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SOCIAL MEDIA STAR

TIKTOK STAR MAHER ‘SUPERCHARGING’ OLYMPIC RUGBY SEVENS

With her 1.7mn TikTok followers, US women's rugby sevens forward Ilona Maher is one of the biggest social media stars at the Paris Games, supercharging the sport's profile ahead of Los Angeles 2028. With her social media videos often attracting as many as five million views, the 27-year-old is seen as a magnet for young female fans of the sport that organisers hope to expand to new markets. Although French rugby superstar Antoine Dupont is one of the pin-ups of the Games, even he can't come close to Maher when it comes to social media stardom.


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GULF TIMES

SPORT



GYMNASTICS

Brilliant Biles inspires USA to women’s team gold

Americans already had gold in hand when Biles electrified crowd with a gravity-defying floor routine

AFP
Paris

Simone Biles led the United States to a dominant victory in the women's gymnastics team final yesterday, laying the ghosts of Tokyo to rest as she claimed a fifth career Olympic gold medal.

Three years after Biles battled a disorientating mental block in Tokyo, pulling out of the team final in which the United States settled for silver, she and teammates Jordan Chiles, Jade Carey and Sunisa Lee led wire-to-wire in reclaiming gold ahead of Italy, with Brazil taking a historic bronze.

The Americans already had gold in hand when Biles electrified the Bercy Arena crowd with a gravity-defying floor routine that featured two of her signature skills – a double back flip with a half twist and the “triple-double” of two back flips with three twists. She said she knew after she'd landed her opening vault – not her signature double Yurchenko but a marginally less difficult Cheng – that she and the USA were on their way.

“After I finished vault, I was relieved,” Biles said. “I was like, ‘Whew, because at least no flashbacks or anything. As soon as I landed vault, I was like, Oh yeah, I’m definitely – we’re going to do this.’”

The United States combined for the highest score on all four apparatus for a total of 171.296 points and a whopping 5.802-point margin over Italy – whose last team medal was a silver in 1928. For the Brazilian squad led by Tokyo vault gold medalist Rebeca Andrade it was a first Olympic team medal.

The Americans grabbed their third team gold in four Games after victories in 2012 and 2016. This one was especially sweet for a quartet of gymnasts who were all in Tokyo when that streak was broken. For Biles



FROM LEFT: United States’ Jordan Chiles, Sunisa Lee, Simone Biles, Hezly Rivera and Jade Carey celebrate with gold medals after winning the artistic gymnastics team event at the Paris Olympic Games at Bercy Arena in Paris yesterday. (Reuters)

it marks a return to the Olympic summit after a two-year break as she focused on her mental health, and she said the sensation of her second team gold – eight years after her first in Rio, was different.

“It was just like we were a little young

and naive,” she said. “So it didn’t hit the way that it does now. Now that I’m much older, we have so much more experience and we’re out here really having fun and enjoying what we’re doing – so I think it’s just different.”

Biles now has eight Olympic medals, the most of any gymnast in history, and once again the stars were out for the sport's greatest ever. Serena Williams, Nicole Kidman and Bill Gates were on hand, as was Biles's husband, NFL player Jonathan

Owens in a T-shirt emblazoned with his wife's name and picture.

Fans were on their feet as soon as the United States team were introduced, Biles beaming and blowing kisses before they made their way to the vault. Biles had her sore left calf wrapped but showed no sign of trouble as the United States emerged from the first rotation with a 1.434-point lead over China.

It was the same story as the USA moved on to uneven bars, where Lee, who has battled two career-threatening kidney ailments since winning all-around gold in Tokyo, set the pace with a routine that garnered 14.566 points. Chiles had nailed her bars routine and let out a yell before Biles powered through her weakest event, smiling from ear to ear after earning 14.400 points. At the halfway point, the competition had become a virtual coronation as the United States pushed their lead to 3.102 points over European champions Italy.

Meanwhile China, bedevilled by the consistency problems that have hurt them in the past, were on a slide that saw them eventually finish sixth. A fall for Chiles on balance beam was barely a blip. Lee got the US back on track with a superb beam routine and Biles weathered a couple of wobbly moments on the 10cm-wide apparatus to send the Americans into their final floor exercise with a 3.602-point cushion.

“I kind of knew as long as I landed on my feet, on all passes, we were going to be good,” Biles said.

“So as soon as I stepped out of bounds, I was like, ‘Oh, well there's a line. But I guess it's not that big of a deal.’ This was the second of 14 artistic gymnastics titles on the line in Paris, with Japan's Daiki Hashimoto aiming to defend his men's all-around title today.



SWIMMING

McKeown retains gold as Wiffen makes history

AFP
Paris

Kaylee McKeown won back-to-back gold in the women's 100m backstroke while Daniel Wiffen made history as he became the first Irishman to win a swimming gold as he swept to victory in the 800m freestyle at the Paris Games yesterday.

There was also joy for Great Britain's men who defended their 4x200m freestyle relay gold with a convincing victory. Australia's women continued their domination over rivals the USA in the La Defense Arena with McKeown beating world record holder Regan Smith in one of the most highly anticipated duels of the Games.

After Ariarne Titmus beat Katie Ledecky in the 400m freestyle ‘Race of the Century’ on the opening night and Mollie O’Callaghan won the 200m freestyle and the Dolphins combined for gold in the 4x100m freestyle relay, this was another show of strength.

“It’s been an awesome few days watching all the Aussies get up and race so I just had to put my best foot forward tonight,” said McKeown, who now owns four Olympic golds and will aim for another in the 200m backstroke. “To have all this atmosphere all that adrenaline and be able to perform like that it’s really special to me and I’m happy to have gone so far,” she said.

She is now one of only two women, along with American Natalie Coughlin, to have won two golds in this event. Smith, coached by Bob Bowman, Michael Phelps’s former coach who is also working with French sensation Leon Marchand, had raised hopes last month of a gold by smashing the world record time, set by McKeown, in the US trials.

At the 50-metre mark, Smith was in the lead with McKeown trailing in fourth but, not for the first time, the Australian turned



Daniel Wiffen of Ireland celebrates after breaking the Olympic record to win the men's 800m freestyle gold at the Paris La Defense Arena in Nanterre, France. (Reuters)



on the turbo power for the last 30m to win with an Olympic record time of 57.33sec with Smith 0.33sec behind. “Ultimately, I think other people’s performances are completely out of my control and Kaylee is... one on one, she is an absolutely incredible racer and she knows what to do when it matters, but I’m really proud of myself,” said the American.

Katharine Berkoff of the United States, who had threatened an upset, had to settle for bronze. Wiffen had talked ahead of his final of how he would be happy with any

medal, especially given that Ireland had never had any kind of podium finish in men's swimming.

But he delivered an epic finish to leave Tokyo champion Bobby Finke in second and experienced Italian Gregorio Paltrinieri with bronze as he set a new Olympic record time of 7:38.19. Ireland's only swimming medals had come in 1996 in Atlanta when Michelle Smith claimed three golds, so it was no surprise that a tearful Wiffen was caught up in the emotion of the occasion.

“I don’t normally cry, so I really hope that nobody’s going to see that. But it did come



Kaylee McKeown of Australia celebrates on the podium after winning the 100m backstroke gold. (Reuters)

out of me, and it’s obviously just a special moment. I’ve never heard that national anthem at Olympics before, and, it’s just crazy that it was me standing on a number one podium here for the first time at Olympics,” he said.

Wiffen will swim in the 1,500m and he also plans to take part in the 10km open water race in the River Seine. Duncan Scott delivered the clutch anchor leg for Great Britain as they held off the USA and Australia in the 4x200m freestyle relay.

Led off by James Guy and brought home by Scott, with Tom Dean and Matt Richards in the middle legs, they led from start to finish and touched in 6min 59.43sec. The same team won gold at the Tokyo Games, which bettered the silver they claimed at Rio in 2016.

MEDALS TALLY				
TEAMS	G	S	B	T
1. Japan	7	2	4	13
2. China	6	6	2	14
3. Australia	6	4	1	11
4. France	5	9	4	18
5. South Korea	5	3	3	11
6. USA	4	11	11	26
7. Great Britain	4	5	3	12
8. Italy	3	4	4	11
9. Canada	2	2	2	6
10. Hong Kong	2	0	1	3
11. Germany	2	0	0	2
12. Kazakhstan	1	0	2	3
12. South Africa	1	0	2	3
14. Belgium	1	0	1	2
14. Ireland	1	0	1	2
16. Azerbaijan	1	0	0	1
16. New Zealand	1	0	0	1
16. Romania	1	0	0	1
16. Serbia	1	0	0	1
16. Slovenia	1	0	0	1
16. Uzbekistan	1	0	0	1
22. Brazil	0	1	3	4
23. Sweden	0	1	2	3
24. Kkosovo	0	1	1	2
24. Mexico	0	1	1	2
24. Poland	0	1	1	2
24. Turkey	0	1	1	2
28. Fiji	0	1	0	1
28. Georgia	0	1	0	1
28. Mongolia	0	1	0	1
28. North Korea	0	1	0	1
28. Tunisia	0	1	0	1
33. India	0	0	2	2
33. Moldova	0	0	2	2
35. Croatia	0	0	1	1
35. Egypt	0	0	1	1
35. Guatemala	0	0	1	1
35. Hungary	0	0	1	1
35. Slovakia	0	0	1	1
35. Spain	0	0	1	1
35. Switzerland	0	0	1	1
35. Tajikistan	0	0	1	1
35. Ukraine	0	0	1	1
G-Gold, S-Silver, B-Bronze, T-Total				

JUDO

Japan's Nagase retains men's title, Leski claims gold

'This struggle lasted more than before Tokyo but I managed to win'

Reuters
Paris

Japan's Takanori Nagase retained the Olympic under 81kg judo title he won in Tokyo three years ago before Andreja Leski triumphed in the women's under 63kg final to hand Slovenia its first gold medal of the Paris Games yesterday.

Nagase, a bronze medallist in Rio eight years ago, was already a point up when he secured a victory by ippon over Georgia's three-times world champion Tato Grigalashvili after two minutes, 48 seconds of the contest.

In front of a crowd mainly composed of locals hoping for a first judo gold for France, Nagase at first showed little emotion before finally waving to the audience when the speaker announced that he was now a double Olympic champion.

Before Paris, Nagase's form was uncertain as the 2015 world champion competed just eight times between his two Olympic titles, only winning the Antalya Grand Slam in March.

"The first time, the second time, both were tough, I can't say which one was easier or harder but after Tokyo I went through difficult times, I could not win much," Nagase said.

"This struggle lasted more than before Tokyo but I managed to win gold here in Paris and this is an achievement", added Nagase, who did not confirm whether he will aim for a third gold at the Los Angeles Olympics.

Leski had already disappointed another packed house at Champ-de-Mars Arena by beating French reigning champion Clarisse Agbegnenou 1-0 in the semi-finals of the women's competition.

The European champion went on to take out Mexican Prisca Awiti Alcaraz by ippon to clinch her country's second Olympic judo gold following Urska Zolnir in the same class in London in 2012. "I said to myself, 'I have five fights left', I just go all in and enjoy," Leski said. "I will explode from joy. It's historic for Slovenia."



FROM LEFT: Silver medallist Georgia's Tato Grigalashvili, gold medallist Japan's Takanori Nagase and bronze medallists South Korea's Lee Hye-kyeong, Tajikistan's Somon Makhmadbekov pose for a selfie on the podium after the judo men's -81kg of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games at the Champ-de-Mars Arena, in Paris yesterday. (AFP)



Gold medallist Slovenia's Andreja Leski and bronze medallist France's Clarisse Agbegnenou pose after the judo women's -63kg of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games at the Champ-de-Mars Arena, in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

During a press conference, Agbegnenou asked Leski about her participation at the Los Angeles Games in four years. The Slovenian replied that she was not sure about it.

"When you will be sure? You will have to tell me so we can have a revenge," said the Frenchwoman with a smile. Just 15 seconds before the gong in the semi-final, the Slovenian had

swiped her opponent's feet from under her and forced Agbegnenou on her shoulder.

Officials used video refereeing to confirm the decision of a waza-ari, stunning a crowd that has yet to celebrate a home judo gold at the Paris Games after four days of competition.

A "devastated" Agbegnenou, who had beaten Leski twice in

world championship finals, managed to recover in time to claim bronze, winning by ippon against Austria's Lubjana Piovesana.

After her win, she made a heart sign with her fingers to the crowd, who gave her a lengthy standing ovation.

The six-times world champion shared a moment in front of the stands with her two-year-old child, Athena, and being comforted by her teammates as well as France's Sports minister Amelie Oudea-Castera.

"That's incredible to come back like this after a pregnancy. A little girl that I'm still breastfeeding - that's crazy," Agbegnenou said. "I can be proud of me. I'll put the medal around my daughter's neck".

Alcaraz, who was born in Britain but has competed for Mexico since 2017, took silver, Mexico's first ever Olympic medal in judo.

Kosovo's Laura Fazliu won the other bronze, while South Korean Lee Joon-hwan and Somon Makhmadbekov of Tajikistan won bronzes in the men's competition.

It was Tajikistan's first medal of the Paris Olympics.

FOOTBALL

France set up Argentina showdown

AFP
Paris

France set up a potentially explosive quarter-final showdown with Argentina in the men's Olympic football tournament after beating New Zealand 3-0 in their final group game yesterday.

Argentina had sealed their last-eight spot earlier in the day and France joined them in the knockout phase with Jean-Philippe Mateta, Desire Doue and Arnaud Kalimuendo scoring for the hosts against New Zealand in Marseille.

France finish on top of Group A with three wins out of three and no goals conceded, with the United States going through as runners-up after seeing off Guinea 3-0, Kevin Paredes scoring twice.

That means Thierry Henry's French side will take on Argentina in Bordeaux on Friday after the South Americans, two-time gold medallists, went through in second place in Group B thanks to a 2-0 win over Ukraine in Lyon.

Thiago Almada's superb strike gave Argentina the lead just after half-time and substitute Claudio Echeverri sealed their victory late on. It will be the first meeting of the nations since Argentina players were recorded singing racist chants about French players as they celebrated winning the Copa America earlier this month.

FIFA has announced an investigation into the chants, which targeted France's star striker Kylian Mbappe among others and included racist and homophobic insults.

Argentina players have already been booed by rival fans at the Olympic tournament. The nations last met in the 2022 World Cup final in Qatar which Argentina won on penalties after a 3-3 draw.

However, the men's Olympic football tournament is an under-23 competition, with the exception of up to three over-age players per squad.

Only two members of Argentina's Olympic squad, Nicolas Otamendi and Julian Alvarez, played in the 2022 game, and none of France's.

Argentina will only face France after missing out on first place in Group B to Morocco on head to head.

Morocco beat Iraq 3-0 in Nice in their last group game thanks to goals by Amir Richardson - the son of former NBA star Michael Ray Richardson - Soufiane Rahimi's fourth of the tournament and a stunning goal from Abde Ezzalzouli, all in the first half.

Morocco and Argentina finished level on six points, and tied on goals scored and goals conceded, but Morocco won 2-1 when the sides met in their opening game.

That was only because a last-gasp equaliser for the South Americans was disallowed after a VAR review before the final minutes of the game were completed in an empty stadium following crowd trouble. Morocco, winners of last year's Under-23 Africa Cup of Nations, will play their quarter-final tie on Friday in Paris against the United States.

Earlier, Egypt reached the quarter-finals with a surprise 2-1 win over already-qualified Spain, with Ibrahim Adel scoring both goals.

Adel gave Egypt the lead in Bordeaux with a superb strike late in the first half and added another on 62 minutes, pouncing to score after possession was given away by Spain's Jon Pacheco.

Samu Omorodion pulled one back late on for Spain, but Egypt held on for the win that allowed them to leapfrog their opponents and snatch first place in Group C.

Egypt, captained by former Arsenal midfielder Mohamed El-neny, will play their quarter-final on Friday in Marseille against the runners-up in Group D, which contains Japan, Paraguay, Mali and Israel. Egypt lost in the quarter-finals three years ago to Brazil, who went on to beat Spain in the final.



SPOTLIGHT

Gutsy New Zealand come from behind to retain Rugby Sevens title

AFP
Paris

New Zealand's women defended their Olympic sevens title with a gritty, come-from-behind 19-12 victory over Canada yesterday as the United States bagged a surprise bronze.

The Kiwis outscored the Canadians by three tries to two in a tense, defence-led match in front of a near-capacity 69,000 crowd at the Stade de France.

The US, having made their first-ever semi-finals, had earlier upset pre-tournament favourites Australia 14-12 to claim third place.

The final saw Kiwi skipper Risi Pouri-Lane step Chloe Daniels and run in from 50 metres for the open-

ing try, also hitting the conversion. New Zealand pinned Canada back in their own 22m, but when the ball was worked left to Charity Williams, the winger was one-on-one with Portia Woodman-Wickliffe.

However, the New Zealander, a star of both the sevens and 15s game for more than a decade, saw yellow for the high, covering tackle. Canada took advantage, Daniels played into space by Olivia Apps for a straight run-in to the line and successfully adding the extras.

Sarah Hirini tried one ambitious offload too many as the Kiwis regrouped, Alysha Corrigan intercepting and showing a clean pair of soles for Canada's second try to leave it 12-7 at half-time.

New Zealand started the sec-

ond period exactly as they needed to, the impressive Michaela Blyde stepping inside Corrigan for a fine try, converted by Tyla King to hand them back the lead.

Stacey Wakaa then got the decisive score following a fine Hirini break and some slick inter-passing between those two and King.

A dramatic bronze medal match saw Maddison Levi score two more tries to finish on a record 14 for the tournament.

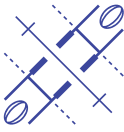
The previous best in an Olympics was Woodman-Wickliffe's tally of 10 for New Zealand at the 2016 Rio Games.

But it was not enough as the US responded with tries from Alev Kelter, when Levi's sister Teagan was in the sin bin, and Alex Sedrick to make it 12 points apiece.

Sedrick herself kicked the vital conversion to seal a famous US bronze in perfect timing for the run-in to the next Olympic Games, on home soil in Los Angeles in 2028. The women's tournament followed a similar three-day competition for the men, which could not have been better scripted as global superstar Antoine Dupont led France to victory over defending champions Fiji.

"We always said this is our chance of coming of age for rugby sevens in the Olympics, and it has been, it's been incredible," World Rugby CEO Alan Gilpin told reporters yesterday.

"553,000 spectators in six days. It's been amazing. It's everything we hoped it could be. And hopefully, it's a great platform for the future."



Badminton friends Taiwan's Wang and Lee enjoy comfortable win over US pair



Chi-Lin Wang of Taiwan and compatriot Yang Lee shake hands with their coaching staff after winning the Group D match against Americans Joshua Yuan and Vinson Chiu at the Paris 2024 Olympics. (Reuters)

PARIS: Reigning champions Wang Chi-Lin and Lee Yang of Taiwan, who are in the men's doubles 'Group of Death' along with top pairs from India, Japan, China and South Korea, enjoyed a straightforward victory at the Paris Games yesterday. The Taiwanese, who are childhood friends, beat Vinson Chiu and Joshua Yuan of the United States 21-12 21-13 in Group D. "After Tokyo (Olympics), we've not played very good, so we just need to focus on every match," Wang said.

"We just want to play well. And for us in the Olympics we have that feeling. So we'll just focus more and more, pay

attention on the every match." Wang and Lee, who bagged gold in Tokyo, are part of a group including Japan's former world champions Hoki Takuro and Kobayashi Yugo, Olympic silver medallist Liu Yuchen of China, and ex-European Games champions Kim Astrup and Anders Rasmussen from Denmark - dubbed as the men's doubles 'Group of Death'. Wang laughed when asked how he feels being in that group. "It's good experience," he said. "We'll just have to enjoy it and find a way to win every match." China's Liu and partner Ou Xuanyi bat-



tled it out with Japan's Kobayashi and Hoki with the Chinese pair winning 22-20 21-18 in a near hour-long battle in which 19 shuttlecocks were used and whose longest rally was 30 strokes.

One court over, South Korea's Kang Min-hyuk and Seo Seung-jae, ranked fourth in men's doubles, smashed their way to a 21-16 21-15 victory over Thailand's Supak Jomkoh and Kittinupong Kendren, the world number 23 pairing. Number five men's duo Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy - widely considered India's best chance of a badminton gold - won 21-13 21-13 against seventh-ranked Fajar Alfian

and Mohamed Ardianto of Indonesia in 40 minutes. "Obviously we wanted to get this win in," Shetty said yesterday. "It really boosts our confidence, that we could win against Fajar and Mohamed - they are a top pair and we've always really had some fun, tough battles against them." In women's doubles, world number four Matsuyama Nami and Shida Chiharu of Japan were upset 24-22 26-24 by South Korea's Kim So-yeong and Kong Hee-yong, who rank 10th. Also yesterday, world number nine women's singles shuttler He Bingjiao of China beat Britain's Kirsty Gilmour 24-22, 21-8.

HORSE RACING / QATAR GOODWOOD FESTIVAL

Kyprios retains Al Shaqab Goodwood Cup

Festival features class racing, with several black type races bearing the name of Qatar



Connections of Kyprios celebrate after the colt won the Al Shaqab Goodwood Cup Stakes on the first day of Qatar Goodwood Festival yesterday. QREC Chairman Issa bin Mohamed al-Mohannadi presented the trophies.

By Sports Reporter
Goodwood, UK

Kyprios secured a comprehensive victory in the Group 1 Al Shaqab Goodwood Cup Stakes, as the Qatar Goodwood Festival kicked off yesterday. The world famous five-day Festival is one of the highlights of the flat racing season in the UK and Europe.

The festival features class racing, with several black type races bearing the name of Qatar. The opening day of this year's edition of the Qatar Racing and Equestrian

Club (QREC) sponsored Festival had an eight-race card, where top-class racing was on display at the unique racecourse which was built in 1802.

Kyprios managed to reclaim his title for the second time, having already won it in 2022. QREC Chairman Issa bin Mohamed al-Mohannadi presented the trophies to connections of Kyprios.

Owned by Moyglare, Magnier, Tabor, Smith & Westerberg, Kyprios was coming to this race on the back of a Group 1 success when landing the Gold Cup at Royal Ascot when last seen. Trained by Aidan O'Brien, the six-year-old

won this race in 2022. Ridden by Ryan Moore, Kyprios was always close to the pace in a race led by Gregory (Golden Horn) early on and Al Qareem (Awtaad) after six furlongs. Travelling confidently in the straight for home the son of Galileo quickly pulled clear to win by four lengths. Sweet William (Sea The Stars) ran on for second. Gregory was third.

"I thought there would be pace with Al Qareem; he's usually a free-going horse. It took a while to get there, but my horse obviously stays well. It was very smooth and we've obviously done the track record. The only thing that hap-



Jockey Ryan Moore guided Kyprios to Al Shaqab Goodwood Cup Stakes win yesterday.

pened was that he slipped on the top turn, then he was just on the back foot and dropped away from the horse who was going to take me into the race. He still got there with two to run going very easy, and he was a bit idle in front there, but it was a tremendous performance," Moore said.

"He's been a great horse for a long time now and his record is incredible, really. Since we stepped him up in trip there's only been two defeats last year, neither of which was completely his fault.

"He is just very high class. This fella is very, very good. He wouldn't show you how good he

is, but he's very good. It is fun to ride him because you know he's that much better than the rest," he said.

Today, the Qatar International Stakes (Group 1 PA) will take centre stage as one of the world's top Arabian races and the first leg of the Doha Triple Crown.

Nine horses have been declared including: the big favourite and title holder Al Ghadeer, who is owned by Al Shaqab Racing as are Al Wakrah and Afjan; Fareedhat El Izz for Al Nujaifi Racing Ltd; Ska de l'Aigle, the representative of Abdullah bin Fahad A H al-Attiyah; Al Zeer owned by Mohamed bin Fa-

had A H al-Attiyah; Winds of Fortune and Upstart Crown presented by James Owen and Abiyah Athbah for Dilmun Racing.

Present on the opening day as well were President of the Asian Equestrian Federation and QREC Vice-Chairman Hamad bin Abdulrahman al-Attiya, QREC Board Members Khalifa bin Mohamed al-Attiya and Ahmed bin Mohamed Alabdulmalik, Racing Manager Abdulla bin Rashid al-Kubaisi, Director of Support Services Ahmed al-Sheebani and Director of Public Relations & External Communications and Marketing Salem Khejaim al-Adbi.

HOCKEY

Dutch draw with Britain in the heat, India post win

Reuters
Paris

Top-ranked Netherlands drew 2-2 with world number two side Britain after conceding two late goals to forward Lee Morton in men's hockey at the Paris Olympics but led Pool A yesterday.

Sweat drenched the players and spectators alike as the crowds continued to turn out despite forecasts of 36C (96.8F) heat, with cheers of "Holland!" ringing out as their supporters showed up in a sea of orange.

Storms are forecast for the two evening Pool B games and throughout Wednesday.

"Today the heat was unbelievable... Netherlands captain Thierry Brinkman said. "It was heavy to keep running normally. And the subs are coming closer, sooner, quicker. So when you're just off, someone is calling one minute and then we switch. "The most important thing now is to recover well, get a good sleep, and



Lee Morton of Britain celebrates scoring their second hockey goal against Netherlands at Paris 2024 Olympics at Yves-du-Manoir Stadium yesterday. (Reuters)

then fight again tomorrow." Britain's captain David Ames added: "I think the quality that we've shown, our determination to keep fighting towards the end, to get two goals in the calibre and the

way that we did, it's nice to come off with a draw and move forward unbeaten."

The draw leaves Britain third on five points behind the Dutch with seven and second-placed

Germany on six. Table-topping India beat Ireland 2-0 in yesterday's first Pool B game as captain Harmanpreet Singh enabled their fans to relax with two early drag-flick goals after the outcome of the team's previous two matches was decided in the final minutes.

Harmanpreet has now scored the decisive goal in all three games for India who have seven points ahead of Belgium and Australia on six. The top four in each six-team Pool qualify for the quarter-finals.

Spain came back twice to secure a 3-3 draw against France after substitute Timothee Clement opened the scoring with two goals for the hosts, securing their first point in Pool A and keeping their quarter-final hopes alive.

"Before the game we knew if we lose it's finished," France captain Viktor Lockwood said. "Yesterday and this morning, we had a lot of meetings... It's our first Olympics and maybe our last. Give everything in the game and just play, just play."

Germany bounced back to pummel South Africa 5-1, also in Pool A, after an upset loss to Spain on Sunday.

FENCING

Italy beat France to win epee team gold



Alberta Santuccio of Italy celebrates with teammates after winning the gold medal at the Paris 2024 Olympics in the women's epee team final at Grand Palais, Paris, France, yesterday. (Reuters)

Reuters
Paris

World number one Italy claimed gold in the final of the women's epee with a 30-29 victory over France in a high-octane, sudden-death contest at the Paris Olympics yesterday. Poland took the bronze medal by beating China 32-31. France, who beat world number two South Korea and world number three Poland on their way to the final in the boiling-hot Grand Palais arena, opened a 19-15 lead but faded in the decisive moments. Defending champions Estonia had failed to qualify for the Olympics.

Meanwhile, Egyptian fencer Nada Hafez has revealed she competed at the Paris Olympics, reaching the last 16 in her event and defeating a higher-ranked rival on the way, while seven months pregnant.

Hafez, a three-time Olympian from Cairo, ranked 26th, beat American fencer Elizabeth Tartakovsky in the sabre event before succumbing to Hayoung Jeon of South Korea in the quarter finals on Monday. "Three times *Olympian* but this time carrying a little Olympian!" the 26-year-old said on Instagram late on Monday. "What appears to you as two players...they were actually three! It was me, my competitor, and my yet-to-come to our world, little baby!" she wrote in English.

India beat Sri Lanka, bag T20 series 3-0



Indian players celebrate winning the three-match T20 series against hosts Sri Lanka in Pallekele yesterday. India yesterday won the third and final T20 in the Super Over after both sides were tied during regulation play. The two teams will turn their attention to a three-match ODI series. The matches will be played on August 2, 4 and 7. All matches will be played in Colombo.

FROM OFFICE JOB TO GAMES, AUSTRALIAN ECHEGARAY PROUD OF 'TREMENDOUS FEAT'

PARIS: Tiana Echegaray was eliminated from the Paris Olympics following a loss to Turkiye's Hatice Akbas yesterday, but the Australian said she is still proud of herself for making it this far in such a short space of time.

Until 2019, the 30-year-old worked an office job for a music rights company, before quitting and taking up boxing as a way to keep fit.

"I was just working a pretty mediocre 9-5 job for the majority of my life, and it felt really meaningless. Everything that I was doing was just going to the abyss and having no value or benefit to anyone in my life,"



Hatice Akbas of Turkiye in action against Tiana Echegaray of Australia during their 54kg bout yesterday. (Reuters)

bantamweight Echegaray said. "I decided to do something different and do a full 360 of my life. I started boxing for fitness and it felt good to move, to have

exercise is really an incredible thing. I met some people in boxing, particularly women, who just looked really badass, like hitting the bag. I was just watching them and I thought, there's obviously so much more to this sport," Echegaray said.

"I didn't grow up dreaming of going to the Olympics. I started boxing really late. I had my first fight in 2021, and to even make it to the Olympics is a tremendous feat.

"I'm so proud of myself for making it this far, and just being here, representing myself, my family, my coaches, my gym."

(Reuters)

Abusharib says ‘best is yet to come’ after finishing 26th



Qatar’s shooter Saeed Abusharib finished in 26th place with a total score of 118 in the trap qualification at the Paris Olympic Games yesterday. Abusharib, who was in 22nd place after first three series on day one, slid four places after scores of 25 and 23 in fourth and fifth series. Abusharib expressed his happiness in performance in his first Olympic participation. “I hoped to reach the finals, but hopefully, the best is yet to come. The preparations will start now for future events to achieve better results,” the 40-year-old said.

QOC Secretary-General attends Saudi reception



Qatar Olympic Committee (QOC) Secretary-General Jassim bin Rashid al-Bueinain attended the Saudi House reception in Paris on the sidelines of the Olympic Games yesterday. Sheikh Khalifa bin Khalid al-Thani, Director of the Sports at the QOC and Sarah al-Mosnad, Assistant Director of the International Relations and Communication Department also attended the event. The Qatar delegation was received by Saudi Minister of Sports and President of the Saudi Olympic and Paralympic Committee Prince Abdulaziz bin Turki al-Faisal al-Saud and the Vice-President of the Saudi Olympic and Paralympic Committee Prince Fahd bin Jalawi bin Abdulaziz.

TENNIS

Nadal keeps medal hopes alive as tearful Gauff exits

Women’s top seed Swiatek reaches last eights on a sweltering day

AFP
Paris

Rafael Nadal kept alive his dream of a third Olympic gold yesterday, powering into the men’s doubles quarter-finals alongside teammate Carlos Alcaraz after a tearful Coco Gauff crashed out of the singles.

Women’s top seed Iga Swiatek reached the last eight on a sweltering day at Roland Garros while defending men’s champion Alexander Zverev eased through. With temperatures rocketing into the mid-30s Celsius, officials activated a heat protocol, allowing a 10-minute break between the second and third sets.

Just 24 hours after he was dumped out of the singles competition by long-time rival Novak Djokovic, Nadal was back on court alongside Alcaraz in the “Nadalcaraz” dream team. The Spanish pair lost the second set but stepped up a gear in the match tie-break to beat Dutch team Tallon Griekspoor and Wesley Koolhof 6-4, 6-7 (2/7), 10-2 in two hours and 22 minutes.

The packed crowd on Court Suzanne Lenglen made no secret of their support for the Spanish pair, regularly chanting: “Let’s go Rafa, let’s go”. Nadal, a 14-time French Open champion, has been plagued by injuries in recent years and has slumped to 161st in the world. He said after his painful defeat to Djokovic that he would make a decision on his future after the Paris Games.

But the Spaniard, who won singles gold at the 2008 Beijing Games and doubles gold in Rio in 2016, can still collect a medal after teaming up with French Open and Wimbledon champion Alcaraz.

In the first match on Court Philippe Chatrier, Croatia’s Donna Vekic shocked women’s second seed Gauff 7-6 (9/7), 6-2 to reach the quarter-finals. But the match was overshadowed by a lengthy row between the US Open champion and the chair umpire. Gauff, the flag-bearer for the United States at the Olympic opening ceremony alongside NBA star LeBron James, lost the first set and had a lengthy row with the umpire at the end of the sixth game of the second set.

At 30-40, Vekic hit a return deep to Gauff’s



Carlos Alcaraz and Rafael Nadal of Spain celebrate after their win over Tallon Griekspoor and Wesley Koolhof of the Netherlands in the second round of the men’s doubles in Paris. (Reuters)

forehand, which the American mishit into the net. Vekic’s shot was called out but the call was overruled by the chair umpire and the point was awarded to the Croat, giving her the break.

Gauff argued her shot was compromised by the initial call. “I have to advocate for myself all the time,” a weeping Gauff, 20, said on court. “I’m getting cheated in this game. You guys are not fair to me.”

Vekic briefly lost her composure, slipping to 0-40 on her own serve before recovering to hold, and she broke again to seal victory. The world number 21, a Wimbledon semi-finalist earlier this month, said the row over the line call was a “tricky situation”. “After that, the crowd, it was not so easy,” she said. “I lost my concentration for a couple of points, but I’m happy that I managed to come back in that

game because it was an important game.”

Women’s world number one Swiatek won her 24th straight match on the clay courts of Paris against China’s Wang Xiyu and will face America’s Danielle Collins next. The 23-year-old Pole, who has won the past three French Open titles, triumphed 6-3, 6-4 and is yet to drop a set at the Olympics.

There were also wins for three-time Grand Slam champion Angelique Kerber of Germany, Wimbledon champion Barbora Krejickova and China’s Zheng Qinwen. Germany’s Zverev coasted into the third round of the men’s competition with a 6-3, 7-5 win over 39th-ranked Czech Tomas Machac. Britain’s three-time Grand Slam champion Andy Murray, playing his final tournament, is in action later alongside doubles partner Dan Evans.

SPOTLIGHT

North Korea win first Olympic medal in eight years with table tennis silver

AFP
Paris

North Korea said they could learn from China after winning their first Olympic medal in eight years yesterday in Paris, settling for silver after a mixed-doubles defeat to the table tennis superpower. China arrived in Paris as the world’s undisputed table tennis kings, having won 32 of the 37 available golds since it became an Olympic sport.

They failed to claim the mixed doubles title when it was introduced three years ago in Tokyo but Wang Chuqin and Sun Yingsha set the record straight with an 11-6, 7-11, 11-8, 11-5, 7-11, 11-8 win over North Korea’s Ri Jong Sik and Kim Kum Yong.

It was the first gold of what China hope will be a clean sweep of table tennis in the French capital. For North Korea, they skipped the pandemic-postponed Tokyo Olympics in 2021 over coronavirus concerns.

Kim said she and Ri had trained with the Chinese team to prepare for Paris and vowed to come back stronger. “We had some time with the Chinese team, which is the world’s best,” said the

22-year-old. “Of course it wasn’t enough in the end. We had a good performance but there are some regrets. We learned a lot from them.”

Ri and Kim were on the medals podium with the South Korean duo Lim Jong-hoon and Shin Yu-bin, who won bronze. When asked if they saw the South Korean pair as their rivals, Kim and Ri both shook their heads.

Kim said they had not yet been able to speak to their family to tell them about the match. “We hope to do better next time and win the gold,” she said.

Wang and Sun have not lost outside China for four years and they are the world’s number one-ranked pair. They had overwhelming support from the red-clad fans inside the standing room-only South Paris Arena, cheering and chanting throughout the match.

But Sun admitted that the element of the unknown made it difficult to face the North Korean pair. “It’s quite rare to have a North Korean pair in international competition,” she said. “We had never played them before. They have strengths and they have been able to beat a lot of opponents. They have a distinctive style,” she added.



China’s Wang Chuqin (second right) and Sun Yingsha (centre) celebrate after their win over North Korea’s Kim Kum-yong and Ri Jong-sik in the mixed doubles table tennis gold medal match. (AFP)

SHOOTING

Britain’s Hales traps gold, Serbia win air pistol mixed team event



FROM LEFT: 10m air pistol mixed team event silver medalists Sevvall Ilayda Tarhan and Yusuf Dikec of Türkiye, gold medalists Zorana Arunovic and Mikec Damir of Serbia and bronze medalists Manu Bhaker and Sarabjot Singh of India take a selfie on the podium at the Paris Olympic Games at Chateauroux Shooting Centre yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters
Chateauroux, France

Britain’s Nathan Hales clinched the men’s trap gold at the Paris Games with a new Olympic record, while the Serbian pair of Zorana Arunovic and Damir Mikec rallied to win the 10-metre air pistol mixed team event. Hales hit 48 shots out of 50 in his Olympic debut and fell agonisingly short of his own world record of 49 on a hot afternoon at the Chateauroux Shooting Centre. The 28-year-old missed just one shot in each of the two stages to put daylight between himself and Qi Ying (44) of China, who settled for silver.

“That’s quite something,” Hales said of his new status as an Olympic champion. “I don’t think it’s sunk in yet. It’s been an amazing experience, just absolutely un-

real. I’m very emotional.” Jean Pierre Brol (35) claimed Guatemala’s first shooting medal at the Olympics.

Earlier, in the mixed team pistol event, Arunovic and Mikec drew level when Türkiye’s Sevvall Ilayda Tarhan and Yusuf Dikec looked on the brink of victory at 14-12 in the race to the magic number of 16.

Dikec needed a 10 to secure Türkiye’s gold but he managed 9.1 as their euphoric Serbian opponents hugged each other, tumbled and rolled on the floor in jubilation.

“It was a real rollercoaster,” Arunovic said after their thrilling 16-14 win that secured Serbia’s first medal in Paris. “We went down 8-2, but ... we knew we could rely on each other to give our best, and we put our faith in each other. It was really stressful but I hope we put on a good show for people who have come here. Not many people usually come to watch shoot-

ing but I hope the audience enjoyed a good display.”

Mikec, who won the men’s individual silver in Tokyo Olympics, also savoured the occasion. “This is what I dreamed of. Everyone in Serbia said to me, ‘You had silver in Tokyo, then you will win gold in Paris,’” he said. Tarhan and Dikec won Türkiye’s first Olympic medal in shooting and promised to do even better in 2028. “An Olympic medal is an Olympic medal,” Dikec told a press conference. “In Los Angeles, we’ll snatch the gold from them,” he said tapping on the shoulder of his Serbian rival Arunovic, who only giggled.

Manu Bhaker and Sarabjot Singh claimed the bronze for India, beating the South Korean pair Oh Ye-jin and Lee Won-ho 16-10. Bhaker, who won bronze in the women’s individual event, becomes India’s first multi-medallist at an Olympic Games since the country’s independence in 1947.