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DIAMOND LEAGUE

Barshim 'satisfied' after finishing second in Xiamen

Qatari was competing for the first time since taking a six-month break to recover from injuries

By Sports Reporter
Doha

High jump Olympic champion Mutaz Barshim showed signs of rust as the Qatari legend finished second behind Shelby McEwen at the Xiamen Diamond League meeting yesterday. Barshim's rustiness was understandable as the 32-year-old was taking part in his first competition since taking a six-month break with back and hip problems.

The three-time world champion nailed first-time clearances at 2.15m, 2.20m and 2.24m but then hit a brick wall, failing to negotiate 2.27m and 2.29m. World indoor silver medalist McEwen was the only man to succeed at 2.27m. That first-time clearance was sufficient to earn the US jumper the victory ahead of Barshim, with New Zealand's world indoor champion Hamish Kerr in third, also with 2.24m.

Barshim said he was satisfied with his performance despite not finishing on top of the podium. "I didn't get the win, but it's a good opening to be honest, it is a 2.27 today. I had to adjust my run up. It's a bit of a tricky situation. It was windy, rainy, and again windy and rainy. So it's a bit tough to jump to be honest, but I think I should be satisfied with the opening of the season," he said.

Barshim has prioritized training in the build-up to his Olympic defence later this year, not competing since winning his third Asian Games title in October 2023 and skipping the World Indoor championships.

Barshim, who is aiming to become the first to ever athlete to win two men's Ol-



Qatar's Mutaz Barshim clears the bar during the men's high jump event at the Xiamen Diamond League in China yesterday. (Reuters)

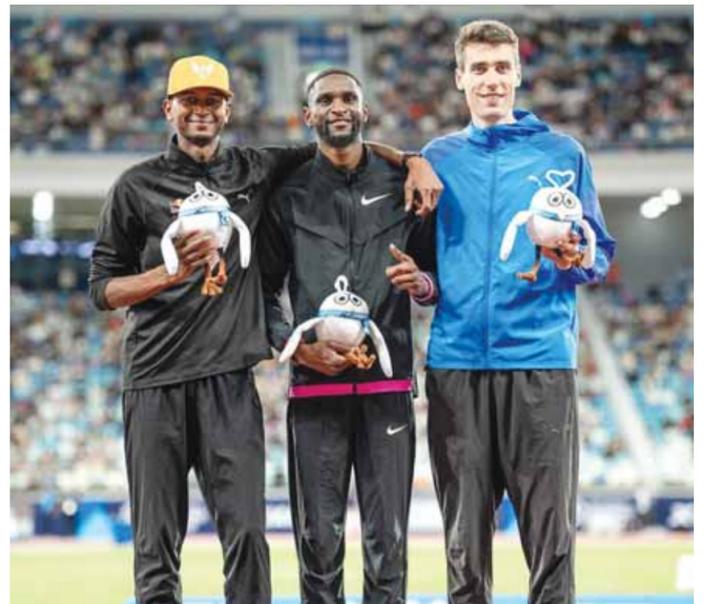
ympic high jump titles, said it was difficult to make a comeback from injury, that too at his age. "During the race, every jump feels different because I can't do my job which is very fast jumping. I have to adjust a lot. In my 20s, I was much healthier, I didn't have so much injury, but I didn't have so much experience. And now it's the opposite way," he noted.

"I am a more experienced jumper, but I have a lot of injuries, so I need to adjust. I am trying to stay humble and trying to think of every day as a new beginning,

regardless of what I've achieved so far," Barshim added.

The Qatari icon paid credit to his team and family for keeping him grounded and said he is hungry to improve despite his phenomenal achievements.

"If you go to my house, you're not going to see anything. I keep everything away. I try not to make my mind go toward satisfaction, and it's not easy, but I have a good team around me, and my family too, so they help me and give me mental strength." "As to the secret that keeps me going so



Shelby McEwen (centre) won the high jump event ahead of Mutaz Barshim and Hamish Kerr at the Xiamen Diamond League yesterday.

far, I would say staying hungry. I always want to improve myself every single day, even if that improvement doesn't necessarily make me jump higher. I focus on details. The quality of work, and not just the work itself. Now it's just the beginning of the year when the season opens,

and the target for me is always the Olympics. It's my 4th Olympics, it's very important to me, I want to make sure I'm going to be there ready to fight and jump high. So everything I'm doing now is according to the plan to be ready for the Olympics," Barshim said.

SPOTLIGHT

Duplantis better his own world record

AFP
Xiamen, China

Sweden's Armand 'Mondo' Duplantis opened his outdoor season in Olympic year in stunning fashion yesterday as he bettered his own pole vault world record at the Xiamen Diamond League meeting. Duplantis, the reigning Olympic, two-time world and European champion, fired out a warning to any potential rivals at this summer's Paris Games by sailing over 6.24 metres at his first attempt at the Egret Stadium to improve by 1cm his previous best set in Eugene last year.

The US-born 24-year-old entered competition at 5.62m, clearing 5.82 and 6.00m before setting the new world record - his eighth in the discipline, each by 1cm since first breaking the record in February 2020 in Torun, Poland. "For me to jump a world record I need everything to be in the right place," said Duplantis, hailing no winds and great energy from the crowd. "Everything added up to what I needed for me to jump high today.

"It definitely felt like it was within reach after that 6.00m attempt," he said, adding that it made up for what he called a "sloppy" indoor season - albeit one in which he retained his world indoor title in Glasgow last month with a 6.05m clearance. "I obviously had some fire in me today, I really wanted to show myself that I could do better than I did then."

American Sam Hendricks, who finished second with a best of 5.82m, a massive 42 centimetres adrift, said Duplantis has got "God's hand on his back". "I've been a champion before, Mondo has been my vice-champion. I've seen him from a 14-year-old come all the way up and it makes me actually ever joyous to be even just second place behind the world record holder because I know he works so darned hard, he goes all over the place and he's becoming the true champion we all want him to be."

Australian teenager Torrie Lewis produced a devastating finish to upset world 100m champion Sha'Carri Richardson in the 200m. Richardson, who also won world bronze for Team USA in the 200m in Budapest last year, looked to have victory sewn up but hadn't counted on



Sweden's Armand Duplantis celebrates after setting a new pole vault world record during the Xiamen Diamond League meeting at Egret Stadium in Xiamen, China, yesterday. (AFP)

19-year-old Lewis way out in lane nine, who won in 22.96sec.

"It's kind of late for me in the season to open up," said Richardson. "I was a little nervous but once I was on the track it felt like home. I felt really good with this first performance. I know what I've got to work on."

Lewis said she was shocked, not having expected to win against a high-calibre field. "No, not at all! My goal was honestly just to hold on as long as I could. I was in lane nine so I knew they'd all be chasing me," Lewis said. "I just did nationals on Sunday so came straight here from that. And this is most of their season opens so I knew I had an edge coming in but I wasn't sure because I've never raced them. I honestly didn't notice I'd beaten them until I saw the replay and it was like 'Holy crap!' It was so surreal beating Sha'Carri."

There was no such drama for Christian Coleman in the men's 100m, the American holding his composure after his trademark fast start misfired for the win in 10.13sec, teammate Fred Kerley in second at 0.04sec. "I'll put that in the bank and keep getting better,"

said Coleman. "Usually I'm out 20-30 metres in a race but today I felt I was a step behind. I feel really good about the fact that I was able to stay composed, stay in my lane and put together a good race."

Gudaf Tsegay, a multi-medallist between 1500-10,000m, led home a quintet of Ethiopians as she set a meet record and world lead of 3:50.30 to win the women's 1500m. It was the third fastest race ever run. "I'm surprised because it's my first race outdoors!" said Tsegay. "Competition is easy, training is hard for me!"

A loaded 100m hurdles saw Olympic champion Jasmine Camacho-Quinn come from behind to take the win in a meeting record of 12.45sec. Two other reigning world champions secured victories, Marileidy Paulino of the Dominican Republic winning the women's 400m in 50.08sec while Canada's Marco Arop claimed the men's 800m in a rapid 1:43.61.

Cuban-born Portuguese Pedro Pichardo won the men's triple jump with 17.51m. China had one winner in the shape of Olympic champion Lijiao Gong in the women's shot put (19.72m).

AFC U-23 ASIAN CUP

Qatar face Australia, eye third win on trot

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Hosts Qatar, who have already confirmed their place in the quarter-finals, will be looking for their third successive win as they take on Australia in the final Group A match of the AFC U-23 Asian Cup.

With wins over Indonesia and Jordan, Ildio Vale's men have been in fine form. Against Australia, they will be without Saifaldeen Hassan, who is suspended after picking up a second yellow card in two games against Jordan, and the Portuguese coach is not expecting to make major alterations to his team despite confirming their progress to the next phase.

"As I have said before, I take each match one at a time," he said. "I don't think I will change the formation and system because we would like to secure nine points and first place, therefore all the players will want to (do their best) as well."

Meanwhile, Australia coach Tony Vidmar is confident his squad

can still perform to their potential as the Olyroos go into their clash with Qatar knowing even victory might not be enough to keep their title hopes alive.

A 1-0 loss to Indonesia on Thursday left the Australians with one point from two games and, with his team yet to score, Vidmar's side are bottom of the standings going into the final round of group matches.

That means Australia need to pick up all three points against Qatar while hoping Shin Tae-yong's Indonesia side draw with third-placed Jordan in their meeting today to have a realistic chance of advancing to the quarter-finals.

"We have to rely on other results," said Vidmar. "We still have to win the last game against Qatar but we need the other result to fall in our favour. We've got full belief in the squad that whichever team we put out there we can play to what we are capable of, which has happened in the two games. We just need to take our chances. That's modern day football, that's international football."



Qatar U-23 players at a training session yesterday.

Madoulaud emerges victorious at Qatar Off Road Championship



Valentin Madoulaud clinched victory in the Class 1 category as the third round of the Qatar Off Road Championship, organised by the Qatar Motor & Motorcycle Federation (QMMF), was held yesterday. Riding a Yamaha YFZ 450, Madoulaud completed 17 laps, clocking a total time of 1 hour, 22 minutes, and 51.641 seconds. South African rider Michael Anderson finished second on a KTM 450 SXF. Anderson completed the same number of laps as Madoulaud but finished five minutes and 07.133 seconds behind the Frenchman. UAE's Mohamed al-Balooshi claimed the third spot riding his Yamaha YZ450F, finishing one lap behind the top two riders. In the Class 2 category, Abdulaziz Ahli emerged victorious after completing 15 laps in his Yamaha YZ450R. The quad category saw Mansoor al-Suwaidi securing the second position, with Abdullah al-Falasi finishing third, marking a remarkable UAE 1-2-3 finish in the third round of the championship. The next round of the series is scheduled for April 26-27.

FORMULA 1

Verstappen enjoys 'incredible' pole after sprint win

'If car is even half as good tomorrow as it was in sprint we will be all right'

AFP
Shanghai

Max Verstappen continued his dominant start to the season in emphatic style yesterday by romping to sprint victory then claiming pole position for the Chinese Grand Prix - an "incredible" 100th for his Red Bull team.

It was an ominous display from Verstappen, who looks on course to win a fourth grand prix out of five today as he marches towards a fourth consecutive world title. The Red Bull driver was 0.322 seconds clear of Sergio Perez as Red Bull locked up the front row, with Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso third on Formula One's return to China after five years away.

Verstappen clocked a fastest lap of 1min 33.660sec to record the team milestone and his first pole at the Shanghai International Circuit. "Before I jumped in the car (Red Bull chief Christian) Horner told me if you get pole today it could be number 100 for the team, so I was like, 'OK, that's nice, I'll give it a good go,'" Verstappen said. "Of course that's an incredible achievement for the whole team." Verstappen won the 19-lap sprint in the morning by a huge 13 seconds from Lewis Hamilton's Mercedes as the Dutchman laid down a marker for Sunday's 56-lap race. "The car worked even better in qualifying," said Verstappen. "That final lap felt pretty decent and very happy to drive here in the dry, it was a lot of fun. "If the car is even half as good tomorrow as it was in the sprint we will be all right."

Lando Norris will start on the second row in his McLaren alongside Alonso for the first Grand Prix to be held in China since 2019 because of Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. Oscar Piastri was fifth fastest in the second McLaren ahead of the Ferrari pair of Charles Leclerc and Carlos Sainz, with



Red Bull Racing's Mexican driver Sergio Perez, Red Bull Racing's Dutch driver Max Verstappen (centre) and Aston Martin's Spanish driver Fernando Alonso (right) pose after the qualifying session for the Formula One Chinese Grand Prix at the Shanghai International Circuit in Shanghai yesterday. (AFP)

THE GRID

1st row: Max Verstappen (NED/Red Bull), Sergio Perez (MEX/Red Bull)
2nd row: Fernando Alonso (ESP/Aston Martin), Lando Norris (GBR/McLaren)
3rd row: Oscar Piastri (AUS/McLaren), Charles Leclerc (MON/Ferrari)
4th row: Carlos Sainz (ESP/

Ferrari), George Russell (GBR/Mercedes)
5th row: Nico Hulkenberg (GER/Haas), Valtteri Bottas (FIN/Sauber)
6th row: Lance Stroll (CAN/Aston Martin), Daniel Ricciardo (AUS/RB)
7th row: Esteban Ocon (FRA/Alpine), Alexander Albon (THA/

Williams)
8th row: Pierre Gasly (FRA/Alpine), Zhou Guanyu (CHN/Sauber)
9th row: Kevin Magnussen (DEN/Haas), Lewis Hamilton (GBR/Mercedes)
10th row: Yuki Tsunoda (JPN/RB), Logan Sargeant (USA/Williams)

George Russell's Mercedes eighth. Perez was relieved to be on the front row. "Very intense, I nearly got knocked out in Q1," said the Mexican. "In the final run the track was getting quite a bit better and I managed to put a good lap together."

Leclerc said he hoped Ferrari could be stronger on Sunday.

"We compromised our qualifying by prioritising the race tomorrow and struggled slightly more than we expected," said Leclerc.

"Our race pace is strong and it will be a long one, with tyre degradation playing a big role here."

Earlier, Verstappen blasted from fourth on the sprint grid to an easy victory that increased his championship lead over Perez to 25 points.

But Hamilton's joy at coming second turned to despair in Q1 when the Englishman locked up, relegating him to 18th. It was the first time since the 2022 Saudi Grand Prix that the seven-time world champion had been knocked out so early. "I made massive changes into qualifying," said Hamilton who won the last Chinese Grand Prix in 2019. "It is what it is. We can still have some fun even if we are starting

from P18." Sainz is the only driver apart from Verstappen to win a grand prix in 2024 and he survived a huge scare in Q2.

The Spaniard ran wide at the final bend and span across the start-finish straight to lose his nose cone in the barriers.

It brought out the red flags but Sainz was able to limp back to the pits and make it to the top 10 shootout. "I had a big moment there, touching the gravel," Sainz said. "From then on, a tough quali. I just don't think we have been very quick this weekend. It's a difficult track for us."

CRICKET

Pakistan trounce depleted New Zealand in second Twenty20

AFP
Rawalpindi

Left-armers Shaheen Shah Afridi and Mohamed Amir shared five wickets to rock New Zealand for a paltry 90 before Mohamed Rizwan anchored the chase to help Pakistan win the second Twenty20 clash yesterday in Rawalpindi.

Shaheen led the attack with 3-13 while Amir, returning to international cricket after nearly four years, finished with 2-13 as the visitors were bowled out in 18.1 overs after being sent in to bat.

Rizwan finished with 45 not out off 34 balls with a six and four boundaries to ensure Pakistan chased down a modest target in 12.1 overs and take a 1-0 lead in the five-match series.

The first match, also in Rawalpindi, was washed out after just two deliveries on Thursday. New Zealand did fight back with wickets of Saim Ayub (four), Babar Azam (14) and debutant Usman Khan (seven) but Muhammad Irfan Khan (run-a-ball 18) partnered Rizwan in an unfinished 36-run stand to seal victory.

Ayub hit a boundary off the first ball of the innings before giving a return catch to pacer Ben Lister off the next while Azam was stumped off rival skipper Michael Bracewell and Usman bowled by spinner Ish Sodhi.

Earlier Amir - returning to international cricket after nearly four years - jolted New Zealand in the opening overs. Amir retired abruptly in 2020 after he was dropped from the team, the second break in his career after he was banned for five years in a spot-fixing scandal in 2010.

Spinners Abrar Ahmed (2-15) and Shadab Khan (2-15) doubled the pressure as New Zealand were dismissed for their second lowest total against Pakistan in the game's shortest format.

Mark Chapman (19), Cole McConchie (15), Dean Foxcroft (13) and Tim Seifert (13) were the only batsmen to reach double figures.

Chapman hit three boundaries in his 16-ball knock. New Zealand's lowest T20I total against Pakistan is 80, made at Christchurch in 2010.

Fast bowler Naseem Shah, also playing his first match since injuring his shoulder in September last year, took 1-27 in four overs.

Both teams are preparing for the Twenty20 World Cup to be held in June in the United States and the West Indies.

New Zealand are missing a host of their top players due to playing in the ongoing Indian Premier League, unavailability and injuries.

The remaining matches are in Rawalpindi today followed by the last two in Lahore on April 25 and 27.

BRIEF SCORES: Pakistan 92 for 3 (Rizwan 45*, Lister 1-10) **beat New Zealand 90** (Chapman 19, Afridi 3-13, Amir 2-13, Abrar 2-15, Shadab 2-15) **by seven wickets.**



Pakistan's Mohamed Amir (third from right) celebrates with teammates after taking the wicket of New Zealand's Tim Robinson (right) during the second Twenty20 match at the Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium in Rawalpindi yesterday. (AFP)

INDIAN PREMIER LEAGUE

Head blitz fires Sunrisers to 266 and big win

AFP
New Delhi

Australia's Travis Head smashed 89 off 32 balls to lead Sunrisers Hyderabad to another huge Indian Premier League (IPL) total of 266-7 in a crushing 67-run victory over Delhi Capitals yesterday.

Hyderabad have twice broken records this season with IPL totals of 277 and 287 and threatened to breach the mark once again at Delhi's Arun Jaitley Stadium.

Delhi skipper Rishabh Pant won the toss and put Hyderabad into bat on a batting-friendly pitch, which produced the fourth highest total of the T20 tournament.

Delhi, were bowled out for 199 in 19.1 overs with left-arm quick T Natarajan returning impressive figures of 4-19. Hyderabad jumped to second spot behind Rajasthan Royals with five wins in seven matches. Head remained the hero after he blasted a 16-ball 50 in an explosive opening stand with fellow left-hander Abhishek Sharma to tear into the opposition attack as Hyderabad reached 100 in five overs and 125 in six.

Head and Sharma hit 12 sixes between them as the innings witnessed a joint IPL record of 22 hit over the fence and Hyderabad equalled their effort from the previous match when they smashed 287-3 in a win over Royal Challengers Bengaluru early this week.

Left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav checked the carnage with two wickets in the seventh over as he sent back Sharma, out for 46 off 12 balls, and then Aiden Markram, for one.

Hyderabad then lost two wickets in the space of two deliveries after Kuldeep dismissed Head and fellow spinner Axar Patel bowled Heinrich Klaasen, for 15, at the start of the next over.

Shahbaz Ahmed then steadied the innings and kept up the attack as he hammered an unbeaten 59 off 29 balls. Ahmed, a left-handed batsman, put on 67 runs with Nishik Kumar Reddy, who made 37, before Kuldeep dismissed Reddy to finish with four wickets.

Hyderabad lost two wickets in

the final over including skipper Pat Cummins to a run out but Ahmed reached his first IPL fifty with a four and ended the innings with a six. Washington Sundar came in as the impact player in place of Head as Hyderabad added a spinner to defend the total.

Sundar opened the bowling and was hit for four straight boundaries by Prithvi Shaw, who was Delhi's impact player, but got his revenge on the fifth when he dismissed the opener for 16. David Warner fell to Bhuvneshwar Kumar for one before up and coming Australian batsman Jake Fraser-McGurk hit an 18-ball 65 and put on 84 runs with Abhishek Porel, who hit 42.

Leg-spinner Mayank Markande



Sunrisers Hyderabad's Travis Head celebrates after scoring a half-century during the IPL match against Delhi Capitals in New Delhi. (AFP)

dismissed the two and the rest of the batting failed to live up to the challenge despite Pant's 44.

BRIEF SCORES Sunrisers Hyderabad 266 for 7

(Head 89, Shahbaz 59*, Abhishek 46, Kuldeep 4-55) **beat Delhi Capitals 199** (Fraser-McGurk 65, Rishabh Pant 44, Natarajan 4-19, Reddy 2-17, Markande 2-26) **by 67 runs.**

SPOTLIGHT

Two-time major winner Muguruza retires

AFP
Barcelona

Former world number one and two-time Grand Slam winner **Garbine Muguruza** announced her retirement from tennis yesterday after more than a year without playing.

"The time has come to say goodbye, it has been a long and beautiful career, but I feel the time has come to retire," Muguruza, 30, told a press conference at the Laureus Awards.

"It's a decision that I've been taking little by little."

Muguruza had not competed since January 2023 when she played her last official match at the Lyon Open before taking a break from the sport. "When I stopped competing, I returned home and I welcomed the break with open arms," said Muguruza who ends her career with 10 singles titles.

"Every day that went by I felt better and I didn't miss the discipline and the difficulty of the life I had before, so it has been a progressive thing."

Muguruza made her WTA main-draw debut in 2012, and reached her first Grand Slam final in 2015 where she was defeated by Serena Williams at Wimbledon. However she beat the American to claim her first Grand Slam at the French Open in 2016, and then beat Venus Williams in 2017 to win Wimbledon.



Her Paris win made Muguruza the first Spanish woman to lift a Grand Slam trophy since Arantxa Sanchez Vicario triumphed in the French capital in 1998. When she added Wimbledon to her title collection the following year

she became the first Spanish female to triumph at the All England Club since Conchita Martinez in 1994. Fittingly, it was Martinez who coached her to the title and two months later Muguruza rose to number one in the world.

FOCUS

Rybakina to take on Kostyuk in final

AFP
Stuttgart, Germany

Elena Rybakina ended defending champion Iga Swiatek's 10-match winning streak in Stuttgart yesterday to reach the final of the clay-court tournament.

Fourth seed Rybakina came through their semi-final clash 6-3, 4-6, 6-3, stunning the Polish world number one who had captured the last two titles at the German event.

Rybakina will face Ukrainian Marta Kostyuk, who defeated Wimbledon champion Marketa Vondrousova 7-6 (7/2), 6-2 in Saturday's second semi-final, for the title.

Rybakina now boasts a 4-2 career head-to-head record against four-time Grand Slam winner Swiatek and will be playing in her fifth final of 2024 today. "Like always it was a very tough match," Rybakina said of her opponent.

"My serve helped me a lot in important moments. I was fighting for the ball."

"It was such a close match. I'm really happy I managed to win and could show a good game."

Winners of the Stuttgart tournament, sponsored by German

automobile company Porsche, receive a car but Rybakina revealed the prize would be of little use.

"I actually don't have a driver's licence," said Rybakina, 24, who has titles to her name this season in Adelaide and Abu Dhabi and runners-up spots at Doha and Miami.

Kostyuk took just one hour 35 minutes to beat world number eight Vondrousova, just a day after coming through a three-set epic against US Open champion and world number three Coco Gauff.

"I don't think a lot of people know but I started my career 0-14 against top 10 players so I'm really trying to catch up," said world number 27 Kostyuk who also eliminated seventh-ranked Zheng Qinwen earlier in the week.

"These are some of the best players in the world in the last year and it's incredible to beat all of them - and I'm hoping for a Grand Slam too for myself one day."

The 21-year-old Ukrainian will play in her second final of the season, having finished runner-up to Katie Boulter at the San Diego Open in March.

It will be her third career final having claimed her maiden WTA title in Austin last season.



Kazakhstan's Elena Rybakina reacts after winning her semi-final against Poland's Iga Swiatek in Stuttgart yesterday. (AFP)

TENNIS

Tsitsipas sets up Ruud rematch in Barcelona final

'It was not (easy) at all, he was fighting really hard, I wasn't very consistent'

AFP
Barcelona

Stefanos Tsitsipas set up a rematch with Casper Ruud in the Barcelona Open final by defeating Dusan Lajovic 5-7, 6-4, 6-2 yesterday.

The Greek beat world number six Ruud last week in the Monte Carlo Masters final, inflicting the Norwegian's third final defeat this year.

Ruud, a three-time Grand Slam runner-up, edged past Tomas Etcheverry 7-6 (8/6), 6-4 earlier yesterday in the first semi-final to record his tour-leading 28th win of the season.

Tsitsipas, seventh in the world rankings, battled back after a shaky first set and overpowered his Serbian opponent.

"It was not (easy) at all, he was fighting really hard, I wasn't very consistent," said Tsitsipas.

"The more the match progressed I got deeper into the reasons of why I'm not winning the games I need to win - I got really deep with myself and tried to escape that one-way route the match started at."

Tsitsipas saved a break point to hold for 4-4 in the first set in which he committed several unforced errors, and Lajovic secured it when the Greek pushed a shot into the net.

However the 25-year-old broke decisively in the second set for a 4-3 lead and then dominated in the third set.

"I delivered really different tennis and a much better version of myself in the second and third set," added Tsitsipas.

Ruud triumphed in straight sets earlier but Etcheverry tested him.

"It's been fantastic, two weeks has been really good, two finals in a row and it's gonna be special tomorrow, I'm gonna play for the biggest title of my career," Ruud told Teledeporte.

"It was a difficult match, level-wise maybe it was my best match here in Barcelona, a very tough opponent, Tomas is playing fantastic tennis."

"I was a bit lucky in the first set...but that's what you need sometimes, a bit of luck."



Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas celebrates victory against Serbia's Dusan Lajovic during the ATP Barcelona Open at the Real Club de Tennis in Barcelona yesterday. (AFP)

Ruud lost two finals in Mexico and then against Tsitsipas in Monte Carlo but is enjoying a strong season. The players traded breaks in the first set, with Ruud's superb forehand winner earning him a 4-2 lead.

However Etcheverry broke back with Ruud slapping another forehand into the net and consolidated for 4-4. Ruud dropped two set

points before eventually shading a tight tie-break. In the second set Ruud broke straight away but Etcheverry immediately hit back. The Norwegian broke again in the fifth game and served it out.

Ruud wrapped up his win by converting the second of three match points when Etcheverry sent a return into the net.

O'Callaghan upstages Titmus as McKeown challenges world record

World record holder Mollie O'Callaghan upstaged Olympic champion Ariarne Titmus in the year's fastest 200m freestyle yesterday, while Kaylee McKeown narrowly missed her own 200m backstroke world best. Kyle Chalmers was also in blistering form at the Australian championships, swimming a lightening 100m free to lay down a marker ahead of the Olympics. O'Callaghan hit the wall on the Gold Coast in an eye-popping 1min 53.57sec, with an explosive last 50 pulling her away from Titmus, who touched second in 1:55.38. "I'm always striving to go fast," said O'Callaghan, who also won the 100m title. The 200 is a difficult event to work out and this was the last time to get it worked out before trials."

Australia's Olympic trials are at Brisbane in June, with the 20-year-old potentially targeting six gold medals in Paris this summer. All-conquering backstroke star McKeown will also be in the hunt for multiple Olympic titles. She clocked the fastest 200m backstroke of the year ahead of American arch-rival Regan Smith by powering home in 2:03.84 to miss her world record by just seven-tenths of a second. "I just wanted to go out hard and try and hang on," said McKeown, who was under world record pace at the halfway mark. "I definitely felt it in the last 35 metres."

McKeown also won the 50m backstroke, but skipped the 100m to focus on the 200m and 400m medley where she set among the fastest times ever. The 22-year-old confirmed she will swim the 200 medley at the Olympic trials, along with the backstroke events, but not the 400 medley. Chalmers, the 2016 Olympic champion who took silver in Tokyo behind American arch-rival Caeleb Dressel, blitzed to a 47.63 victory ahead of William Yang (48.20). Since the last Olympics, China's Pan Zhanle has burst on the scene to challenge the old guard, setting a new world record of 46.80 this year. He is in the only man faster than Chalmers this year. "I really wanted to go under 48, so really, really happy with that," said Chalmers. "I love racing, no matter where it is, when it is, I love getting myself up for a race. That's what keeps me motivated."

In other races, Japan veteran Daiya Seto took out the 400m medley in 4:10.44, comfortably beating reigning world champion Lewis Clareburt of New Zealand. Both men were swimming on invitations, with Seto scoring revenge after Clareburt beat him into third at the February world titles in Doha. Australia's most decorated Olympian Emma McKeon won the women's 100m butterfly in 56.58 ahead of Brianna Throssell (56.77).



Mollie O'Callaghan reacts after competing in the women's 100m backstroke event during the Australian Open Swimming Championships at the Gold Coast Aquatic Centre yesterday. (AFP)

Cherif consolidates overall lead at Hathab

Cyrine Cherif regained her overall lead after winning the Big Tour class during the 12th round of Hathab at the Qatar Equestrian Federation outdoor arena yesterday. Riding I'am Moerhoeve's Princess Z, the French rider clocked 36.12 secs to top the event ahead of Faleh Suwead al-Ajami, who finished second astride Ghana with a time of 36.37 secs. Lara Sakakini astried Hour was third in 40.06 secs. With two rounds remaining, Cherif leads the overall standings by 248 points followed by Mohamed Khalifa Albaker (244 points) and Hamad Nasser al-Qadi (223 points). Meanwhile, Marc Bettinger registered victory in Open Class guiding Dukhan 3 to a flawless round in 56.88 secs. Ghanim Nasser al-Qadi (Bonne Chance) and Hamad Towaim al-Marri (Famous) finished second and third with times of 57.23 and 58.72, respectively.



FOCUS

Fitzgerald claims Qatar Open Amateur Golf Championship

By Sports Reporter

Doha

Despite struggling in the final round, Calum Fitzgerald registered a three-shot victory to claim the 2024 WAGR Qatar Open Amateur Golf Championship at the Doha Golf Club yesterday.

The Englishman, who shot a four-over-par 76 in the last round, finished with an aggregate of 217, ahead of Saleh al-Kaabi after the Qatar ace soared to day's best score of one-under-par 71 to finish runner-up.

Fitzgerald will compete in the next edition of the prestigious Commercial Bank Qatar Masters by virtue of winning the tournament. Ireland's Keith Crowley secured third place with a card of 77 yesterday aggregating 225, with Pakistan's Omar Khalid Hussain finishing joint fourth after falling a stroke behind with a card of 75 yesterday along with Andrew Ikstrums.

Australia's Ikstrums, who shared joint lead on the opening day, wrapped up his campaign carding 77 yesterday.

Qatar's Daniil Sokolov and Bahrain's Mohamed Diab Alnoaimi followed the duo with total scores of 227 and 228 respectively.

Another Bahrain golfer Yousif Ali Janahi and Olivier van Lelyveld of the Netherlands registered identical aggregates of 232 while England's Andrew Saunders carded 71 yesterday to finish with a total of 233.

Qatar Golf Association (QGA) board member, Mohamed Faisal al-Naimi honoured the top finishing golfers during the closing ceremony. Around 100 golfers from 30 countries took part in the tournament, which was in its 38th edition.

QGA board member Mohamed Faisal al-Naimi honoured the winners of the 2024 WAGR Qatar Open Amateur Golf Championship at the Doha Golf Club yesterday.



GYMNASTICS

Yulo, Nemour shine on final day of Doha World Cup

Anna Lashchevska of Ukraine grabbed women's balance beam gold

By Sports Reporter

Doha

Former World champion Carlos Yulo of the Philippines won a gold and silver each at the 16th Artistic Gymnastics World Cup Doha, which concluded at the Ladies Sports Hall yesterday.

Yulo secured the gold in the parallel bars final after earlier having had to settle for silver in the vault event. Yulo, who had already clinched a place for the 2024 Paris Olympics, scored 15.200 to finish ahead of Chinese Taipei's Hung Yuan-Hsi (14.966) and Brazil's Caio Souza (14.566) for the gold in the parallel bars.

Earlier, he also won the silver in the men's vault final after scoring 15.066, finishing just behind 2020 Olympic bronze medalist Artur Davtayan of Armenia, who finished with a score of 15.166. Yavor Sharankou (14.749) came third.

World championships medalist Kaylia Nemour of Algeria took gold in the floor exercise, where she posted a score of 13.700. Britain's Ruby Evans was second (13.300) while Spain's Laura Casabuena was third (13.233).

Anna Lashchevska of Ukraine grabbed women's Balance Beam gold. Though Nemour led the standings from the start, it was Lashchevska's heroics on the beam that saw her clinch the title with 13.533 points. Nemour, who had also won the women's uneven bar event on Friday, picked up silver (13.400) followed by Chiara Barzasi of Italy (12.900).

In the horizontal bar final, Chinese Taipei's Tang Chia-Hung soared to the top of the standings



Carlos Yulo of the Philippines performs on the parallel bars during the Artistic Gymnastics World Cup Doha at the Ladies Sports Hall yesterday.

with a 15.133 final score. Lithuania's Robert Tvorogal was the silver-medal winner at 14.700. Brazil's Arthur Nory grabbed the bronze medal with a 14.533 after repeating his exercise after his grip broke.

Twenty gymnasts qualified for the Paris Olympics after the final leg of the World Cup in Doha. Two gymnasts per apparatus – so a total of eight women's artistic gymnasts and 12 men's – earned berths for their nation through the series. Only one country can secure a spot per apparatus, with a maximum of three overall per National Olympic Committee.

But those gymnasts are not eligible if their team has already secured a quota via the 2023 or 2024 World Championships, or if they have already obtained a quota spot for their nation as an individual.



Anna Lashchevska (centre) of Ukraine poses with the gold after winning the Balance Beam final. Kaylia Nemour (left) of Algeria took silver, Chiara Barzasi of Italy won bronze.

AFC U-23 ASIAN CUP

Uzbekistan, Vietnam seal knockout berths

By Sports Reporter

Doha

Impressive Uzbekistan secured their place in the AFC U-23 Asian Cup quarter-finals with a 5-0 win over Kuwait at the Al Janoub Stadium yesterday. The victory meant Vietnam were also assured of their knockout stage spot, with the two sides to meet on Tuesday to decide the Group C winners in a repeat of the 2018 final.

Uzbekistan asserted themselves from the get-go, and their persistence paid off in the 32nd minute when Alibek Davronov dived to head home Muhammadkodir Hamraliev's cross to break the deadlock. Uzbekistan extended their lead just four minutes into the second half when Jasurbek Jaloliddinov's free-kick was tapped home by Hamraliev.

With their tournament hopes hanging by a thread, Kuwait began to push forward only for Uzbekistan to further widen their lead following a counterattack in the 55th minute which saw Jaloliddinov supplying yet another assist with Hojimat Erkinov converting.

Kuwait were dealt another blow in the 71st minute when

substitute Hamad al-Taweel was sent off for a dangerous challenge on Abdurauf Buriev following a VAR review. Uzbekistan kept pushing and earned a penalty in the 86th minute after Diyor Jijanov's strike hit Khaled al-Fadhli's arm with Diyor Kholmatorov slotting home.

Norchaev then missed from the penalty spot in added time after al-Mehtab brought down Erkinov in the box but the forward redeemed himself just moments later, finishing Zafarmurod Abdirahmatov's pass from close range.

Meanwhile, Vietnam defeated Malaysia 2-0.

Goals either side of the break gave Vietnam the win, with the Southeast Asian side to face Uzbekistan on Tuesday to decide the group winners in a meeting between the 2018 finalists. Vietnam took lead six minutes before half-time when Van Khang sent his left-footed curling free-kick into the top corner.

Vietnam hit on the break with substitute Bui Vi Hao beating Mohamed Ubaidullah for pace before being taken down by the defender, forcing referee Mooud Bonyarifard to award a penalty kick which Minh Khoa converted.



Uzbekistan players celebrate after their win over Kuwait in the AFC U-23 Asian Cup yesterday.

FOOTBALL

Silva strikes late as Man City sink Chelsea to reach FA Cup final



Manchester City's Bernardo Silva, Kyle Walker and Ruben Dias celebrate after beating Chelsea in the FA Cup semi-final in London yesterday.

AFP
London

Bernardo Silva fired Manchester City back into the FA Cup final as the Portuguese midfielder's late strike sealed the holders' 1-0 win against Chelsea at Wembley yesterday.

Pep Guardiola's side were second best for long periods of the semi-final, but Chelsea wasted a string of chances before Silva delivered the knockout blow six minutes from full-time.

Shaken by their Champions League quarter-final loss against Real Madrid on penalties in midweek, City took a while to shake off

the gloom from the end of their treble bid. They were hampered by the absence of Norway striker Erling Haaland after he suffered a knock against Real, with Julian Alvarez unable to make an impact as his replacement. City were bailed out by Chelsea striker Nicolas Jackson's profligacy and Guardiola will hope the hard-fought success provides a timely lift as they chase a Premier League and FA Cup double.

City face Manchester United or Coventry, who meet on Sunday, in the final on May 25 and will retain the Premier League title if they win their last six games.

It will be City's 13th final in the competition and potentially a repeat of last year's 2-1 win over

United in the Wembley Manchester derby.

Beaten by Liverpool in the League Cup final in February, Chelsea's wait to win their first domestic trophy since the 2018 FA Cup goes on for another season.

It was a bitter blow for Blues boss Mauricio Pochettino, who has endured a difficult first season in charge and remains without silverware in England.

The semi-final was billed as in-form Chelsea forward Cole Palmer's chance to punish his old club for selling him to the Blues in September. Guardiola said Palmer was asking to leave City for two years before he eventually joined Chelsea, where he has scored 23 goals

in all competitions this, including 11 in his last six games.

Palmer, who scored four times in Monday's 6-0 rout of Everton, was a constant threat for Chelsea, but ultimately it was his team's lack of killer instinct that proved decisive. Palmer's pin-point pass sent Jackson racing into the City area early on, but his strike lacked the accuracy to beat Stefan Ortega in a miss that foreshadowed Chelsea's fate. Jackson wasted a golden opportunity to give Chelsea the goal their dominance deserved.

Enzo Fernandez's pass split the City defence, but Jackson opted to go around Ortega rather than shoot and the chance was gone as Nathan Ake scurried back to clear.