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De Kock set for international farewell at World Cup



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SPORT



QATAR ROUND-UP

Younousse, Tijan enter final; shooters raise medal hopes

Defending beach volleyball champs will start as favourites against Chinese pair Mutailipu and Jiaxin



Qatar's beach volleyball pair Cherif Younousse (left) and Ahmed Tijan in action during the semi-finals against Kazakhstan's Sergey Bogatu and Dmitriy Yakovlev at the Hangzhou Asian Games in Ningbo, China, yesterday.



Qatar team led by Nasser al-Attiyah and al-Athba brothers – Masoud and Rashid – were in second place with a combined score of 218 in skeet after stage one of the competition.

By Sports Reporter
Hangzhou, China

Qatar's beach volleyball stars Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan will be gunning for their second consecutive Asian Games gold tomorrow, as they take on home favourites Abuduhalikejiang Mutailipu and Wu Jiaxin in the final in Hangzhou.

At the Ningbo Banbianshan Beach Volleyball Centre in Ningbo, China, yesterday, Younousse and Tijan brushed off the challenge from Kazakhstan's Sergey Bogatu and Dmitriy Yakovlev 21-9, 21-19 in the semi-finals in 34 minutes.

The World No 3 and Tokyo Olympic bronze medallists had little trouble in the first set, but were given a stern test in the second by the Kazakh pair. "Our defence was working well today. We are more balanced in attacking and defence. But we need to do better in the next game." said Tijan after the match. Younousse and Tijan will start as favourites against Chinese pair Mutailipu and Jiaxin, who beat Iran's Abbas Pourasgari and Alireza Aghajanighasab 26-24, 21-16 in the second semi-final.

Qatar volleyball team suffered a heartbreak though as they lost the bronze medal playoff to Japan at the Linping Sports Center Gymnasium yesterday. The second string Japan side proved too good for Qatar as they won 3-1 (37-35, 25-22, 23-25, 25-23). Iran, who had defeated Qatar in the semis, beat China 3-1 (19-25, 25-14, 25-22, 26-24) to defend their title. It's the third consecutive gold for Iran in the event at the Asiad.

Meanwhile, Qatar will be hoping for their first medal of the Hangzhou Asiad today from the skeet shooters. After day one of the qualification, Qatar team led by Nasser al-Attiyah and al-Athba brothers – Masoud and Rashid – were second with a combined score of 218, two behind leaders China. The trio will take part in stage 2, which will begin at 4am Qatar time today.

The 2021 London Olympics bronze medallist al-Attiyah was also third in the skeet individual event. While the top six shooters will make the final, the 52-year-old has shot 74 targets, only trailing behind leader Yunxuan Wu of China and second-placed Yuan Meng Lee of Chinese Taipei on count back. Masoud and Rashid al-Athba were ninth and 11 respectively. The individual stage 2 will be conducted concurrently with the team event tomorrow.

The women's skeet team placed fifth after stage one of the competition. Reem al-Sharshani, Hajar Mohamed and Sarah Mohamed had a combined score of 197 and will need a perfect second stage to secure a medal.

Al-Sharshani was Qatar's best placed shooter at eighth place, with Sarah in 13th spot and Hajar 20th. In the 25m pistol event, Nasra Mohamud was languishing at 38th place after the precision stage, with the rapid stage to be held today. There was disappointment in the 10m Air Rifle Mixed event as Ali al-Muhannadi and Matara al-Aseiri finished 20th among 21st competitors.

Qatar 3x3 basketball team began their campaign on high note beating Thailand 16-12 yesterday. Qatar will play Kazakstan tomorrow and Cambodia on Friday in other group stage matches. Meanwhile, the basketball team slumped to a 63-95 defeat at the hands of Japan. They will face South Korea and Indonesia next.

Meanwhile, none of the Qatari swimmers made it to the finals yesterday. Hamza Shaalan in the 400m medley race timed 4:57.99 secs, while Abdullah al-Khalidi stopped the clock at 17:21.61 secs in the 1,500m freestyle. The sailors too finished out of medal brackets. Faris al-Bakri finished in 11th place, while Ahmed al-Mulla was tenth. The squash team led by Abdulla al-Tamimi lost both their group stage matches to India and Pakistan 3-0 and 3-1, respectively.

Today, Qatar's U-23 football team will face off against China in the last 16 match at 2:30pm Qatar time. 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.

The handball team will also be in action today as they face South Korea. The defending champions had won their opening fixture against Hong Kong 36-18 on Monday.



Qatar 3x3 basketball team began their campaign on high note beating Thailand 16-12 yesterday.

HORSE RACING

Entries for two Group 1 PA race at Saint-Cloud published



Al Wasmiyah Racing's Al Ghadeer, which won Qatar Arabian Trophy Des Poulains last year in Saint-Cloud, France, will also compete this time.

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The first of the events associated with the Qatar Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe weekend, held annually in Paris under Qatari sponsorship through the Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC), is scheduled for tomorrow.

The beginning will be with the Arqana Purebred Arabian Horse Sale, which will attract a large number of horse breeders and owners in the world, due to the quality of the horses offered. Besides, the Sale is held annually at this time just before the start of the races at Saint-Cloud and ParisLonchamp.

QREC delegation and Qatari horse owners, who have runners at the weekend's races, as well as trainers will be present, targeting the best horses at the Sale.

In conjunction with the approaching start of the Qatar Prix de l'Arc de Triomphe, France Galop, being the organiser of the event, has announced the final entries for the race meeting, which will be held on Friday, September 29th, at Saint-Cloud racecourse, including the two feature races of the day, the Qatar Arabian Trophy des Poulains (Colts) and the Qatar Arabian Trophy des Pouliches (Fillies).

Both are Group ones run over 2,000m for three-year-olds respectively. As usual, the two races will have a strong Qatari presence with high hopes for a new Qatari victory as was the case last year when Al Ghadeer, in the colours of Al Wasmiyah Racing, won the colts' race and the Al Shaqab Racing-owned Nour Al Maury took the fillies' contest.

Twelve colts remain in the Qatar Arabian Trophy des Poulains Gr 1 PA. Al Shaqab Racing are represented by three runners including Afjan, who won the Gr 3 PA Prix Tidjani over 1,900m in July.

The list also includes Wathnan Racing's Ghassan II, who was placed on group level in his last two starts, as well as No Reply Al Maury and Extra Time, who filled the first two places in a recent Gr 2 PA at La Teste - the latter also won the Al Rayyan Cup Gr 1 PA at Deauville this summer.

There are 15 fillies entered in the Qatar Arabian Trophy des Pouliches Gr 1 PA, including HE Sheika Yasmeen bint Mohamed bin Khalifa al-Thani's Asslan Al Shahania, who clinched a Gr 3 PA victory when she won the Prix Razzia III over 1,900m less than three months ago. Also lining up is the promising Africa De Monlau, a recent winner at La Teste. Following the races at Saint-Cloud on Friday, the action will move to ParisLongchamp on Saturday and Sunday.

SPORT

FINAL ASSIGNMENT

De Kock ready for international farewell

AFP
Johannesburg

Quinton de Kock is a cricketing maverick who enjoys nothing more than his time away from the game by going fishing and playing golf, and at the age of 30 reckons he has served his time in the international arena.

"I've played a lot of cricket already," says the stroke-playing batsman-wicketkeeper.

He retired from Test cricket in 2022, and the Cricket World Cup will bring down the curtain on his one-day international career at an age when many players are reaching maturity.

He will remain available for Twenty20 internationals - but, it seems, only when they don't clash with more lucrative franchise opportunities.

De Kock is expected to miss a T20 series against India in December because he has signed a contract to play in Australia's Big Bash League.

Cricket South Africa has seemingly bowed to the reality that they will have to be flexible if they want star players to be available for major tournaments such as next year's T20 World Cup in the West Indies and United States.

De Kock first played for the Gauteng provincial team as a 15-year-old schoolboy in an unofficial match against a touring team from Durham.

He made his List A debut at 16, played first-class cricket at 17 and appeared for South Africa in a T20 international just four days after his 20th birthday.

Far from overawed at his rapid ascent to cricketing stardom, the talented left-hander has resolutely done things his own way.

The story is told that the 15-year-old De Kock didn't bother to put on a thigh pad when he went out to face a Durham attack which included England fast bowlers Steve Harmison, Liam Plunkett and Graham Onions.

"I honestly can't remember, but it is probably true," he says.

He had almost immediate success at every level and reeled off three successive one-day international centuries against India before he turned 21.

Going into the World Cup, he has taken his tally of one-day hundreds to 17, opening the batting and invariably scoring at a rapid rate.

'Take the knee' drama

He has scored six Test centuries and one in a T20 international.

He missed a match in the T20 World Cup in the United Arab Emirates in 2021 when he refused to obey a last-minute edict by CSA to "take the knee" in sympathy with the Black Lives Matter movement - not out of opposition to the cause but because of the way it was handled.

That incident came after he had captained South Africa in all three formats.

He never looked entirely comfortable in the leadership role and freely admits, "I don't mind captaining but I was pretty happy to hand it over. It's not really in my character."

In an age of relentless reference to video analysis, De Kock said early in his career that he didn't study potential opponents.

That remains his philosophy.

"I basically play what's in front of me. You can look at videos, but it's not the same as being in the middle."

Nor does he think about cricket or practice when he's away from the game. He lives in Knysna, a popular tourist town on a large lagoon some five hours drive from Cape Town, where cricket can easily be forgotten.

"I like golf, fishing, spending time with my family," he says.

"I don't touch a bat when I am at home. We play so much cricket that it's like riding a bicycle. A couple of nets when I join up with the team and I'm ready to play."

One of his regular golfing partners is legendary former South Africa batsman Barry Richards, who at 78 is old enough to be his grandfather.

"We see each other almost every day because we live in the same complex."

Do they talk about cricket? "Not really. We might talk a bit about it but he's like me, we talk mainly about other things."

"I'll give the World Cup my best shot. I would like to tick off an ICC (International Cricket Council) event," he says.

After that he might play T20 cricket for a maximum of five or six years before he walks away from the sport.

"I don't see myself being involved in the game in any way when I stop playing. I want a life after cricket."



FOCUS

Young and Milne shine as Kiwis blank Bangladesh

THE VISITORS WHITEWASH HOSTS AHEAD OF WORLD CUP

AFP
Dhaka

New Zealand gave themselves a perfect boost ahead of the World Cup by whitewashing Bangladesh in the three-match series 2-0, with a seven wickets win in the final one-day international in Dhaka yesterday.

Will Young and Adam Milne starred with bat and ball respectively, with Young hitting 70 off 80 balls to guide New Zealand to 175-3.

Milne's 4-34 restricted the hosts to 171 in 34.3 overs at Dhaka's Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

Stand-in skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto scored highest with 76 runs for Bangladesh, but was unable to give the hosts a competitive score with a lack of support from the other end after he opted to bat first.

New Zealand made light of their target despite losing Finn Allen (28) and Dean Foxcroft (0) to Shoriful Islam in consecutive balls, as Young put on 81 runs with in-form Henry Nicholls for the third wicket.

By the time left-arm spinner Nasum Ahmed bowled Young, New Zealand were well in control.

Nicholls, who made 44 and 49 runs in the previous two matches, went on to complete 50 this time, with a single off Mahmudullah Riyad.

Tom Blundell (23 not out) hit a boundary to take New Zealand home, with 91 balls to spare.

Cole McConchie and Trent Boult earlier complemented Milne, who was playing his first match of the series, claiming 2-18 and 2-33 respectively to deny Bangladesh any serious momentum in the contest.

The Kiwis, who lost the previous two series in Bangladesh 4-0 in 2010 and 3-0 in 2013, won the second match by 86 runs on Saturday.

The first match was washed out by rain.

"The World Cup is just around the corner - to come up with the first win since 2008 is great," said Young, the man of the match, in a briefing afterwards.

"This group plays a lot together, we gel well and it's a lot of fun," he added.

Young said that while he could not predict what the playing conditions the Kiwis would face in India when the World Cup opens on October 5, he hoped "it's similar to these".

Bangladesh initially rested key players but, with the series at stake, they brought back stalwarts Najmul, Mushfiqur Rahim and Shoriful Islam. However, it did little to improve their performance.

Najmul, leading Bangladesh for the first time, held down one end to score his fifth ODI fifty but wickets kept falling regularly from the other end.

"Our batsmen didn't score big runs," Najmul said. "Hopefully, next time batters take responsibility and bat long."

Milne and Boult struck early to reduce Bangladesh to 35-3, before Najmul and Mushfiqur offered a brief resistance with a 53-run fourth wicket stand.

Mushfiqur's dismissal to Lockie Ferguson for 18 put New Zealand back on top and the visitors did not lose the momentum again.

McConchie ended any real chance of Bangladesh lodging a fighting score by dismissing Najmul with his second ball of the day, with the left-hander hitting 10 fours in his 84-ball innings.



New Zealand's cricketers pose with the series trophy after they won the third one-day international against Bangladesh in Dhaka yesterday. *(AFP)*

BRIEF SCORES
Bangladesh 171 all out, 34.3 overs (Najmul Hossain Shanto 76, Mahmudullah Riyad 21; A. Milne 4-34, C. McConchie 2-18, T. Boult 2-33) **v New Zealand 175-3, 34.5 overs** (W. Young 70, H. Nicholls 50; Shoriful Islam 2-32)
Toss: Bangladesh
Result: New Zealand won by seven wickets
Series: New Zealand won three-match series 2-0

Bangladesh drop ex-captain Tamim from World Cup squad

Dhaka: Bangladesh yesterday announced their 15-man squad for the ODI World Cup in India, leaving out former captain Tamim Iqbal due to injury concerns.
Tamim, 34, who retired in a shock move in July before reversing his decision a day later at the request of Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, returned to the side only last week for the opening two matches of the just-concluded home series against New Zealand.
Tamim established himself as one of the country's most dependable players and is the only Bangladeshi to score centuries in all three formats of the game.
But he took a break from Tuesday's final match that Bangladesh lost by seven wickets in Dhaka, and reportedly refused to give a guarantee of his participation in all matches in the World Cup starting next month.
Top-selling Bengali newspaper *Prothom Al* reported yesterday that coach Chandika Hathurusinghe and skipper Shakib Al Hasan said only fully fit players could be in the World Cup squad, leading to the exclusion of Tamim.
"Tamim Iqbal has had an injury concern for a long time, which we know," chief selector Mihajul Abedin said. "He was fighting against it and got back to fitness ahead of the New Zealand series. But after the first game, he complained of injury again."
New Zealand whitewashed Bangladesh to win the three-match series 2-0.
Batsman Najmul Hossain Shanto, who made his debut as captain during the series against the Kiwis, has been named as vice-captain for the World Cup.
The Bangladesh side travels to Guwahati on Wednesday for two warm-up matches against Sri Lanka on September 29 and against England on October 2, before the World Cup begins on October 5.
The side will then move to Dharamshala for their tournament opener against Afghanistan on October 7.

Squad: Shakib Al Hasan (capt), Liton Das, Tanzid Hasan Tamim, Najmul Hossain Shanto (vice-captain), Towhid Hridoy, Mushfiqur Rahim, Mahmudullah Riyad, Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Nasum Ahmed, Mahedi Hasan, Taskin Ahmed, Mustafizur Rahman, Hasan Mahmud, Shoriful Islam, Tanzim Hasan Sakib.

India-Australia ODI today


India captain Rohit Sharma looks on during a practice session in Rajkot on the eve of their third one-day international against Australia. India lead the three-match series 2-0. *(AFP)*

Rain washes out third England vs Ireland one-dayer

Bristol, England: England's third and final one-day international against Ireland in Bristol yesterday was abandoned because of rain, with the hosts' batter Ben Duckett hitting his maiden century in the 50-overs format.
A no result at the Gloucestershire Cricket Stadium means the three-match series was won 1-0 by England, after the first ODI was abandoned without a ball being bowled due to rain before Rehan Ahmed inspired England to a 48-run victory in the second.
Ireland won the toss yesterday and elected to bowl, with England's openers Phil Salt and Will Jacks getting them off to a strong start as they combined for 87 runs.
After the pair were dismissed by Irish fast bowler Craig Young in quick succession, Duckett (107 not out) and captain Zak Crawley stepped on the gas and put together a 101-run partnership off just 85 balls to take England past 200 in under 23 overs.
Crawley departed on 51 and Young picked up a third wicket after getting Sam Hain caught on 17, before a downpour brought a halt to the proceedings at around 1345 GMT, with England on 280/4. Play was called off just under an hour later.
"A real shame today. We were going towards a good score and it was a good summer, nice to get this award," England's Jacks said after being named the Player of the Series.
"(Salt) made it easy for me today, he got off to a flying start. If we could've got going it could've been a flying start."
This series was part of England's preparations as they look ahead to their title defence at next month's 50-over World Cup in India. England face New Zealand in the opening match of the World Cup on Oct 5.

SPOTLIGHT

Unfamiliar Indian conditions not a worry for Babar

Reuters
Lahore, Pakistan


Pakistan's cricket team captain Babar Azam speaks during a press conference in Lahore yesterday. *(AFP)*

Pakistan captain Babar Azam does not think lack of familiarity with Indian conditions would hurt their bid for a second 50-overs World Cup title as they embark on a rare tour of the neighbouring country yesterday.

Bilateral cricket remains suspended between the neighbours, thanks to their soured political relations, and the last time Pakistan toured India was for the T20 World Cup in 2016.

Pakistan players do not feature in the Indian Premier League either, which means most of them would have little knowledge of the conditions they are going to face during the showpiece event beginning on Oct 5.

In his pre-departure press conference, Babar dismissed suggestions it increased the pressure on his team to do well across the border.

"There's no such pressure," the 28-year-old told reporters as his team prepared to leave for India via Dubai. "Every player keeps himself ready to perform in every condition, in every country.

"Most of us have not played in India but the information we have gathered suggest conditions are going to be similar, except in Chennai maybe where spinners get more help. "Rest of the venues will have good, sporting tracks.

"I played the 2019 World Cup as a player but this time I'm leading the side. It's a big honour for me and our effort would be to perform well and bring home the World Cup."

The difficulty in securing visa for India tour means Pakistan would not get much support from the stands either but Babar was not perturbed.

"Unfortunately, we will be missing the fans," Pakistan's batting mainstay said.

"However, our games are all soldout, so we will be playing in jam-packed stadiums. Although our fans will not be there, I know they will make sure their love is heard on social media."

Pakistan will play two warmup matches in Hyderabad before beginning their World Cup campaign with an Oct 6 match against the Netherlands.

FOCUS

Premier Padel appoints Eno Polo as CEO

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Premier Padel, the world's leading professional padel tour – founded by Qatar Sports Investments (QSI) together with the International Padel Federation (FIP) and the Professional Padel Association (PPA) – have appointed **Eno Polo** as CEO to lead the ambitious next phase of Premier Padel's sporting development, commercial growth and global expansion. Eno Polo will report to the Board of Premier Padel and begins his appointment on 16th November 2023.

Eno has had a wide-ranging and accomplished career in sport – including extensive experience in padel and tennis – spanning senior roles in Nike across Europe and North America; subsequent positions as President of Havaianas EMEA and North America; President of Global Brands Group Europe; and as senior consultant to FIFA.

Eno joins Premier Padel most recently from LeDap Group – an international group of padel companies, operating more than 120 clubs with over 700 padel courts worldwide – where he was CEO. Since January 2021, Eno has also been a member of the Board of Directors of the ATP Tour.

Last month, QSI and FIP announced that an historic agreement had been reached with Damm for the acquisition of World Padel Tour (WPT) by QSI, with Premier Padel and WPT to be unified as a single global professional padel tour – called Premier Padel – in 2024 under the governance of the International Padel Federation, subject to customary regulatory approvals. Eno's immediate responsibility will be to manage the merger of the two tours, then drive the sporting and commercial step-change of Premier Padel into being one of the most dynamic, modern and professional tours in global sport.

Premier Padel was only launched in 2022 and within its first year has become one of the fastest growing tours in world sport. Over 500 players from around the world competed in Premier Padel tournaments in its first year, played in some of the most iconic venues in sports history, including at Stade Roland-Garros in Paris. Premier Padel has secured multi-year broadcast agreements that cover 180+ countries reaching over 150 million households, while the inaugural 2022 Premier Padel season attracted 22.7 million views on YouTube. Over 110 leading professional female players joined Premier Padel in March this year.



Nasser al-Khelaïfi, Chairman of Qatar Sports Investments and Premier Padel, said: "We are very pleased to appoint Eno as CEO of Premier Padel. Eno brings a wealth of knowledge, experience and relationships to the tour, having had a fantastic career across sport – including racket sports – for nearly 30 years. He understands how to build an elite global tour, and also the importance of players to any project. We look forward to Eno driving forward the next great phase of development of Premier Padel."

Luigi Carraro, President of the International Padel Federation, said: "Eno is an outstanding executive appointment to lead Premier Padel's next stage of ambitious growth. As the governing body of Premier Padel, FIP is proud to be at the heart of the development of padel professionally all around the world, placing the players and National Federations at the centre of our mission to grow the sport everywhere. Eno's experience with all stakeholders within the sports ecosystem – especially with players on the ATP Tour – will be invaluable as we look to take Premier Padel to the top of world sport."

Eno Polo, newly-appointed CEO of Premier Padel, said: "I am delighted to join Premier Padel as CEO to lead – without any doubt – the most exciting project in world sport."

He added: "Through the vision and ambition of the owners, what has been achieved by Premier Padel in such a short time is incredible. But what's most exciting is that we have barely started to unlock the brilliant potential of this world-leading tour.

"I cannot wait to bring my experience, energy and leadership to drive Premier Padel forward, working with stakeholders across padel, sport and business to build something very special for the men's and women's professional players – who are our most important constituent – and everyone connected to the fantastic sport of padel."

FOOTBALL

Messi remains injury doubt for US Open Cup final

The World Cup hero's involvement to be made at the 'last minute'

AFP
Fort Lauderdale, United States

Lionel Messi remains an injury doubt for Inter Miami's US Open Cup final against Houston Dynamo today with a decision on his involvement to be made at the "last minute," coach Gerardo Martino told reporters yesterday.

Messi's former Barcelona teammate, Spaniard Jordi Alba, is almost certain to be ruled out of the game for Miami but Martino said there remains a chance the Argentine World Cup winner could take some part.

"We will wait until tomorrow (Wednesday) – Jordi I don't think so, it is difficult – but Leo we will wait until tomorrow, we will wait last minute to make a decision," Martino said.

The final represents a chance for Miami to win a second trophy since Messi joined the club, adding to the club's victory in the Leagues Cup last month.

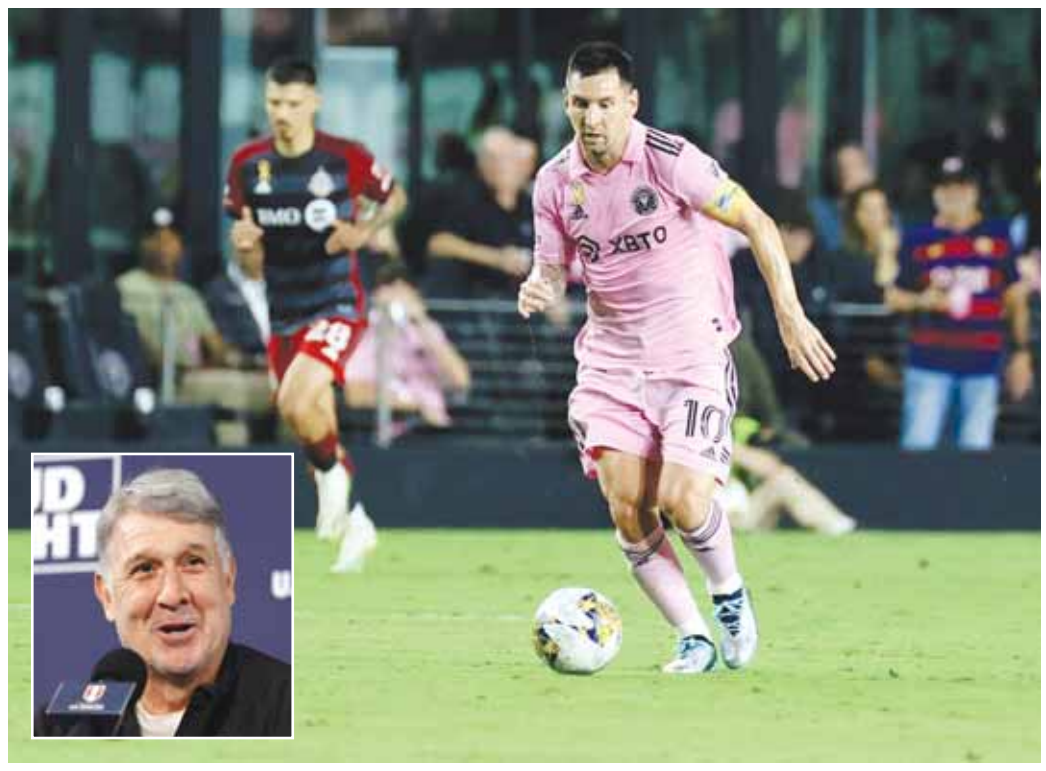
Martino said that they would not even be considering Messi for the game if a trophy were not at stake.

"It has exclusively to do with the final," he said. "If it were one of 34 (regular-season Major League Soccer) games, we wouldn't take a risk.

"It's logical to wait. If it were any other type of match, I don't think we would be taking that kind of risk."

Messi did not participate in the open portion of Inter Miami's training session ahead of the US Open Cup final against Houston.

The seven-time Ballon d'Or winner is struggling with what was initially called muscle fatigue but now appears to be some sort of injury, with Martino previously referring to old "scars" that are troubling the player.



Inter Miami's Argentine forward Lionel Messi runs with the ball during the Major League Soccer match against Toronto FC at DRV PNK Stadium in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, on September 20, 2023. Messi remains an injury doubt for Inter Miami's US Open Cup final against Houston Dynamo today with a decision on his involvement to be made at the "last minute," coach Gerardo Martino **(inset)** said yesterday. *(AFP)*

"I will sit down with him, see how he feels," said Martino.

"We always talk, we will get together and find the best way. We have to consider three things - the player, the final and what comes after.

"We have to assess all three things."

Messi missed Miami's 1-1 draw at Orlando City on Sunday with Martino saying he had a "day to day" status.

Inter's training session was open to the media for the first 15 minutes and neither Messi nor Alba were involved in the session, although Martin quipped that they took part after the media left. Messi has been struggling since he was substituted in the 88th minute of Argentina's World Cup qualifier against Ecuador on September 7.

He sat out the world champions' second qualifier, at Bolivia five days later, before returning to his club after the international break.

Messi then missed Miami's 5-2 defeat at Atlanta on September 16 with Martino saying that he was suffering from muscle fatigue.

He then started the home game against Toronto but had to be substituted in the 38th minute, just minutes after Alba had been withdrawn.

After the final, Miami will have five games remaining in the MLS regular season, seeking a late push into the playoff positions.

On Saturday, Miami will host New York City FC, who currently hold the last Eastern Conference playoff qualification spot, ninth place, five points ahead of Martino's team.

The US Open Cup, a knockout tournament for amateur and professional teams, has been contested since 1914, making it by far the oldest soccer competition in the country.

SPOTLIGHT

Chelsea owners are 'welcome' in dressing room, says Pochettino

AFP
London

Under-fire Chelsea boss Mauricio Pochettino says the club's owners are welcome to visit the dressing room - as long as they leave the talking to him.

Chelsea co-owner Behdad Eghbali went into the Stamford Bridge dressing room on Sunday after a 1-0 defeat against Aston Villa extended their woeful start to the Premier League season.

Eghbali is not the only member of Chelsea's hierarchy to have entered the team's inner sanctum - co-owner Todd Boehly and co-sporting directors Paul Winstanley and Laurence Stewart have also paid visits.

With Pochettino under scrutiny following Chelsea's run of one win from their first six league games, Eghbali's appearance in the dressing room was interpreted as a sign the pressure is mounting on the Blues manager just weeks into his reign.

But the Argentine boss said he was happy to see Chelsea's power-brokers sharing in the team's "suffering".

"I like when the owners come - in all my career as a coach, at Espanyol then Southampton, Tottenham and Paris Saint-Germain also, before and after," Pochettino told reporters yesterday.

"It's good that the owners came to the dressing room. It's in the way that they approach the players that is the most important. If they are in a good way, I think they're very welcome."

Last season, Boehly reportedly told Chelsea's players their season was "embarrassing" during his dressing room speech after a home defeat against Brighton towards the end of a miserable campaign.

But there was apparently no repeat after the Villa game, with Pochettino adamant that it was up to him or the captain to address the players.

"It's not a job of the owner to come to the dressing room and give some speech after the game," he said. "But they know very well how they need to behave."

Chelsea are languishing in 14th place in the league, just four points above the relegation zone, and Wednesday's League Cup third-round tie against in-form Brighton might not offer any respite for Pochettino.

European champions just two years ago, big-spending Chelsea have made their worst start to a season for 45 years.

Boehly ruthlessly axed Pochettino's predecessors Thomas Tuchel and Graham Potter last season when results dipped.

But Pochettino struck a positive note, saying his injury-hit team are still a work in progress.

"Every single football person in this country sees Chelsea deserve more but we have missed (scoring) goals, the most important thing in football. We cannot forget that," he said.

"We need to get criticised, of course, because we are not winning games but we need to keep being strong in the belief.

"It's not worse than I thought. We always knew the new project is difficult."



Chelsea manager Mauricio Pochettino looks dejected during the Premier League match against Aston Villa at Stamford Bridge, London, on Sunday. *(Reuters)*

Qatar SC announces departure of Moroccan coach Youssef Safri

Doha: Qatar SC yesterday announced that Moroccan **Youssef Safri** will not continue as coach of the first football team in the current season 2023-2024.
The club published a brief official statement on its official website in which it said the Qatar SC management accepted coach Youssef Safri's request to quit.
The statement added the management wished the coach success in his future career, and thanked him for his stint with the club.
Qatar SC management did not announce in the statement the name of the replacement coach who will lead the team in the next confrontation against Al Arabi tomorrow in the fifth round of the Qatari Football League (Expo Stars League). Qatar SC are at the 10th spot from four matches in the league this season.



ANNOUNCEMENT

PSG, Jordan Brand launch bold new collection

A few days after celebrating the fifth anniversary of their collaboration, Paris Saint-Germain and Jordan Brand unveil the club's Third collection for the 2023/2024 season. For the first time, the iconic elephant print, which made the Jumpman brand a global success, will appear on a football jersey.

Designed to worn for major fixtures, the jersey has been donned by the Parisians for the first time during the UEFA Champions League vs Borrusia Dortnumbd on September 19th at the Parc des Princes.

With this collection, including gameday, training and lifestyle products, Paris Saint-Germain and the Jordan Brand are starting a new chapter in their exclusive partnership. This THIRD range features a unique and elegant colour palette, made up of understated tones of grey and beige with black details and flashes of orange. An iridescent tint enhances the design of some of the items in the collection, including the jersey. The apparel designed by Jordan Brand is coupled with an Air Jordan 6 Low and Jumpman Peat 3 shoes, both in the same colours as the rest of the range.



To boost the launch of this THIRD 23/24 collection and celebrate the elephant print's first appearance in the world of football, Paris Saint-Germain and the Jordan Brand are dipping into the archives. A campaign inspired by the emblematic series of adverts filmed with Michael Jordan and Spike Lee back in 1988 highlights the diversity of the collection in an original and creative way.

Paris Saint-Germain and Jordan Brand have also adopted an innovative design approach, centred around sustainable development, that will enable the athletes to achieve high performance while minimising their environmental impact: The Dri-FIT ADV kits are made from, 100% recycled polyester.

The new jersey, and lifestyle range is now available at PSG Store Villagio Mall.

Wednesday, September 27, 2023
GULF TIMES SPORT



ROUND-UP

Teenager Pan powers China to 4x100m medley relay gold

Hosts China stretch their lead atop the medals table with golds from gymnastics, table tennis and shooting

Reuters
Hangzhou

Teen sensation Pan Zhanle swam a freestyle leg at world record pace to drive China to the men's 4x100m medley relay gold at the Asian Games yesterday after the hosts claimed the first title at esports' official debut in the multi-sport event. Two nights after becoming the first Asian swimmer to break the 47 seconds barrier in the 100m freestyle, 19-year-old Pan clocked an incredible 46.65 as China threatened the United States' world record.

Pan's time was 0.21 seconds faster than the 100m world record held by another 19-year-old wunderkind, Romanian David Popovici. With world champion Qin Haiyang swimming the breaststroke leg in 57.63 seconds - faster than the Asian record - China won in three minutes 27.01 seconds, just outside the US world record of 3:26.78 from the Tokyo Olympics in 2021.

"We thought we would have to wait until next year to come close to the world record, so tonight we put in a really good performance," said Qin, who owns the 50m, 100m and 200m breaststroke world titles. "There must be a higher goal. Our goal has always been to win the gold medal at the Paris Olympics next year."

China have ruled the Hangzhou pool - and the Games in general. Olympic bronze medallist Li Bingjie won the women's 400m freestyle to add to the medal haul.

However, Hong Kong's Siobhan Haughey has been a bulwark of resistance to China's dominance.

The former British colony's first Olympic swimming medallist stormed to victory in the blue ribband 100m freestyle with an Asian record swim of 52.17 seconds, a day after taking the 200m title.

"I haven't swum a (personal) best time since Tokyo," said 25-year-old Haughey, who took the 100m and 200m silvers at the Olympics. "It just proves that I'm not at my peak yet."

China stretched their lead atop the medals table with golds in their usual strengths of gymnastics, table tennis and shooting.

Home favourite and twice world champion gymnast Zhang Boheng grabbed his second gold, adding the all-around individual title to his men's team triumph on Sunday. Unbeaten in every rotation, Zhang stuck the landing in the horizontal bar to finish with a total score of 89.299, over two points clear of Japan's runner-up Takeru Kitazono.

North Korea's delegation has made a splash in their first appearance at a multi-sport event since Jakarta five years ago. On Monday, three North Korean shooters refused to join their South Korean rivals in a group photo of medal winners after missing out on gold.

North Korea's flag, meanwhile, is meant to be banned at all major events outside the Olympics due to anti-doping failures but it has flown proudly at the Games.

The World Anti-Doping Agency said it had launched a "compliance procedure" against the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) over the flag. The OCA did not comment. South Korea's delegation has also been in the spotlight for its athletes' conduct. Judoka Lee Hye-kyeong was disqualified in the semi-finals of the women's 48kg division for slapping a Kazakh opponent in the face during their bout on Sunday, while on Monday men's tennis player Kwon Soon-woo destroyed his racket in an epic tantrum after he lost to a much lower-ranked Thai opponent.

Kwon, who also snubbed the post-match handshake, visited Thailand's training camp to apologise, a South Korean tennis federation official told Yonhap yesterday.

The Games had a royal touch when Thailand's Princess Sirivannavari Mahidol rode in on a horse named 'Es Fangar's Samba King' in the dressage team event.

With Thailand finishing fifth - behind gold-winning India - the 36-year-old daughter of King Vajiralongkorn was unable to add a medal to the crown jewels.

"Luckily our father is supporting us," said the princess, who played badminton at the 2006 Asian Games and competed in equestrian at the 2014 edition.

"He knows that what drives my heart is horses and badminton."



FROM LEFT: China's 4X100m medley relay gold medallists Xu Jiayu, Qin Haiyang, Wang Changhao and Pan Zhanle pose during the medal ceremony at the Hangzhou Asian Games at the Aquatic Sports Arena in Hangzhou, China, yesterday.

MEDALS TALLY

Country	G	S	B	T
1. China	53	29	13	95
2. South Korea	14	16	19	49
3. Japan	8	20	19	47
4. Uzbekistan	5	6	11	22
5. Hong Kong,	5	4	10	19
6. India	3	3	6	12
7. Indonesia	3	1	5	9
8. Chinese Taipei	2	3	3	8
9. Thailand	2	0	5	7
10. Iran	1	4	5	10
11. UAE	1	1	3	5
12. Tajikistan	1	1	1	3
13. Macao	1	0	2	3
14. Kyrgyzstan	1	0	0	1
15. North Korea	0	3	2	5
16. Kazakhstan	0	2	7	9
17. Mongolia	0	2	4	6
18. Malaysia	0	2	2	4
19. Vietnam	0	1	5	6
20. Brunei	0	1	0	1
20. Sri Lanka	0	1	0	1
22. Philippines	0	0	2	2
23. Afghanistan	0	0	1	1
23. Bangladesh	0	0	1	1
23. Jordan	0	0	1	1
23. Kuwait	0	0	1	1
23. Lebanon	0	0	1	1
23. Singapore	0	0	1	1
23. Turkmenistan	0	0	1	1

HISTORIC

India end 41-year wait to win dressage team gold medal



Sudipti Hajela, Divyakriti Singh, Vipul Chheda Hriday, Anush Agarwalla of India step on the podium after winning the dressage team gold at the Tonglu Equestrian Centre in Hangzhou yesterday. *(AFP)*

Agencies
Hangzhou, China

India's Hriday Chheda, Anush Agarwalla, Divyakriti Singh and Sudipti Hajela combined to win the equestrian team dressage gold medal at the Asian Games 2023 in Hangzhou, China, yesterday.

The gold ended a 41-year long wait for India, who had dominated equestrian event at made its maiden appearance at the Asian Games in 1982. But the long wait was finally over yesterday at the Tonglu Equestrian Centre.

All four Indian equestrians put on impressive performances. Anush Agarwalla, riding his horse Etro, was the pick of the lot, scoring 71.088. Hriday Chheda, mounted on Chemxpro Emerald, followed with 69.941 while Divyakriti Singh and her horse Adrenalin Firfod were awarded 68.176. Sudipti Hajela, with horse Chinski, contributed 66.706.

The best three scores were added up for India's team total, which came up to 209.205 (Anush Agarwalla - 71.088; Hriday Chheda - 69.941; Divyakriti Singh - 68.176).

The Chinese team of Huang Zhuoqin (68.176), Rao Jiayi (69.265) and Lan Chao (67.441) secured the dressage team silver with a combined score of 204.882. Hong Kong China's Chan Samantha Grace (65.353), Ho Yuen Yan Annie (68.323) and Siu Jacqueline Wing Ying (71.176) took the bronze with a total score of 204.852.

As per the individual rankings, Anush Agarwalla and Hriday Chheda were the second and third-best scorers of the day behind Siu Jacqueline Wing Ying. All four Indian equestrian riders will be in action in the individual dressage event today.

"It has been a very long journey but everything came together with this team. None of us were able to believe it at that moment but we gave our 100 percent and then when you see the Tiranga going up, that is the biggest motivation," Sudipti, the youngest at 21, chirped in.

This was India's third gold medal at Hangzhou 2023. The women's cricket team and men's 10m air rifle team of Rudrankksh Patil, Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar and Divyansh Singh Panwar accounted for the other two.

Before yesterday's dressage team gold, India had won three gold medals, three silver medals and six bronze medals in equestrian at the Asian Games. All three gold medals came at Delhi 1982. Raghubir Singh, who was crowned champion in individual eventing in that edition, also won a gold in team eventing alongside Ghulam Mohamed Khan, Bishal Singh and Milkha Singh. Rupinder Singh Brar won the gold medal in individual tent pegging, a category which featured at the continental games only in that edition.

SPOTLIGHT

China win first-ever Asiad eSports gold

AFP
Hangzhou

Hosts China yesterday won the Asian Games' first-ever gold in eSports in a landmark for gaming, beating Malaysia 2-0 in the smartphone game Arena of Valor. ESports is making its debut as a medal event at the Games in Hangzhou, seen as a major step towards the Olympics one day.

Medals are up for grabs in seven gaming titles, including Arena of Valor, League of Legends and EA Sports FC Online.

In the fantasy-themed Arena of Valor, players take on virtual avatars, each with different traits and strengths, and work together with teammates to destroy enemy towers before reaching the ultimate target, the opposing team's crystal.

"Being able to stand on the podium, I felt very honoured and proud," Chinese player Jiang Tao told reporters after his team's historic victory. "Everyone performed really well today," he said of his teammates.

Emotions were high at the packed 4,500-capacity Hangzhou Esports Center, where the crowd was dominated by China fans. The young spectators waved flags and banners in support of the host country, as well as photos of their favourite players. "Chinese eSports, step onstage and create legends!" one banner read.

Team China stepped out on to the stage to roars, while Malaysia were greeted with polite applause. China immediately outpaced Malaysia in destroying enemy towers in the first round of the best-of-three match, putting the Southeast Asian team on the defensive.

Players sat almost perfectly still in rows of gaming chairs onstage, only moving their hands rapidly to control their on-screen "heroes".

"We felt nervous but we have tried our best to play a good game," Malaysia's Lai Chia Chien said.

Underlining just how popular it is, eSports is the only competition at the Games where tickets were allocated through an initial online lottery, before being opened up last week for direct purchase.

Thailand nabbed the sport's first-ever Asian Games medal earlier in the day, beating Vietnam to win Arena of Valor bronze.

"I'm playing for my country and I'm so excited to win a medal for my country," Thai player Kawee Wachiraphas said.

Chinese eSports fan and spectator Gong Lin said before the match she had faith the home team would win, especially because of their captain Luo Siyuan.

"I have a lot of confidence in him particularly," she said.

Qatar's athletics contingent reach Hangzhou



The Qatar athletics team touched down in Hangzhou yesterday for the Asian games, after a preparatory camp in Shanghai. While Olympic high jump champion Mutaz Barshim was yet to land in China, the track athletes arrived before the competitions begin from Friday. Femi Ogunode will participate in 100m and 200m races, while Ashraf Hussein and Ismail Daoud are competing in 400m. Abu Bakr Haider (800m), Abdul Rahman Saeed (1,500m and 800m), Mohamed al-Karni (1,500 and 5,000m), Yasser Salem (3,000m steeplechase and 5,000m) will also be in action. The 400m hurdles world medallist Abdelrahman Samba will make his comeback from injury at the Asian Games, with Bassem Abdelsalam Hamida also taking part in the same race. In the field event, apart from Barshim, Saif Din Abdul Salam Hamida will participate in pole vault. Moaz Ibrahim will participate in discus throw, while hammer throw will see Ahmed al-Saifi and Ashraf al-Saifi battle for medals.