

To subscribe
GULF TIMES
Newspaper
Please call
444 666 35



ATHLETICS | Page 4

Olympic champ
Tebogo gets hero's
homecoming in
Botswana



TENNIS | Page 3

Popyrin breaks
Aussie dry
spell with ATP
Montreal title

To advertise here,
PLEASE CALL
444 666 21

Wednesday, August 14, 2024
Safar 10, 1446 AH

GULF TIMES

SPORT

CRICKET

England captain
Stokes out of
Sri Lanka series
with torn hamstring

Page 2

AFC CHAMPIONS LEAGUE

Sassi's strike sends Gharafa through to group stage

SASSI THUMPS IN A HEADER IN THE 50TH MINUTE AFTER DIAZ SENDS A WELL-TIMED CROSS



Al Gharafa's Ferjani Sassi (right) celebrates after scoring against Shabab Al Ahli during the AFC Champions League Elite Preliminary Stage 2 match at the Al Bayt Stadium.

By Sports Reporter
Al Khor

Ferjani Sassi's second half strike sealed Qatar's Al Gharafa a 1-0 win over Shabab Al Ahli of the United Arab Emirates in their AFC Champions League Elite Preliminary Stage 2 fixture at the Al Bayt Stadium yesterday.

The victory secured Al Gharafa a place in the AFC Champions League Elite 2024/25 group stage while Shabab Al Ahli will compete in the AFC Champions League Two 2024/25 with the draw for both competitions to be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on Friday.

The home side started brightly and their high tempo approach almost opened the scoring in the sixth minute when Joselu's shot struck the post after a throw-in. Moments later, Jamal Hamed saw his effort off a rebound denied by Shabab Al Ahli keeper Hassan Hamza, who foiled Florinel Coman's effort shortly after.

Shabab Al Ahli had a chance to respond in the ninth minute but Breno Cascardo's header was comfortably saved by Al Gharafa keeper Khalifa Ababacar.

The Qatari side continued to press and came close to scoring with Fabricio Diaz forcing another fine save from Hamza in the 13th minute, who then needed to be at full stretch to tip away the deflected effort from distance. The visitors had a golden opportunity to break the deadlock in the 23rd minute but Yuri Cesar pulled his shot wide, while Al Gharafa came close again in the 37th minute when Assim Madibo just failed to find the net off his free-kick.

Al Gharafa started from where they left off in the second half and kept Shabab Al Ahli on their toes with Diaz testing Hamza



Al Gharafa's Jamal Hamed (left) and Shabab Al Ahli's Breno Cascardo vie for the ball.

from distance before Jang Hyun-soo angled his headed attempt wide from the ensuing corner.

Shabab Al Ahli's defence finally succumbed in the 50th minute when Sassi combined well with Diaz before the Uruguayan sent a well-timed cross for Sassi to finish with a thumping header to give Al Gharafa a deserved lead.

Shabab Al Ahli came close to levelling the score three minutes later, Ababacar having to be at his best to deny Breno Cascardo's curling effort from inside the area.

In an effort to salvage their hopes, Shabab Al Ahli head coach Paulo Sousa introduced Gaston Suarez, Sardar Azmoun and Guilherme Bala into the mix but it was to no avail as Al Gharafa hung on for the win and a place in the top tier of Asian club football.

FOCUS

Olympic flag arrival kicks off 2028 'pressure' for Los Angeles

AFP
Los Angeles

The Olympic flag arrived under bright skies on Monday in Los Angeles, where officials now have four short years to organise a Games capable of rivalling the widely praised Paris edition in a notoriously traffic-clogged metropolis.

Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass landed in a plane emblazoned with palm trees and the logo "LA 2028", and crossed the tarmac holding the five-ringed banner, accompanied by several US athletes. "We feel the pressure to make sure that our city and our region is prepared and ready," she told reporters. "We have the flag now. It's on us. We got a lot of work to do Los Angeles," Bass added.

A timely reminder of potential unique challenges came moments before her plane landed, as a 4.6-magnitude earthquake shook Los Angeles. "Making sure that we are prepared for events like an earthquake" will be key to infrastructure plans, she said. "But also now we have climate events that we never thought about impacting our region, that we have to be prepared for as well."

Still, the biggest challenge will inevitably be transport. In Paris for the closing ceremony last weekend, Bass outlined plans for Los Angeles to deliver a "no-car Games".

In a city addicted to private vehicles, where gigantic freeways criss-cross the urban sprawl and traffic jams are a daily inevitability, that pledge is ambitious. "I'm sceptical we'll actually achieve that, but I know we're going to try," said James Moore, an industrial and systems engineering professor at University of Southern California.

Los Angeles does have a subway network, but at just five-and-a-half lines and relatively infrequent service, it is tiny for the region's 10mn residents. Authorities plan to bring in 3,000



Los Angeles mayor Karen Bass (left) waves the Olympic flag next to LA28 chairman Casey Wasserman after their arrival at Los Angeles International Airport on Monday. (AFP)

buses, borrowed from all over the country, and to create dedicated road lanes for them.

Public transport will receive priority over private cars, which will not be banned. Not all Olympic sites are expected to have parking. The last time Los Angeles hosted the Olympics, in 1984, many residents left the city, averting a traffic nightmare.

"If we see residents following the same strategy in 2028 and basically getting out of town for a few days, that may free up enough road space that we're able to move everybody with buses," said Moore.

The city's giant main airport, infamous for its accessibility issues, will – at least – finally be connected to the metro train network. An automated shuttle, long in the works, is due to open by 2026, when Los Angeles will host the opening match of the football World Cup.

Los Angeles is counting heavily on its reputation as the world's movies and entertainment capital. In a "handover" segment of the Paris closing ceremony, Tom Cruise parachuted with the Olympic flag into Los Angeles near the famous Hollywood sign, which he then redecorated with the Olympic logo.

Los Angeles is also a US sporting powerhouse, with numerous major teams and state-of-the-art stadiums. "What's not in our DNA? We're creative, we're storytellers. We've got sport, we've got diversity. It's LA," Reynold Hoover, CEO of the 2028 organising committee, told AFP.

But beneath the Hollywood glitz, Los Angeles has an enormous homelessness crisis. Some 75,000 people lack housing, in a city where real estate is eye-wateringly expensive. Since arriving at City Hall, Bass has made this long standing issue a priority. A vast shelter program has recently shown signs of progress. The total number of homeless people fell slightly in 2024, for the first time in six years.

SPOTLIGHT

Chiles must return bronze medal after USA Gymnastics appeal fails

AFP
Washington

The Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) will not reconsider a ruling that cost US gymnast **Jordan Chiles** an Olympic bronze medal in floor exercise despite new evidence, USA Gymnastics said on Monday.

Chiles took the bronze when a challenge from Team USA about her degree of difficulty of her routine was accepted, denying Romanian gymnast Ana Barbosu the prize. But CAS cancelled the re-evaluation of Chiles's score, saying Team USA's appeal was lodged four seconds after the regulatory deadline. And the International Olympic Committee opted to award the medal to Barbosu.

USA Gymnastics attempted to have CAS reconsider the matter and reinstate the bronze to Chiles, citing new video evidence proving the appeal was made in time, but said Monday that attempt had been denied. "USA Gymnastics was notified by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) on Monday that their rules do not allow for an arbitral award to be reconsidered even when conclusive new evidence is presented," the statement said.

USA Gymnastics said it will press its effort further, potential-



ly to Swiss authorities, in a quest to resolve the Paris Olympics dispute in the American's favour. "We are deeply disappointed by the notification and will continue to pursue every possible avenue and appeal process, including to the Swiss Federal Tribunal, to ensure the just scoring, placement, and medal award for Jordan," the statement said.

On Sunday, USA Gymnastics submitted a letter and video evidence to CAS establishing team coach Cecile Landi's request to file an inquiry was submitted 47 seconds after the publishing of the score, within a one-minute deadline required by the International Gymnastics Federation.

USA Gymnastics also said Landi filed a second statement 55 seconds after the original posting of the score. USA Gymnastics did not provide the video footage before the initial CAS decision because it was not available to the sport governing body at that time, giving them no opportunity to submit it for the hearing.

CRICKET

Captain Stokes out of Sri Lanka series with injury

ECB SAYS VICE-CAPTAIN POPE WILL LEAD THE ENGLAND SIDE

AFF
London

England captain Ben Stokes has been ruled out for the rest of the season with a torn hamstring and will miss the Test series against Sri Lanka, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) announced yesterday.

“England Men’s Test Captain Ben Stokes has been ruled out for the rest of the summer after tearing his left hamstring while playing for Northern Superchargers in The Hundred on Sunday,” said an ECB statement.

The 33-year-old all-rounder will be replaced as Test skipper by vice-captain Ollie Pope, the ECB added.

The first Test against Sri Lanka begins on August 21 at Old Trafford.

“As a result of the scans conducted in Leeds on Tuesday, Stokes will miss England’s three-match Test series against Sri Lanka,” aid the ECB.

“The all-rounder is aiming to return for England’s winter Test tour of Pakistan, scheduled to start in early October.”

No replacement player has been added to the England squad for the Sri Lanka series announced on August 4.

Stokes had knee surgery in November and then ruled himself out of England’s T20 World Cup title defence in the Caribbean and the United States earlier this year to ensure he could be fit to play a role as a fully-fledged all-rounder in the Test side.

He scored 192 runs at an average



England’s captain Ben Stokes plays a shot on the second day of the third Test against West Indies at Edgbaston in Birmingham on July 27, 2024. (AFP)

of 48 and took five wickets with his lively medium-pace bowling during a 3-0 series whitewash of the West Indies - the first half of England’s home Test programme this season.

Stokes looked well on his way to full fitness before suffering the injury against Manchester Originals at Old Trafford, where he was later seen on crutches.

Stokes’ injury provoked a fresh round of social media criticism of the Hundred, the ECB’s controversial 100-balls-per-side

tournament, that features eight specially created teams rather than the traditional 18 first-class counties.

England players are routinely withdrawn by the ECB from the first-class County Championship or domestic limited-overs tournaments such as the T20 Blast and One-Day Cup to protect their fitness for international duty.

Stokes, however, was cleared to play in the Hundred, despite pulling out of the T20 World Cup.

His absence is a fresh injury

blow for England, with opening batsman Zak Crawley already ruled out of the Sri Lanka series because of a broken finger sustained while fielding against the West Indies. Uncapped paceman Dillon Pennington has been sidelined after also suffering a hamstring injury while in action for Northern Superchargers.

Sri Lanka will have one warm-up match, a four-day fixture against the second-string England Lions in Worcester starting today, before the first Test.

SPOTLIGHT

Former player Thorpe killed by train: Inquest

AFF
London

Former England batsman Graham Thorpe died after being struck by a train at a railway station, an inquest into his death heard yesterday.

The 55-year-old took his own life, his wife Amanda revealed on Monday in an interview with *The Times*.

Thorpe died on the morning of August 4 having suffered “traumatic injuries” during the incident at Esher railway station, southwest of London, Surrey Coroner’s Court in Woking was told.

The area coroner for Surrey, Simon Wickens, recorded Thorpe’s cause of death as one of multiple injuries during the short hearing.

The coroner offered his “sincere condolences” not just to Thorpe’s family, but to “all those touched by his life and career”.

A date for the full inquest will be fixed at a later time.

Thorpe’s death plunged the cricket world into mourning for the popular star.

He enjoyed an impressive England career as an elegant batsman from 1993 to 2005, before spending 12 years in various coaching roles. But Thorpe was hospitalised in May 2022 and declared “seriously ill”.

Amanda Thorpe told *The Times* that the former Surrey batsman attempted suicide two years ago before taking his own life.

“Despite having a wife and two daughters whom he loved and who loved him, he did not get better. He was so unwell in recent times and he really did believe that we would be better off without him and we are devastated that he acted on that and took his own life,” she said.

Amanda Thorpe added: “Graham was renowned as someone who was very mentally strong on the field and he was in good physical health.

“But mental illness is a real disease and can affect anyone.”

The left-hander featured in 100 Test matches and 82 one-day internationals for England, scoring over 9,000 runs for his country, including 16 Test hundreds.

Sri Lanka name Bell as batting coach for England tour

Colombo: Former England player Ian Bell was named yesterday as Sri Lanka’s batting coach for the three-match Test series against England. Sri Lanka Cricket said the 42-year-old former right-hand batter was hired to draw on his experience of playing 118 Tests for England.

“We appointed Ian to bring in a person with local knowledge to help the players with key insights on the conditions there,” Sri Lanka Cricket chief executive Ashley de Silva said.

“We believe his inputs will help our team in this crucial tour,” he added.

Sri Lanka appointed former skipper Sanath Jayasuriya last month to replace head coach Chris Silverwood, who quit following the country’s early exit from the T20 World Cup. Jayasuriya, 55, will be the “interim” coach until a full-time

appointment is made for the national team. Jayasuriya represented Sri Lanka 586 times across the three formats of the game, hitting 42 centuries and taking 440 wickets. He played his last international in 2011. Former England coach Silverwood, 49, quit for “personal reasons”, according to Sri Lanka Cricket.

Sri Lanka won only one match at the T20 World Cup tournament, against the Netherlands, and finished third in their group behind South Africa and Bangladesh. Silverwood took over in April 2022 and enjoyed immediate success when Sri Lanka won the T20 Asia Cup that year. Sri Lanka then reached the final of the 50-over Asia Cup in 2023. However, they failed to make it to the knockout stages of the T20 World Cup in 2022 and last year’s 50-over World Cup.

RUGBY

SA make changes ahead of Wallabies Test

AFF
Perth, Australia

Scrum-half Morne van den Berg and lock Ruan Nortje will make their first starts for the Springboks against Australia in Perth after coach Rassie Erasmus yesterday named a team that shows 10 changes to the side that convincingly won its Rugby Championship opener in Brisbane.

The only players retaining their starting places from the 33-7 victory against the Wallabies at the weekend are backs Cheslin Kolbe, Jesse Kriel and Sacha Feinberg-Mngomezulu, and forwards Elrigh Louw and Pieter-Steph du Toit, who makes a positional move from lock to flanker.

With regular captain Siya Kolisi rested, lock Salmaan Moerat will captain the team for the second time at the Optus Stadium on Saturday while veteran Eben Etzebeth starts on bench.

“We made it clear from the outset this season that one of our main goals is to build squad depth with an eye on the next Rugby

World Cup here in Australia,” said Erasmus. “There is no better way to test some of the younger players and assess where we are as a group against a top-Tier nation, especially away from home, in this match.”

Lions scrumhalf Van den Berg, 26, made his debut off the bench in the 64-21 win over Portugal last month while Nortje, also 26, has recovered from the knee issue that ruled him out of the Brisbane match and returns for the first time since making his Test debut as a replacement against Wales in Bloemfontein in 2022.

The rotation of players also allows Erasmus to rest some key individuals ahead of the subsequent four Tests in the Rugby Championship against New Zealand and Argentina.

“We have a big squad and it’s important to balance some players’ workload while at the same time bringing a few young players into the mix, and this squad allows us to do both,” said Erasmus, who expects a massive backlash from the Wallabies.

“They will be desperate to come back strongly from last week’s defeat and I have

no doubt that Joe Schmidt (Australian head coach) will select a team that is fired up and who will give everything to turn things around and get their campaign back on track.

“They are a proud nation and they’ll be highly motivated to continue their impressive home win record against us in Australia, so we’re fully aware of the challenge.

“This is a massive match for us because if we can build on last week, it will give us a good chance to be in the mix for the title which we last won in 2019.”

South Africa team (15-1):

Aphelele Fassi; Cheslin Kolbe, Jesse Kriel, Lukhanyo Am, Makazole Mapimpi; Sacha Feinberg-Mngomezulu, Morne van den Berg; Elrigh Louw, Pieter-Steph du Toit, Marco van Staden, Ruan Nortje, Salmaan Moerat (capt), Thomas du Toit, Johan Grobbelaar, Jan-Hendrik Wessels
Replacements: Malcolm Marx, Ox Nche, Vincent Koch, Eben Etzebeth, Kwagga Smith, Grant Williams, Manie Libbok, Handre Pollard.



Ruan Nortje has recovered from his niggle and will start against the Wallabies in Perth. (www.springboks.rugby)

GOLF

Kentucky’s Valhalla to host 2028 Solheim Cup

Reuters
Louisville, Kentucky

Valhalla Golf Club in Louisville, Kentucky, was named yesterday as the host course for the 21st Solheim Cup in 2028.

Valhalla will join The Greenbrier, Muirfield Village and Gleneagles as the only courses to host both a Solheim Cup - which pits top American players from the LPGA Tour against European pros in a biennial competition - and a Ryder Cup.

The 2024 PGA Championship and other major men’s tournaments have been played at Valhalla, but this will be the first major women’s competition there. The Ryder Cup was contested at Valhalla in 2008. Dates have yet to be finalized for the 2028 event.

“We are thrilled to be selected to host the 2028 Solheim Cup. Valhalla has a history of providing compelling finishes and we are excited to add this event to our championship lore,” club owner Jimmy Kirshdorfer said. “We look forward to welcoming golf fans



A view of the Valhalla Golf Club in Louisville, Kentucky. (@PGACHampionship)

from around the globe back to our Kentucky home for what promises to be an unforgettable week of competition and camaraderie.”

With the Solheim Cup, Kentucky will host its first women’s golf event since 1974.

The 2024 Solheim Cup will be played at the Robert Trent Jones Golf Club in Gaines-

ville, Virginia, on Sept 13-15, with Stacy Lewis as captain for the US Team and Suzann Pettersen in charge of the European team.

In 2026, the event will be held at Bernardus Golf in Cromvoirt, Netherlands.

The US holds a 10-7-1 all-time lead in Solheim Cup competition.

All Blacks ‘excited’ for redemption chance after Pumas defeat

WELLINGTON: All Blacks lock Sam Darry said yesterday they are “excited” about the chance to redeem themselves after their shock defeat to Argentina, as New Zealand prepare to face the Pumas again. Following their 38-30 loss in Wellington, the All Blacks play Argentina once more in The Rugby Championship this Saturday at Auckland’s Eden Park, where New Zealand have not lost a Test for 30 years. They were outplayed in Wellington last Saturday, but Darry says the New Zealand team is relishing the chance to show an improved display. “We have got to own our mistakes,” he told reporters in Auckland. “It’s on everyone. Everyone has got to have a bit of a look in the mirror - at their prep, how they turned up for the game and how we can be better. “We are

really excited about the opportunity at Eden Park against a quality Argentina side. It’s a great Test to see what we are made of.” The 24-year-old made his debut against Fiji in San Diego last month. He claimed his first international try in Wellington against Argentina, only to then taste his first defeat in the famous black shirt. “That really hurt,” he admitted. Darry said there is no panic in the All Blacks camp and the squad saw plenty of positives to build upon, despite the defeat. “We are really clear with how we want to play,” he said. “There are a few things we want to tweak, but also a few things we are really happy with so it’s not throwing the baby out with the bath water. We still know what works for us and we will stick with that.”



TENNIS

Popyrin breaks Aussie dry spell, wins in Montreal

POPYRIN IS THE FIRST AUSTRALIAN PLAYER TO LIFT THE MASTERS 1000 TITLE SINCE LLEYTON HEWITT IN 2003



Alexei Popyrin of Australia addresses the media after defeating Andrey Rublev 6-2, 6-4 during the singles final match on day seven of the ATP Masters 1000 National Bank Open at Stade IGA in Montreal, Canada. (AFP)

AFP
Montreal

Alexei Popyrin profited from the mental fragility of Andrey Rublev on Monday as the Australian won the biggest title of his career at the ATP Montreal Masters. World number 62 Popyrin beat sixth-ranked Rublev 6-2, 6-4 in 90 minutes in the US Open tune-up, denying the Russian a second Masters crown this season after winning at Madrid. “One of the best matches I’ve played in my life,” Popyrin said of the victory. “It’s not the way I played in that final that makes me most proud. It’s more the way I played all week.” Popyrin is the first Australian to win a Masters 1000 title since Lleyton Hewitt in 2003 at Indian Wells. The only other Aussie to reach a Canadian final was Patrick Rafter in 2001, who lost to Romanian Andrei Pavel.

Popyrin, who turned 25 last week, is the fourth from his nation to win at this level, following Rafter (1998 Toronto, 1998 Cincinnati), Mark Philippoussis (1999 Indian Wells) and Hewitt (2002-2003 Indian Wells). “This means so much, it means the world,” an emotional Popyrin said. “All the hard work we’ve put in over the last couple of years has paid off.” Popyrin, who beat five top-20 opponents during his run to Canadian glory, said he never felt much pressure. “I felt pretty calm. I love to play matches like this. There is no point in being nervous or afraid of the opportunity,” he said. “I wanted to impose myself in the first game and I think I managed to do that. It disturbed him a little bit, which was part of the game plan. I kept going in that way.” Rublev, who has boiled over several times this season on court and confessed to dealing with mental stress, got off to a poor

start and took out his frustrations early through screaming, kicking a towel container and generally breaking down in tight moments. His form in knocking out world number one Jannik Sinner in the quarter-finals was barely visible as he ran into an inspired Popyrin. But Rublev said that from a month ago his head is “clear” and his mental attitude is improving. “A month ago I was (mis)behaving much more. I showed emotions today but compared to other matches I did a better job,” said Rublev, who was disqualified from Dubai in February for angrily confronting a linesman. “I would call this a very positive and very good week. It was a big step forward. I’m proud I was able to play really good mentally all week.” The Australian started the final on a tear, winning seven of the opening eight points as Rublev’s fragile temper began to fray. Popyrin drove home his superiority with a double break as the seed

double-faulted for a second time within minutes to lose serve. Rublev annulled a set point in the six-minute seventh game to hold to 2-5. But Popyrin calmly finished off the opening set on his third chance. The Aussie sent a sizzler down the line past Rublev to clinch a set where he twice saved double break points against his serve. In the second set, Popyrin again began with a break as Rublev called for the doctor after the third game and was given tablets, presumably for the stomach problems which have plagued the locker room throughout last week. Popyrin dropped his first service game as Rublev levelled for 3-all only to give it away a game later. Popyrin won on his third match point with an unreachable winner. Popyrin did have one small regret in victory. “This is one of the few weeks where my girlfriend isn’t travelling with me...and I win the tournament,” he said. “I hope she comes to New York now.”

SPOTLIGHT

Pegula beats Anisimova for second Canadian Open title in a row



Jessica Pegula of the US holds up the championship trophy after defeating compatriot Amanda Anisimova in the women’s final of the Canadian Open at Sobeys Stadium in Toronto. (USA TODAY Sports)

AFP
Toronto, Canada

Jessica Pegula defeated Amanda Anisimova 6-3, 2-6, 6-1 in an all-American final on Monday to win the WTA Canadian Open, becoming the event’s first back-to-back champion since 2000. Sixth-ranked Pegula captured her sixth career WTA title and second of the year after Berlin in June to become the first consecutive winner in Canada since Martina Hingis in 1999-2000. “Crazy. I can’t believe it. I wanted it so bad,” a tearful Pegula said after the final. “Getting emotional thinking about it. I’m so happy to take the title here. It’s awesome. I’m just flooded with emotions.” “It has been an up-and-down year but these are happy tears. I’m so happy.” Pegula said she was happy to have won the Canadian crown in both of the event’s alternating home cities, Montreal and Toronto, which is near her own hometown of Buffalo, New York. Her grandparents, one from Toronto and the other from Montreal, were in the audience. “One in each city so that’s one for each of you,” Pegula said. Pegula improved to 3-0 in her career rivalry with Anisimova, taking her second victory of the year after April at Charleston. Pegula broke Anisimova to begin the match and again to claim the first set after 27 minutes when Anisimova double faulted. In the second set, Anisimova smacked a forehand winner to

break Pegula for a 2-1 lead and Pegula double faulted away a break to give Anisimova a 5-2 edge on the way to a third set. **‘Just super excited’** After dropping her first set of the week, Pegula broke for a 2-0 lead on an Anisimova double fault and took a 4-0 edge when Anisimova netted a forehand to surrender another break. Anisimova, who won only three points in the first four games of the final set, sent a forehand long to drop the match on Pegula’s serve after 87 minutes. “I know everyone’s talking about my record and all this stuff, but it’s nice to be able to get through the week and to back it up,” Pegula said. “Just super excited, I mean, an honour, really.” At 132nd in the world, Anisimova became the lowest-ranked finalist at the Canadian tournament in 40 years. Anisimova dispatched four top-20 rivals this week to reach her fourth career WTA final, but could not claim a third title after Bogota in 2019 and Melbourne in 2022. Anisimova took a nine-month mental health break from tennis last year and fell to 373rd in the world rankings at the start of the year, but ensured a return to the top 50 with her runner-up finish. “I put the work in, I kept my head down and I tried to come back to the sport with more of a relaxed feeling,” Anisimova said. “Trying to enjoy each day as it comes and not being so serious about everything, because I think that takes away the joy from a lot of things. I think with that kind of approach to my everyday life, I think that’s helped me a lot.”

CYCLING

Vollering wins time trial to surge into Tour points lead

AFP
Rotterdam, Netherlands

Defending champion Demi Vollering won yesterday’s 6.3-kilometre time trial through the streets of Rotterdam to take over the lead after three stages of the women’s Tour de France. Charlotte Kool made it two wins from two stages on home soil in the morning, before fellow Dutch rider Vollering clocked the fastest time in the second part of a Tuesday double-header to grab the yellow jersey. Vollering powered around the course in 7min 25sec to finish ahead of Olympic time-trial bronze medallist Chloe Dygert. She leads compatriot Lorena Wiebes in the overall standings by three seconds. “I am very surprised that I managed to win this time trial. Even with a difference of five seconds. I have no idea how that’s possible,” said Vollering. “Such a short time trial of 6.3 kilometres is something we do very seldom. I thought this course was more for the sprinters,” she added. “It is very special to win a stage in the Tour de France in my own country. And it is even more wonderful that I can start in yellow tomorrow



Demi Vollering celebrates on the podium with the overall leader’s yellow jersey after stage 3 of the Women’s Tour de France in Rotterdam yesterday. (AFP)

in Valkenburg. For me, this Tour only starts with the stage from Valkenburg to Liege.” Kristen Faulkner, the Paris 2024 road race champion, finished six sec-

onds behind, but Poland’s Katarzyna Niewiadoma - seen as Vollering’s main rival - lost 30 seconds. Niewiadoma came third in the last two editions of the race. Belgium’s

Lotte Kopecky, the runner-up a year ago, is not competing after taking part in the omnium at the Olympics on Sunday. Olympic time-trial champion Grace Brown of Australia suffered a puncture, ruining her chances of winning the third stage. Earlier yesterday, Belgian rider Audrey De Keersmaecker attacked early on the 67km ride from Dordrecht to Rotterdam, which saw numerous crashes. But it was Kool who overtook Wiebes, the pre-race favourite who was hoping to make up for a problem with her chain on Sunday, and Marianne Vos in the sprint up the final straight. “I had to stay calm because it was very edgy,” explained Kool. “I’m feeling strong, whereas two weeks ago I wasn’t feeling well.” The race enters Belgium today and finishes on Sunday with one of cycling’s most challenging climbs up Alpe d’Huez. Dutch police on Monday estimated some 150,000 spectators lined the route for the opening stage, with big crowds again on hand for yesterday’s stages. “For women’s cycling it’s really great news to see so many people along the routes,” said Vollering.

Vingegaard grabs Tour of Poland lead after time trial

Karpacz, Poland: Jonas Vingegaard took the overall lead in the Tour of Poland yesterday when he finished runner-up in the second stage, a 15.4 kilometre time trial. Belgian Tim Wellens was fastest in the run from Myslakowice to Karpacz in 23 minutes and 59 seconds. Vingegaard, second to Tadej Pogacar in the Tour de France in July, was nine seconds slower. The Dane took the yellow jersey from another Belgian, Thibau Nys, who won the opening-day climb to Karpacz. Vingegaard leads his Visma teammate Wilco Kelderman by 24 seconds. Stage three today is a hilly 156.5km ride from Walbrzych to Duszniki-Zdroj.



OLYMPICS

Hero’s homecoming for Botswana’s Tebogo

AFP
Gaborone, Botswana

Botswana gave a rapturous welcome to Letsile Tebogo yesterday as the sprinter returned home with the southern African country’s first ever Olympic gold medal. Families with children, elderly people and young supporters waved Botswana’s sky blue, white and black national flag as the Olympic team landed back in the capital Gaborone. Hundreds of supporters had gathered at the small airport, benefiting from an impromptu half-day holiday declared by President Mokgweetsi Masisi to celebrate Tebogo’s success.

Before greeting the athletes, Masisi danced on the tarmac as an aide held an umbrella to shelter him from the sun. Outside, traditional dancers wearing animal skins and beads kicked off a welcoming ceremony. “Tebogo has made history not only for Botswana but in Africa,” he later told a crowd of more than 20,000 people that packed the city’s national stadium as part of the celebrations.

The 21-year-old became the first African to win the men’s 200m, in an African record time of 19.46sec, when he powered past Americans Kenny Bednarek and Noah Lyles in Paris on August 8. His gold, as well as silver in the men’s 4x400m relay, boosted the country’s total Olympic medal tally to four.

“I implore you to shower him and other participants with any kind of gifts that you may have,” Masisi told the crowd. Earlier the sports minister said the sprinter would receive two houses from the government as a reward. The other members of the relay team would receive one house each.

“This is a happy moment,” the athlete told the stadium. “I would like to thank the nation for rallying behind me. I went through a lot,” said Tebogo, who lost his mother in May.

After crossing the 200m finishing line in Par-



Botswana's Letsile Tebogo, who won the men's 200m gold at the Paris Olympic Games, holds his medal during an open bus parade at the Botswana national Stadium in Gaborone. (AFP)

is last week, he had held up to the cameras his running shoes stamped with the date of birth his mother, whom he has described as his inspiration. Masisi already granted the country of 2.3 million people a first half a day off to party on August 9.

Tebogo is only the second African athlete to win an Olympic medal in the men’s 200m, after Namibian Frankie Fredericks took silver in Atlanta in 1996. Botswana won their first Olympic medal at the 2012 London Games when

Nijel Amos took silver in the 800m. Its men’s 4x400m relay team took bronze in Tokyo three years ago.

Botswana’s success at the Paris Olympics helped to raise Africa’s medal haul to 39, two more than at the Tokyo Games, with Kenya scooping 11 in the French capital. Half of the line-up at the men’s 200m where Tebogo excelled were athletes from Africa, with the continent rising as a contender in shorter events beyond its dominance at longer distances.

SPOTLIGHT

British Olympic shooter wants apology over call that ended gold bid

AFP
London

British shooter Amber Rutter said yesterday she was owed an apology from the sport’s global governing body after she missed out on an Olympic gold medal in controversial circumstances.

Rutter had to settle instead for silver in the women’s skeet final on August 4 at the Paris Games after she was ruled to have missed a shot, even though television replays appeared to show she had clipped the target. Both Rutter and her coach made a protest at the time, but this fell on deaf ears.

Rutter and Chile’s Francisca Crovetto Chadid were tied after three rounds of the four-round shoot-off. The 26-year-old Rutter has now repeated her call for a “fair playing field” in her sport, either as a result of better judging or the use of Video Assistant Referee (VAR) technology, which is used in other shooting competitions overseen by the International Shooting Sport Federation (ISSF).

After Rutter questioned the referees’ call, Crovetto Chadid struck with both her next shots to clinch gold. Rutter wrote on Instagram she did not want to



get “sucked into the negativity of what could have been” but said she felt compelled to speak out to help “spark change” in her sport.

“Every athlete, especially at the Games, deserves to compete on a fair playing field,” she said. “Whether that be through experienced and exceptional judging, or new technologies such as VAR which we have always had in place previously at ISSF competitions.

“At this point in time, I can’t imagine a huge amount will be done, and that is not what I am looking for. However, I do believe some accountability needs to be taken to acknowledge and an apology for the incorrect decision ultimately costing me an opportunity of winning an Olympic gold medal. And furthermore a plan to prevent something like this happening in the future.”

SUPER CUP

Ancelotti tight-lipped on Mbappe’s role

Real Madrid, who have clinched five Super Cups, take on Atalanta today

Reuters
Warsaw

Kylian Mbappe could make his debut for Real Madrid when they face Atalanta in the Super Cup yesterday but coach Carlo Ancelotti would not be drawn on whether the French forward would start the game.

Mbappe, 25, landed in the Spanish capital last week to start training with the team after he had joined Real as a free agent on a five-year deal in June, ending a transfer saga that rumbled on for years. “Mbappe has arrived well, just like the other players who joined last week,” Ancelotti told a press conference yesterday. “We haven’t had much time to train but we are doing very well, and Kylian has also arrived in good shape. He is adapting very well. Obviously everyone who is here can play tomorrow.”

The Italian coach had previously said following one of the recent US friendlies that it is the players who won the Champions League who should play the Super Cup. Ancelotti, however, did not rule out the Frenchman making an appearance at some stage.

Asked whether Mbappe could be assigned penalty-taking duties, the manager said that job would only be given to a player who started the game.

“Mbappe is a penalty taker, he does it very well,” Ancelotti said. “(But) Bellingham has done well in the European Championship, and (Federico) Valverde was spectacular in Copa America. So we have a lot of penalty takers. I have to pick one of them for tomorrow’s game. Obviously, I have to pick one that will start the game.”

Real, who have clinched five Super Cups



Real Madrid's Kylian Mbappe during a training session on the eve of the UEFA Super Cup match against Atalanta in Warsaw, Poland, yesterday. (AFP)

so far, have a chance to become the standalone leaders of the competition ahead of Barcelona and AC Milan, who have also won five times. They could also make history this season if they kick-start their campaign with a win, as there will be seven titles up for grabs for the very first time thanks to FIFA’s new Intercontinental Cup.

“As always, we’re starting the season

with all the excitement and desire,” Ancelotti added. “It’s the first title of a season that is going to be very demanding but can also be very successful. We want to start it well. We are aware of the difficulties but I see the team in good shape, motivated to play a great game.”

Meanwhile, the stakes will be high for Europa League winners Atalanta when they

face the Real Madrid in the Super Cup but coach Gian Piero Gasperini believes they can pull off another surprise.

Atalanta defeated Bayer Leverkusen 3-0 in May, ending the German champions’ remarkable unbeaten streak, and will be up against European champions Real who beat Borussia Dortmund 2-0 to lift their record-extending 15th Champions League trophy. “On paper we’re even more of an underdog than we were against Leverkusen, who were coming into the (final) game unbeaten in an entire season,” Gasperini said. “Real Madrid will be an even greater hurdle but that means we’re even more motivated. It doesn’t happen often but you can overturn the odds in football.”

Atalanta will, however, face an extra challenge in Warsaw as they have travelled without injured striker Gianluca Scamacca. The Italy forward, who scored six goals in their winning Europa League campaign, ruptured his anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) in a pre-season friendly defeat by Parma (4-1) on Aug. 4 and could be out of action for at least six months. They will also be without Netherlands midfielder Teun Koopmeiners who Italian media reports said is nearing a move to rivals Juventus.

Winger Ademola Lookman said Atalanta should not be underestimated.

“We can’t wait to get on the pitch. Not just me, but the whole team can’t wait to play this match,” Lookman said. “We deserve to be here. Our hard work and perseverance has brought us here and tomorrow is another night to show that.”

Lookman’s hat-trick sealed the Europa League for Atalanta, their second major trophy after they won the Italian top flight in the 1962-63 season.

Delay over City case creates ‘uncertainty’, says Premier League chief

London: Premier League chief executive Richard Masters admits the legal cases facing Manchester City and other top-flight teams have created “uncertainty and frustration” ahead of the new season.

An independent commission is set to rule on the 115 charges against Premier League champions City for alleged financial breaches during the season. There are also cases to be resolved involving Leicester and Everton, related to alleged breaches of the league’s profitability and sustainability rules (PSR).

Asked if the unresolved financial issues would cast a shadow over the 2024/25 season, Masters said: “It does matter, and I understand it creates uncertainty and some frustration but there is no happy alternative to enforcing the rules, which everyone has agreed at the beginning of each season. They have looked each other in the eye and shaken each other’s hand and said ‘we will abide by these rules’. So the Premier League has to enforce rules. Whatever difficulty or frustration that creates is part of maintaining and protecting the Premier League’s competition, its core values, competitive competition. And that’s really my role, and that’s what I want to continue doing.”

City, who are bidding for an unprecedented fifth successive Premier League title, have won the top-flight crown twice since the charges, which they vehemently deny, were laid in February last year. Reports have suggested the hearing into City’s case could start in September, but Masters refused to be drawn on a timescale.

“I think it does need to be resolved,” he said. “It’s not in our hands. It’s in the hands of an independent panel. They are in charge of the timing and the running of the process, and we must let them get on with it.”

City’s alleged breaches relate to rules requiring the reporting of accurate financial information and the submission of details of manager and player pay information within the relevant contracts. They also refer to a club’s responsibility as a Premier League member to adhere to UEFA’s financial regulations and to the league’s own profitability and sustainability regulations.

City are alleged to have breached rules requiring them to co-operate and assist with the Premier League’s investigation into those breaches, which the league said began in December 2018. Everton and Nottingham Forest were docked points for PSR breaches last season, and those rules remain in force for the campaign ahead, requiring clubs to limit losses to a maximum of £105mn over three seasons.

QMMF president meets Qatari drivers at Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya



Abdulrahman bin Abdullatif al-Mannai, President of the Qatar Motor & Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) and Lusail International Circuit (LIC), visited Circuit de Barcelona-Catalunya near Barcelona in Spain to support Qatari drivers Abdulla al-Khelaifi, Ghanim al-Ali, Ibrahim al-Abdulghani during their Endurance testing sessions ahead of their upcoming events.

