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HEAVY HEART

TEARFUL SAMOAN BOXER PAYS TRIBUTE TO LATE COACH

Samoa's Ato Plodzicki-Faagali broke down in tears yesterday, describing his anguish after his coach died of a heart attack at the Olympic village two days before the boxer's opening bout. The 25-year-old lost on points to Belgian fighter Victor Schelstraete, but the Samoan said that just dragging himself into the Paris ring felt like a victory after a tragic 48 hours. "I don't care about the medal right now. My deepest feeling right now is for coach Lionel," he said. "He would tell me to keep my head high. Not only to fight hard in the fight, but also just to give it my all. I gave it my all," he said, asked what coach Lionel Erika Fatupaito would have said to him.

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SPORT



SWIMMING

Martinenghi ends Peaty's 'three-peat' dream, Huske wins

FRANCE'S MARCHAND CLAIMS MEN'S 400M MEDLEY GOLD

Paris
Reuters

Italy's Nicolò Martinenghi won the men's 100 metres breaststroke gold at the Paris Olympics yesterday and ended Adam Peaty's "three-peat" bid to win the same event at three successive Games.

Peaty, hoping to become only the second male swimmer after retired U.S. great Michael Phelps to perform the triple, had to settle for silver alongside reigning world champion Nic Fink of the United States.

Both touched out in 59.05, just 0.02 of a second slower than Martinenghi's relatively sedate time.

The Italian told RAI television he had closed his eyes and hoped for the best.

"I showed that the time doesn't matter, it matters how you are, seizing the moment," he said.

Peaty had swam 58.86 on Saturday, some way off the 57.94 he produced at the British championships in April. He holds the world record of 56.88 set in Gwangju, South Korea, in 2019 plus the Olympic record of 57.13 from Rio 2016.

"I gave it my absolute all," Peaty told the BBC. "I executed it as well as I could. It's not about the end goal, it's about the process.

Peaty started in lane four after powering into the final with the fastest time on Saturday, but he was second at the turn and it came down to a matter of milliseconds and a stroke or a glide at the finish.

"It doesn't matter what time it says on the scoreboard. I think in my heart I have already won. I'm so happy that I can race against the best in the world and still come joint-second," he said.

Huske and Walsh secure gold-silver double
Torri Huske reeled in U.S. teammate and world record holder Gretchen Walsh to win the women's 100 metres butterfly gold by 0.04 of a second on an electric night yesterday.



Gold medalist Nicolò Martinenghi of Italy celebrates on the men's 100m breaststroke podium yesterday. (Reuters)

The 2022 world champion touched out in 55.59 to secure the U.S. team's first individual swimming gold of the 2024 Games, with Walsh taking silver in 55.63 after leading at the turn on world record pace. China's Zhang Yufei took the bronze.

The gold was just reward for Huske, who missed out on a butterfly medal in the same event in Tokyo three years ago by a mere 0.01 of a second, and she did it here with a storming finish from third to first in the closing quarter.

"My first 50 felt really good, and then I've been working on my second 50 a lot, especially after last year I had kind of a weak finish, and I kind of died in my race, and like last Olympics also, I like lost it all in the last 50," she said.

"So I really wanted to have a good, strong last 50."

Huske's win continued a sequence of the event never having had a repeat winner since it was first held in 1956. Canada's reigning champion Maggie Mac Neil

finished fifth.

Walsh had set an Olympic record of 55.38 in Saturday's semi-final, a time that would have comfortably won gold on Sunday had she repeated it. She had set the world record at the U.S. trials in Indianapolis last month.

"I think I was definitely nervous before. I feel like there was a lot of pressure on me just having gone the world record and the Olympic record last night," she said.

"I just wanted to try to execute the race as best as I could and it was definitely a fight to the finish. And seeing the one-two up there though was amazing. I'm so proud of Torri. I'm proud of myself.

"I think that was what America needed and wanted and it was a really special moment that we shared out there on the podium," said Walsh.

The pair stood on the top step of the podium together for the anthem, with Zhang - who had expressed concern on Saturday

about how her rivals saw her after a Chinese doping controversy - joining them afterwards.

Meanwhile Leon Marchand surged to France's first Olympic swimming gold since 2012 yesterday, obliterating the field to clock the second-fastest 400m individual medley time ever.

The 22-year-old led off strongly and never looked back, touching in 4mins 02.95secs, nearly six seconds clear of Japan's Tomoyuki Matsushita in second, with American Carson Foster third.

Marchand was heavy favourite after demolishing Michael Phelps' 15-year-old world record in a phenomenal 4:02.50 swim last year.

His performance at a raucous La Defense Arena in Paris was a new Olympic record.

With American defending champion Chase Kalisz failing to reach the final and with the packed crowd roaring him on, Marchand was half a body length clear after the opening butterfly leg. But it was a sensational backstroke 100m that left his rivals trailing.

FOCUS

Ferrand-Prevot solos to women's mountain bike gold

Elancourt, France
Reuters

MEDALS TALLY

Pauline Ferrand-Prevot delivered France's second gold medal of the Paris Olympics as she took a high-quality field apart to win the women's cross-country mountain bike race yesterday.

The 32-year-old produced a devastating acceleration at the start of the second of seven laps around the dusty 4.4km circuit on Elancourt Hill and rode solo to victory.

Haley Batten of the United States and Jenny Rissveds of Sweden were involved in a fierce scrap for silver, with Batten bursting clear to finish runner-up, two minutes

57 seconds back. Young Dutchwoman Puck Pieterse was the only rider who looked capable of making

it a race and was alone in second place when she suffered a puncture on lap five and needed a wheel change.

She fought back to finish fourth ahead of Britain's former world champion Evie Richards.

Ferrand-Prevot, who will return to road racing after the Olympics, is a five-times cross-country world champion but suffered heartbreak at the last two Olympics when favourite.

She failed to finish the race in Rio de Janeiro and in Tokyo she crashed and suffered a puncture, coming in 10th.

It was little wonder then that the tears were flowing after she reigned supreme in the hills near Versailles, embracing her team and family and pretty much everyone else in the chaotic finishing area.

After receiving her medal she made her way through a long

TEAMS	G	S	B	T
Japan	4	2	1	7
Australia	4	2	0	6
United States	3	6	3	12
France	3	3	2	8
South Korea	3	2	1	6
China	3	1	2	6
Italy	1	2	3	6
Kazakhstan	1	0	2	3
Belgium	1	0	1	2
Germany	1	0	0	1
Hong Kong	1	0	0	1
Uzbekistan	1	0	0	1
Great Britain	0	2	2	4
Brazil	0	1	2	3
Canada	0	1	1	2
Fiji	0	1	0	1
Kosovo	0	1	0	1
Mongolia	0	1	0	1
Poland	0	1	0	1
Tunisia	0	1	0	1
Sweden	0	0	2	2
Egypt	0	0	1	1
Spain	0	0	1	1
Hungary	0	0	1	1
India	0	0	1	1
Moldova	0	0	1	1
Mexico	0	0	1	1
South Africa	0	0	1	1

G- Gold, S- Silver, B- Bronze, T- Total

line of TV and media interviews before holding up the tricolore flag towards hundreds of chanting fans, making a heart with her hands and closing her eyes to let the moment sink in.

"After so many years and after so much hard work, winning today was like a dream day," she told reporters. "I was on a mission today. After the warmup I knew it was my day today.

"On the last lap I knew I had a huge gap so I was slowing down because I was saying 'You don't have to make a mistake!'

"I was flying today."



Gold medalist Pauline Ferrand-Prevot of France reacts on the podium after winning the Paris 2024 Olympics Mountain Bike gold at Elancourt Hill, Elancourt, France yesterday. (Reuters)

ARCHERY

South Korea beat China to gold in women's team event shoot-off



Gold medalists South Korea's Jeon Hunyoung, Lim Sihyeon and Nam Suhyeon pose on the podium of the archery women's team final during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games at the Esplanade des Invalides in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

Paris
Reuters

South Korea won their 10th consecutive gold medal in women's team archery in a nail-biting shoot-off as their three first-time Olympians held off China 5-4 at the Paris Games yesterday.

The win means South Korea maintained their complete dominance of the event, winning every gold medal since women's team archery was introduced at the Olympics in 1988. China had to settle for the silver medal and Mexico won bronze.

After winning the first two sets of the match, the South Korean women began to struggle, allowing China to level the score in the next two sets. Archer Lim Sihyeon acknowledged that her country's

unbroken streak in the event was facing stronger competition, but said South Korea would continue to defend its position.

"I'm very happy about keeping this place in Korean archery history," she said. "Even though other countries have progressed, we'll try to keep our place."

The shoot-off in the gold medal match was made even more intense when two of South Korea's arrows were reviewed for landing in between two of the scoring rings on the target circle. The crowd at Esplanade des Invalides, many waving South Korean flags, roared when the shots were awarded the higher point, resulting in the gold medal. The team were treated like celebrities, as earlier in the day, some fans held signs written in Korean above fences around the venue and stood on tip-toes to get a peak at the athletes.

USA'S KIEFER WINS FOIL GOLD



Lee Kiefer of the United States won the gold medal in the women's foil individual event at the Paris Olympics yesterday. Lauren Scruggs, also of the United States, took silver and Eleanor Harvey of Canada was awarded bronze.

SPOTLIGHT

Coco, just 14, rides to gold in skateboarding

Reuters
Paris

Japan's 14-year-old Coco Yoshizawa led a trio of teens on the podium in the women's street skateboarding at the Paris Olympics yesterday, in front of a sellout crowd at the La Concorde venue.

Her compatriot Liz Akama took silver, while Brazil's Rayssa Leal claimed bronze.

The top-ranked competitor heading into the Olympics, Yoshizawa held her arms out wide after sliding down the rail in the highest-scoring attempt of the best-trick stage of the competition that put her out of reach.

Akama, who had a slim lead heading into the best tricks, nailed a sublime 270 switch front board on her opening attempt but could not improve on that effort.

Yoshizawa said she was surprised to have won and that performing her tricks well was even



Japan's Coco Yoshizawa competes in the women's street skateboarding prelims during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games at La Concorde yesterday. **Right:** Gold medallist Yoshizawa celebrates on the podium with silver medallist Liz Akama of Japan and bronze medallist Rayssa Leal of Brazil. (AFP/Reuters)

sweeter than Olympic gold.

"Paris is a big city and the Olympics is a very, very big event, and I'm very happy to win," she said via an interpreter.

The rowdy crowd at the urban park was a ringing endorsement of the sport, just three years on from

its introduction to the Olympic programme at the Covid-delayed Tokyo Games.

Yoshizawa had the best overall score of the opening heats and showed no loss of momentum in the final, where she made terrific use of the skatepark's 18 features



in two pristine runs. She trailed Akama by a few points going into the five tricks and unleashed the best moves she had in her arsenal to try to wrest the lead back, with a fine kick flip front board on her second trick.

Yoshizawa had her highest-

scoring trick (96.49) on the fourth try.

The 16-year-old Leal had the full support of a large Brazilian contingent in the crowd as she attempted to improve on her Tokyo silver.

But after a couple of tumbles she was happy to take bronze with

a kick flip front board on her final trick of the day, as the crowd chanted her name.

"There are so many Brazilian fans here. It's crazy," she said. "I did what I could, and I'm really happy."

Three teenagers on the podium would seem shocking at most other Olympic events, but not so at the women's street, where the next generation has a firm grip on things, with only a handful of the 22 Paris competitors aged 20 or older.

School-age skaters flew through the course against the backdrop of Paris' historic landmarks, as the Eiffel Tower, Grand Palais and Arc de Triomphe loomed on the horizon.

The sport lifted television ratings when it was added to the programme in Tokyo, as organisers work to bring a younger audience to the Olympics.

The men's street competition is set for today, after rain on Saturday forced a postponement.

HORSE RACING

QREC announces new season to start from Oct 16

The 2024-25 calendar to see more races than the last season

By Sports Reporter
Doha

The Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club (QREC), headed by Issa bin Mohamed al-Mohannadi, yesterday announced the horse racing programme for the new season 2024-2025, which will see a total of 69 races, including 47 races on Al Rayyan track and the rest on Al Uqda racecourse.

The season will witness more number of races in comparison to the last season which had 67 races. This increase is in line with the club's vision to benefit from all available facilities and to provide greater opportunities for owners, trainers and jockeys to participate, especially with the large financial prizes allocated for racing in general.

The new season is scheduled to start on October 16 with the Al Ghariya Cup race at the Al Rayyan sand track, followed by the second race on October 17th for the Al Hamla Cup at Al Rayyan racecourse's grass track.

Prestigious HH The Amir Festival in February: Al-Mohannadi

Issa bin Mohamed al-Mohannadi, Chairman of the Board of Directors of Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club, said: "Since the end of last season, the club's management has been working to complete the 2024-2025 season programme in co-ordination with owners and trainers. More than one meeting was held and the broad outlines of the race programme, rounds, categories of participating horses, and classification of horses in each round were explained. A proposed pro-



QREC chairman Issa bin Mohamed al-Mohannadi.



Badr bin Mohamed al-Darwish, acting CEO of QREC.

gramme was discussed it with owners and trainers because we all care about success and holding Qatari races that are worthy of the status that horseracing has reached in Qatar, as well as the amount of support available to us from officials in the country.

Al-Mohannadi added: "According to the new season's programme's, the most important and largest event organised by the



club every year, which is the HH The Amir's Sword Festival, will start on February 13, 2025, and continue for three days at the Al Rayyan track.

"The last day, February 15, will be dedicated to holding the strongest and largest races in terms of financial prizes throughout the season, which is the HH The Amir's Sword race for purebred Arabian horses of the first category for a distance of 2,400m, and the HH The Amir's Trophy race for purebred Arabian horses of the first category for a distance of 2,400m.

"The Qatar International Derby, His Highness Sheikh Abdullah Bin Khalifa Al Thani Trophy, His Highness Sheikh Mohamed Bin Khalifa Al Thani Trophy, His Excellency Sheikh Joaan Bin Hamad Al Thani Rifle, and the Qatar Golden Sword, all of these races have been placed in the racing programme according to the appropriate dates based on classification and quality of the horses participating, and some of them will have international participation, such as HH The Amir's

Sword and the Qatar International Derby." Badr bin Mohamed al-Darwish, acting CEO of Qatar Racing and Equestrian Club, said: "We look forward to organising a distinguished racing season in light of the great desire of the club's management to continuously develop the races and work to reach a level appropriate to the size of the interest and support for Qatari horse racing.

"Announcing the official calendar is the first step towards confirming readiness for the new season, although we are currently focusing on the major overseas races sponsored by the club but the management is working on two parallel paths and we have the experience that helps us achieve our goal in implementing everything in an ideal manner. We hope that the level of racing in the next season will be in line with the size of the interest and standards that are being applied, which have contributed to placing horseracing held in Qatar on the map of major races, especially when we organize the HH The Amir's Sword Festival every year."

Russell claims 'awesome' one-stop win in Mercedes one-two triumph

Spa-Francorchamps, Belgium: George Russell claimed a memorable if unexpected victory ahead of his Mercedes teammate Lewis Hamilton in a thrilling finish to yesterday's Belgian Grand Prix, having started sixth on the grid.

The 26-year-old Briton came home 0.526 seconds ahead of the seven-time world champion, who controlled most of the race before being called in for a second stop, with McLaren's Oscar Piastri finishing third, just 1.173 seconds adrift of Russell.

Russell drove the 44-lap race with only one pit stop which led to him going 34 laps on his second set of tyres, a strategic decision taken during the contest enabling him to take the lead and an unexpected third career victory.

"Amazing, amazing result," shrieked Russell.

"We definitely didn't predict this in our strategy meeting this morning but the car was awesome. We changed a lot on Friday night and the tyres felt great.

"I kept saying 'I think we can do the one-stop, I think we can do the one-stop' and the strategy was a really great job.

"Well done to Lewis as he really controlled that race and if circumstances were slightly different, I'm sure he would have got the victory.

"One-two for the team was



awesome and what a way to go to the break." Russell's win also brought Mercedes a third win in four races following a poor run of results in the last two years.

"We had such a disaster on Friday when the car was nowhere," said Hamilton, who led for most of the race until Russell's strategy undercut the field.

"We made some changes and it was difficult to know in the wet yesterday, but the car was fantastic. Congratulations to George and the team."

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc, who started on pole position, came home fourth ahead of three-time world champion and series leader Max Verstappen of Red Bull, Lando Norris in the second McLaren and Carlos Sainz in the second Ferrari.

Sergio Perez, who started second, finished eighth in the second Red Bull ahead of two-time champion Fernando Alonso of Aston Martin and Esteban Ocon of Alpine.

Abe retains judo title, Keldiyorova brings first gold for Uzbekistan

Paris: Japan's Hifumi Abe retained his men's under 66kg crown before Diyora Keldiyorova, who had ended Abe's sister's Olympic title defence earlier in the day, won Uzbekistan's first judo gold medal in the women's under 52kg class yesterday.

Abe pointed two fingers in the air after beating Brazilian Willian Lima in the final to indicate that he now owned two Olympic gold medals, including the one he won in front of empty stands in Tokyo during the Covid pandemic three years ago.

"I had never seen that view, of the venue filled with people. And here I had my whole family watching," Abe said, adding that

he would be back to defend the title when the Games are staged in Los Angeles in 2028.

Lima, disappointed that he had missed his shot at gold, thought the ippon that gave Abe victory was not a point.

Keldiyorova had elbowed her way into the final on the back of an ippon upset of Uta Abe in the round of 16, ending the reigning champion's unbeaten run in individual competition that went back to 2019.

Abe, who had won gold within 30 minutes of her brother in Tokyo, sank to her knees holding her head in her hands as she tried to come to terms with what had happened.

England pocket Test series 3-0



England's Ben Stokes (left) and Ben Duckett celebrate winning the third and final Test against West Indies at Edgbaston Cricket Ground, Birmingham, Britain, yesterday. England won the Test by 10 wickets to take the three-match series 3-0. (Reuters)

CRICKET

India beat Sri Lanka to secure T20 series

Reuters
Colombo

India beat Sri Lanka in a rain-affected clash by seven wickets via the Duckworth-Lewis-Stern method in Pallekele yesterday, securing their first series win under new head coach Gautam Gambhir and Twenty20 captain Suryakumar Yadav.

Leg spinner Ravi Bishnoi did the bulk of the damage with the ball for India, running through the Sri Lankan middle-order to take three wickets for 26 runs.

Missing newly-appointed T20 vice-captain Shubman Gill due to a neck spasm, India won the toss and elected to bowl after rain delayed the start of the match, restricting the hosts to 161-9. Kusal Perera was Sri Lanka's highest run-getter of the day, scoring 53 runs off 34 deliveries after their opening pair of Kusal Mendis (10) and Pathum Nissanka (32) were removed cheaply.

Sri Lanka had lost just two wickets for 130 runs in the first 15 overs but suffered another middle-order collapse, which saw them lose seven batters for 31 in the last five overs.

With the chase reduced after rain interrupted play, India needed 78 runs to win in eight overs with two overs of powerplay.

The visitors got off to a shaky start as Sanju Samson, who replaced Gill, fell for a golden duck. But fellow opening batter Yashasvi Jaiswal and Suryakumar stabilised the Indian innings by scoring 30 and 26 runs, respectively. All-rounder Hardik Pandya finished things in style, blasting 22 runs off nine deliveries as India chased the target with nine balls to spare. The final T20 will be played tomorrow.

MCBRINE SHINES AS IRELAND BEAT ZIMBABWE IN ONE-OFF TEST

Andy McBrine starred with both bat and ball as Ireland beat Zimbabwe by four wickets in a one-off Test in Belfast yesterday after recovering from a dramatic top-order collapse.

Set just 158 to win in the shadow of Stormont Castle, Ireland had slumped to 33-5 at the close of Saturday's third day, with Zimbabwe left-arm quick Richard Ngarava doing the bulk of the damage in a sensational burst of 4-12 in four overs.

But in the first Test to be played in Northern Ireland, the home side lost just one more wicket yesterday.

Lorcan Tucker (56) and McBrine, who completed a fine all-round match to be 55 not out, turned the tide after coming together when Ireland had collapsed to 21-5.

BRIEF SCORES:

Zimbabwe 210 (P Masvaure 74, J Gumbie 49; A McBrine 3-37, B McCarthy 3-42) **and 197** (D Myers 57, S Williams 40; A McBrine 4-38) v **Ireland 250** (PJ Moor 79; T Chivanga 3-39, B Muzarabani 3-53) **and 158-6** (L Tucker 56, A McBrine 55 no; R Ngarava 4-53)

Result: Ireland won by four wickets

Toss: Ireland

FOOTBALL

Australia win 11-goal thriller, Spain into knockouts

AFP
Nice, France

Australia produced an incredible comeback to overturn a three-goal deficit and beat Zambia 6-5 in the Olympic women's football yesterday, as World Cup holders Spain secured a quarter-final berth and Japan stunned Brazil.

The Australians got off to a terrible start in Group B with a 3-0 defeat by Germany in their opening game and appeared to be heading for a second straight loss when they trailed Zambia 5-2 early in the second half in Nice.

But the Matildas came roaring back and won an 11-goal thriller thanks to Michelle Heyman's 90th-minute strike in an unforgettable match.

It was a shocking collapse by Zambia, for whom Barbra Banda opened the scoring in the first minute and went on to net a hat-trick, with Racheal Kundananji scoring twice.

Alanna Kennedy quickly cancelled out Banda's opener, only for Kundananji to restore Zambia's lead before Banda made it 3-1.

Hayley Raso pulled one back but Banda scrambled in to complete her hat-trick just before the break and make it 4-2.

Kundananji then headed in for 5-2 on 56 minutes, but defensive gifts by Zambia handed last year's World Cup semi-finalists a way back into the contest.



Lushomo Mweemba played a clearance from her own line off goalkeeper Ngambo Musole and into the net for an own goal, and the 'keeper then fumbled in a Steph Catley free-kick for 5-4.

Catley converted a penalty for 5-5 and Heyman ran through for the winner.

Record four-time gold medallists the United States take on Germany in Marseille later in the same group.

Spain's all-star side beat Nigeria 1-0 for their second straight victory in Group C, with former Ballon d'Or winner Alexia Putellas scoring a late free-kick to decide the game in Nantes.

The world champions are now certain to at the very least be one of the best third-placed sides and will be in the quarter-finals.

Earlier in the same group, Momoko Tanikawa scored a stunning 96th-minute winner as Japan netted twice in injury time to come from behind and beat Brazil 2-1 in Paris.

Japan, the 2012 silver medallists, were staring at a second straight defeat in Group C that would have left them in serious danger of a first-round exit after Jhennifer put Brazil ahead early in the second half.

But captain Saki Kumagai rolled in a 92nd-minute penalty to equalise at the Parc des Princes before 19-year-old substitute Tanikawa's incredible first-time shot from 30 metres sailed over the goalkeeper and in for the winner.

It was a remarkable comeback by Japan, for whom Mina Tanaka had a pen-



Zambia's Hellen Chanda (left) vying for the ball with Australia's Hayley Raso in the women's Group B match during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games at the Nice Stadium in Nice yesterday. (AFP)

alty saved in the first half with the game goalless. The result means Japan and Brazil - silver medallists in 2004 and 2008 - are now level on three points after two

matches. Colombia beat New Zealand 2-0 in Lyon in Group A, in which hosts France play reigning Olympic champions Canada later. The Canadians are in turmoil after

being deducted six points on Saturday for the spying scandal which led to coach Bev Priestman being suspended for a year by FIFA.

BASKETBALL

Durant dunks 23 points as USA hammer Serbia

The Americans start well in bid for fifth Olympic gold medal

AFP
Villeneuve-d'Ascq, France

Kevin Durant returned from injury to produce a shooting masterclass as the United States launched the defence of their Olympic basketball crown with a 110-84 win over Serbia yesterday.

Durant, who missed the entirety of the USA's Olympic build-up with a calf injury, shot a near-perfect 8-of-9 from the field to finish with 23 points in a convincing win for the reigning champions, who are eyeing a fifth straight Olympic crown.

"It feels good to make some shots," Durant told reporters after the win.

"Everybody played their role pretty well tonight and my role was to come in and make some space for the team - glad I was able to knock some down.

"It's just basketball at the end of the day. I just tried to follow the gameplan, be there for my teammates on the defensive end, and when the ball touched my hands be aggressive."

The 35-year-old Phoenix Suns ace, the all-time leader for the USA in points, points-per-game and field goals, entered the game in the first quarter with the star-studded American line-up trailing 19-14.

The 14-time NBA All-Star, a member of the USA's gold medal-winning Olympic teams in 2012, 2016 and in Tokyo three years ago, then proceeded to take over, raining in a succession of buckets to get the Americans back on track.

LeBron James provided scoring support with 21 points, with Jrue Holiday adding 15 points and Devin Booker finishing on 12.



Kevin Durant of USA in action against Vanja Marinkovic of Serbia during their Group C basketball game at Lille, Pierre Mauroy Stadium, Villeneuve-d'Ascq, France, yesterday. (Reuters)

Denver star Nikola Jokic led the Serbia scoring with 20 points.

The USA are the overwhelming favourites for the Olympic crown and have arrived in France with a squad featuring a galaxy of NBA stars led by the likes of James, Durant and Stephen Curry.

James and Curry lavished praise on Durant after yesterday's win.

'KD was phenomenal'
"KD was phenomenal," James said. "It's almost like he never missed anything. If you watch him at practice, everything he does is at game speed. So there's no surprise he comes out and gets right into it - it's good to have him on our side."

Durant's former Golden State teammate Curry was similarly effusive.

"KD was unbelievable in the first half and gave us a huge boost," Curry said. "Nothing he does surprises me. To shoot perfect in the first half? That's special. He's used to this stage. "He's the all-time leading scorer in USA basketball (team) history for a reason. It was great to see him get out there having fun."

The Americans face South Sudan in their second group game on Wednesday before wrapping up the first round in Lille against Puerto Rico next Saturday.

Yesterday's evidence Golden

State coach Steve Kerr's squad will take some stopping when the 12-team tournament moves to Paris for the knockout rounds on August 6.

Serbia, led by three-time NBA Most Valuable Player Jokic, made a fast start in yesterday's clash at the Pierre Mauroy Stadium in Lille, sprinting into an early 10-2 lead. But the arrival of Durant from the bench galvanised the US line-up, and once the Americans found their shooting touch the result was never in doubt.

Durant was welcomed into the game with a blatant body check by Vasilije Micic which sent the 6ft 11in (2.11m) 35-year-old sprawling to the hardwood.



SPOTLIGHT

Palestinian boxer Abusal says journey not over after defeat



Palestinian Wasim Abusal gestures at the end of his men's 57kg preliminaries round of 32 boxing match against Sweden's Nebil Ibrahim during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games at the North Paris Arena, in Villepinte yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters
Paris

Palestinian boxer Wasim Abusal said his Olympic journey was far from over despite defeat by Sweden's Nebil Ibrahim yesterday, adding that he hoped to win a medal at the Los Angeles Olympics in 2028.

Yesterday, a packed North Paris Arena erupted in cheers when featherweight Abusal entered, with chants of "Free Palestine" breaking out loudly and often.

When the fight began, the crowd erased any remaining doubt over who they were supporting, cheering loudly every time Abusal connected with a shot or evaded a punch, and groaning when he was hit.

Unfortunately for Abusal, who was awarded a universality place, there were more groans than cheers, and when the bout ended, Ibrahim was ahead on every judge's scoresheet.

"I promise you I will continue training in the coming four years till 2028, which I hope is the year I get a medal," Abusal said.

"I came here to grab a medal but that is sport and God willing, I will fight again. In four years' time I will raise the Palestinian flag over the podium."

More than 39,000 Palestinians have been killed in the Israeli of-

fensive in Gaza, say local health authorities.

Israel launched its military action in response to a Hamas-led attack in southern Israel in October. About 1,200 people were killed and 250 were taken hostage in the Oct 7 attack, according to Israeli tallies.

Abusal's journey to the Olympics has been affected by the conflict, with his coach Ahmad Harara having to train him from abroad due to travel restrictions.

Ibrahim said was well aware of his 20-year-old opponent's struggles, after holding the Palestinian boxer's arm aloft following the fight.

"I was very sad when I was drawn against him, because I'm a very strong Palestinian supporter. I want to win gold in this tournament, of course.

"So I have to eliminate him," Ibrahim said.

"But I tried to turn it around. It's an honour for me to be the one to fight the first Palestinian boxer to enter at the Olympics.

"He's not only representing his people and his country. He's representing every oppressed nation in the world.

"Right now, Palestine is in the face of oppression. So he has a big burden on his shoulders."

Ibrahim next meets 2023 world champion Abdumalik Khalokov of Uzbekistan.

COMMENT

Young Palestinian swimmer hopes for sporting chance in future



Palestinian swimmer Yazan al-Bawwab hopes his appearance at the Paris Olympics will help boost opportunities for athletes from the war-torn territory.

Al Bawwab, 24, who was born in Saudi Arabia and lives in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, competed in the heats of the men's 100m backstroke yesterday.

It is his second appearance in the Olympics, following on from

Tokyo, and he has two gold medals from the Arab Games.

And while his time at La Defense Arena was not enough to see him qualify for the semi-finals, he hopes his presence on the global stage will highlight the plight of Palestinians who want to compete in top-level sport.

"I have a time just for Palestine, a lane just for Palestine. I think this is my message of peace. We're trying to get the world to know that

we're human beings. I can play sports like everybody else," he told reporters after his race.

"I look like a kid from Gaza and the thing is, because of sports you listen to me, and you care about what I say, but nobody cares about what people in Palestine say, so this is my message of peace. Please treat us as human beings, we deserve the same rights as everybody else, and we want to play sports like everybody else," he said.

Al-Bawwab swam with a small Palestinian flag painted on his chest and said that the presence of the team and their flag at the Games had prompted reactions.

"Honestly, 95% positive," he said.

"We have a lot of people surprised that we're even here, they're surprised how Palestine could qualify to a competition like this, having no food and water in their country."

However he said some other athletes had "made fun of us".

"We've had, in other competitions, people telling us to take off our flag, take off your shirt, we don't want to see Palestine on it," he said.

"Imagine if it was your country? But hey, I'm Palestinian and I'm proud, and I don't care if somebody doesn't want me to wear my flag, you know, deal with it," he added.

SHOOTING

Xie makes golden debut, Korean 1-2 in women's pistol

Bhaker wins historic bronze in 10m air pistol to get India off the mark

Chateauroux, France
Reuters

Xie Yu of China struck gold in a dream Olympic debut in the men's 10m air pistol and Oh Ye-jin led a South Korean 1-2 in the women's event yesterday.

After China won the 10 metre air rifle mixed team event on Saturday, Xie (240.9) mined another gold from the Chateauroux Shooting Centre, beating Italian Federico Nilo Maldini (240) who took the silver medal.

Paolo Monna (218.6) claimed bronze with clear daylight between the top three and rest of the field.

"If I hadn't won, this may have been my biggest regret," Xie told reporters.

"It is very difficult to be selected for China for the Olympics, so to be able to stand here today, on this higher stage, is very significant for me."

Xie carried a wafer-thin cushion of 0.4 going into the final shot after Maldini had reduced the gap in the elimination section.

The Italian lost his momentum at the last minute, however, and stood gazing at the floor after signing off with a modest 9.5.

Xie scored 10 to seal the gold and flashed a shy smile as his teammates in bright red-and-white erupted in the stands.

"We both made some silly mistakes but we have no regrets whatsoever," Maldini said, referring to compatriot Monna.

"I had good vibes since the beginning of the final," Monna said. "It's certainly emotional and a very rare one because we are friends."

"This is the first time we're on the podium together and it is the most important one."

Similar camaraderie prevailed



FROM LEFT: Silver medalist South Korea's Kim Ye-ji, gold medalist South Korea's Oh Ye-jin and bronze medalist India's Manu Bhaker celebrate on the 10m air pistol women's podium during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games at Chateauroux Shooting Centre yesterday. (AFP)



Gold medalist China's Xie Yu poses on the 10m air rifle men's podium shooting yesterday. (AFP)

in the women's competition where a 19-year-old Oh beat roommate Kim Ye-ji to the gold and Manu

Bhaker won India's first medal in the Paris Games. Oh tallied 243.2 to set an Olym-

pic record and Kim 241.3. "I still cannot believe I'm wearing a gold medal on my neck right now, but maybe if time goes by, I will believe I have a gold medal," said Oh, who burst into tears after winning the gold.

"This medal is very heavy, by the way."

Kim said she had no issues finishing behind a shooter she guided early in her career.

"She's like my sister... When she won the gold, I was extra happy," she said.

Bhaker (221.7) settled for the bronze but became the first Indian woman shooter to win an Olympic medal.

"I have three more events to go and I hope India finishes strong in this Olympics and win as many medals as possible not just in shooting but also in other sports," she told reporters.

TENNIS

Nadal says Djokovic 'clear favourite' in Olympics blockbuster

AFP
Paris

Rafael Nadal insists Novak Djokovic will be the favourite when they clash at the Paris Olympics, after the Spaniard battled to victory over Marton Fucsovics in the first round yesterday.

Nadal had left his participation in the singles in doubt until the last minute because of a thigh injury, and was made to work hard for his 6-1, 4-6, 6-4 victory. The 38-year-old - who has won 14 of his 22 Grand Slam titles on the clay of Roland Garros - believes old rival Djokovic will be favourite when they meet for the 60th time.

"Situations are completely different for him, for me. He's being very competitive. I was not being very competitive for the last two years, so in that case, I think probably he is the clear favourite," said Nadal, who holds an 8-2 head-to-head advantage over the Serb at Roland Garros. "I'm going to try my best to bring the best to the court and then let's see how far I can go and how many problems I can create for him."

The latest chapter of a generation-defining rivalry, and perhaps the final act, will bring Nadal and Djokovic full circle - the duo having met as teenagers in their very first meeting in the 2006 Roland Garros quarter-finals.

Outside round-robin matches in the season-ending ATP Finals, their second-round encounter at the Olympics will be the earliest they have ever met at a tournament.

"It has always been super special to play against Novak, no doubt about that," said Nadal. "But the difference is normally we have been playing for finals or for semi-finals."

"Of course, it's an Olympics... every match is super special. But it's true that at the same time, almost every single match that I played against Novak, I arrive at it with a different situation that I am today."

"So that makes the match more difficult for me and more

unpredictable. But, I always have hope, I always believe."

Nadal, a singles gold medalist at the 2008 Beijing Olympics and doubles champion at Rio four years later, is playing just his seventh tournament of 2024.

He reached the final in Bastad last weekend but suffered a setback in training on Wednesday, jeopardising his hopes of appearing at a fifth Olympics.

Nadal teamed up with Carlos Alcaraz in the doubles on Saturday, but he had his right thigh heavily bandaged as the pair won their first-round match in straight sets. His leg sported similar strapping against Fucsovics, but Nadal said he was feeling "good".

"Bit tired, of course. I mean, a long match, but at the same time... it was a good test," said Nadal. "The good thing is I was able to play at a good level of tennis for a while. That always gives hope. And then (the) negative stuff is I was not able to hold that great level."

Fucsovics suggested the Spaniard still had what it takes to beat Djokovic, who leads the career head-to-head 30-29.

"He was fighting until the end, so his fighting spirit is still at the top still, but he's not at his best playing level," said Fucsovics. "But if he has a good day he can beat him (Djokovic) still."

Zverev makes strong start to title defence

Germany's Alexander Zverev made a confident start to his Olympic title defence with a convincing 6-2 6-2 first-round victory over Spain's Jaume Munar yesterday.

The third seed rounded off a packed schedule on day two at Roland Garros in quick time to move through to a second round clash against Czech Tomas Machac.

Zverev, beaten in the French Open final last month, had lost his only previous match against Munar but was streets ahead on a warm evening on Court Philippe Chatrier.

The 27-year-old is bidding to match Briton Andy Murray's feat of winning consecutive Olympic men's singles titles.



Spain's Rafael Nadal reacts during the first round match against Hungary's Marton Fucsovics at the Roland-Garros Stadium in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

No rhythm, no blues as Hassan makes Olympics history for Lebanon

Benjamin Hassan became the first Lebanese tennis player to win a match at the Olympics yesterday, saying he benefited from having "no rhythm".

The 29-year-old defeated Christopher Eubanks of the United States, a former Wimbledon quarter-finalist and top 30 player, 6-4, 6-2.

"I worked a lot with the second serve as a first serve. I think he didn't know what happened, actu-

ally," said 29-year-old Hassan. "Like, he didn't get used to my rhythm because there was no rhythm."

Hassan, ranked at 170 in the world, was born in Germany after his father Zaki fled the Lebanon civil war in the 1980s.

Despite being German-born, Hassan has represented Lebanon in the Davis Cup since 2018 and on Sunday was carried to victory

by loud, passionate support out on Court 11. "It was an unbelievable atmosphere. I'm just trying to be calm because I don't want to waste too much energy to get with the crowd," he said.

"I had that in the past where I lost much energy throughout the whole match. I try to be calm, focused, and then when I win I can let it out."

He will face either Argentina's Se-

bastian Baez or Thiago Monteiro of Brazil in the next round. Before that, however, he is on a pin hunt to complete his collection from all the competing nations. "I still need two more, but I'm out of pins because I want one from Thailand and Korea. I think the most special one is Japan because I'm a huge fan of Japan. I like watching a lot of animated mangas," he said.

GYMNASTICS

Biles off to a rousing start despite injury scare

AFP
Paris

Simone Biles made a stunning return to Olympic competition yesterday, powering through left calf pain to get her multiple-medal bid off to a rousing start.

The US superstar, aiming to add to the four gold medals she won in Rio de Janeiro in 2016, tweaked her left calf warming up for her second apparatus, the floor exercise.

It didn't stop her from soaring through her signature Yurchenko double pike vault - now known as the Biles II - which even with a big step back on landing earned a 9.4 for execution for a massive total of 15.800 points.

She had another step back landing her second vault, but laughed as she crawled back towards her teammates on her hands and knees.

That was all it took for Biles's coach Cecile Landi to know that for Biles "It's on. It's OK."

Landi, who said Biles aggravated a minor injury she'd first dealt

with a couple of weeks ago, said there was never any doubt Biles would continue.

"Never in her mind," Landi said, adding that she was also confident that Biles would be ready to go for the team final on Tuesday and the individual events to follow.

With three of the five qualifying sessions complete, the United States topped the team standings on 172.296 ahead of Italy and China, with all three assured places in the final.

Japan, led by a sparkling performance from 16-year-old Kishi Rina, were lying fourth ahead of Britain, Romania and the Netherlands with team medal contenders Brazil and France yet to compete.

Biles topped the all-around standings with 59.566 points.

"Pretty amazing, 59.5" was Landi's assessment of Biles's performance in front of a star-studded crowd at Bercy Arena, where celebrity fans included Hollywood A-listers Tom Cruise, Jessica Chastain and Greta Gerwig, pop star Ariana Grande and Vogue editor-in-chief Anna Wintour.

Chants of "U-S-A" rang out even before gymnasts made their entrance for the second session of qualifying, and the roar when Biles was introduced was deafening.

She crushed every element in her opening balance beam routine, roaring through her aerial skills and spins without a wobble.

It was then she appeared to hurt herself warming up for the floor exercise, but after having her left leg taped from calf to foot Biles delivered a dynamic floor routine that featured both her Biles I double layout with half a twist and her Biles II "triple-double" of two back flips with three twists.

"It's incredible," US team technical lead Chellsie Memmel said yesterday.

"What she was able to do looking like she has soreness or something in her leg is remarkable."

Landi said Biles was already feeling better by the time she closed out her day by sticking the landing on her uneven bars routine - receiving another huge ovation and beaming as she shared



Simone Biles of the US reacts after competing in the uneven bars event of the artistic gymnastics women's qualification during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games at the Bercy Arena in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

a dance with teammate Jordan Chiles. Teammate Suni Lee, who has battled two career-threatening kidney ailments since winning

all-around gold in Tokyo, was second in the all-around standings, meaning the all-around final is set to feature the last two gold medal-

lists for the first time in Olympic history.

Algerian uneven bars specialist Kaylia Nemour topped that apparatus and was also headed to the all-around final.

But the spotlight was on Biles, who led the vault and floor exercise standings and was second in balance beam behind China's Zhou Yaqin.

She was still clinging to the eighth and last finals berth in uneven bars with two qualifying sessions to come.

Biles withdrew from multiple events at the Tokyo Games as she battled the disorientating mental block that gymnasts call "twist-ies".

She still went home with a silver and bronze and was lauded for speaking openly about mental health struggles.

After two years away, Biles returned to win four world titles last year, taking her tally to an astonishing 23.

At 27 she could become the oldest women's all-around Olympic champion in 72 years and just the third woman to capture more than one Olympic all-around title.