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WORLD AQUATICS CHAMPIONSHIPS

Ledecky wins 22nd title as Popovici savours 'scary' gold

American great is four short of the retired compatriot Phelps' career tally of 26 world gold medals

AFP
Singapore

Katie Ledecky won the 22nd world title of her legendary career yesterday to close in on Michael Phelps's record as fellow Olympic champions David Popovici and Kaylee McKeown also struck gold.

American great Ledecky cruised to a dominant 1,500m freestyle gold, touching the wall in 15min 26.44sec, having threatened her own world record of 15:20.48. The masterful win in Singapore moved Ledecky four short of the retired Phelps's career tally of 26 world gold medals.

"Growing up it was very inspiring to watch world championships, Olympic Games that Michael was in, trying to learn from the very best," said Ledecky, 28. "I was always a student of the sport."

Ledecky's win gave the American the sixth world 1,500m freestyle title of her career. She is also a nine-time Olympic gold medallist. Second was Simona Quadarella of Italy in 15:31.79 and third Australia's Lani Pallister in 15:41.18.

Ledecky was the red-hot favourite going into the race, having qualified for the final over 10 seconds faster than nearest challenger Pallister. She also went into the race owning the top 24 1,500m freestyle times ever, and set the second-fastest time in history in April behind her own record.

Pallister pushed her with a fast early tempo and Ledecky was on world record pace until late in the race. In the end she fell short of the mark but still clocked the fifth-fastest time ever. "Lani took it out there. I knew she would be out fast and I just wanted to get out fast, but comfortable enough that I could go from there," said Ledecky. "I'm happy with the time and happy with the swim."

It is Ledecky's first gold medal of the championships, after picking up a bronze behind Summer McIntosh in the 400m freestyle on Sunday's opening night in Singapore. Ledecky is set to go head-to-head with Canadian phenomenon McIntosh again in the 800m freestyle.

Popovici claimed a thrilling 200m freestyle gold – then revealed he had very nearly pulled out. The 20-year-old Romanian reeled in US rival Luke Hobson to take the title in 1:43.53, with Hobson settling for silver (1:43.84) and Japan's 18-year-old Tatsuya Murasa taking bronze (1:44.54).

Popovici said afterwards that he had seriously considered withdrawing from the competition before it started, even going as far as looking at flights home. "It was a mental thing and it had to do with the fear of seeing my real potential," said Popovici, who reclaimed his world crown from 2022. "That's very scary. And so I'm really glad I didn't quit."



American swimmer Katie Ledecky competes in the final of the women's 1500m freestyle during the World Aquatics Championships in Singapore. *(AFP)*

Australia's McKeown beat a recently dislocated shoulder, nerves and old rival Regan Smith of the United States to win the 100m backstroke gold, narrowly missing the world record. McKeown powered to the wall in a championship record 57.16sec, with Smith having to once more settle for second, just 0.19sec behind. Katharine Berkoff, also of the United States, took bronze. McKeown's victory underlines her status as the undisputed force in women's backstroke. "It's always very nerve-wracking, especially off the back of the Olympics," said the 24-year-old, who won the 100-200m backstroke double at the Tokyo and Paris Olympics. "I was probably a bit more nervous than I would like to have been tonight."

Germany's Anna Elendt won the first world title of her career in the women's 100m breaststroke, coming home in 1:05.19. American Kate Douglass was second in 1:05.27, with China's Tang Qianting third in 1:05.64. South Africa's Pieter Coetze won the men's 100m backstroke in 51.85sec in a surprise, ahead of Italy's Thomas Ceccon (51.90) and France's Yohann Ndoye-Brouard.



Gold medallist Katie Ledecky (centre) of the US celebrates with silver medallist Italy's Simona Quadarella (left) and bronze medallist Australia's Lani Pallister. *(Reuters)*

FOCUS

McKeown beats Smith for more gold

AFP
Singapore



Australia's **Kaylee McKeown** beat nerves and great rival Regan Smith in a humdinger to win the 100m backstroke world gold yesterday, narrowly missing the world record.

McKeown fought back to power to the wall in a championship record 57.16sec, with Smith having to once more settle for second, just 0.19sec behind. Katharine Berkoff, also of the United States, took bronze in Singapore.

McKeown's victory underlines her status as the undisputed force in women's backstroke. "It's always very nerve-wracking, especially off the back of the Olympics," said the 24-year-old, who won the 100-200m backstroke double at the Tokyo and Paris Olympics. "I was probably a bit more nervous than I would like to have been tonight."

This was another chapter in the storied rivalry between arch-rivals Smith and McKeown. The 23-year-old American Smith set a world record of 57.13sec at the 2024 US Olympic trials, snatching McKeown's world record.

However, McKeown got the better of the American to win gold at the Paris Olympics, relegating Smith into silver in both the 100m and 200m backstroke. Ahead of Singapore, McKeown and Smith shared the 20 fastest times in history.

Smith once more pushed McKeown all the way, the Australian's time a personal best on the way to a fifth world gold. "I'm really really proud. It's a little bit emotional, I've worked so hard just to get myself into a happy state and it's just what I've been focusing on," said McKeown. "I think it goes to show that a happy swimmer is a fast swimmer. I have trained hard but I wasn't expecting to make a personal best tonight."

Silver medallist Smith clocked her third-fastest swim ever – and all with acute gastroenteritis having swept through the majority of the US squad in Singapore. "America as a whole had the odds stacked against us," she said.

"We had a really unfortunate situation happen to us during a training camp, and I did not think I was going to go for 57.35. To come up with a silver, I can't really control the place of the medal, but what I can control is how fast I swim and how well I can do my race, and I think I did an incredible job, especially under the circumstances."

Al-Jabir elected as World Aquatics Bureau Member

Doha: Khalil Ibrahim al-Jabir, Executive Director of the Qatar Olympic Academy and former President of the Qatar Swimming Association (QSA), has been elected as a Bureau Member of World Aquatics for the 2025-2029 term. The announcement came during the World Aquatics General Congress held on the sidelines of the 2025 World Aquatics Championships in Singapore.

Al-Jabir, a leading figure in Qatari and Asian aquatic sports, previously served as QSA president from 2008 to 2024. His longstanding service to the sport includes being first elected to World Aquatics in 2017, followed by a key role in 2021 when he was selected at the Doha General Assembly as one of the members representing host nations of the World Championships. His re-election this year is another milestone in a distinguished career dedicated to advancing aquatic sports on a global scale.

In addition to his World Aquatics responsibilities, al-Jabir also holds the position of Vice-President of the Asian Aquatics Federation for the 2024-2029 term, a role he secured during the 2024 general assembly in Bangkok, Thailand.

Meanwhile, QSA President Mubarak bin Ali al-Nuaimi participated in the 2025 World Aquatics General Congress in Singapore. His attendance reflects the association's continued efforts to reinforce Qatar's presence in the international sporting arena. On behalf of the Association, al-Nuaimi congratulated al-Jabir on his election and expressed confidence in his ability to represent Qatar with distinction and help shape the future of aquatic sports worldwide.

The Congress also saw the election of the World Aquatics Board of Directors for the upcoming term, selecting several prominent figures tasked with leading the global governing body into its next chapter.

SPORT

CRICKET

Australia sweep T20 series against hosts West Indies

Australia clinch 3-wicket win in fifth T20I, Dwarshuis takes key wickets



Australia's players celebrate with the trophy at the end of the fifth and final Twenty20 match against West Indies at Warner Park Sporting Complex in Basseterre, Saint Kitts and Nevis. *(AFP)*

Reuters
Basseterre, Saint Kitts

Australia completed a 5-0 sweep of the West Indies in their Twenty20 international series with Ben Dwarshuis's bowling paving the way for a three-wicket victory in Basseterre, Saint Kitts on Monday.

Mitchell Owen top-scored for Australia with 37 off 17 balls, while Cameron Green (32), Tim David (30) and Aaron Hardie (28 not out) all made valuable contributions as the visitors reached their target of 171 with 18 balls to spare.

The win sealed the first T20 series sweep by an Australian men's team in the West Indies, and saw them end the tour with a perfect 8-0 record after a similar sweep in the three-test series.

"I didn't expect 5-0 at the start of the series," Australia captain Mitchell Marsh said. "But we played some great cricket. It was something we spoke about after the fourth game.

"We knew no Australian team had completed a clean sweep. We've had guys come in and played different roles for us."

The match featured 15 sixes, which Marsh attributed to the size of the venue.

"I think it's a small ground, so there's always going to be more sixes than normal," he said.

"But I think if you look down our batting order in all the five games, we had a lot of power and I guess the messaging was just to play their natural game."



Sean Abbott (centre) and Ben Dwarshuis (right) of Australia celebrate the dismissal of Shimron Hetmyer of West Indies in Basseterre, Saint Kitts and Nevis. *(AFP)*

Marsh also lauded the performance of his relatively inexperienced bowlers in the death overs.

"I'm pretty sure in the last four overs, we didn't go for more than 40 or 50 across the five games," he said.

"It's really hard to do. So I think all of them executed. Nathan Ellis was outstanding, Sean Abbott was brilliant. Ben Dwarshuis hasn't played a lot, did a really good role, and even Xavier Bartlett has grown and grown as a bowler."

West Indies fans must have feared the worst when Australia won a fifth straight toss and bowled the hosts out for 170, a total they reached thanks in large part to Shimron Hetmyer's knock of 52 off 31 balls.

Dwarshuis picked up Hetmyer's wicket as well as those of openers Brandon King (11) and Shai Hope (9).

"It was a little bit of a slower wicket so we tried to hit the wicket hard and use the slower balls as well," said Dwarshuis, who was named player of the match.

Australia return home for a limited-overs series against South Africa, while the West Indies play Pakistan in three T20Is and three one-day internationals.

BRIEF SCORES: Australia 173 for 7 (Owen 37, Hosein 3-17) **beat West Indies 170** (Hetmyer 52, Dwarshuis 3-41) **by three wickets**

SPOTLIGHT

Latham ruled out of Zimbabwe Test

AFP
Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

New Zealand captain Tom Latham will miss the opening Test against Zimbabwe with a shoulder injury and Mitch Santner will step in to lead the side, New Zealand Cricket said on the eve of the match beginning in Bulawayo today.

Latham suffered the injury while fielding during a T20 match for Birmingham in the Vitality Blast earlier this month and has not recovered sufficiently to be included in the playing 11, the NZC said.

Latham will stay in Zimbabwe with New Zealand hoping he will be fit for the second Test starting on August 7.

"It's hugely disappointing for Tom to be missing the first Test, as captain but also as an integral part of the team," head coach Rob Walter said.

"It's never great when you lose your captain, who's a world-class opening batter and a great team man, but that said we're going to work really hard to have him available for the second Test.

"We'll continue to assess and see whether a replacement player is necessary, but at this stage we are hopeful that he'll recover in time."

White-ball captain Santner oversaw New Zealand's T20 tri-series victory in Harare where they remained undefeated throughout the five-match series. "Mitch did a wonderful job with the T20 squad in this recent series," Walter said.

"He was excellent from a strategy point of view and he has a strong understanding of the game. Whilst the format is different, he certainly has the respect of the players and will be supported by some highly experienced test cricketers, so I trust that he's going to do a great job."

FOCUS

'No signs of life' after German biathlete Dahlmeier in accident

AFP
Frankfurt, Germany

German double Olympic biathlon champion Laura Dahlmeier was caught in a rockfall in Pakistan and rescuers have not found "signs of life" at the accident site, her team said yesterday.

The accident happened Monday while Dahlmeier was climbing with a partner on Laila Peak, a mountain of over 6,000 metres (19,700 feet) in the Karakoram range, according to a statement from her team on her official social media sites. The 31-year-old was "hit by falling rocks," it said, adding no one had yet been able to reach her due to the danger of further rockfalls and the site's "remoteness".

However, a helicopter managed to fly over the location and rescuers saw that "the experienced mountaineer is at least seriously injured", it said.

"No signs of life were detected."

The accident happened around midday at 5,700 metres and a rescue operation was launched immediately.

The International Biathlon Union said in a statement it was "thinking of Dahlmeier and her family, hoping for good news to emerge soon".

Dahlmeier, an experienced mountaineer, had been in the region since the end of June and had already ascended the Great Trango Tower, it said.

She has won seven world championship gold medals, and at the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang she became the first female biathlete to win both the sprint and the pursuit at the same Games.

Dahlmeier retired from professional competition in 2019 at the age of 25.

She went on to become a commentator on biathlon events for German broadcaster ZDF, and also took up mountaineering.

She is a certified mountain and ski guide and an active member of the mountain rescue, according to her team.



BOTTOMLINE

Gambhir clashes with Oval staff ahead of final Test

AFP
London

India head coach Gautam Gambhir was involved in an angry exchange with Surrey's head groundsman at the Oval ahead of tomorrow's final Test against England – the latest incident during an increasingly tetchy tour.

Ben Stokes' team are resting ahead of the decisive fifth Test but the tourists were practising in the nets as they attempt to salvage a 2-2 draw.

Gambhir was seen sharing terse words with Lee Fortis, Surrey's lead curator at the London ground.

The 58-Test veteran was caught on camera wagging his finger as Fortis towered over him, repeatedly stating: "You can't tell us what to do" and "You don't tell any of us what to do".

Gambhir can also be heard adding: "You're just the groundsman, nothing beyond."

Fortis is understood to have been keeping a protective eye on the playing area during India's practice, with plenty of cricket still to be played on it this season.

After walking away in conversation with India batting coach Sitanshu Kotak, who appeared to take on the role of mediator, Fortis told Gambhir he may be forced to lodge a complaint against him, drawing a response of: "You can go and report to whoever you want".



It is unclear whether India have concerns over the pitch, which is expected to provide greater pace and bounce than has been seen in the previous four matches, potentially favouring England's quick bowlers. The home team's attack has struggled for penetration at times, including in India's second innings at Old Trafford, where the bowlers took just four wickets in 143 overs as the fourth Test ended in a draw on Sunday.

The series has become increasingly heated, with the tourists refusing to shake hands on a draw early in Manchester to allow Washington Sundar and Ravindra Jadeja to reach centuries, a decision that angered England.

India captain Shubman Gill accused England of ignoring the "spirit of cricket" with time-wasting tactics in the third Test at Lord's, where India fast bowler Mohammed Siraj was fined for the aggressive "send-off" he gave to Ben Duckett.

England are expected to make changes after the draw in Manchester, particularly to their bowling line-up, with just three days' rest between matches.

India have suffered a major blow in losing Rishabh Pant, who sustained a fracture to his right foot in Manchester.

The wicketkeeper-batsman, who scored 479 runs in the series at an average of 68.42 has been replaced in the squad by Narayan Jagadeesan.

The visitors also need to make a decision on pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah, who has played three Tests so far – the maximum team bosses said he would feature in before the series started.

Gambhir has said all of his quicks are fit for the finale.

BROAD, HUSSAIN WARN ENGLAND AGAINST RISKING ARCHER AT THE OVAL

England will be putting fast bowler **Jofra Archer** at risk of a fresh injury if they select him for the fifth and final match against India at the Oval this week, according to former test players Stuart Broad and Nasser Hussain.

Archer is taking part in his first test series in four years after overcoming elbow and back injuries.

The 30-year-old sat out the first two matches before claiming five wickets in his return to the format at Lord's and four in the drawn Manchester test.

While India could draw the series with a win at the Oval, Broad told Sky Sports that England should prioritise Archer's long-term fitness.

"We can't not have Archer for four years, bring him back and then bowl him into the ground and not see him for another four years," he said.

"(Josh) Tongue started the series, and I know he mainly got lower-order players out, but you probably have a natural replacement for Archer."

England have added fast bowling all-rounder Jamie Overton to their tiring pace battery.

Chris Woakes and Brydon Carse have played all four tests, while skipper Ben Stokes said he would "run through a brick wall" to try to be available for the final test beginning on Thursday.

Gus Atkinson and Tongue are likely to feature in the decisive final test, and England are likely to rest Archer with the Ashes series against Australia in four months' time. "I don't think you can have Archer playing three on the bounce coming back after four years," former England captain Hussain told Sky Sports. "Gus Atkinson coming back after a long time, and then Stokes with a niggle as three of your four seamers – but I would definitely play Atkinson on his home ground if fit."



TENNIS

Bouchard extends her career with win in Montreal

'If I win this tournament, I will not retire. I felt like the old Genie out there'

Reuters
Montreal

Hometown hero Eugenie Bouchard beat Emiliana Arango 6-4, 2-6, 6-2 in the first round of the Canadian Open in Montreal on Monday, a win that delayed the former world number five's retirement.

Bouchard announced earlier this month she would walk away from the sport after the tournament but added a condition to that plan in the wake of her thrilling victory in front of a packed crowd. "If I win this tournament, I will not retire. "I felt like the old Genie out there," she said in an on-court interview.

Playing in only her second singles match of the year, Bouchard blasted a forehand winner to take the first set but Colombian Arango turned the tables in the second set amid a cascade of unforced errors from her opponent.

However, Bouchard broke for a 3-1 lead in the decider and hammered a swinging volley to extend the advantage to 4-1.

The 31-year-old wildcard put her hands on her head and then her heart after securing the victory to set up a second round meeting with 17th seed Belinda Bencic of Switzerland.

"I woke up this morning just telling myself, look I can't control the result, I just want to have a good attitude, have good fight and try to feel good with my shots, feel good with my game," she added.

"No matter what happens, I wanted to walk off the court having enjoyed that gritty battle. I enjoyed every second of it."

Krista McNanney, who has been following Bouchard's career since 2005 and travelled from Petawawa, Ont., to watch her play at the nearly sold-out stadium, said she thinks the hometown crowd helped Bouchard win. "I think (Canadian players) shine here because there's so many Canadian fans," she said in an interview after getting a tennis ball signed by Bouchard. "I always find that they do a little bit better when they're in their home country."

Briton Emma Raducanu beat her good friend Elena-Gabriela Ruse of Romania 6-2, 6-4 and will next meet 32nd seed Peyton Stearns. "It's very difficult to play someone who you are close to," Raducanu said. "I'm really glad about how I was able to put that to one side for the match and back up a good week in D.C."

Four-time Grand Slam winner Naomi Osaka of Japan beat Canadian qualifier Ariana Arseneault 6-4, 6-2 in breezy conditions to set up a second-round meeting with 13th seed Liudmila Samsonova of Russia.

In the men's tournament, which is being playing in Toronto, Australian Adam Walton roared back from a set down to defeat Frenchman Benjamin Bonzi 4-6, 6-0, 6-3 and set up a second-round meeting with top seed Alexander Zverev of Germany. Spaniard Pablo Carreno Busta, the tournament's 2022 champion, came from behind to defeat Liam Draxl 2-6, 6-4, 6-4.

Several top players withdrew ahead of the Masters and WTA 1000 tournament including world number ones Aryna Sabalenka and Jannik Sinner, Carlos Alcaraz, Novak Djokovic and Jack Draper.



Eugénie Bouchard of Canada reacts as she celebrates her victory against Emiliana Arango of Colombia during their first round match of the Canadian Open in Montreal. *(AFP)*

GOLF

Korda marvels at Woad's 'absolutely amazing' game

Reuters
New York

Lottie Woad's meteoric rise to golf stardom has impressed many of her fellow competitors, including World No 1 Nelly Korda.

The two were paired together at last week's Scottish Open, which Woad won by three strokes in her professional debut. The world's No 1-ranked amateur just two weeks ago, Woad already has shot up to No 24 in the Rolex World Rankings.

Korda was asked about Woad's game, which she called "absolutely amazing."

"I was very impressed with her composure, her process," Korda said on Tuesday ahead of this week's AIG Women's Open at Royal Porthcawl in Wales. "When it comes to her shot routine, especially under pressure and in the heat of the moment, sometimes people seem to fidget and kind of doubt themselves. But she stuck to it, she stuck to her process every single time.

"I think that's one of the main things that I noticed is how mature she is for her age and how comfortable she was in the heat of the moment."

Woad, 21, arrived on the LPGA Tour after a stellar career at Florida State, and accepted her tour membership after tying for third at the Evian Championship earlier this month.

"I feel good obviously," she said Tuesday. "I don't feel too different, to be honest. I got a lot of confidence from the last few - the last month really. Just trying to continue to ride that."

The Englishwoman is paired with former world No. 1 and defending champion Lydia Ko and 2023 champion Lilia Vu for the first two rounds this week.

"I think there's a little bit more experience under her belt than what people probably give her credit for," Ko said. "But when I've seen the coverage or how she composes herself, she doesn't seem like she rushes into things or gets like overly emotional. I'm sure that's going to help her with that transition as well."

Korda will be playing in another marquee group along with Ariya Jutanugarn and Angel Yin. Jenno Thitikul, who is nipping at Korda's heels for that No. 1 ranking, is paired with Minjee Lee and Charley Hull.

Korda was in contention last week before settling for a tie for fifth following a 71 on Sunday. She is still seeking her first victory of 2025 but did finish second at last year's Women's Open and celebrated her 27th birthday on Monday.

"New week, new golf course, new conditions," Korda said. "My goal is to prepare the best that I can, enjoy myself and, hopefully, be in contention. And then kind of enjoy the ride because, as many highs as I've had, I've had a lot of lows, too, with this sport, but I still come back and I still want to experience those highs in all the different circumstances, different golf courses, different conditions.

"And just continue to grow my love for the game."

Osaka parts company with coach Mouratoglou after Washington exit

Naomi Osaka has parted company with coach Patrick Mouratoglou less than a year after the pair began working together, the four-times Grand Slam champion said days after her defeat to Emma Raducanu at the Washington Open.

The 27-year-old began working with Mouratoglou ahead of the China Open in September last year, as she sought to reignite her career following a patchy run of form after returning to the tour from a long maternity break.

"Merci Patrick. It was such a great experience learning from you. Wishing you nothing but the best. You are one of the coolest people I've ever met and I'm sure I'll see you around," Osaka wrote in a post on Instagram on Sunday.

Under Frenchman Mouratoglou, who previously guided Serena Williams to 10 of her 23 major titles, Osaka won her first WTA title since 2021 at the L'Open 35 de Saint-Malo in May - a WTA 125 tournament. She also reached the final of the Auckland Classic in January, where she was forced to retire with an injury, and suffered a frustrating first-round exit from this year's French Open at the hands of Paula Badosa.

"Nothing lasts forever. What counts is what a collaboration has brought to each other and what lasts after," Mouratoglou wrote on social media.

"After 10 months of collaboration, we have decided to part ways professionally. I am grateful for the trust, the journey and what we have built together. I will always root for you and wish you nothing but the best."

FOCUS

Qatar's reserve team to meet UAE in Arab basketball today

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar's reserve basketball team is gearing up for a critical match against the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the 26th Arab Basketball Championship. The game is scheduled for 4:00pm today at Khalifa Sports City Arena in Manama, Bahrain, where the tournament is being hosted from July 25-August 2, 2025.

This fourth-round clash is a pivotal opportunity for Qatar's reserve squad to secure their first victory in the championship, boosting their points tally and strengthening their bid for a top position. The match follows a challenging 92-66 defeat to Algeria in the third round on Tuesday, July 29, 2025.

The Algerian team dominated early, winning the first quarter 28-14. Despite Qatar's improved performance in the second quarter, which ended in a 20-20 tie, Algeria regained control in the third and fourth quarters, securing 20-13 and 24-19 victories, respectively, to clinch the game.

Qatar's Dejan Yanik stood out, scoring 19 points, while Algeria's Sid Ali Ben Zaim led the game with 21 points. The Qatari reserve team's participation aligns with a strategic vision set by the Qatar Basketball Federation to nurture young talent. This initiative aims to provide emerging players with international exposure and competitive experience, preparing them for future integration into the senior national team. The effort underscores Qatar's commitment to advancing its basketball program and elevating its standing in regional and continental competitions.

Qatar's campaign began with a 72-61 loss to host nation Bahrain, followed by an improved showing against Egypt in the second round, despite a 90-69 defeat. The team displayed notable progress in the third and fourth quarters against Egypt, signalling their growing cohesion and potential.

Following the UAE match, Qatar will face Kuwait on August 1 and conclude their tournament schedule against Tunisia on August 2. The Arab Championship features a single-round robin format with seven participating teams: Qatar, Bahrain, Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, the UAE, and Kuwait. The team with the highest points at the end of the competition will claim the title.

CYCLING

Wiebes claims stage as Vos holds lead

AFP
Poitiers, France

Dutch cyclist Lorena Wiebes won the fourth stage of the women's Tour de France yesterday, outpacing her compatriot and yellow jersey-holder Marianne Vos at the end of a bunch sprint.

Just as in the previous day's stage, the SD Worx team sprinter once again beat the overall leader by a wheel to claim her second consecutive stage victory.

"On the final straight it was a big chaos and I was really fighting for position," said Wiebes, 26.

"It's really nice to win again and it's really nice to finish it off for the girls after their hard work at the end again."

Ireland's Lara Gillespie completed the podium at the end of a stage which was thankfully much cleaner than Monday's in Angers, when several riders found themselves caught up in a mass crash.

The main victim of that crash, Dutch rider Demi Vollering, appeared apprehensive at the start in Saumur yesterday. But the overall favourite for the Tour finished in the peloton in the same time as Wiebes. Vollering sits sixth overall, 25sec behind leader Vos and 13sec behind second-placed Wiebes.

Tuesday's stage was led by Franziska Koch of Germany and Brazilian Ana Vitoria Magalhaes, after they made a break just over an hour into the day's racing.

They were caught 3km from the finish line by the SD Worx team, who catapulted Wiebes to her 16th victory this season and the 109th of her career.

"She's (Wiebes) just the best sprinter in the world, she's a phenomenon in the sprint and every time she shows it again," said veteran Vos.

"It's nice to keep the yellow on such a day. You know it's going to be tough," added the 38-year-old. Today will be the longest stage of the 2025 edition with its 165.8km run between Chasseneuil-du-Poitou/Futuroscope and Gueret, complete with a slog to the finish featuring three climbs inside the final 35km.



Team SD Worx-Protime's Dutch rider Lorena Wiebes celebrates on the podium after winning the 4th stage of the fourth edition of the Women's Tour de France cycling race, 130.7km from Saumur to Poitiers, in Poitiers, western France, yesterday. *(AFP)*

SPOTLIGHT

Spurs' Frank relishing 'more than a friendly' against Arsenal

The fierce rivals will lock horns tomorrow in the first North London derby outside

AFP
Hong Kong

New Tottenham manager Thomas Frank admitted yesterday that a pre-season clash against Arsenal in Hong Kong would be his first "great challenge" since taking charge and warned it would be "more than a friendly".

The fierce rivals will lock horns tomorrow in the first North London derby outside British shores. "It's a great challenge," the Dane told reporters at 50,000-seat Kai Tak Stadium in Hong Kong, which is sold out for the match. "Besides being our big rivals, and the first North London derby outside the UK, they are also, right now, one of the best teams, I must say unfortunately, in the world," he said with a smile. "Against Arsenal it's not only a friendly and we'll do everything we can to win."

Frank took over last month from Ange Postecoglou, who was sacked despite leading Tottenham to Europa League glory and ending a 17-year trophy drought.

Tottenham have signed attacking midfielder Mohammed Kudus from West Ham for $74mn, but have been thwarted in efforts to capture Morgan Gibbs-White from Nottingham Forest. Frank said he and the club were "constantly talking about transfers" but "that is something I would like to keep private".

"In general I am happy with the squad. We're aware of where we maybe want to strengthen in general," he said. "Mohammed has come in and shown his quality already. But, of course, we are looking."

One of Tottenham's problems last season, when they finished 17th in the Premier League, was a long injury list. One of the key players who missed large chunks of the campaign was Micky van de Ven. But the Dutch central defender is confident his injury problems are behind him after a first uninterrupted summer with the Spurs.

"I haven't had a pre-season at Tottenham before," Van de Ven, who signed late in the transfer window in 2023 and then played in the Euros last year, said.

"It's more time to work on my body and to make my body prepare for the Premier League and for the Champions League and for all the other games that are coming up," added the 24-year-old. "So I will say that's a positive thing."

Frank said he was aware of the fitness issues last term and having a fully fit squad available would be vital. "I think it's a big thing for any club in the world," said Frank. "Availability is key. It is difficult because there are more games and the intensity in the game is going up. The good thing is we have a good and long preseason. That means it's possible to push and pull the players. We are very aware how we want to play, I want to train, and I think that it needs to be complete. We have made a few adjustments. Hopefully we'll be successful there."

Meanwhile, Frank has given no indication that he believes Son Heung-min will imminently leave the club, amid strong links to MLS club Los Angeles Football Club this summer.

LAFC have been reported to be progressing in talks to sign Son, who succeeded Hugo Lloris as Spurs captain in 2023. But Frank spoke as though the plan is for the South Korean to remain, and gave nothing away if a transfer is close.

"I think first and foremost, Son's legacy here is remarkable. He's been a fantastic player for Tottenham, he is a fantastic player for Tottenham," Frank said. "I see a player that that can play a very good role here next season. He's come in [for pre-season], very good mindset, trained very hard, pushed the players. So I'm excited about it."

It has been suggested that Tottenham won't stand in Son's way and the decision will be his alone. But no definitive update is expected to come before Spurs face Newcastle United in a friendly in Son's native South Korea on Sunday. He is a huge marketing draw and, in addition to being a Tottenham legend, his presence makes such opportunities possible and more lucrative.

With Son easily the biggest name in Asian football, Spurs have played four times in South Korea in recent summers — twice each in 2022 and 2024 — as well as several other friendlies in China, Singapore and Japan, going back to 2019.

Since joining Spurs in 2015, Son, now 33, has scored 173 goals in 454 appearances. He is fifth on the club's all-time top scorers — the only foreign player among the top 10 — and seventh on the appearances list, not far behind Glenn Hoddle.


Tottenham Hotspur head coach Thomas Frank gestures during a training session at the Kai Tak Stadium in Hong Kong, ahead of a friendly match against Arsenal. *(AFP)*

Portugal's Felix joins Ronaldo at Al Nassr in Saudi



Riyadh: Portuguese forward **Joao Felix** has signed a two-year deal with Saudi Arabia's Al Nassr, where he will join Cristiano Ronaldo, the club announced. Felix, now 25, made a blockbuster move from Benfica to Atletico Madrid in 2019, but has since seen his fortunes decline.

Neither club disclosed any financial details of the deal, but reports said the transfer could cost up to 43.7mn pounds ($58.17mn), consisting of an initial 26.2mn fee plus 17.5mn in potential add-ons.

"I'm here to spread joy. Let's win together," said Felix in a video posted on the Riyadh club's X account. A separate post said he had signed until 2027. Felix remains one of the most expensive transfers in history, following his move to Atletico for 127.7mn euros ($147.3mn) six years ago.

He has since failed to score more than 10 goals a season, despite stints at Barcelona, AC Milan and Chelsea. According to reports, Felix will earn $10mn a year. Saudi Arabia has shaken up football by spending heavily on stars from Europe, starting with Ronaldo's arrival in 2023, and the conservative desert nation will host the World Cup in 2034.

Many of the signings have been ageing stars, but Felix bucks the trend along with Mateo Retegui, 26, the Serie A top-scorer who joined Al Qadsiah last week. French international Theo Hernandez, 27, left AC Milan for Al Hilal in a reported $29 million deal earlier this month.

Top coaches have also been lured to Saudi Arabia, including Italy's Simone Inzaghi who led Al Hilal to an upset win over Manchester City at the Club World Cup. At Al Nassr, Felix will be working under Portuguese coach Jorge Jesus, who was sacked by Al Hilal in May following their defeat in the Asian Champions League semi-finals.

FOCUS

Mbeumo looks forward to Fernandes link-up at Man United

AFP
London



Bryan Mbeumo says he is excited about linking up with Manchester United captain Bruno Fernandes as he prepares for life at Old Trafford following his move from Brentford.

After weeks of drawn-out talks, the 25-year-old finally joined United last week for £65mn ($87mn) plus a potential £6mn in add-ons.

The Cameroon winger, who scored 20 goals and provided seven assists for Brentford in the Premier League last season, has signed a five-year deal with United, becoming their third signing of the summer transfer window.

Mbeumo said that Fernandes was the player he was most looking forward to playing with. "Everyone sees in the past years, he can shoot, he can cross, he can do crazy ball," he said. "Yeah, for a striker, you just enjoy that."

Mbeumo is hoping to benefit from the experience of the Portuguese midfielder, who said last month he had rejected a huge offer from Saudi Arabia to stay at United despite their struggles last season.

"On the pitch, when you're smart like he is, I think you don't even need to think a lot," he said. "You just need to make the run and he's going to play you in the right space every time. But of course, you can have a little discussion to make him know how I prefer the balls and how I'm feeling the best to have the ball. But at a certain point, there is only one way, even if it's not the one you like, you have to do the run and he's going to put the ball in a good position."

Mbeumo's arrival follows the signings of Wolves forward Matheus Cunha and Paraguay left-back Diego Leon, from Cerro Porteno. United have recently been linked with Ollie Watkins – RB Leipzig's Benjamin Sesko is also a reported target – and Mbeumo described his former Brentford teammate as the "complete striker".

Mbeumo said of Watkins: "He's like a complete striker. He can do a lot of things."

AMORIM IS THE RIGHT MAN FOR UNITED, SAYS UGARTE

Meanwhile, midfielder Manuel Ugarte said finishing 15th in the Premier League was nowhere near good enough for Manchester United last season but the players still have faith in manager Ruben Amorim, Amorim took charge of United in November last year but guided them to just seven wins in 27 league matches and their worst-ever finish in the Premier League.

They also failed to qualify for the Champions League as they lost the Europa League final 1-0 to Tottenham Hotspur. "We have to improve things," Ugarte told British media. "We are all very motivated, because we believe in the coach, we believe in what he wants and that is very important," added the Uruguayan, who also played under Amorim at Sporting.

"Last year we made some changes, we changed our coach, we changed our formation. You have to have responsibilities when you play for United. Sometimes the connections take time to get to know each other. I already know the league, the rivals, which is important."

United will play two pre-season matches in the US, taking on Bournemouth in Chicago today and facing Everton in Atlanta on Sunday, before returning home to face Fiorentina at Old Trafford on August 9. They begin the new Premier League season against Arsenal on August 17.

ROUND-UP

Goalkeeper Trafford returns to Man City from Burnley

Goalkeeper **James Trafford** has signed a deal to return to Manchester City from Burnley, the Premier League giants announced. Man City activated a £27.5mn ($36.7mn) buy-back clause for the 22-year-old England youth international, according to British media reports. Trafford, who never played for the City senior team during his first spell at the Etihad Stadium, left for Burnley in 2023. He struggled in his first season as the Clarets were relegated from the Premier League, but equalled an English football record with 29 clean sheets last term to help Burnley earn promotion back into the top flight.

City coach Pep Guardiola dropped established number one Ederson multiple times last season in favour of Stefan Ortega. Trafford, who will wear the number one shirt, will battle with Brazilian Ederson to be first choice.

He is Man City's sixth signing of the transfer window after they finished third last season, well adrift of champions Liverpool in their bid for a fifth straight Premier League title.

Rayan Ait-Nouri, Tijjani Reijnders, Marcus Bettinelli, Rayan Cherki and Sverre Nypan have all already moved to the club since the end of last season.

STRIKER AUBAMEYANG CLOSE TO MARSEILLE RETURN: CLUB

Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang is set to return to Marseille after a season in Saudi Arabia, the Ligue 1 club said in a statement. The 36-year-old striker, a former Arsenal, Barcelona and Chelsea forward, previously played for Marseille during the 2023/24 campaign, scoring 30 goals in all competitions.

He moved to Al Qadsiah after Marseille failed to qualify for Europe, but has ended his contract with the Saudi Pro League side. Aubameyang is the Gabon national team's all-time leading scorer with 35 goals.

His other former clubs include AC Milan and Borussia Dortmund, while he has won several major trophies, including the 2022/23 La Liga title with Barcelona. Marseille finished second in Ligue 1 last term behind champions Paris Saint-Germain to qualify for the Champions League.

CHAMPIONS CHINA DRAWN WITH NORTH KOREA AT 2026 WOMEN'S ASIAN CUP

Defending champions China were drawn in the same group in Sydney yesterday as three-time winners North Korea for the 2026 Women's Asian Cup, while powerhouse Japan will take on Vietnam, India and Taiwan.



China are gunning for a 10th title and will also face tournament debutants Bangladesh and Uzbekistan in Group B at the showpiece event in Perth, Gold Coast and Sydney from March 1-21 next year. Japan, the highest FIFA-ranked team in the competition at seven, are top seeds in Group C, aiming to add to their 2014 and 2018 triumphs.

They will be making their 18th Asian Cup appearance and 16th in a row – both records.

Hosts Australia, the 2010 winners, have their work cut out in Group A with 2022 runners-up South Korea, Iran and the Philippines. They will be looking to channel the home support that drove them to the semi-finals at the 2023 World Cup on home soil. The top two sides from each group, along with the two best third-placed teams, progress to the quarter-finals, with the top six finishers booking their tickets to the 2027 World Cup in Brazil.

COLOMBIAN SUAREZ JOINS SPORTING FROM ALMERIA

Colombian forward Luis Suarez will join Sporting from Spanish side Almeria, with a contract until 2030 that has an exit clause of 80mn euros, the Portuguese club announced on Monday. Financial details were not disclosed, but according to Spanish media reports, the transfer fee was around 25mn euros. The 27-year-old began his career with Itagui Leones in Colombia's second division in 2015. He moved to Granada in Spain for the 2016/17 campaign and then played for Real Valladolid, Gimnastic de Tarragona, Real Zaragoza and Olympique de Marseille.