashed out.

ANNOUNCEMENT

ECB promises to establish independent regulator

Reuters
London

The England & Wales Cricket Board (ECB) will establish an independent regulator and increase investment in the women's game as part of efforts to make cricket more inclusive after a report found widespread discrimination across the sport.

The ECB published its response yesterday after the Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket (ICEC) outlined 44 recommendations in the report, which found evidence of deep-rooted racism, sexism, classism and elitism.

The report recommended the creation of a new regulatory body, independent of the ECB, within the next year. The ECB said the regulator would be operational before the start of the 2024 season and report to the Independent Cricket Regulatory Board.

Within the current broadcast cycle, which runs until 2028, the ECB said it would invest at least £25mn (\$30.55mn) per year to further grow the women's and girls' game at every level.

The investment will be independent of any revenue generated by the women's game.

"There is no doubt that the ICEC highlighted to great effect the impact of discrimination on individuals and the extent of the systemic challenges to be addressed," ECB chair Richard Thompson said in a statement.

"Its in-depth analysis also presented an opportunity to put in place a comprehensive plan of action that will deliver meaningful change



and rebuild trust among the communities we serve.

"This response represents a set of actions that will accelerate and intensify our work to make cricket a game for everyone, actions that cricket can deliver and fund within an achievable timeframe."

Last month, the ECB equalised match fees for England's women and men's team with immediate effect, implementing a change recommended in the ICEC report.

"In collaboration with the game, we will develop a Women's Professional Game Strategy for 2025-2029 to plot our path to sustainable domestic player pay parity in the future," the ECB said.

The ECB will also publish a state of equity report every three years and adopt a more

transparent and accountable approach to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI).

Other planned steps in line with ICEC recommendations include overhauling the talent pathway to "make it more meritocratic, inclusive, accountable, transparent and consistent" and adding victimisation as an offence in the Anti-Discrimination Code.

"On the day the ICEC published its report, I apologised without reservation on behalf of cricket's wider leadership to anyone who has suffered discrimination or felt excluded from our sport," Thompson added. "As well as reiterating that apology here, I reaffirm our absolute commitment that cricket will strive to become the most inclusive sport in England and Wales. Cricket hasn't got it right in the past, but this is an opportunity to move forwards together."

In an interview with *Sky Sports* yesterday, former Yorkshire cricketer Azeem Rafiq, whose allegations of institutional racism at Yorkshire rocked English cricket, said the ECB's response was inadequate.

"I expected the three-month response to be detailed, clear with strong commitments and unfortunately from what I've read it falls incredibly short and it's flimsy at best," Rafiq said.

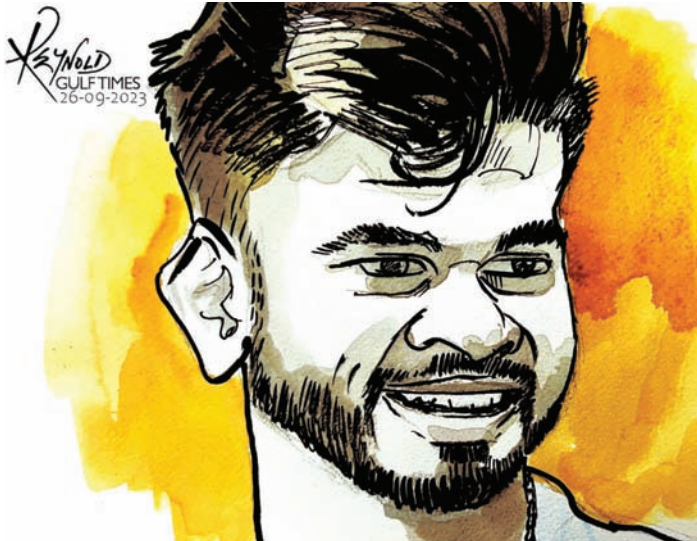
"How independent is the new regulator? We don't have any detail about it... There are a couple of positives with commitments around women's cricket and match-fee equalisation, that should be the bare minimum."

"These commitments are important, but is it going to solve the other issues that led us here in the first place? I don't think it will."

The ECB declined to comment.

FOCUS

Top-order bat Iyer sees flexibility as key trait for hopes of India spot



Reuters
New Delhi

Shreyas Iyer knows competition for a spot in India's batting lineup is fierce and the 28-year-old said he is prepared to bat anywhere for the hosts at the upcoming Cricket World Cup.

The stylish right-hander, who delivered a match-winning century in Sunday's second one-day game against Australia, had pretty much nailed down the number four position until suffering a lower back injury in March that required surgery.

Things did not go smoothly on his return. Picked for the Asia Cup squad, he missed much of India's successful campaign due to a back spasm. But Iyer proved his worth on Sunday with a 90-ball 105 to set up India's series-clinching victory in Indore and was named Player of the Match.

With KL Rahul, Ishan Kishan and Suryakumar Yadav also in strong form, Iyer said he would bat wherever India captain Rohit Sharma tells him to.

"I'm flexible about whatever number I'd be getting to bat," Iyer, who is expected to retain his usual number four position in the World Cup, told reporters.

"(It's) wherever the team requires at that point of time - if I have to go lower down the order, or up the order."

"There's competition and that's the best part about this team ... as a professional, I can't be complaining about that."

"All I can say is I will embrace the opportunity that I'd be getting

in future and leave no stone unturned in my preparation."

Iyer averages 46-plus in ODIs with a healthy strike rate of 97.55 and the importance of his latest knock was not lost on the Mumbai batter.

"It was one of my finest innings, especially coming off injury. I was eagerly waiting to come and perform for the team. I keep telling myself my competition is against me. It's about my mindset especially when the chips are down."

India will look to complete a 3-0 series sweep when they take on Australia in the final ODI in Rajkot on Sunday.

Meanwhile Australian all-rounder Sean Abbott admitted his team is struggling to bowl in the right areas in the two matches of the series.

"We've obviously just not executed as well as we would have liked," Abbott said after the loss to India on Sunday.

"It's all well and good to say that we'll take learnings out of these games and stuff like that, but we do need to execute better as a whole."

"It showed today when we were bowling, and it was a little bit the same in South Africa as well, as soon as we missed the stumps we were punished," he added. "Although we went for 400 again (in the second ODI), I thought the death bowling was pretty good," Abbott said.

"It can still be improved a lot. But like I've mentioned a couple of times already, our execution and bringing those stumps into play, owning our lengths and putting pressure on the batters that way certainly has to improve and I have no doubt that we've got a very skilled attack."

Visas issued for Pakistan team for World Cup in India

New Delhi: Visas have been issued for the Pakistan team for their participation in the 50-overs World Cup in India, the governing International Cricket Council (ICC) said yesterday, following complaints of a delay in the process. The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) had written to the governing body complaining about a visa delay which, it said, had disrupted the team's preparation for the showpiece event across the border. "Visas have been issued to the Pakistan team," an ICC spokesperson told Reuters without elaborating further. PCB spokesperson Umar Farooq confirmed to Reuters they have been asked to collect their passports from the Indian high

commission in Islamabad. India and Pakistan have suspended bilateral cricket, thanks to a soured political relations between the neighbours, and play each other only in multi-team events like the World Cup and Asia Cup. Earlier in a strongly-worded statement, Farooq decried the "inequitable treatment" meted out to a Pakistan team, who are scheduled to arrive in India tomorrow. "There has been an extraordinary delay in getting clearance and securing Indian visas for the Pakistan team for ICC World Cup," Farooq said in the statement. "We have written to ICC raising our concerns about inequitable treatment towards Pakistan."

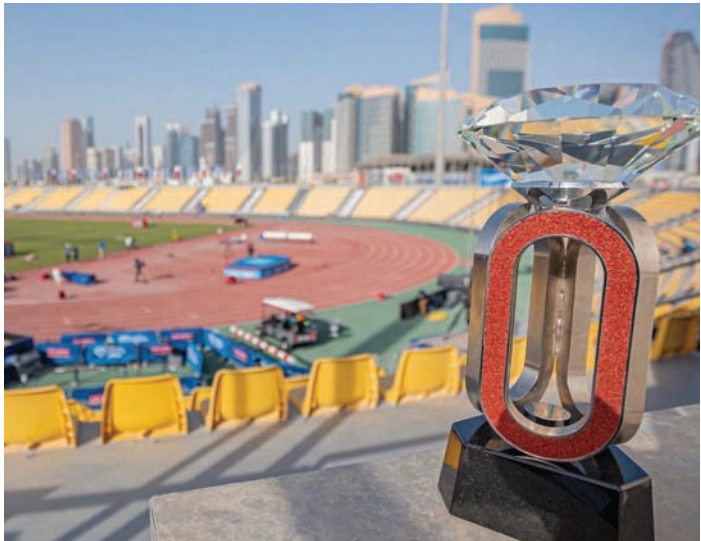
Bangladesh set for NZ ODI



Bangladesh's captain Najmul Hossain Shanto (left) listens to his team coach Nic Pothas during a practice session in Dhaka on the eve of their third and final one-day international against New Zealand. (AFP)

ATHLETICS

Doha to host DL round on May 10 in 2024



By Sports Reporter
Doha

Doha will host its next year's Diamond League (DL) meeting on May 10 following back-to-back legs in China, according to the calendar released by the world governing body IAAF yesterday.

The 2024 Diamond League calendar will begin in Xiamen on April 20 and finish at the two-day season finale in Brussels on September 13-14th.

After a historic season came to a dramatic climax in Eugene earlier this month, athletes and fans can now set their sights on the 2024 Diamond League season.

The 2024 calendar will feature 15 of the most prestigious one-day meetings in global track and field.

As in previous years, athletes will compete for points at 14 series meetings, with the most

successful in each discipline qualifying for the Wanda Diamond League Final at the end of the season.

The season will begin with a Chinese double bill, with meetings in Xiamen on 20th April and Shanghai on 27th April.

Following meetings in Doha, Rabat and Eugene, the series will then head to Oslo and Stockholm for the first European meetings on May 30th and June 2nd.

In July, meetings in Paris, Monaco and London will give athletes the chance to prepare for the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. After the Olympics, there will be four more chances to earn points in Lausanne, Silesia, Rome and Zurich before the season finale on September 13th-14th.

The 2024 season will see the Wanda Diamond League Final return to Brussels for the first time since 2019, with all 32 Diamond League champions set to be crowned over one weekend at the Allianz Memorial Van Damme.

**DIAMOND LEAGUE CALENDAR:
The 2024 season**

20 April: Xiamen, China
27 April: Shanghai, China
10 May: Doha, Qatar
19 May: Rabat, Morocco
25 May: Eugene, USA
30 May: Oslo, Norway
2 June: Stockholm, Sweden
7 July: Paris, France
12 July: Monte Carlo, Monaco
20 July: London, Great Britain
22 August: Lausanne, Switzerland
25 August: Silesia, Poland
29 August: Rome, Italy
5 September: Zurich, Switzerland
13 & 14 September: Brussels, Belgium - Diamond League Final

FOOTBALL

Mbappe comes off hurt as PSG beat Marseille

The France superstar was replaced just after the half-hour mark

AFP
Paris

Paris Saint-Germain demolished Marseille in Ligue 1 on Sunday with summer signing Goncalo Ramos scoring twice in a 4-0 victory for the reigning champions, but Kylian Mbappe came off injured in the first half.

Mbappe appeared to hurt his ankle in winning the free-kick which saw Achraf Hakimi put PSG ahead in the eighth minute at the Parc des Princes.

The France superstar was eventually replaced just after the half-hour mark, but the home side went on to double their lead before the break through Randal Kolo Muani.

Ramos then headed in the home side's third goal just after half-time and completed the rout late on as PSG followed up their 2-0 victory over Borussia Dortmund in the Champions League in mid-week.

The win leaves Luis Enrique's team in fourth place after six games, two points behind surprise leaders Brest, who beat Lyon 1-0 on Saturday.

Luis Enrique suggested after the game the injury suffered by his top scorer Mbappe was nothing serious.

"I think it was a knock. He tried to change the strapping on it and continue but the pain wouldn't go away," the coach said.

"I don't think it is anything serious and I suppose he will be back soon but it is better not to take risks when a player is not 100 percent."

The former Barcelona and Spain boss added: "I think this was without doubt the most complete performance in my time here and luckily for us it came against our biggest rivals."

Marseille had started the day unbeaten and were above PSG in the table, but they were out-classed here at the end of a turbulent week.

Their coach Marcelino Garcia Toral resigned on Wednesday after only seven games at the helm and following an angry meeting between club officials and fan representatives.

Marseille president Pablo Longoria and several senior colleagues opted not to travel to Amsterdam for Thursday's 3-3 draw with Ajax in the Europa League amid doubt as to whether they would carry on.

Double for Ramos

However, Longoria has since decided to stay and was in Paris for Sunday's game in which former player Jacques Abardonado took interim charge of the team.

"We showed a total lack of character and if you do that against some of the best players in Europe that is what happens," Abardonado admitted.



Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe grimaces as he sits on the pitch during the French L1 match against Olympique de Marseille at The Parc des Princes Stadium in Paris on Sunday. The France international was eventually replaced just after the half-hour mark. (AFP)

Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe grimaces as he sits on the pitch during the French L1 match against Olympique de Marseille at The Parc des Princes Stadium in Paris on Sunday. The France international was eventually replaced just after the half-hour mark. (AFP)

Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe grimaces as he sits on the pitch during the French L1 match against Olympique de Marseille at The Parc des Princes Stadium in Paris on Sunday. The France international was eventually replaced just after the half-hour mark. (AFP)

Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe grimaces as he sits on the pitch during the French L1 match against Olympique de Marseille at The Parc des Princes Stadium in Paris on Sunday. The France international was eventually replaced just after the half-hour mark. (AFP)

Rapinoe makes winning farewell as US beat SA

Chicago: Megan Rapinoe was a winner in her farewell game for the United States on Sunday, setting up a goal with a corner kick in a 2-0 triumph over South Africa.

The iconic 38-year-old striker, celebrated for off-field activism as well as glories on the pitch, ended her epic US career with 63 goals in 203 caps over more than 17 years with a 54th-minute exit at Chicago's Soldier Field.

"It makes me really proud to know we've been as successful on the field as we have, but also that we've helped make the world a little bit better of a place," Rapinoe said after the victory.

Rapinoe sparked the Americans to crowns at the 2015 and 2019 Women's World Cups and gold at the 2012 London Olympics, but was a champion for social causes as well.

Rapinoe was presented the Presidential Medal of Freedom, America's top civilian award, in 2002 by President Joe Biden.

Rapinoe, FIFA's 2019 Women's Player of the Year, also was among the leaders of the US women's successful fight with US Soccer for equal pay and conditions with the men's squad.

"She has affected so many people's lives in a positive way. She has changed this sport forever," US forward Trinity Rodman said of Rapinoe.

"I'm so grateful I'm able to play on the same field with her as well as learn from her so she's a legend."

Rapinoe, the 14th player to make 200 career appearances for the US women, was replaced by Margaret Purce in the 54th minute and departed to a standing ovation, teammates coming over to share a hug before she stepped off the pitch for the last time in a USA uniform.

"So overwhelming. It has been



amazing," Rapinoe said of the day. "It has been really wonderful, to hear all the nice things, to have a closure moment, to play in front of a big crowd again. "I'll miss it forever. I don't think I'll ever be at a moment where it will feel perfect but this is pretty close."

Rapinoe thanked fans worldwide and her teammates in speaking to the crowd after the match, saying, "I feel like I've been able to grow up in front of all of you."

"It has been such an honour to be able to wear this shirt and play with all these amazing players and to just live out my childhood dream, casually, just like in front of the world," she said.

"We fought so hard off the field to continue to create more space for ourselves to be who we are but hopefully in turn more space for you guys to be who you are."

Rapinoe told fans: "I'm not going to go away forever. Don't worry. I'm one of you guys now."

Rapinoe looks forward to time off after a few final matches with her club side, OL Reign of the National Women's Soccer League.

"I feel like I got the most out of my career," Rapinoe said.

"I did my absolute best and maximized my talent..."

"I think that's probably why I feel so at peace."

FOCUS

Morata shines as Atletico beat Real Madrid 3-1

AFP
Barcelona

Alvaro Morata struck twice for Atletico Madrid as they inflicted rivals Real Madrid's first defeat of the season, with a 3-1 derby triumph on Sunday in La Liga.

Champions Barcelona sit top of the league as Los Blancos lost their 100 percent record, with Antoine Griezmann also on target for Atletico, fifth, at their raucous Metropolitan stadium.

Real Madrid are third, a point behind Barcelona and high-flying Girona in second place, after they failed to match Atletico's level of intensity in an enthralling clash.

Morata netted an early header and Griezmann doubled Atletico's lead, before Toni Kroos pulled Madrid into the game with a stinging drive before half-time.

However Morata headed home again at the start of the second half and Madrid could not find a way back against an Atletico side bouncing back from what coach Diego Simeone labelled their "weakest" performance of his long reign last weekend.

"It was a problem of defensive fragility, which we haven't had in the first few games," Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti told reporters.

"In just over 45 minutes they put three past us, it was not a good



Atletico Madrid's Spanish forward Alvaro Morata celebrates scoring during the La Liga match against Real Madrid CF in Madrid on Sunday. (AFP)

night ... the team was not compact, above all in the first half, Atletico took advantage of that."

Morata led the line well for Atletico and was rewarded with two goals, which he celebrated wildly.

"What I need is to feel important and this year, maybe I feel more important than in other years - I hope we keep winning because I really want to win a title with Atletico," Morata told DAZN.

"I'm very happy for all the fans. I said it the other day ... that the fans are going to have the most important role, and that's how it was. "We're all together, us on the pitch and them in the stands."

SPOTLIGHT

Nunez has taken massive steps, says Klopp

Reuters
London

Darwin Nunez has made big strides in his second season at Liverpool, manager Juergen Klopp said on Sunday after the Uruguayan striker scored in their 3-1 Premier League win over West Ham United.

The 24-year-old has scored 12 goals and registered four assists in 35 league appearances since being signed from Portuguese club Benfica last year for an initial fee of €75mn (\$79.85mn).

After struggling in front of goal in his debut campaign at the club, Nunez has netted three goals and provided one assist in his six



Liverpool's Darwin Nunez with manager Juergen Klopp after being substituted in the Premier League match against West Ham United at Anfield, Liverpool, Britain, on Sunday. (Reuters)

league appearances so far this season. He also had a goal and an

assist in Liverpool's 3-1 win over LASK in the Europa League on

Thursday. "Massive steps in the last few weeks. He is a threat," Klopp said. "He was always available for us; it is super-important for us that we have now - I am not sure it's the right word - a ball player."

"The defensive work he puts in now, that's probably the main difference. He always wanted, but it was less coordinated. Now that looks much better and we found a way how we can do it around him."

Liverpool are unbeaten in their league and are in second place, two points behind Manchester City. They next host Championship side Leicester City in the League Cup tomorrow, followed by a league visit to fourth-placed Tottenham Hotspur on Saturday.

Sheikh Joaan attends OCA's 110-year celebration, meets Qatari athletes at Games Village



HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani, President of the Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC), attended the Olympic Council of Asia's (OCA) ceremony on the occasion of the 110th anniversary of the launch of the first edition of the Asian Games on the sidelines of the Hangzhou Asiad in China. The QOC chief also visited the headquarters of the Qatari delegation at the Asian Games Village. During the visit, Sheikh Joaan was accompanied by Qatar's ambassador to China Mohamed bin Abdullah al-Duhaimi, QOC Second Vice-President Dr Thani bin Abdul Rahman al-Kuwari, Secretary-General Jassim bin Rashid al-Buainain and other officials of the Qatar sports federations.

SPOTLIGHT

India shooters set world record in Hangzhou

Another shooting world record fell to Chinese teenager Lihao in 10m air rifle

AFP
Hangzhou, China

India claimed the first world record of the Hangzhou Asian Games yesterday as hosts China snapped up more gold medals and a nine-year-old skateboarder melted hearts. The Indian trio of Divyansh Panwar, Rudranksh Patil and Aishwary Tomar blew away the field with a new world best 1,893.7 points to win the men's 10m air rifle team event on day two of the multi-sports extravaganza.

They beat the previous mark of 1,893.3 set by China last month and in doing so won India's first gold of a Games where the hosts have swept 32 of the 51 titles decided so far. "In the 10m event they are both perfect athletes," Tomar said of his teammates. "Playing with them is huge, it's really good."

Another shooting world record fell to Chinese teenager Sheng Lihao in the men's 10m air rifle with his 253.3 points surpassing teammate Yu Haonan's 252.8 from Rio four years ago. "I had good luck in the final. I did quite well today, I was basically smooth," said the 18-year-old, a Tokyo Olympic silver medalist.

In other action, Mazel Paris Alegado - aged just nine - said it was "so fun" competing in skateboarding. Thought to be the youngest athlete in Hangzhou and representing the Philippines, she qualified for the "women's" park final and came seventh out of eight. The competition was won by comparative veteran Hinano Kusaki from Japan, aged 15. China's Chen Ye, also just 15, won the men's park in skateboarding.

At the Fuyang Water Sports Centre, Zhang Liang became the



India's 10m air rifle team gold medalists Divyansh Singh Panwar (left), Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar (centre) and Rudranksh Patil pose on the podium at the Fuyang Yinhu Sports Centre in Hangzhou, China. (AFP)

most successful Asian Games rower of all time. China's Zhang won the men's single sculls to add to his men's double sculls gold from Sunday and now has five Asian Games titles from four editions. "I cannot say I am a leader. I do what I should do as a rower, to pursue my goals and dreams, to do well," he said.

Elsewhere on day two of competition, three North Korean marksmen refused to join their South Korean rivals in a group

photo of medal winners after narrowly missing out on gold in a men's team shooting competition. North Korea, competing in their first major international sporting event since the pandemic, added silvers in men's team shooting and women's judo to their lone bronze.

China picked up golds in artistic gymnastics, swimming, skateboarding, taekwondo, mountain biking, fencing, wushu, shooting and rowing. But Uzbekistan stole

some of their thunder by pipping the hosts to gold in the men's four and women's single skulls.

The single skulls winner, Anna Prakaten, came into the event with some pedigree having won silver at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021 whilst representing the Russian Olympic Committee.

Another who upset China's party was Thailand's Panipak Wongpattanakit who leapt for joy after beating local fighter Guo Qing 2-1 in a tight and dramatic

MEDALS TALLY				
Country	G	S	B	T
China	39	21	9	69
South Korea	10	10	13	33
Japan	5	14	12	31
Uzbekistan	4	4	6	14
Hong Kong	3	4	7	14
India	2	3	6	11
Taiwan	2	1	3	6
Indonesia	1	1	4	6
Thailand	1	0	2	3
Macau	1	0	1	2
Tajikistan	1	0	1	2
Iran	0	3	5	8
North Korea	0	2	2	4
Vietnam	0	1	5	6
Kazakhstan	0	1	4	5
Mongolia	0	1	3	4
UAE	0	1	1	2
Brunei	0	1	0	1
Sri Lanka	0	1	0	1
Philippines	0	0	2	2
Afghanistan	0	0	1	1
Bangladesh	0	0	1	1
Kuwait	0	0	1	1
Singapore	0	0	1	1
Turkmenistan	0	0	1	1

contest in the women's -49kg taekwondo final. It was Thailand's first gold of the Games and triggered a roar of delight from several Thai journalists watching in the Games' media centre.

"My dad and my whole family are very happy," said Olympic and former world champion Wongpattanakit following a fight that included a delay in the final round whilst officials debated a points decision and a late comeback to snatch the victory.

Away from the action, between 150 and 200 athletes have been tested for doping, the Olympic Council of Asia said, with no positive results.

Mighty Qin lights up pool as Haughey claims 200m free gold

Hangzhou, China: World champion Qin Haiyang surged to the world's second fastest time this year and the Asian Games 100m breaststroke title yesterday while star freestyler Siobhan Haughey clinched Hong Kong's first-ever swimming gold medal. China won four of the seven titles on offer in the Hangzhou pool, but Haughey and South Korea's Ji Yu-chan denied them a clean sweep, taking out the women's 200m freestyle and men's 50m freestyle crowns respectively. South Korea also upset China in the men's 4x200m freestyle, but needed a new Asian record to do so.

Chinese superstar Qin was the overwhelming favourite after a stunning swim to win the world championship this year in Fukuoka in the absence of British great Adam Peaty. He went on to complete an unprecedented sweep of the breaststroke races, an achievement he is aiming to match at his home Asiad as he builds towards next year's Paris Olympics.

He first cracked the Asian Games record in the heats and bettered it again in the final to touch in 57.76sec - the second quickest of 2023 after his world championship-winning exploits. Qin finished a gaping 1.33sec ahead of teammate Yan Zibei with South Korea's Choi Dong-yeol bagging bronze. "I'm quite pleased with the result today. My form is quite similar to what it was at the world championships, and I'm trying out some new race strategies," he said. "I'm more aggressive in the first half of my swims, going faster."

It ensured yet another gold medal for the dominant hosts, whose four on day two added to the seven-from-seven they won on Sunday. Qin had already claimed a silver after finishing second to storming Olympic champion Wang Shun in the 200m medley on the opening night of action. Haughey was also in scintillating form. She pulled clear over the opening 50m and never looked back to touch in 1:54.12, leaving China's Li Bingjie and Liu Yaxin in her wake.

FOCUS

India claim cricket gold as Hangzhou fuels Olympic ambitions

Reuters
Hangzhou, China

Fringed by forested mountains in eastern China, the Pingfeng campus of Zhejiang University of Technology might seem an unlikely battleground for cricketers with Olympic ambitions. But yesterday it was the focus of much of south Asia as India's women beat Sri Lanka by 19 runs in the Asian Games final, claiming the nation's first gold medal in the sport at the continental showcase.

Propelled by 46 runs from opening batter Smriti Mandhana and 42 from number three Jemimah Rodrigues, India set Sri Lanka 117 for victory and 18-year-old bowler Titas Sadhu took three wickets for six runs to help secure victory in the T20 match. "I think this is one of the biggest achievements for us as a team," Rodrigues said. "Just to get the gold for the nation and to add to the medals of the nation, I think there's no bigger prize than that."



India's women cricketers pose with their gold medals after winning the final against Sri Lanka at the Hangzhou Asian Games yesterday. (AFP)

The usually quadrennial Games have been around for over 70 years but cricket only joined the programme at the 2010 edition in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou. Though returning at the 2014 Games in Incheon, South Korea, it was dropped from Jakarta in 2018.

Having not sent a team to Guangzhou or Incheon, powerhouse India's snubbing of the tournament was often blamed for the Jakarta miss. Yet no-one can accuse India of lacking en-

thusiasm now, with the country sending a strong women's squad to Hangzhou and a men's outfit as well despite a scheduling clash with the 50-over World Cup starting on home soil next week.

India's presence has been a coup for Hangzhou, ensuring a sizeable chunk of the subcontinent's population tune in. A big Indian press pack was present to cover the women's final and a parade of the country's officials, including government and Olympic executives, filtered into the venue as their team

began batting in the first innings.

Unlike Asia's other populous giant China, India have never made much of a splash at the Olympics, their seven-medal haul at the Tokyo Games a record for the nation. Adding cricket to the Olympic programme - as is expected for the 2028 Los Angeles Games - could help boost the tally.

"It certainly looks like it could go to the Olympics. And why not?" Indian Olympic Association executive member Amitabh Sharma told Reuters before the women's

final. "When we talk about China hosting the Asian Games and cricket being here, it's good for the sport."

It could also be good for the Olympics as well, which has seen viewership numbers in key markets, including the United States, plunge in recent events. Cricket might help boost interest in the Olympics in south Asia, a region which has traditionally been lukewarm about the world's biggest sporting event. Global cricket officials, meanwhile, will hope

Hangzhou's Asian Games tournament might help raise the sport's profile in China, where it has never caught on.

With a roofed grandstand for a few hundred spectators behind the wicket and a big digital scoreboard showing scores and replays, organisers spared little expense to host the tournament to international standard. A few local sports journalists covered the tournament but several admitted to being sketchy on aspects of the game.

The Zhejiang University of Technology intends to keep the cricket ground, having introduced the sport into its curriculum this year. Chinese fans in the crowd got into the spirit on a steamy afternoon, cheering every time the batters smashed the ball to the boundary.

Cricket's entry into the Olympics would give it more cachet among Games-loving Chinese officials and likely bring a funding boost. It would also inspire India's women to chase another medal, having also won silver at last year's Commonwealth Games in Birmingham.