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DIAMOND LEAGUE

Qatar's Samba finishes second in Zurich

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's Abderrahman Samba finished second in 400m hurdles at the Zurich Diamond League yesterday. Roshawn Clarke won the event as the Jamaican clocked a season's best of 47.49 seconds.

Samba, who finished sixth at the Paris Olympics, also registered his season's best time of 47.58 secs. Rasmus Magi of Estonia was third in 48.02 secs.

Olympics silver medallist and world record holder Karsten Warholm of Norway did not start due to a hamstring injury, while Alison dos Santos of Brazil did not finish the race. The Olympic bronze medallist had aimed for the Diamond League trophy, but an apparent injury forced him to stop midway through the race. The conditions were not ideal as the track was wet due to heavy rain.

Meanwhile Armand Duplantis admitted to feeling "wrecked" after an exhibition 100m race, while Sha'Carri Richardson and Letsile Tebogo steamed to sprint victories. So much is now expected when Duplantis takes to the runway of the pole vault, but it was



Qatar's Abderrahman Samba and Jamaica's Roshawn Clarke compete in the 400m hurdles race during the Diamond League meeting at the Letzigrund stadium in Zurich yesterday. (AFP)

for him a relatively disappointing competition in cold and rainy conditions, albeit a victory.

The Swede won with a best clearance of 5.82m on countback from American Sam Kendricks.

"Mentally, I felt good today, but my body felt wrecked after yesterday's race," he said in reference to the 100m showdown with 400m hurdles world record holder Karsten Warholm. Duplantis won

the sprint in a "very impressive" 10.37sec to Warholm's 10.47.

"For both of us it was a great experience," said Duplantis.

"It was super amazing. I think we built a super event, it was very

new and innovative."

While Duplantis at least picked up another win, Warholm was an absentee after pinning his hamstring after his sprint endeavours.

But as the loser, Warholm was designed to wear one of the Swede's national tops in action yesterday.

While not competing, Warholm duly made an appearance on the track dressed in Duplantis' kit, but said it was "terrible. I need to take a really good shower after this!"

Roshawn Clarke of Jamaica, in 47.49sec, won the 400m hurdles in his absence. World champion Richardson went some way to avenging her Olympic defeat by Julien Alfred by reversing the tables in the 100m.

Richardson headed into the final 20 metres in third behind Saint Lucia's Olympic champion Julien Alfred and Britain's Dina Asher-Smith. But the American stayed strong and focused on the line, producing a savage dip for first place in 10.84 seconds, 0.04sec ahead of Alfred. "I am training and executing because I know the race is not going to take care of itself," said Richardson.

Botswana's Olympic champion Tebogo also left it late for his victory in the men's 200m.

The 21-year-old edged Olympic

silver medallist Kenny Bednarek by 0.02sec as he won in 19.55sec.

And in a re-run of the men's 1500m Olympic final, it was American Yared Nuguse who took the spoils, outsprinting Norway's Jakob Ingebrigtsen to the line in 3:29.21. Beatrice Chebet, who became double Olympic champion in Paris (5,000m and 10,000m), fell short in her tilt at a world record in the shorter event.

Chebet had pacemakers, wave-light technology and a 30,000 sell-out crowd baying her on, but the Kenyan finally timed 14:09.52, all the while smashing by 21sec the meet record set back in September 2011 by compatriot Vivian Jepkemei Cheruiyot.

There was a fifth consecutive Diamond League victory for Ukraine's Olympic champion and world record holder Yaroslava Mahuchikh, who managed a best of 1.96m in the high jump for victory. There were also two more dominant performances from Americans who'd struck gold in Paris.

First up, three-time Olympic champion Ryan Crouser wrapped up another shot put competition with a winning 22.66m. Grant Holloway then clocked a rapid 12.99sec for victory in the 110m hurdles.

WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

UAE produce a thrilling comeback to defeat Qatar

Qatar will look to bounce back in their game against North Korea in Laos on September 10

By Rizwan Rehmat
Al Rayyan

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) yesterday rallied for a fighting 3-1 win over Asian champions Qatar in the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifiers at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium. Qatar opened the scoring through Ibrahim al-Hasan in the 38th minute in what was the 18-year-old's first international goal for the home team.

Harib Abdalla Suhail (68th minute), Khaled Ebraheim (80) and Ali Saleh (90+4) sealed UAE's first over Qatar since Jan 2015. It was UAE's first win on Qatar soil since 2001. It was Qatar's first loss under new coach Marquez Lopez in over nine months. For rival coach Paulo Bento, it was a welcome relief for UAE who exited the AFC Asian Cup at the Round of 16 stage earlier this year in Qatar.

"It was a difficult for us. We started well in the first half. We were the better side and succeeded in scoring the lead goal but missed some other opportunities," Qatar defender Tareq Salman said.

"In the second half, there were some individual mistakes that the UAE national team exploited to score three goals. The players feel we must work hard on correcting the mistakes in the future. We want to tell our fans that we will rectify our mistakes in the upcoming matches. We will work hard since the journey is still long in the qualifiers," he added.

While the first half belonged to Qatar, Bento's spirited UAE side responded with three goals in the second. A bicycle kick in the second minute by Qatar forward Jassem Gaber inside the UAE box was wayward but the intent was obvious from the home side.

Defender Lucas Mendes headed away on a loopy cross from Kouame Autonne following a deep lob from the flank by Yahya al-Ghassani with a cross in the 12th minute. The game got held up twice in quick succession when al-Ghassani (17th minute) and Yahia Nader (18th minute) called for medical help. In the 25th minute, UAE's Autonne got booked with a yellow card for a reckless foul.



Qatar and UAE players vie for the ball during the FIFA World Cup 2026 qualifier at the Ahmad Bin Ali Stadium in Al Rayyan yesterday. PICTURES: Noushad Thekkayil

Close to the half hour mark, Gaber headed from very close range but the ball flew high following an assist by striker Akram Afif with a cross following a corner.

In the 35th minute, Al Duhail captain Almoez Ali launched a right-footed shot from the right side of the box but it was blocked following an assist by Ismail Mohamed. Three minutes later, Qatar opened the scoring thanks largely to Afif's deft pass that found young al-Hasan close by. The 18-year-old slipped in a right-footed shot from the centre of the UAE box to the bottom right corner for the home team's only goal.

Six minutes into the second half, Afif drilled a right-footed shot from outside the box but the ball flew high and wide of the UAE goalmouth following a corner kick. Close to the hour-mark, Afif found Almoez with a loopy header near the UAE box but UAE's Ivorian-born defender Au-

tonne was alive to the situation to thwart the Al Duhail forward.

UAE's Abdullah Hamad in a desperate attempt for an equaliser launched a long-range shot but was found wanting on the angle. Moments later, UAE's Tahnoon al-Zaabi drilled a curling left-footed drive from outside the Qatar box. Al-Zaabi's shot hit the outside of the net with keeper Meshaal Barsham beaten by the flight of the ball in the 63rd minute.

With momentum on their side, UAE produced a classy equaliser from inside the Qatar box. Suhail delivered a beautiful curling left-footed shot from about 10 yards out to bring things level at 1-1 at a packed Ahmed Bin Ali Stadium. The ball flew past the outstretched hand of keeper Barsham before thudding into the net.

UAE continued to apply pressure with an attacking game in the last 20 minutes of the match resulting in two quick goals. In a



Qatar's teenager Ibrahim al-Hasan (right) celebrates with Akram Afif after scoring.

fast break in the 80th minute, Ebraheim - after an assist from Suhail - drilled a left-footed shot from outside the box to the top right corner of Qatar goal.

Substitute MacKenzie Hunt - after replacing al-Zaabi in the 89th minute - made an immediate impact. Four minutes into injury time, Hunt found Saleh with a through ball. Quick-footed Saleh had the

time and space to drill a left-footed shot to the top left corner of the Qatar goalmouth.

A few minutes earlier, Qatar had a penalty denied following a long VAR decision in the 86th minute.

Qatar now fly to Laos to take on North Korea on September 10. Asian giants Iran, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan are the other teams in Group A.

CRICKET

Mendis stays down order as SL seek to avoid whitewash

'If he is scoring runs there, let him score runs at number seven'



AFP
London

Sri Lanka's in-form **Kamindu Mendis** is set to stay at number seven in the batting order as his side try to avoid a 3-0 series whitewash by England.

The visitors head into the third Test at The Oval starting today already 2-0 down in the series after last week's 190-run loss to England at Lord's, which followed a five-wicket defeat at Old Trafford.

The 25-year-old Kamindu Mendis, however, has been a shining light for Sri Lanka, topping their series batting averages with 203 runs, including a century in Manchester, at an impressive average of more than 50.

Initially best known as an ambidextrous spin bowler, the left-

handed batsman has now scored three hundreds in his five Tests.

Against England he has generally been batting down the order and despite Sri Lanka's top-order struggles, is likely to stay there.

"If he is scoring runs there, let him score runs at number seven," Sri Lanka captain Dhananjaya de Silva said at The Oval yesterday.

"We should not upset his momentum as well. We will see whether we can make changes in the future.

"That would be a tough call for him, to ask him to bat early. If he gets out early, the blame will come on me. He is doing well at number seven. For now let him play at number seven."

The series may be lost but De Silva said victory, which would end a run of seven straight Test defeats by England, would still be valuable. "Winning a Test match

will be awesome," he explained. "The main thing is we need points for the World Test Championship."

De Silva was speaking before Sri Lanka named their side for the match, with two changes from the team that played across London at Lord's. Kusal Mendis returns as wicketkeeper and number three batsman after Nishan Madushka, who had the tough job of both opening and being behind the stumps in the second Test, was dropped.

And left-arm pacesman Vishwa Fernando was recalled in place of left-arm spinner Prabath Jayasuriya as Sri Lanka opted for a four-man seam attack. "If there is left-arm variety, that's great," said De Silva. "It will be handy for the attack. Vishwa has some experience here (playing for Yorkshire)." England will also have a left-

arm quick in their side, with towering 20-year-old Josh Hull given a Test debut.

The 6 feet, 7 inches (2 metres) tall Hull replaces Matthew Potts despite having taken just 16 wickets in 10 first-class matches.

Sri Lanka came across Hull in their lone warm-up match against the second-string England Lions last month, with the rookie quick taking five wickets.

"He was good," said De Silva. "Tall, quick and swinging the ball both ways."

SRI LANKA TEAM

Dimuth Karunaratne, Pathum Nissanka, Kusal Mendis (wkt), Angelo Mathews, Dinesh Chandimal, Dhananjaya de Silva (capt), Kamindu Mendis, Milan Rathnayake, Lahiru Kumara, Vishwa Fernando, Asitha Fernando.

McCullum eager to make England white-ball teams 'bulletproof'

Test coach **Brendon McCullum** says he wants to make England's white-ball teams feel "10 feet tall and bulletproof" when he takes charge of the limited-overs sides in a major leadership shake-up. The New Zealander has reinvigorated England's Test set-up alongside captain Ben Stokes since 2022 and will seek to bring his attacking approach to the limited-overs teams.

McCullum, 42, has extended his contract until the end of 2027, officially taking over the one-day international and Twenty20 sides in January to coincide with a tour of India and the Champions Trophy in Pakistan. He will succeed Matthew Mott, sacked as coach in July following lacklustre defences of England's 50-over and Twenty20 World Cup titles. One of McCullum's most pressing tasks is to revive the fortunes of limited-overs skipper Jos Buttler. Buttler, 33, will miss the upcoming T20 series against Australia with a calf injury but McCullum backed the man he called England's greatest ever white-ball player to come good in the twilight of his career.

"He's not naturally as expressive as some may be but I think he's done a great job. He's an incredibly gifted player and he's a fine leader," said McCullum.

"My job is to get the best out of him so that all those guys that sit in the dressing room feel like they can be 10 foot tall and bulletproof when they walk out to play." The former New Zealand captain added: "Jos and I actually start from a strong base. We know each other, we're mates, we have similar styles of play.

"If he was to retire today, he'd go down as probably the greatest white-ball player England's ever

produced, so the opportunity for the next three or four years is just to enjoy it."

McCullum, was speaking at The Oval, where England face Sri Lanka in the final Test of their 2024 home campaign starting today.

England are already 2-0 up in the three-match series, having whitewashed the West Indies 3-0 earlier in the season.

STOKES A MAN FOR THE 'BIG MOMENT'

One more win would give England their first perfect home Test season in 20 years and be a further endorsement of their progress under McCullum and Stokes. They could now be together for at least two more Ashes series, with McCullum also leaving the door open for Stokes to continue to feature in major white-ball events.

"The skipper and I haven't spoken about that actually but I'm assuming he's all in. He seems like that sort of bloke."

Stokes, 33, came out of one-day international retirement to play in the 50-over World Cup last year, but has not played white-ball cricket for England since.

"There'll be some bilateral series where we simply can't have all of our best players playing at the same time," added McCullum. "But when it comes to major events and big series, I think those players are very much in those discussions. Ben loves big moments and big stages."

As for his own increased responsibilities, an optimistic McCullum said: "I don't see it being a problem... It's going to be an added workload that's for sure, but some bets are worth it, right?"

(AFP)



England seek Pakistan clarity after reports say Test could be moved

England are seeking clarity over their forthcoming Test tour of Pakistan following reports that matches could be moved to a another country. Media in the region have suggested the schedule for next month's three-match series could be altered due to construction work at the proposed grounds.

England are currently scheduled to play the first Test in Multan from October 7, followed by matches at Karachi and Rawalpindi, but renovations ahead of next year's Champions

Trophy are understood to be causing issues at the latter two venues. It is understood the prospect of moving one or more of the games to the United Arab Emirates or Sri Lanka has been suggested, with the England and Wales Cricket Board awaiting developments.

England coach Brendon McCullum addressed the issue yesterday while speaking to reporters at The Oval ahead of the third Test against Sri Lanka. "We don't really know (what is happening in Pakistan) but we can't pick a team until

we know where we're going to play," he said. "It would be nice if, over the next couple of days, we found out."

The former New Zealand captain added: "Then we'll sit down and make sure we've got the right team for the right conditions and the right opposition."

England did not tour Pakistan between 2005 and 2022, owing to security concerns, with the Pakistan Cricket Board staging matches in the UAE throughout that period.

SPOTLIGHT

England captain Buttler ruled out of Australia T20 series

AFP
London

England captain **Jos Buttler** has been ruled out of the upcoming Twenty20 series against Australia, with Phil Salt stepping up to lead the side.

The 33-year-old wicketkeeper-batsman has not played since the T20 World Cup in June because of a calf injury and a recent setback has extended his lay-off.

Salt, who deputised for Buttler at Manchester Originals in this season's Hundred tournament, will lead England for the first time in Southampton on September 11, before games in Cardiff and at Old Trafford. England have been forced to juggle the captaincy in recent months across different formats.

Ollie Pope has taken charge of the Test team against Sri Lanka in the absence of skipper Ben Stokes, who suffered a torn hamstring. Harry Brook has served as Pope's vice-captain and is expected to be named as captain for the one-day internationals against Australia should Buttler's absence continue. The five-match ODI series starts at Trent Bridge on September 19.



England have tweaked their squads to cover for Buttler, adding Surrey all-rounder Jamie Overton to the T20 group and naming Jordan Cox as cover for the 50-over matches. Marcus Trescothick will serve as interim head coach against Australia, with Test head coach Brendon McCullum taking over all formats in the new year.

CYCLING

Berrade wins stage 18, O'Connor stays in red

Reuters
Madrid

Spain's Urko Berrade won the 18th stage of the Vuelta a Espana yesterday with a late breakaway in the Basque hills as Australian Ben O'Connor kept the leader's red jersey.

The northern Spanish terrain proved challenging, with a leading group of 13 riders still together up the final serious ascent before the last 40km to the finish line just outside the village of Maeztu.

Most of the leading group stuck together as they waited for an opportunity to make a late breakaway and Berrade seized his chance on the last climb with less than 5km to go.

For Kern-Pharma rider Berrade, who was born in the city of Pamplona not far from the route, the win felt especially sweet.

"It's a dream. The stage closer to home, with all my family watching me, friends, in the last stages of La Vuelta," said Berrade.

"I didn't see myself as the winner until I crossed the finish line. No doubt it comes from a great previous work that we (Kern-Pharma) have done."

Switzerland's Mauro Schmid secured second place and Spaniard Pau Miquel Delgado came third. O'Connor maintained his five-second lead in the overall standings over Slovenian Primož Roglic as the pair once again



Team Kern Pharma's Urko Berrade celebrates after crossing the finish line of stage 18 of the Vuelta a Espana, a 179.5km race between Vitoria-Gasteiz and Maeztu, yesterday. (AFP)

crossed the line together among a large group.

O'Connor admitted that the stage was not easy, but he did not think today's effort would have any impact on future stages.

"Probably not, because we raced every single day, and everyone is just tired. But somehow, I'm still managing to crack out some pretty good numbers, so I

minutes and 38 seconds, an increase of over three minutes, putting his race ambitions in jeopardy.

Injured Van Aert calls time on cycling season

Belgian rider Wout Van Aert, who was forced to abandon the Vuelta a Espana after a heavy fall, has ended his season to treat a serious right knee injury, his team said yesterday.

"He needs time to recover," said the Visma-Lease a Bike team, confirming that the rider, winner of three stages of the Vuelta and at the top of the points and mountain classifications when he crashed out, is not suffering from a fracture.

The Antwerp rider, who was in fine form on the Spanish roads after winning the bronze medal in the Olympic time trial at the end of July, has had a torrid year, having been involved in no less than 10 falls.

The worst of those came at the end of March in the Dwars door Vlaanderen one-day race when he fractured his collarbone, sternum and several ribs, and suffered bruising to a lung. These injuries forced him to give up his two major spring objectives, the Tour of Flanders and Paris-Roubaix.

Van Aert's decision to close his season now means he will miss the European championships in Limburg, Belgium on September 15, and the world championships in Zurich on September 29.

don't think it makes any difference now," O'Connor said. "And I'm still in the lead! It's nice to have it for another day. I don't know if it's 13 or 14 days, a long time. I've loved it and I enjoyed it a lot."

Spain's Mikel Landa suffered a significant setback, dropping five spots to 10th place and falling further behind O'Connor.

He now trails the leader by 5

TRAGEDY

Outrage and sorrow at death of Cheptegei

AFP
Nairobi

Outrage and sorrow greeted the death yesterday of Ugandan Olympian **Rebecca Cheptegei**, who succumbed to severe burns after being doused with petrol and set on fire by her boyfriend.

It was the latest horrific act of gender-based violence in the East African country, where activists have warned of a rising femicide epidemic.

The 33-year-old long distance runner died around 5:30am (0230 GMT), the doctor treating her at a hospital in Eldoret in western Kenya told reporters.

"Her injuries were extensive and covered most parts of her body. It led to multiple organ failure," said Kimani Mbugua, head of the intensive care unit at the Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital.

"We tried our best but we did not succeed. Looking at her age

and the over 80-percent burns she suffered, the hope of recovery was slim."

Police say the attack was carried out on Sunday by Cheptegei's Kenyan partner, Dickson Ndiema Marangach. It took place just weeks after Cheptegei made her Olympic debut in the women's marathon at the Paris Games, where she finished in 44th.

Marangach snuck into her home in Endebeess near the border with Uganda while she was at church with her two young daughters, police said. He also received severe burns in the incident, with a doctor saying he was in a stable condition but still in intensive care.

Kenyan media said Cheptegei's children, aged nine and 11, had witnessed the attack.

The attack triggered widespread condemnation.

"The news of our daughter Rebecca Cheptegei's tragic death due to domestic violence is deeply disturbing," Janet Museveni, Uganda's First Lady and Education



Minister, posted on X.

Kenyan Sports Minister Kipchumba Murkomen said it was a "stark reminder" that more must be done to combat gender-based

violence. The Paris Olympics organisers voiced their "profound indignation and sadness".

Kenya's National Olympic Committee said: "Rebecca's tal-

ent and perseverance as Uganda's Women's Marathon record holder and a Paris 2024 Olympian will always be remembered and celebrated."

Her father, Joseph Cheptegei, told reporters the dispute with Marangach had been over the property where she lived with her sister and daughters. He told Kenyan media earlier this week that Marangach had bought five litres of petrol then hid out in a chicken coop before the attack.

"He poured the petrol and lit her on fire. When she called her sister to help, he threatened her with a machete and she ran away."

The police said the couple had "constantly had family wrangles".

One of Cheptegei's daughters told Kenya's *The Standard* newspaper that Marangach "kicked me while I tried to run to the rescue of my mother".

"I immediately cried out for help, attracting a neighbour who tried to extinguish the flames with water, but it was not possible."

Violence against women is widespread in Kenya, which saw 725 femicide cases in 2022 alone, according to the latest UN figures.

A 2023 report by Kenya's National Bureau of Statistics found 34 percent of women had experienced physical violence since the age of 15.

In October 2021, record-breaking Kenyan runner Agnes Tirop, 25, was found stabbed to death at her home in the renowned Rift Valley running hub of Iten.

Her estranged husband, who denies murdering her, is on trial.

In April 2022, Kenyan-born Bahraini athlete Damaris Mutua was also found dead in Iten, in a suspected domestic violence incident. Joan Chelimo, athlete and cofounder of Tirop's Angels, a group set up to combat gender-based violence after Tirop's death, said on Instagram she was "deeply shaken and outraged" by the attack on Cheptegei.

"This senseless violence must end."

US OPEN

Sinner overcomes Medvedev, Pegula stuns Swiatek

'IT WAS VERY TOUGH, I KNEW IT WOULD BE VERY PHYSICAL'

AFP
New York

Jannik Sinner closed in on his second Grand Slam title of 2024 on Wednesday when he reached his maiden US Open semi-final as Jessica Pegula stunned Iga Swiatek to complete a rollercoaster Grand Slam year for the world number one.

Top seed Sinner defeated 2021 US Open champion and two-time runner-up Daniil Medvedev 6-2, 1-6, 6-1, 6-4.

He will take on 25th-ranked Jack Draper for a place in the final after the British player made his first semi-final at the Slams with a 6-3, 7-5, 6-2 win over Australia's Alex de Minaur. Sinner, 23, is the only top-10 man to make the semi-finals with number 12 Taylor Fritz due to face US compatriot Frances Tiafoe, ranked 20, in Friday's other last-four duel.

Sixth-ranked Pegula booked a place in the last-four of a Grand Slam for the first time by sweeping past Swiatek 6-2, 6-4.

She will tackle Karolina Muchova who saw off Beatriz Haddad Maia of Brazil 6-1, 6-4.

Emma Navarro of the US tackles world number two and Australian Open champion Aryna Sabalenka in the other women's semi-final.

'VERY PHYSICAL'

"It was very tough, I knew it would be very physical," said Sinner, who had also beaten Medvedev to capture the Australian Open. "It was strange in the first two sets, who ever got the break started to roll."

Medvedev had to save 10 of 15 break points while his dream of making a 10th Slam semi-final was undermined by 57 unforced errors. Draper pulled off the victory over 10th-ranked De Minaur despite taking a medical timeout early in the second set to have his right thigh bandaged.

"It's amazing. My first time on Arthur Ashe Stadium, it means the world to me," said Draper, who had



Italy's Jannik Sinner celebrates defeating Russia's Daniil Medvedev in the US Open quarter-final at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York yesterday. (AFP)

lost three times in three meetings with De Minaur before Wednesday. "I played a solid match and I feel the best, fitness-wise, that I have felt in a long time."

Draper is the first British man to make the last four since Andy Murray won the title 12 years ago.

He has made the semi-finals without dropping a set as he continued an impressive summer run which saw him capture his first ATP title in Stuttgart and then defeat Carlos Alcaraz at Queen's Club. Draper sent down 11 aces among his 40 winners while forcing De Minaur to fend off 14 of 20 break points. The British player enjoys a 1-0 lead over Sinner in the pair's head-to-head record although that win at Queen's came three years ago. Pegula has now won 14 times in 15 matches on US

hard courts this summer. "Finally I can say I'm a semi-finalist. I lost so many of these damn things," said the American after her fourth career win against Swiatek. Before Wednesday, she had lost six times at the quarter-final stage at the majors. "Thanks to the crowd. I sent over a 65mph second serve (on a third match point) because I was so tight."

Swiatek was undone by 41 unforced errors and was left to ponder an uneven season at the Grand Slams. There was the high of a fourth French Open triumph but that was sandwiched by third-round exits at the Australian Open and Wimbledon. At the Paris Olympics, played on her favourite Roland Garros courts, she had to settle for the bronze medal.

"It's hard to have low expecta-

tions when everybody is expecting something from you," said Swiatek. Muchova's win over Haddad Maia came despite having to sprint to the bathroom early in the second set, a dash which caught everyone on the hop.

"I had a problem that I wouldn't like to comment on," said the 28-year-old. "I really didn't have any other choice."

After losing to eventual champion Coco Gauff in the 2023 semi-finals, Muchova suffered a serious wrist injury which sidelined her until June this year.

A former world number eight, now ranked at 52, Muchova has yet to drop a set, knocking out two-time champion Naomi Osaka and this year's French Open and Wimbledon runner-up Jasmine Paolini.

SPOTLIGHT

Duplantis beats Warholm in one-off 100m exhibition race

AFP
Zurich

Pole vault king Armand Duplantis beat 400m hurdles master Karsten Warholm in a one-off 100m exhibition race in Zurich on Wednesday.

Pitched as "100m to settle it all, a battle of legends", Sweden's Duplantis used all his raw runway speed to belt out an incredible start he never ceded.

Norway's Warholm, in lane six, one outside the Swede, never looked like reeling in his opponent, who won in 10.37 seconds. Duplantis, the newly-crowned double Olympic champion who has broken the pole vault world record an incredible 10 times, even threw across a cheeky peak to his right as he went through the line.

"I'm pretty fired up," said Duplantis. "I feel very, very good."

Warholm clocked 10.47sec in second and as loser will don one of Duplantis' Sweden tops in competition in Thursday's Diamond League programme proper.

"He had a great start, congrats," Warholm said of Duplantis.

The two track stars raced off at the Letzigrund Stadium to make good on some training ground banter that has escalated all the way to a sprint-off.

Organisers managed to pack around 2,500 fans into the main tribune, tickets selling for up to 100 Swiss francs (106 euros).

The rivalry commenced after a joint training session between Warholm and Duplantis in the run-up to last year's Monaco Diamond League meet.

"He was saying that I looked fast, and I was like, 'Let's race,'" Duplantis said.

Warholm accepted the challenge after Duplantis claimed he could win.

"With my ego and how highly I think of myself, I needed to accept," explained the Norwegian, the reigning 400m hurdles world record holder, an Olympic gold and silver medallist and three-time world champion.

On the night, each athlete was welcomed onto the track at the 50m mark in a glitzy walk-on worthy of prize fighters.

Warholm came out wearing a boxer's red dressing gown, hood pulled up over a cap. His coach Leif Olav Alnes followed, dressed in a skin-tight blue and white all-in one with "Fat by choice" written on his back, and also toting a Viking horn hat.

Duplantis wore a boxer's blue dressing gown, accompanied by an array of athletes including US sprinter Fred Kerley, who has been helping with his block training.

"No biting, no kicking, no pulling of vests," said emcee Colin Jackson.

"Shake hands and a good clean scrap," the former 110m hurdles world record holder said.

There was only one winner of the "scrap" as Duplantis exploded out of the blocks and never looked back.



Swedish pole vaulter Armand Duplantis (left) presents a Sweden jersey to be worn by Norwegian hurdler and sprinter Karsten Warholm after winning a head-to-head exhibition 100m sprint race on the sideline of the IAAF Diamond League meet in Zurich. (AFP)

BAGNAIA TARGETS TOP SPOT AT SAN MARINO MOTOGP AFTER ARAGON CRASH

Francesco Bagnaia has put his horror crash in Aragon behind him as the MotoGP champion attempts to reclaim top spot from Jorge Martin at this weekend's San Marino and Rimini Riviera Grand Prix. From having a five-point lead this time last week Ducati rider Bagnaia dropped 23 points behind Martin after a disastrous weekend in Spain which culminated with the ugly accident with Alex Marquez that ended both their races.

The Italian was livid after the crash, claiming that Marquez deliberately ran him off the track and then insulted him once confronted, while Marquez insisted that he would have avoided contact but that Bagnaia made it impossible. But in yester-

day's pre-race press conference Bagnaia apologised to Marquez for the vehemence of his reaction, which he put down to being "very angry after what happened". "I didn't want to say that he made me crash on purpose, his defence was a bit aggressive but that is normal when you're fighting for podium positions," said Bagnaia. Marquez told Sky Sport in Italy that the pair had since spoken privately and the matter was now closed. Just like last year, when he recovered from a huge crash at the Catalunya GP to compete at Misano, Bagnaia will race through the pain on home soil. "I'm not at my 100 percent, I feel a lot of pain on the shoulder, over the collar bone and neck," added

Bagnaia. "I don't feel like I can move my body as I want... the impact was very huge, 170 kilos were on my shoulder and the hit on the ground was quite huge. Luckily I didn't get any broken bones but the muscles and ligaments are suffering a bit." The crash, and the elder Marquez, Marc, winning his first GP in three years, blasted wide open the title race, with four riders now in contention and eight races remaining in the season. Six-time MotoGP champion Marc Marquez jumped up to third, one point above Enea Bastianini, in the standings after a perfect weekend on his home track last time out, winning both the sprint and the GP. The 31-year-old, who rides for Ducati

satellite team Gresini, is 70 points behind countryman and Pramac rider Martin who has not won a race since May's French MotoGP. A seventh MotoGP crown would be an incredible feat for Marc Marquez who has had to deal with surgery on a broken arm, multiple crashes and a diagnosis of diplopia, or double vision, over the past few seasons. "We need to use that extra boost, that extra confidence to continue, to keep going," he said. "After everything that has happened in my life and in my body, I have to work double, I have to be often with the physio, but it's the way to do if I want to continue in the top level. I'm ready to do it." Martin won at Misano Adriatico last year

and has been knocking on the door recently, finishing second in the sprint and race at four of the last five GPs. It's been that level of consistency that has allowed Martin to take command of the championship despite only winning two races and one sprint all season. Bagnaia, who has seven GP wins and three sprint wins under his belt this season, will have some help in the shape of big home support as he bids to reclaim the summit. This race weekend is the first of two in a row at the Marco Simoncelli circuit, as the track is being used later in September for the Emilia Romagna GP which replaces the cancelled race in Kazakhstan.

(AFP)

FOOTBALL

Palestine give South Korea scare in draw

AFP
Seoul

Palestine gave South Korea a major scare in an entertaining 0-0 away draw yesterday as they attempt to reach the World Cup for the first time. Making their debut in the third stage of Asian qualifying and 96 in FIFA's rankings to South Korea's 23, Palestine refused to be overawed for much of an open contest in Seoul.

Palestine play their home matches abroad, usually in the Middle East, because of the war in Gaza. The local league has been suspended and many of the players are without a club.

Despite those obstacles, they thought they had taken the lead in the 22nd minute at the 66,000-capacity Seoul World Cup Stadium, only for the goal to be correctly ruled out for offside.

The hosts, under their fourth coach this year with Hong Myung-bo, looked shaky at the back and were struggling to get their talisman and skipper Son Heung-min into the game.

Their best chance of an even first half fell to Lee Kang-in, but Palestinian goalkeeper Rami Hamadeh just about kept out the Paris Saint-Germain player's well-struck close-range effort. The Palestinians appeared to tire in the second half and were restricted to rare but dangerous breakaways.

Lee was again guilty of missing a glorious chance when he shot wildly, then was denied with a 74th-minute free-kick that Hamadeh tipped over the bar. Oday Dabbagh then went close for the visitors on the break, before Spurs star Son rattled the outside of the Palestine post in the dying minutes.

Palestine could have won it themselves late



South Korea's Son Heung-min (third left) vies for the ball with Palestine's Michel Termanini during the World Cup qualifiers in Seoul yesterday. (Reuters)

on, only for goalkeeper Jo Hyeon-woo to save the hosts from an embarrassing defeat. There were boos from the home fans at the end and the coach Hong said: "I'm sorry we couldn't win this first match. The players did their best."

Under their Tunisian coach Makram Daboub the Palestinian team have reached new heights this year. At this year's Asian Cup, they won a game for the first time in the history of the competition, defeating Hong Kong 3-0. That put them into the knockout rounds of the tour-

namment, another first, before going down 2-1 to hosts and eventual champions Qatar.

The squad trained in Malaysia for the South Korea game and will return there to prepare for their next qualifier, against Jordan in Kuala Lumpur on Tuesday, in what is nominally a home match. They reached this stage of qualifying for the World Cup for the first time by coming second behind Australia in their group, winning two, losing two and drawing two of their six matches.

PARALYMPICS

Sara vows to bounce back after finishing ninth in Paris

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's Sara Masud ended her campaign at the Paris 2024 Paralympic Games finishing ninth and last in the women's shot put final yesterday.

The 2016 Rio Games silver medalist threw 5.3m in the event, which was won by China's Qing Wu after hurling 7.98m. Mexico's Gilda Guadalupe claimed silver medal after clearing 7.89m with Russia's Svetlana

Krivenok securing a bronze medal after a throw of 7.74m.

Sara was disappointed at her show in the tough contest. "Of course, I was expecting a better result but it was a very strong field. But I will continue to work hard and will return to the competitions stronger after overcoming my shortcomings," she said after the final.

Qatar will now pin hopes for a medal on wheelchair racer Ali Arshad, who will compete in the 800m T34 heat today. He had finished sixth in the men's 100m T34 event earlier this week.



WORLD CUP QUALIFIERS

Bahrain stun Australia as Japan crush China

Iran defeat Kyrgyzstan thanks to Taremi's goal while Uzbekistan beat North Korea

Reuters

Saitama, Japan

Bahrain stunned Australia 1-0 after a late Harry Souttar own goal in a dramatic opening to Asia's third round of World Cup qualifying yesterday. There were no problems, however, for World Cup regulars Japan as Hajime Moriyasu's side handed China a 7-0 thrashing at Saitama Stadium and six-times qualifiers Iran secured a 1-0 win over visitors Kyrgyzstan.

The Bahrainis celebrated wildly after the final whistle at Robina Stadium on the Gold Coast having beaten Australia for the first time in seven attempts, making the perfect start to their bid to qualify for the finals for the first time. The Socceroos were already down to 10 men in the Group C contest after the dismissal of Kusini Yengi and Abdullah al-Khalasi's cross took a wicked deflection off Souttar to wrongfoot goalkeeper Mat Ryan and give Bahrain the points.

Japan, who are also in Group C alongside Saudi Arabia and Indonesia, had no such problems against an inept Chinese side that collapsed to an embarrassing loss.

Wataru Endo gave the hosts the lead with a 12th-minute header and Kaoru Mitoma doubled the advantage when he nodded in Ritsu Doan's cross in the dying moments of the half.

Takumi Minamino scored twice in six minutes soon after the interval to put the result beyond doubt, but Moriyasu's side refused to ease off against the already well-beaten Chinese. Substitute Junya Ito hit the fifth with a shot that was deflected past Wang Dalei by Jiang Guangtai before Daizen Maeda headed home the sixth with three minutes remaining. Takefusa Kubo



Japan's Kaoru Mitoma scores against China in the World Cup Qualifiers in Saitama, Japan, yesterday. (Reuters)

put the seal on the win with the last kick of the game, slamming his shot into the roof of the Chinese goal.

Brighton winger Mitoma, who has missed a chunk of this year with injury, was making his first appearance for Japan since the Asian Cup in January.

"The home support was overwhelming and that allowed us to play well from the first whistle," Mitoma said.

South Korea were unable to find a way past Palestine goalkeeper Rami Hamada at Seoul World Cup Stadium in Group B in the first game under Hong Myung-bo after the former defender returned to coach the team in July.

The Koreans trail Iraq in the early standings as Aymen Hussein's header earned his side a 1-0 win over Oman in Basra.

In Group A, the UAE fought back to de-

feat Qatar 3-1. Iran defeated Kyrgyzstan thanks to Mehdi Taremi's 34th minute goal while Uzbekistan also claimed three points when Jaliloddin Marsharipov's strike handed North Korea a 1-0 loss in Tashkent.

The top two from each of the three groups progresses directly to the 2026 finals in the United States, Mexico and Canada with the third and fourth placed teams going into another round of qualifying.

FOCUS

ECA Board approves 'Membership for All' reforms

The ECA Board, chaired by Nasser al-Khelaifi, concluded its meeting on Wednesday in Dublin, Ireland with a number of key decisions taken concerning its future membership structure and growth.

The Board approved a revision to the organisational regulations that will see the existing membership structure amended with the Partner/Network category being merged into the Associated Member category across respective Subdivisions.

This means that the former Network/Partner clubs will have the ability to elect members to the Board via the Subdivisions and have the same rights as those held by Associated Members. There is no change for Ordinary Members.

Commenting on the huge growth of ECA membership, ECA Chairman al-Khelaifi, said: "This is an amazing achievement to have reached over 700 clubs of the ECA Family with a member growth of 160% since the start of the 2023/24 season. With the changes to our membership structure approved by the Board today, that will go to the General Assembly for final ratification,

we will continue to make ECA more democratic, more open and more inclusive for all clubs across Europe."

The Board then acknowledged the recent announcement on reduced ticket prices caps for visiting fans in UEFA men's club competitions for the 2024/25 season and 2025/26 season, and of the importance of fans to the very fabric of the club game across Europe.

"This is a great example of the new ECA where we have over 700 members all of different shapes and sizes across 55 countries, but we always try to find consensus through compromise," said al-Khelaifi.

"Many clubs had strong, valid and different views on this topic, but as an institution ECA found a collective position on behalf of all 700+ clubs, which puts fans first and will help drive football forward," he concluded.

The Board confirmed the first three appointments to the ECA Foundation, currently being set-up, to include al-Khelaifi, Dariusz Mioduski and Joe Cerrell of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Further appointments will be made in due course with official launch taking place in 2025.



Qatar's Nasser al-Khelaifi chaired the ECA Board meeting in Dublin on Wednesday.

Mbappe not dwelling on Euro disappointment

Paris: Kylian Mbappe returns to action for France for the first time since Euro 2024 in today's UEFA Nations League clash against Italy, with the superstar forward insisting he is not dwelling on that disappointing campaign.

The 25-year-old will lead France in the heavyweight encounter in Paris as Les Bleus take to the field again, two months on from losing to eventual champions Spain in the semi-finals at the Euros.

It was a poor tournament in particular for Mbappe, who suffered a broken nose in France's opening game and only scored one goal, a penalty in a group-stage draw with Poland.

It was put to the new Real Madrid signing that he might be keen to make up for that in the match at the Parc des Princes and Monday's meeting with Belgium, but Mbappe dismissed that suggestion.

"Maybe it comes with age, but I have learned that it is not about revenge," he told reporters. "Everything is a process, and what went well or not so well last year will help me this year."

The Nations League is the next objective for Didier Deschamps and his team, before qualifying for the 2026 World Cup begins this year. Mbappe and France, who will also face Israel in League A, Group 2, won the Nations League in 2021, when they defeated Spain in the final in Milan.

The former Paris Saint-Germain player admitted, however, that he was not sure how to feel about the tournament. France were almost relegated from the top-tier League A during the last edition in 2022, only winning one of their six matches.

"We have already won it, but at the end of that match (the 2021 final) I didn't feel like we had won a trophy," Mbappe said. "We came back to France. I felt nothing. It didn't generate any extraordinary enthusiasm. Then there was the 2022 World Cup which we lost. We almost got relegated (to League B). We were hauled over the coals for that. It was a disgrace."

Italy come to Paris also looking to put behind them a disappointing Euros, as their defence of that trophy ended with a defeat by Switzerland in the last 16. Their coach, Luciano Spalletti, is wary of a French side who in general struggled to score goals in Germany, reaching the last four principally thanks to their defensive solidity.

"Tactically they put you to sleep," Spalletti said. "They almost give you the impression that you are controlling the game and then that becomes their strength. You grow in confidence. You take two or three steps forward, and then they take the ball off you and release their wide attackers."

Along with Italy, France will also face Belgium and Israel in their Nations League group, and manager Didier Deschamps is keen to use the competition to try out new players.