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KOREA CONFUSION

IOC APOLOGISES FOR SOUTH KOREA GAFFE IN OPENING CEREMONY

The International Olympic Committee apologised for a gaffe during the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics in which South Korean athletes were incorrectly introduced as North Korean. As the South Korean delegation sailed down the Seine river in the French capital, they were introduced with the official name for North Korea: "Republique populaire democratique de Coree" in French, then "Democratic People's Republic of Korea" in English. The error sparked displeased reactions in South Korea, a global cultural and technological powerhouse that is technically still at war with the nuclear-armed North Korea.


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**SPORT**



Sheikh Joaan visits UAE's Olympic House



Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) President HE Sheikh Joaan bin Hamad al-Thani visited the United Arab Emirates Olympic House on the sidelines of the Paris Games yesterday. The QOC president and his accompanying delegation were received by Sheikh Rashid bin Humaid al-Nuaimi, vice-president of the United Arab Emirates National Olympic Committee and Head of the UAE delegation at the Paris 2024 Olympics. HE Sheikh Joaan toured UAE's Olympic House, which features a wide range of activities. During his visit, Sheikh Joaan was accompanied by the QOC Second Vice-President Dr Thani bin Abdulrahman al-Kuwari and the QOC Secretary-General Jassim bin Rashid al-Buenain. FIFA president Gianni Infantino was also present on the occasion.

Al-Obaidly excited to compete with world's best



Qatar's young swimmer Abdulaziz al-Obaidly finished sixth among eight participants in the 100m breaststroke heats at the Tokyo Olympics yesterday. The 22-year-old, who had also taken part in the Tokyo Games in 2021, clocked 1:04.31 seconds and was overall 30th out of 36 swimmers who took part in the heats. Al-Obaidly said he was satisfied with his performance and was excited to compete with best swimmers in the world.

SWIMMING

# Titmus dominates Ledeccky to retain 400m free crown

‘I know what it takes to be a champion and I know how hard it is racing in these circumstances’

**AFP**  
Paris

Ariarne Titmus dominated rivals Katie Ledeccky and Summer McIntosh to retain her Olympic 400m freestyle title yesterday as German Lukas Maertens surged to the men's gold on day one in the pool in Paris.

The decorated American Ledeccky was gunning for revenge after the Australian dethroned her in Tokyo three years ago, but it was Titmus who again prevailed in an electric atmosphere at La Defense Arena. The 23-year-old world record holder led from start to finish to hit the wall in 3mins 57.49 secs and remain unbeaten over the distance since 2019.

Ledeccky had to settle for bronze after fading badly over the final lap, adding to her cache of 10 Olympic medals, seven of them gold. Canadian teenager McIntosh grabbed silver after reeling in the American great to clinch her first Olympic medal, after coming fourth in Tokyo as a 14-year-old.

"I know what it takes to be a champion and I know how hard it is racing in these circumstances," said Titmus, who came to Paris after swimming the second fastest time in history last month. "An Olympic Games - it's not really like anything else. I probably felt the expectation and pressure for this



Gold medalist Ariarne Titmus (centre) of Australia, silver medalist Summer McIntosh (left) of Canada and bronze medalist Katie Ledeccky of United States celebrate at the 400m freestyle podium ceremony. (Reuters)

race more than anything in my life, to be honest."

It was billed as a blockbuster showdown, with Titmus, Ledeccky and McIntosh sharing the 27 fastest times in history.

Known as "The Terminator", Titmus will also defend her 200m title on the back of shattering the world record last month, while trying to prevent Ledeccky winning a fourth straight gold over 800m.

Ledeccky has dropped the 200m from her schedule but will be a strong favourite over 800m and 1,500m, races she has long dominated. McIntosh is also skipping the 200 free, instead prioritising the 200-400m medley and 200m butterfly.

Maertens was equally untouchable in the men's 400m, under world record pace for much of the race before tiring in the final stretch to touch in 3:41.78 ahead of

Australia's Elijah Winnington and South Korea's Kim Woo-min.

The German arrived in Paris more than a second quicker than anyone else this season after clocking the best time since 2012 in April, just 0.26 seconds away from Paul Biedermann's super-suited world record.

Australia again proved unstoppable in the women's 4x100m freestyle relay to remain undefeated at the Olympics since 2012.

BEACH VOLLEYBALL

## Younousse and Tijan off to a flier

**Agencies**  
Paris

Qatar's beach volleyball pair Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan made a winning start at the Paris Olympics Games yesterday after a 21-19, 21-18 victory over Italy's Paolo Nicolai and Samuele Cottafava in the Group A preliminary match.

The 2020 Tokyo Games bronze medallists took early lead in both the sets and never relinquished it to wrap up the match in 45 minutes. They Asia's top ranked pair next face Sweden's World No 1 pair of David Ahman and Jonatan Hellvig tomorrow. Their final group stage match is against Australia's Mark Nicolaidis and Izac Carracher on Thursday, August 1. Twenty-four teams start in both the men's and women's events, before being whittled down to 16 for the knockout stages, with the finals taking place on August 9 and 10.

The beach volleyball is played at the most spectacular venue of the Paris Olympics in the shadow of a just-visible Eiffel Tower. And Younousse and Tijan's also put on a sizzling display in front of an iconic venue. After a rain-soaked opening ceremony on Friday, the first full day of sporting action in Paris was equally wet and crowds at the purpose-built stadium huddled under umbrellas, hats and raincoats.

The waterlogged park was supposed to be the standout venue of the Games but the rain lashed down as men's teams from the United States and Cuba took to the sand for the opening match. Beach



Paolo Nicolai of Italy and Samuele Cottafava of Italy in action against Cherif Younousse of Qatar yesterday. (Reuters)



Ahmed Tijan of Qatar celebrates after the game. (Reuters)

volleyball has grown to become one of the most popular events at the Olympics since its inclusion for the first time in 1996, and stadium stands were largely packed.

On the court, Cuba's Noslen Diaz Amaro and Jorge Luis Alayo Moliner easily won the first match of the day against US pair Miles Partain and Andrew Benesh. The United States are the current Ol-

ympic women's champions but have not won men's gold since Beijing in 2008.

Next on the sand were the top-ranked Swedish pairing of Ahman and Hellvig, both aged 22, who eased to victory against Australians Mark Nicolaidis and Izac Carracher. The pair use an aggressive playing style known as the "Swedish jump-set", which adds an element of unpredictability to attacking play and helped them win the day's second match in straight sets. "A lot of people didn't believe that it would work so well but I think we proved a lot of people wrong," said Hellvig.

The women's competition started with a close match between Asian champions China's Xue Chen and Xia Xinyi and Tokyo 2020 silver medallists Mari-afe Artacho del Solar and Taliqua Clancy of Australia. After a tight battle that ran to three sets, Australia managed to get over the line, winning 16-14 in the decider.

MEDALS TALLY					
R	TEAMS	G	S	B	T
1	Australia	3	2	0	5
2	China	2	0	1	3
3	United States	1	2	2	5
4	France	1	2	1	4
5	South Korea	1	1	1	3
6	Belgium	1	0	1	2
	Japan	1	0	1	2
	Kazakhstan	1	0	1	2
9	Germany	1	0	0	1
	Hong Kong	1	0	0	1
11	Italy	0	1	2	3
12	Great Britain	0	1	1	2
13	Canada	0	1	0	1
	Fiji	0	1	0	1
	Mongolia	0	1	0	1
	Tunisia	0	1	0	1
17	Hungary	0	0	1	1
	South Africa	0	0	1	1
	Spain	0	0	1	1
	Sweden	0	0	1	1
R- Rank, G- Gold, S- Silver, B- Bronze, T- Total					

FOOTBALL

# Spain enter knockouts, twice champion Argentina off mark

ARGENTINA CAME BACK FROM BEHIND FOR A 3-1 WIN OVER IRAQ, SPAIN BEAT DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

AFP  
Paris

Argentina bounced back from the chaos of their opening game in the Olympic men's football tournament to beat Iraq 3-1 yesterday, while Spain are the first team through to the quarter-finals.

Two-time gold medallists Argentina began their campaign at the Paris Games with a 2-1 defeat by Morocco on Wednesday in Saint-Etienne in a match marred by crowd trouble.

The South Americans had a late equaliser disallowed and the final minutes took place in an empty stadium following the disruption.

However, Javier Mascherano's side registered their first points in Group B yesterday thanks to goals by Thiago Almada, Luciano Gondou and Ezequiel Fernandez in Lyon, with Aymen Hussein replying for Iraq.

The result, coupled with Ukraine's last-gasp 2-1 win over Morocco in Saint-Etienne later, means all four teams in the group are now level on three points.

Argentina went ahead on 14 minutes in Lyon when Manchester City's Julian Alvarez laid the ball off for Almada to fire in. Iraq drew level in first-half stoppage time as captain Hussein rose to head home.

But Argentina went back ahead just after the hour mark. Argentinos Juniors forward Gondou had been on the pitch barely two minutes when he appeared unmarked at the back post to head in an inviting cross.

The third goal came five minutes from time as Kevin Zenon laid the ball back for Fernandez, of Boca Juniors, to curl in from range.

"We need to look forward and focus on what we can control, which is playing football. That is



Dominican Republic's defender Joao Urbazey vying for the ball with Spain's defender Pau Cubarsi in the men's group C match at the Bordeaux Stadium in Bordeaux yesterday. (AFP)

what I suggested we do, play the better football," said Mascherano as he refused to revisit the Morocco debacle.

**UKRAINE STUN MOROCCO**  
Morocco were caught by a 98th-minute sucker punch against Ukraine, who grabbed the victory and their first points when Oleh Fedor set up Ihor Krasnopir to score from close range.

Ukraine had gone ahead midway through the first half through Dmytro Kryskiv but appeared in trouble when Volodymyr Saliuk pulled back Soufiane Rahimi in the box on the hour mark. Saliuk's yellow card was upgraded to red on review, and Rahimi converted the penalty, his third

goal of the tournament making it 1-1. Morocco were then pushing for the winner with the extra man when Ukraine snatched the points. In the last round of group games on Tuesday, Argentina face Ukraine in Lyon while Morocco meet Iraq in Nice.

Spain are through to the last eight already after claiming a second win from as many games in Group C as the Tokyo silver medallists beat the Dominican Republic 3-1 in Bordeaux. They went ahead midway through the first half as Fermin Lopez intercepted a pass out by goalkeeper Enrique Boels to control and fire in.

It was all one-way traffic but debutants the Dominican Republic surprisingly equalised on 38

minutes when Angel Montes de Oca headed in at a corner.

However, they were reduced to 10 men in first-half stoppage time when captain Edison Azcona received his marching orders for kicking out at Pau Cubarsi.

Spain made the extra player count after the break, with Alex Baena's deflected strike restoring their lead before substitute Miguel Gutierrez tapped in on 70 minutes.

Spain's passage to the last eight was secured after Egypt beat Uzbekistan 1-0 in Nantes.

Egypt are well-placed to advance with them after Ahmed Koka scored the only goal on 11 minutes. Also yesterday, heavily fancied hosts France chase a second straight win when they play Guinea in Nice in Group A.

## Canada Olympic women's football team docked six points over drone scandal

Canada's Olympic women's football team have been deducted six points and their coach Beverly Priestman suspended for a year after a staff member used a drone to spy on a rival team at the Paris Games, FIFA said yesterday. Canada's football association was "responsible for failing to respect the applicable FIFA regulations in connection with... the prohibition on flying drones over any training sites", FIFA said.

It also handed down a fine of 200,000 Swiss francs (\$226,000). The ruling is a hammer blow to Canada's hopes of defending the Olympic title they won at the Tokyo Games three years ago. It leaves them on minus three points in Group A before they play hosts France on Sunday in Saint-Etienne.

They beat New Zealand 2-1 in their opening game on Thursday but the deduction means they now face having to win their next two matches to stand any chance of reaching the quarter-finals. Analyst Joey Lombardi was sent home after being given a suspended eight-month prison sentence for flying the drone over a New Zealand training session ahead of the game.

Assistant Jasime Mander was also sent home, while Priestman withdrew herself from the game against New Zealand and was later suspended by Canada Soccer. Like Priestman, Lombardi and Mander were also suspended by FIFA from "any football-related activity for a period of one year". "The officials were each found responsible for offensive behaviour

and violation of the principles of fair play," world football's governing body said.

The 38-year-old Briton Priestman was in charge of the Canada team that won gold in Tokyo in 2021, when they defeated Sweden on penalties in the final.

Canada Soccer chief executive Kevin Blue had tried to convince FIFA not to punish the team, saying the players had not seen any footage produced by the drone. "The players themselves have not been involved in any unethical behaviour," Blue told reporters on Friday.

"And frankly we ask FIFA to take that into consideration if contemplating any further sanctions. "Specifically we do not feel that a deduction of points in this tournament would be fair to our players."

Canada's players had insisted they were innocent of wrongdoing after their opening victory over the New Zealanders.

"There was a lot of emotion, frustration and humiliation because as a player, it doesn't reflect our values and what we want to represent as competitors at the Olympics," defender Vanessa Gilles said.

"The Games represent fair play. As Canadians, these are not our values or those of our country. We are not cheats."

Canadian Olympic Committee chief executive David Shoemaker said separately on Friday that Canada's victory at the pandemic-delayed Tokyo Olympics might also have been stained by spying tactics.

FOCUS

# Sensational Dupont inspires France to rugby sevens gold

AFP  
Paris

A magnificent Antoine Dupont crowned his two-year odyssey into the world of rugby sevens with a dream Olympic gold in front of an adoring crowd in Paris yesterday.

The France and Toulouse 15s captain again received a rapturous welcome from a raucous Stade de France for the final against Fiji, which the hosts won 28-7 in front of President Emmanuel Macron.

Dupont has established himself as one of world rugby's best players and the scrum-half cuts an iconic figure in France.

The 27-year-old took the gamble of missing the Six Nations to make the French Olympic team, a move that led to some criticism.

But the combative half-back put that to one side, going on to help France to two wins on the World Rugby Sevens Series, including victory in the Madrid finals.

In between, he skippered Toulouse to Top 14 and Champions Cup glory in the 15-a-side code.

After starting the opening two pool matches at the Games, Dupont was named on the bench for the final pool game and the knock-out phases as coach Jerome Daret plumped for Stephen Perez-Edo Martin in the playmaking role. "It's always more difficult to be on the bench... because we cannot do anything. It's more stressful than playing," Dupont admitted.

"But this is a part of being in a squad and the most important thing is the victory."

Wearing the number 11 shirt, Dupont came on for the second half and made an immediate impact in the final against reigning two-time champions Fiji.

The ball was knocked back to him and immediately he was off,



France's Antoine Dupont (right) scores a try past Fiji's Waisea Nacuqu (left) during the men's gold medal rugby sevens match during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games at the Stade de France in Saint-Denis yesterday. (AFP)

rounding Fiji captain Jerry Tuwai and shooting up the left wing.

He popped a try-scoring ball back inside for Aaron Grandidier Nkanang.

That pulled France clear and with Fiji under pressure, Dupont crossed for a brace of well-taken tries in a script that could not have been written any better.

World Rugby CEO Alan Gilpin showered praise on local hero Dupont, telling AFP that what Dupont had achieved was "mind-boggling".

Dupont's presence ensured a 69,000-capacity crowd at the

Stade de France, with World Rugby by expecting more than half a million fans to attend the six days of sevens action.

The last time Dupont played at the stadium north of Paris was in a 29-28 defeat for France against South Africa in the Rugby World Cup quarter-final in October.

Dupont's absence from the Six Nations to focus on making the Olympic team did not sit well with many traditionalists.

But his appearance at the Paris Games was a huge coup not only for French rugby as a whole, but also the organisers.

"I think it speaks volumes for his passion for representing his country at Olympic Games," Gilpin said of the Frenchman's decision to skip the Six Nations to focus on sevens, often seen as rugby union's poor cousin.

"But I think it also speaks volumes for him understanding that the Olympic Games is an unbelievable platform for a star player.

"Rugby sevens is great for the Games and the Games is great for rugby sevens and that's absolutely what we want," Gilpin added: "Let's be clear, what Dupont has done is almost impossible." It's mind-boggling," he added.

CRICKET

## Smith stars after Root leads England recovery

AFP  
Birmingham, United Kingdom

Julian Guyer Jamie Smith fell agonisingly short of a maiden Test hundred as England fought back from a top-order collapse to eye a series clean sweep of the West Indies at Edgbaston yesterday.

England, in dire straits at 54-5 early on the second day of the third Test, recovered to make 376 in reply to the West Indies' first-innings 282, with wicket-keeper Smith out for 95.

And at stumps the West Indies were 33-2 in their second innings, still 61 runs behind, with England already 2-0 ahead in a three-match series.

When England lost both Ollie Pope and Harry Brook cheaply earlier in the day, a first-innings lead looked unlikely.

But England captains past and present in Joe Root (87) and Ben Stokes (54) turned the tide in a sixth-wicket partnership of 115.

Smith, in only his third Test, then continued to take a toll on the West Indies' attack as he put on 106 for the eighth wicket with Chris Woakes, who made 62 on his Warwickshire home ground.

All-rounder Woakes then bowled West Indies captain Kraigg Brathwaite for a duck.

And when Kirk McKenzie completed a woeiful series with the bat - he managed just 33 runs in six innings - when caught behind off fast bowler Gus Atkinson for 12, the West Indies were 22-2.

But Mikyle Louis, 18 not out, after being dropped on nine by Stokes at mid-off, and Alick Athanaze (five not out) prevented further collapse.

**Four-wicket Ngarava puts Zimbabwe on top in Ireland Test Belfast:** Richard Ngarava took four Ireland top-order wickets as Zimbabwe hit back in dramatic style to take charge of a one-off Test in Belfast yesterday.

Zimbabwe started the third day on 12-0 but were dismissed for 197 in their second innings, with Ireland off-spinner Andy McBride taking 4-38.

That left Ireland with a victory target of 158 but their leading batsmen proved powerless to resist 26-year-old left-arm paceman Ngarava, who had the superb stumps figures of 4-12 from four overs, with the hosts 33-5 at the close and still needing a further 125 runs to win.

## Suryakumar's India begin new T20 journey with Sri Lanka thrashing

New captain Suryakumar Yadav hit an attacking half-century to set up a dominant 43-run victory for India in the first of three T20 internationals against Sri Lanka yesterday. Suryakumar, 33, hammered 58 off 26 balls at Kandy's Pallekele in his first match as T20 skipper with India beginning a new era in the format after its T20 World Cup triumph last month. India posted 213-7 and then bowled out the hosts for 170, after spinner Axar Patel struck twice in one over including taking the key wicket of Pathum Nissanka for 79. Nissanka looked like setting up the chase, but Sri Lanka lost nine wickets for 30 runs to be bowled out in 19.2 overs. **BRIEF SCORES:** India 213 for 7 (Suryakumar 58, Pant 49, Jaiswal 40, Pathirana 4-40) beat Sri Lanka 170 (Nissanka 79, Mendis 45, Parag 3-5, Arshdeep 2-24, Axar 2-38) by 43 runs.

FOCUS

# Tsunoda gives Japan golden start in judo, two medals for France

‘Of course, I have been waiting for a long time. I worked very hard to get to this stage’

Reuters  
Paris

Japan’s Natsumi Tsunoda won the gold medal in the women’s under 48kg judo at the Paris Olympics yesterday, while Yeldos Smetov of Kazakhstan won gold in the men’s under 60kg category.

Luka Mkheidze of France took the silver after being defeated by Smetov, while Ryuju Nagayama of Japan and Spain’s Francisco Garrigos earlier won the bronze medals.

In the women’s extra light-weight category, Mongolia’s Baasankhuu Bavuudorj took silver after her defeat by Tsunoda.

France’s Shirine Boukli claimed a bronze medal on her home soil by defeating Spaniard Laura Martinez Abelenda.

Sweden’s Tara Babulfath also won a bronze after overcoming Abiba Abuzhakynova of Kazakhstan.

Tsunoda, taking gold in her first appearance at the Olympics, came close to elimination in the semi-finals against the Babulfath, who was also making her Olympic debut.

Tsunoda only won on a “Golden score”, when the referee penalized Babulfath for a false attack, a decision the 18 year-old Swede did not seem to understand at the time. She later praised Tsunoda in her press conference and refused to comment further.

For Smetov, who won silver in Rio and bronze in Tokyo, this gold medal felt like vindication for all his work over the years.

“Of course, I have been waiting for a long time, before I was on the



Japan's Natsumi Tsunoda (in white and inset) and Mongolia's Baasankhuu Bavuudorj compete during the women's 48kg gold medal bout of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games at the Champ-de-Mars Arena, in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

right and the left side of the podium, but today I decided to stand on the top of it. I worked very hard to get to this stage.”

At the end of the first day of judo competition in Paris, the French are level with Japan on two medals apiece. The two nations have won the most medals in judo

in Olympic history. The crowd at the Arena Champs de Mars, mainly composed of French supporters, cheered its two athletes on wildly, waving flags and singing along.

“It was magical, it was incredible. It is a great crowd that spreads positive vibes. It makes

me want to roll over anything. I feel like this is historic”, said Boukli, 2023 World Championships silver medalist.

French President Emmanuel Macron was seen around the mats supporting the French judokas and chatting with former judokas David Douillet and Stéphane No-

mis, president of the French Judo Federation. Former soccer superstar Zinedine Zidane was also in the area and congratulated Boukli for her bronze medal.

“He was so happy and it made me happy. These are incredible meetings that are inspiring”, said Boukli.

CYCLING

## Evenepoel claims men’s time trial gold for Belgium

AFP  
Paris

Belgian Remco Evenepoel added the Olympic gold medal to his world title yesterday, defying rain, a strong field and a Tour de France hangover to win the 32.4km individual time trial in Paris.

The 24-year-old was almost 15 seconds faster than Italian Filippo Ganna in second while another Belgian, Wout van Aert, took bronze at 25 seconds.

Evenepoel said he only just recovered after he came third overall in the Tour de France last weekend, won the white jersey as best young rider and also won one of the time trials. “I partied until four in the morning and then slept all day, it was two days before I got on a bike again and to be honest I only felt fresh again this morning”, said Evenepoel. A former footballer at youth international level, Evenepoel divides opinion in his homeland where he is loved and criticised in equal measure.

“I’ll enjoy this moment with Wout (van Aert) to-night, maybe not until four in the morning because we have a joint race next week,” he joked. “This is one of the most beautiful moments of my life, even if it’s not enough for some people back home.”

British hope Josh Tarling finished fourth, two seconds behind Van Aert, after losing time on an early puncture. A day after it rained on the opening ceremony, dark skies hung low again over Paris as the first cycling event embarked from the military museum at Invalides. At the ramps where riders set off at one-minute intervals, Tarling and Ganna were pre-race favourites. Evenepoel set off at a lightning pace and was in the



Gold medalist Belgium's Remco Evenepoel celebrates on the podium of the men's road cycling individual time trial in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

lead at every time check. “I didn’t risk it on the corners. I had the time gaps but I only really knew near the end,” said Evenepoel. Ganna saved his fastest form for the finale, a five-kilometre home straight and overhauled Van Aert to move from third to second in the last section.

Evenepoel, a much smaller man, did better on his cornering than the other two medallists.

On the streets through the French capital he chose his line better and accelerated out of corners sooner. The Belgian was world time trial champion in 2023 and world road race champion in 2022 and will target an Olympic double next weekend in the 273km road race. “It’s the last big race I needed to win so I ticked it off now. Beating two cycling legends is crazy and amazing,” he added.

Ganna said he would celebrate with his family in Paris but then return to Italy to train for the Olympic track events. Van Aert broke multiple ribs, a collarbone and a chest bone in a crash in March. “This is the biggest of the races we take part in, it’s only when you are here that you appreciate that,” he said.

HOCKEY

## India outlast New Zealand 3-2 in battle of goalies

Reuters  
Paris

The veteran India men’s hockey team beat New Zealand 3-2 in Pool B on the first day of the Paris Olympics tournament yesterday, as stalwart goalkeeping for both teams kept the score low with India’s winner coming on a penalty shot.

India broke a 41-year medal drought in Olympic men’s hockey with a bronze in Tokyo three years ago, triggering hopes that a ninth gold medal for the once dominant power in the sport might be on the cards in Paris.

“In the dying moment, my defense did a wonderful job to stop them from scoring. As the legends have said, forwards win

matches but the defense wins tournaments,” India’s goalkeeper PR Sreejesh said.

“One special thing is that in the Olympic games, you can’t take anything back. You know, any team can play better games on a particular day. So it’s important for us to just focus on our game and look forward to the match,” Sreejesh said.

The enthusiasm of the crowds in the open air stands has kept the players energised throughout the wet start to the tournament and well into the closing minutes of each opening match as the rain kicked up in trails behind the ball on a waterlogged pitch.

In the other early evening match, a dominant men’s German side silenced the local

crowds chants of “Allez les bleues” with an 8-2 thumping of hosts France to give them the goal differential lead in Pool A.

South Africa also gave the dynamic Netherlands a scare after the Dutch team racked up a four-goal lead before the end of the half but struggled to apply pressure after the break, conceding two more goals to win 5-3 in Group A opener.

Second-ranked Britain walloped Spain 4-0 in the early Pool A game while in Pool B reigning champions Belgium won 2-0 against an Ireland team that missed qualifying for the Tokyo Games and Australia edged Argentina 1-0 in the tightest game so far. So far 22 goals have been scored in the men’s Pool A, compared with only eight in Pool B.



India's goalkeeper PR Sreejesh saves a shot during the men's pool B match against New Zealand during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games at the Yves-du-Manoir Stadium in Colombes yesterday. (AFP)

### ‘Dream come true’ for debutant, 58, despite loss

Table tennis player Zeng Zhiying said her “dream came true” Saturday after making her Olympic debut aged 58, despite suffering defeat for her adopted Chile.

Zeng represented China, the country of her birth, as a young player but retired at 20 and moved to Chile, where she has lived for the past 35 years.

She did not touch a table tennis bat for decades until she began playing again during the pandemic, and she quickly rose through the ranks to become one of South America’s best players.

Her comeback has taken her all the way to Paris, where she lost 4-1 to Lebanon’s Mariana Sahakian- herself 46 - in the preliminary round.

Playing in front of a full house and with extra support from a small but noisy group of Chilean fans, Zeng said the experience had been a rewarding one.

“After 30 years I came back to table tennis, and now that I have been able to play at the Olympics, my dream came true,” Zeng said, in comments translated from Spanish, which she speaks with a Chilean accent.

“I gave my best in every competition and that’s how I managed to get here.”

Zeng was born in the southern Chinese city of Guangzhou and began playing from an early age under the tutelage of her table tennis coach mother. She was chosen for China’s national team at 16 but her career hit the skids before table tennis made its Olympic debut in 1988 and she quit the sport.

She moved to Chile to coach schoolchildren but then drifted away from table tennis and stopped playing to focus on her business.

- Sedate pace -Now she is back on the scene and refuses to rule out another Olympic appearance after getting her first taste of the big time.

“It will be a little difficult but I will always keep playing until my body says stop,” said Zeng, who will be 62 by the time of the next Games, in Los Angeles.

Zeng’s match against Sahakian, another veteran, played out at a noticeably more sedate pace than the other matches being played at the South Paris Arena.

Zeng took the first game but then fell out of contention as her opponent began to take control of the match.

“My opponent was very patient,” said Zeng.

“In the first game she was a bit anxious but she settled down as the match went on and it was quite hard to beat her from then on.

“I gave everything in the game. Of course there are regrets, but it’s fine that I didn’t manage to win.”

Zeng is not even the oldest player in the women’s tournament at the Paris Games - Luxembourg’s 61-year-old Ni Xialian takes that title.

Ni was also born in China before switching allegiance to another country. Zeng believes the nation of her birth will continue to produce champions.

“The system of repetition and timing is unique,” she said.

“What makes the difference is how many times the young players play - all day, every day, over and over.”

### Tamberi loses wedding ring in Seine

World champion high jumper Gianmarco Tamberi had some making up to do yesterday after the Italian lost his wedding ring in the Seine river during the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics.

His country’s male flag-bearer, the ring slipped off Tamberi’s finger as he enthusiastically waved the Italian tricolour during the boat parade in the Parisian rain on Friday.

“I’m sorry, my love, I’m so sorry,” the charismatic 32-year-old wrote on Instagram in a post dedicated to his wife, Chiara Bontempi Tamberi.

The high jumper blamed “too much water, too many kilos lost in the last few months or maybe the irrepressible enthusiasm of what we were doing. Probably all three”.

Tamberi famously shared Olympic gold in Tokyo three years ago with Qatari friend and rival Mutaz Barshim. The Italian has a reputation as something of a showman, including leaving one half of his face unshaved.

TENNIS

FENCING

# Nadal may skip singles after win with Alcaraz

Nadal is due to face Hungary's Fucsovcics in the first round today

AFP  
Paris

Rafael Nadal said yesterday that he does not know if he will play singles at the Paris Olympics after picking up a thigh injury in training.

Nadal is due to face Hungary's Marton Fucsovcics in the first round today and victory would hand him a 60th career clash with old rival Novak Djokovic. "I don't know what's going to happen, I don't know if I am going to play tomorrow or not," said the 38-year-old Spaniard, who is at his farewell Olympics and is also in the men's doubles. "I will talk to my people and make the smartest decision that I can to have the best chance of bringing a medal home, so let's see."

Nadal, who has been plagued by injuries throughout his career, teamed up with Carlos Alcaraz for the first time and defeated Argentina's Maximo Gonzalez and Andres Molteni 7-6 (7/4), 6-4 in front of a packed, raucous crowd under the roof on Court Philippe Chatrier.

Nadal, a singles gold medalist at the 2008 Beijing Olympics and doubles title winner at Rio four years later, appeared on court with a bandage strapped around his right thigh. The Olympics is just his seventh tournament of 2024, in a season where he has also battled a hip injury and seen his singles ranking plummet to 161.

"Sometimes more isn't always more, sometimes more is less," added Nadal over the decision he faces. "I am just enjoying the moment playing doubles together with Carlos," added Nadal, who featured in the opening ceremony on Friday when he carried the Olympic torch. "It has been an unforgettable day for me today and an unforgettable day yesterday. I am enjoying every single moment, having the best experience possible."

Hours earlier when Alcaraz had opened his singles campaign with a straight sets victory over Hady Habib, the 21-year-old said it was a "dream" to play alongside his compatriot Nadal. The duo appeared to a standing ovation on the same packed court where Nadal won 14 French Opens and Alcaraz collected his first just last month.

Gonzalez and Molteni, the sixth seeds, entered the arena to a chorus of boos in the aftermath of a recent racism row between Argentina and France. The Spanish pair endured a nightmare start when Alcaraz was broken in the first game. Having not played doubles on tour since 2022, the rustiness was not surprising.

The greater experience of Nadal was key and the break was quickly retrieved with the veteran's reflexes as razor sharp as ever at the net. Alcaraz and Nadal went to three set points in the tiebreaker and a pinpoint backhand down the line by Nadal secured the opener.

Gonzalez and Molteni raced to a 3-0 lead in the second set but back came the Spanish pair



Spain's Rafael Nadal (left) and Carlos Alcaraz celebrate after winning their first round doubles match against Maximo Gonzalez and Andres Molteni of Argentina at the Paris Olympics. (Reuters)

to level. Nadal secured another key break with a rasping backhand return to allow him and his partner to lead 5-4 and the opportunity to serve for the match. That honour fell to the 22-time Grand Slam title champion and victory was secured when Alcaraz slapped the winning forehand crouching at the net.

## DJOKOVIC, SWIATEK CRUISE

Earlier, Novak Djokovic and Iga Swiatek cruised into the second round on a rain-swept Roland Garros. Djokovic, chasing a first Olympic gold to add to his 24 Grand Slams, brushed aside Australia's Matthew Ebden 6-0, 6-1 in just 53 minutes under the roof of Court Philippe Chatrier. Swiatek enjoyed a straight-sets win against Irina-Camelia Begu.

Only a handful of the day's matches were completed on the covered Chatrier and Suzanne Lenglen arenas.

"Playing him is like finals for me. His record at Roland Garros speaks for itself," said Djokovic of potentially facing Nadal. "If we face each other, it's possibly going to be for the last time on the big stage."

Yesterday, Djokovic was barely pushed by

36-year-old Ebden, who only made the tournament as an alternate after a series of injury pullouts. Without a singles ranking, doubles specialist Ebden had not played a singles match for two years before he got an unexpected Olympics call.

Also going through on a curtailed day was fourth seeded Daniil Medvedev, the Russian former world number one playing as a neutral, who defeated Rinky Hijikata in straight sets.

Women's world number one Swiatek battled to a 6-2, 7-5 victory over Begu as the 23-year-old Pole returned to the court where she captured a fourth French Open title last month.

Swiatek, who only made the second round on her Olympics debut in Tokyo three years ago, will face either Diane Parry of France or Argentina's Nadia Podoroska for a place in the last 16. Italy's Jasmine Paolini, easily defeated by Swiatek in the French Open final, also made the second round with a 7-5, 6-3 win over Romania's Ana Bogdan.

Saturday's night session closed with Angelique Kerber defeating fellow mother Naomi Osaka, a four-time major winner, 7-5, 6-3. Kerber, 36, and a three-time Grand Slam title winner, will retire from tennis at the Games.

## Tearful Kong spoils French party with epee title

AFP  
Paris

Vivian Kong won Hong Kong's second ever Olympic fencing gold medal yesterday, disappointing the home crowd as she beat France's Auriane Mallo-Breton 13-12 in sudden death.

Kong wiped away tears after she had clinched the title, having held her nerve when she trailed 7-1 in the second period and with a passionate home crowd, including President Emmanuel Macron, urging Mallo-Breton on. United States First Lady Jill Biden and Rolling Stones lead singer Mick Jagger, a day after celebrating his 81st birthday, were both in attendance earlier yesterday.

The French president departed quickly to console Mallo-Breton so he missed the men's sabre title match which was won by Korea's Oh Sang-uk.

Mallo-Breton had given the home crowd goosebumps during her progress to the final, not least when she was 13-10 down with 36 seconds remaining in her last-32 match. However, somehow she managed to defeat her crestfallen Ukrainian opponent Dzhoan Bezuhura 14-13.

In the final, though, the Frenchwoman found being in front and the weight of expectation too much and Kong was transformed after she had changed her epee.

Mallo-Breton held her lead until Kong levelled at 10-10 and then the contest became edgier. With

neither wanting to make a fatal error, they ran the clock down with them tied at 12-12.

Mallo-Breton realised the game was up as world number one Kong got the decisive touch in sudden death, the Frenchwoman turning her back and holding her head in her hands. "That is the game. I think it was too easy at one point and she hung in there," said Mallo-Breton. "However, it is a medal and one must be happy with that."

Kong's gold emulates that of Cheung Ka Long in the men's foil in Tokyo. "I just thought I was going to lose but I didn't want it to be so badly so I just tried to enjoy the stage," the world number one said.

Mallo-Breton's medal is the first for France in the women's individual epee since the 2004 Games in Athens.

Earlier, Hungary's Eszter Muhari took the bronze, beating Nelli Differt of Estonia 15-14 in an engrossing duel. Oh won a highly entertaining men's sabre final contest with his Tunisian opponent Fares Ferjani 15-11. The Tunisian kept at Oh throughout but the 27-year-old had enough in the locker to keep him at bay and add individual gold to the team title he won in Tokyo.

The bronze was won by Italy's Luigi Samele who collapsed to the floor as if it was gold and rose in tears to kiss the head of his Egyptian opponent Ziad Elsisy. Samele could have more reason for tears tomorrow, when his girlfriend Olga Kharlan bids to win the one individual title she is lacking - Olympic sabre gold - for Ukraine.



Women's epee fencing gold medalist Man Wai Vivian Kong (centre) of Hong Kong, silver medalist Auriane Mallo-Breton (left) of France and bronze medalist Eszter Muhari of Hungary take a selfie after the podium Ceremony in Paris yesterday. (Reuters)

## Paris opening ceremony sparks controversy

Paris: The grapevine about the Paris Games opening ceremony on the Seine River all suggested the \$1.5bn spectacle was going to blow the world away.

Unfortunately the world saw something very different.

A parody of Leonardo Da Vinci's famous fresco 'The Last Supper' in the Olympic opening ceremony in Paris has sparked fury among the Catholic church and far-right politicians. The unprecedented ceremony on the Seine River, which drew millions of viewers around the world, included a tableau celebrating the French capital's vibrant nightlife and reputation as a place of tolerance, pleasure and subversiveness.

The Catholic church in France criticised the segment yesterday. French bishops complained about alleged "mockery of Christianity" during the norm-breaking opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics which has upset conservatives and drawn mixed reviews.

The rain-soaked parade on Friday evening had offered "wonderful moments of beauty, joy, rich emotions, and was universally praised," a statement from the French Bishops' Conference said yesterday.

"However, this ceremony unfortunately included scenes of derision and mockery of Christianity, which we deeply regret," the bishops said.

While they did not refer to specific parts, they appeared to be referring to a segment entitled "Festivity".

"We think of all Christians across the continents who were hurt by the excesses and provocation of certain scenes," added the bishops in a statement co-signed by the "Holy Games", a sports programme funded by the Catholic church.

Conservatives and far-right politicians in France were also left agast by what they saw as a "woke" spectacle.

The four-hour ceremony saw athletes sail

down a six-kilometre (four-mile) stretch of the river Seine on 85 boats, the first time a Summer Olympics has opened outside the main stadium. A spokesman for France's far-right National Rally party, Julien Odoul called the ceremony "a ransacking of French culture", while conservative US entrepreneur Elon Musk slammed it as "extremely disrespectful to Christians."

Speaking at a press conference yesterday, show artistic director Thomas Jolly said that his intention had not "been to be subversive or to mock, or to shock."

"Above all I wanted to send a message of love, a message of inclusion, not at all to divide," he added.

"In France, you have the right to love as you like, who you like. In France, you can believe (in religion) or not believe. In France, we have lots of rights," he added.

Foreign conservatives such as Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, who sees himself as a defender of "traditional" values in Europe, railed yesterday against the "weakness and disintegration of the Western world" as illustrated by the opening ceremony.

Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova called the show a "mockery of a sacred story for Christians".

French President Emmanuel Macron jumped to Jolly's defence, saying the ceremony had "made our compatriots extremely proud".

Reviews of the music, costumes and new outdoor format were mixed.

French sports newspaper *L'Equipe* said it had "left memories for a century", while *le Monde* said "this extraordinary opening ceremony met the challenge that the naysayers thought was impossible."

But writing in Britain's *The Guardian* newspaper, reviewer Arifa Akbar said there were some "thoroughly weird curatorial decisions".

## ROUND-UP

# Chang, Chen bag diving gold for China

All-conquering Chinese divers Chang Yani and Chen Yiwen bagged the first Olympic gold of their careers yesterday with a superb victory in the women's synchronised three-meter springboard final. Chang and Chen have been unbeatable in global diving events in recent years, winning gold at three straight world championships in 2022, 2023 and 2024.

They extended that run of dominance into the Olympic arena yesterday, romping to victory with a total of 337.68 points. That left them comfortably ahead of the American duo of Sarah Bacon and Cassidy Cook, who took silver with 314.64 pts. Britain's Yasmin Harper and Scarlett Mew Jensen won bronze with a final total of 302.28.

Chang and Chen's victory launched China's bid for a potential sweep of Olympic diving golds. Chinese divers won seven out of eight gold medals in Tokyo three years ago. The diving powerhouse has ruled the 3m springboard synchronised event since its introduction at the 2000 Sydney Olympics, winning gold on six out of seven occasions.

## SHARPSHOOTING SHENG, HUANG WIN MIXED RIFLE GOLD

Sharp-shooting Chinese teenagers Sheng Lihao and Huang Yuting bagged the first gold medal of the Olympic Games in the final of the 10-metre mixed team air rifle event. Sheng, who won an individual silver medal at the pandemic-delayed Tokyo Olympics three years ago at the age of 16, and Huang, 17, kept their cool to edge past South Korea's Keum Ji-hyeon and Park Ha-jun 16-12.



China's Yani Chang and Yiwen Chen celebrate after winning the women's sync 3m springboard diving gold, in Saint-Denis, France, yesterday. (Reuters)

Earlier, Kazakhstan's Alexandra Le and Islam Satpayev won the first medal of the Games with an upset victory in the bronze medal match. Le and Satpayev cruised to victory over Germany's Maximilian Ulbrich and Anna Janssen, outscoring their opponents 17-5 at Chateauroux.

## FRANCE'S WINNING START IN BASKETBALL

Victor Wembanyama scored a joint team-high 19 points as hosts France shrugged off a slow start to beat Brazil 78-66 in their opening game of the Olympic basketball.

France won silver in Tokyo three years ago and are hoping to go one better at home, boosted by the presence of last year's top NBA draft pick and rookie of the year Wembanyama.

The French trailed by eight after the first quarter in Lille before taking charge in the second and third periods, with

Nicolas Batum also contributing 19 points. San Antonio Spurs star Wembanyama, who is playing in his first international tournament for France, said he was blown away by the atmosphere at the Stade Pierre-Mauroy.

France play Japan in their second Group B game on Tuesday. World champions Germany beat Japan earlier in the day to launch their Olympic campaign, led by 22 points from Orlando Magic forward Franz Wagner. Australia, bronze medalists at the last Olympics, took down Spain 92-80 with five different players reaching double digits in points, including Jock Landale who top-scored with 20.

Canada held off Greece 86-79 despite 34 points from Giannis Antetokounmpo in the second Group A game. The United States begin their bid for a fifth successive Olympic title today against Serbia, who can call upon three-time NBA MVP Nikola Jokic.