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SHOOTING

Qatar's Scalzone takes silver in trap showdown

Scalzone finished one target behind Hinton's winning tally of 28

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Angelo Scalzone of Qatar secured a hard-fought victory for silver in the men's trap event at the ISSF World Cup 2026 in Hangzhou yesterday.

William Hinton of the United States held off a relentless challenge from Scalzone in the final series to clinch gold.

The victory represents another important milestone for Hinton, who demonstrated exceptional consistency throughout the competition and converted it into one of the biggest international successes of his career.

In a final packed with Olympic medallists, world champions and rising talents, Hinton delivered the composure required when the pressure was at its highest.

After dropping two targets in the opening stages, the American settled into an outstanding rhythm, producing long sequences of perfect shooting to build momentum heading into the closing rounds.

Scalzone refused to let the contest slip away. The Qatari shooter matched Hinton target for target through much of the final, ensuring the battle for gold remained alive until the very end.

Ultimately, one late miss proved decisive as Hinton finished with 28 hits, one ahead of Scalzone's 27, to capture the World Cup title.

The home crowd had further reason to celebrate as Qi Ying claimed the bronze medal for China. Remaining firmly in medal contention throughout the eliminations, Qi finished with 22 hits, earning a well-deserved place on the podium after another composed display.

Italy's Massimo Fabbrizi, the London 2012 Olympic silver medallist and one of the most experienced athletes in international trap shooting, narrowly missed out on the medals.

He finished fourth with 16 hits, ending his campaign just short of another ISSF World Cup podium.

Chinese Taipei's Yang Kun-Pi took fifth place with 13 hits, while India's Bhowneesh Mendiratta followed in sixth on 11 after reaching another World Cup final.

The United States placed a second athlete in the final, with Jack Brosseau finishing seventh after scoring eight hits.

Completing the eight-athlete field was Italy's Giovanni Pelliolo, one of the most decorated shotgun shooters in ISSF history.

The four-time Olympic medallist exited in eighth place with seven hits, bringing an early end to his bid for another World Cup medal.

The men's trap final provided another thrilling conclusion to the shotgun programme in Hangzhou.

France's Carole Cormenier reaffirmed her status among the world's leading shotgun athletes by capturing the women's trap title yesterday, holding off a strong challenge from the United States' Rachel Tozier to secure gold.

Cormenier was in control throughout much of the final. After opening with a perfect first round, the French shooter maintained remarkable consistency as the eliminations unfolded, missing just three targets on her way to 27 hits.

Even as the pressure mounted in the closing stages, she remained composed to seal her first World Cup victory of the season.

The gold medal adds another significant achievement to the résumé of the French star.

A World Championship medallist, European champion and regular finalist on the ISSF circuit, Cormenier has been one of the most consistent trap shooters of the past decade, and her performance in Hangzhou demonstrated exactly why.

The battle for silver remained alive until the final series. Rachel Tozier matched Cormenier through the early stages before a handful of late misses left her with 25 hits. The American nevertheless enjoyed an outstanding competition, collecting another ISSF World Cup medal and continuing her steady rise among the discipline's leading athletes.

Australia's Kiara Sioux-Lin Dean completed the podium with 22 hits. The young Australian impressed throughout the final, staying in medal contention before securing bronze ahead of her experienced teammate Penny Smith.



Qatar's Angelo Scalzone celebrates after winning trap silver at the ISSF World Cup in Hangzhou yesterday.



FOCUS

Infantino slams World Cup critics for 'spreading hate'

AFF
Paris

FIFA president Gianni Infantino has hit back at World Cup critics, claiming they were “spreading hate and false rumours” and arguing the tournament delivered “only joy and happiness”.

In a long open letter published on Monday, Infantino urged detractors to “take a moment to reflect, meditate, pray” after a tournament marked by controversies ranging from ticket pricing to visa issues.

“Sorry that you were so consumed by hate and criticism that you missed it all,” Infantino wrote in a post shared on his Instagram account and FIFA's official channels.

“To those behind their pens and papers, behind their screens, spreading hate and false rumours, I want to say that while you are sitting behind, we at FIFA are on the front lines organising, working hard, and delivering the best show in the world.

“We experienced no violence, no incidents, 100% safety and security, only joy and happiness!

The build-up to the World Cup in Canada, Mexico and the United States was dominated by fears over sky-high prices, geopolitical tension, the shadow of conflict and the threat of brutal summer heat across the three host nations.

Iran's participation against the backdrop of war with the United States, along with concerns over Haiti's domestic crisis and the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo, brought renewed scrutiny to visa and travel restrictions.

Somali referee Omar Artan became arguably the highest-profile casualty of President Donald Trump's hardline immigration crackdown, when he was denied entry to the United States.

Infantino, however, defended

FIFA's handling of the tournament.

“While you spread hatred, we worked tirelessly to unite two countries at war. Iran entered the United States without incident or conflict,” he said.

“The Iranian team received visas to enter because football is about peace. It's not about politics.”

“Countries facing serious health issues or other challenges were granted visas,” Infantino added.

“You mentioned the few people denied visas and overlooked the millions who were approved, from all parts of the world.”

His remarks contrasted sharply with those of Iran coach Amir Ghalenoei, who said his side had been the “most oppressed” team at the World Cup. Star striker Mehdi Taremi called his team's treatment at the tournament a “disaster”.

Infantino also addressed criticism of officiating at the World Cup after it emerged Trump had personally asked the FIFA president to review a one-match suspension handed to US striker Folarin Balogun, allowing him to face Belgium in the last 16.

European football's governing body UEFA were among those who were critical of the Balogun affair terming it “unprecedented, incomprehensible and unjustifiable” and said it “crossed a red line”.

“Your dissatisfaction with a few decisions made by the competent authorities is understandable, but please refer to public records: such decisions are common in some of the most important leagues,” said Infantino addressing his critics.

“Indeed, ‘arguable’ referees’ decisions or ‘strange’ disciplinary rulings such as for instance potentially mistaken red or yellow cards or subsequent decisions not to ban players in certain situations are routine and widely accepted in some of the biggest leagues worldwide.

“It's curious that the same countries employing these practices are the ones criticising.”



FIFA President Gianni Infantino with the World Cup trophy during a press conference in Mexico City on June 10, 2026. (Reuters)

Al Sadd step up preparations at Austrian training camp ahead of new season



Al Sadd are continuing their preparations for the 2026-2027 season at their pre-season camp in Linz, Austria, which began on July 13 and continues until August 7 as they gear up for domestic and continental competitions.

Under Romanian coach Razvan Lucescu, Al Sadd are undergoing a comprehensive training programme that includes four friendly matches, aimed at improving the players' readiness and helping them reach their peak performance before the start of season.

In their first friendly, they lost 1-2 to Czech club SK Sigma Olomouc. The camp includes a total of 26 players, such as Roberto Firmino, Akram Afif, Claudinho, Paulo Otavio, Abdessamed Bounacer,

Augustin Soria, Giovanni Henrique, Rafa Mújica, Guilherme Torres, Hassan al-Haydous, Meshaal Barsham, Saad al-Dossari, Boualem Khoukhi, Tarek Salman and Hashim Ali besides technical and administrative staff.

Al Sadd enter the new season on a high after winning the 2025-2026 Doha Bank Stars League title (third successive title and 19th overall) following a 3-2 victory over Al Shamal in the final round of competition. In the process, The Wolves also enjoyed a 10-match winning streak, the longest by any team last season.

Al Sadd finished with 45 points from 14 wins, three draws and five defeats, while scoring 56 goals and conceding 30.

Lucescu affirmed that Al Sadd are one of the biggest clubs in Asia and the region, adding that the team aspires to compete for all titles in the new season, most notably AFC Champions League Elite and Amir Cup, while maintaining their identity and attacking style on the field.

Last season also saw Akram being crowned the Best Player at Qatar Football Association (QFA) Awards for 2025-2026 season, while Al Sadd bagged the Best Fans Award. They also won the Qatar-UAE Super Cup's Super Shield by beating Shabab Al Ahli 3-2.

Al Sadd will open their Qatar Stars League campaign against Al Ahli at the Jassim Bin Hamad Stadium on August 22.

HOW CRICKET COULD BECOME THE IOC'S GATEWAY TO INDIA

LAUSANNE: When cricket returns to the Olympics in Los Angeles in 2028, it will bring far more than bats, balls and wickets. Its inclusion reflects a strategic calculation by Olympic leaders that the surest route to billions of new viewers runs through India, cricket's commercial heartland and a country they believe is increasingly central to the Games' future. Cricket, absent from the Olympics since 1900, offers the International Olympic Committee something no recent addition has: direct access to a fan base of more than 2 billion people and, crucially, the commercial power of the Indian market. As the Games seek a younger and broader audience, it may prove the most valuable sport added to the Olympic programme in decades. Cricket has been one of the major global sports not to feature in the Olympics, IOC Sports Director Pierre Ducrey told Reuters in an interview. "It is very strong in markets where maybe you could say the Olympic Games today may not have penetrated as much as they have in other markets," he said. "Cricket will bring to the LA Games audiences that may not necessarily tune in regularly to watch the Olympic Games," Ducrey added. "It's a win-win compromise where we'll give them more opportu-

nities, and they will definitely strengthen our appeal in markets that are very strongly interested in cricket and sometimes mostly in cricket."

INTEREST IN BROADCASTING RIGHTS

The sport's imminent return to the Olympics has already generated demand, with the IOC confirming "strong interest" in broadcasting rights for the Indian subcontinent for the 2028 Games. That would amount to "a multiple" of the value of the 2024 Games contract, IOC Television and Marketing Services Managing Director Anne-Sophie Voumard told Indian media late last year. The Paris 2024 contract was estimated to be worth around \$30mn. "Regarding media rights for the LA28 Olympic Games in the Indian subcontinent, we are currently engaged in constructive discussions with a number of key players across the region," an IOC spokesperson told Reuters. "We can confirm that there has been strong interest from the market, reflecting both the momentum behind the LA28 Olympic Games and the addition of cricket to the sports programme." There are already close relationships between the Olympics and cricket in the region's media mar-



India's Rohit Sharma in action against England at Lord's Cricket Ground in London on July 19, 2026. (Reuters)

ket. Billionaire Mukesh Ambani's Indian broadcaster JioStar, formed from the Reliance Industries and Walt Disney merger of their Indian media assets in 2024, owned the rights for the Paris 2024 Games and the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Games, and also holds the rights to broadcast the Indian Premier League, the country's top cricket league. Ambani's wife Nita is an IOC member and hosted the 2023 IOC session in Mumbai.

T20 RISE

Cricket returned to the Olympic conversation after the IOC

recognised the International Cricket Council in 2010, but the sport's traditional five-day Tests and eight-hour one-day internationals remained impractical for the Games. The breakthrough came with the explosive rise of Twenty20, a three-hour format whose popularity coincided with IOC reforms in 2014 allowing host cities to propose additional sports, paving the way for Los Angeles to bring cricket back in 2028. Beyond its brevity, the high volatility and international reach of T20 made it tailor-made for the Olympics, said ICC Chief Executive Sanjog Gupta, who was previously

the CEO of sports and live experiences at JioStar. "The jeopardy or the unpredictability that live sports benefit from is maximised in this format," Gupta told Reuters. Unlike Test matches, which are restricted to the ICC's 12 full members, T20 can claim to be cricket's true global format. "Avenues of participation have been expanded significantly to really position this format as cricket's handshake with the world," Gupta said. "It's global, more accessible and representative. T20 ticks all the right boxes."

LONG PROCESS

LA28 will mark the end of a 21-year journey that started with cricket's provisional recognition by the IOC back in 2007. "The interests of some of the federations, the interests of the Olympic movement at large, sometimes converge, sometimes they don't," Ducrey said. "And it took some time for the interests of the International Cricket Council, of the sport of cricket at large, and those of the Olympic movement to align in a more significant way that led to the discussions around the 2028 program." "So a long journey, but I would say one that was consistently getting our movements and our sports, and our interests closer and closer." Cricket's commercial rise has

been fuelled by the Indian Premier League, which has transformed the sport over the past two decades, attracting the world's leading players and becoming one of the most valuable sports competitions globally. The 10-team IPL is now valued at around \$20bn, with the 2026 season drawing 1.2 billion viewers across platforms.

OLYMPIC FUTURE

Cricket is expected to remain in the Games beyond 2028. The 2032 Games will be held in Brisbane, Australia - another country with a strong cricketing tradition - and India is heavily pushing Ahmedabad to host the Games in 2036. Beyond geographic expansion, cricket offers a highly coveted demographic. According to ICC chief executive Gupta, nearly 50% of followers are under 35 and 35% are under 27, making cricket "future-ready". By including cricket, the Olympic movement is poised to reap a significant "demographic dividend", said Gupta. "As the Olympic movement looks to the future of its own significance and relevance of sport in various markets, cricket can potentially play a huge role in driving that forward," he said. "Cricket is the fastest growing large-scale team sport in the world. It's a massive opportunity for the Olympic movement to ride on."

CRICKET

Laxman hails Sooryavanshi's leap with India

The IPL star has wasted no time to settle down in India colours

Reuters
Harare

India's teenage batting sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi has shown remarkable maturity over the past six months, a quality that has enabled him to thrive in high-pressure matches after a rapid rise in cricket, coach VVS Laxman said yesterday. Sooryavanshi smashed an 18-ball half-century in the opening Twenty20 against Zimbabwe before scoring 81 on Sunday as India completed a 3-0 sweep of the hosts.

The 15-year-old, fast-tracked into international cricket following a breakthrough Indian Premier League season, was named Player of the Series after scoring two half-centuries in the three-match contest.

"Very mature. That's what I really appreciate about Vaibhav," Laxman told reporters.

"With every experience and every match, he understands, assesses and gets better. He reviews every practice session, not just matches.

"His maturity, understanding and awareness over the last six months have skyrocketed. That's why he's been able to handle tough situations and perform under pressure against the best players."

Sooryavanshi's success in Zimbabwe came after a difficult start to his international career in England earlier this month.

The youngest player to represent India registered scores of 14, 13 and 15 in his first three T20 internationals before being left out of the fifth match.

Laxman, who has tracked Sooryavanshi's progress from



India's Vaibhav Sooryavanshi plays a shot during the third Twenty20 against Zimbabwe at Harare Sports Club in Harare, on Sunday. (AFP)

age-group cricket through the IPL and into the senior national side, said the teenager's willingness to learn had been one of his greatest strengths, but managing his fitness remained an important area of development.

"The one area we want him to improve is his overall fitness," Laxman said.

"He's a very young boy. He

himself wants to get better in every aspect of the game. Even today (on Sunday), when he got injured (while attempting a diving catch running in from deep square leg), he still wanted to stay on the field.

"It was our physio who asked him to come off. That's the eagerness and earnestness he has to contribute in every possible way to the team."

Laxman said he was not concerned by the left-hander's struggles in England and backed him to build on his strong start to international cricket.

"I'm sure he will progress and break all the records at the international level," he said.

"He's got all the potential and ability to do that," the Indian coach added.

SPOTLIGHT

'Fresh' Evenepoel answers questions after second-place finish



Belgian rider Remco Evenepoel cycles past the Sacre Coeur basilica during the 21st stage of the 113th edition of the Tour de France, 88.7 km starting and finishing in Paris, on Sunday. (AFP)

AFP
Paris

Olympic champion Remco Evenepoel said he had answered a lot of questions with his impressive Tour de France showing.

The 26-year-old Belgian has become the world's best time-trialist since bursting onto the professional scene as a precocious teenager in 2019.

He also enjoyed early success in week-long stage races and punchy one-day classics.

But despite winning the 2022 Vuelta a Espana, and finishing third at the Tour in 2024, many experts felt that Evenepoel lacked the climbing endurance to be a consistent challenger to the very best at the Tour de France.

Having won two stages and finished second overall to five-time winner Tadej Pogacar at the Tour, Evenepoel said he had proved that he belonged amongst the sport's elite climbers.

"We learned a lot about my physique, about my mentality, my weight and the watts per kilo," said the three-time world time-trial champion.

"We learned a lot in this Tour de France without really having to go over the limit.

"So, for the future, we have a lot of answers to questions."

One of those answers was whether or not he could maintain his form into the third week of the most arduous of Grand Tours.

If anything, he actually improved.

"I showed to myself and also towards the team that I was on a very good level and a high level for three weeks," he said after Sunday's final stage.

"Now, I feel still really fresh, no real fatigue in the body.

"That's good and we will take that towards the future."

During the first half of the race, Evenepoel had lost contact with other contenders for a podium finish - such as Jonas Vingegaard, Paul Seixas, Isaac del Toro and even his own Red Bull-Bora Hansgrohe team-mate Florian Lipowitz - on the longer, tougher climbs.

But in most cases, he managed to catch up with those rivals on a subsequent descent, allowing him to even gain time on occasions rather than losing it.

But in the final week, after Vingegaard and Lipowitz had crashed out of the race, he was the one distancing his podium rivals when the race headed uphill.

He finished more than three minutes ahead of Del Toro and five and a half minutes ahead of Seixas in the final standings.

Evenepoel won a stage with a mountain top finish for the first time at the Tour and was also second on two other such stages.

On the back-to-back stages finishing on the iconic Alpe d'Huez climb, he proved stronger than all of his podium rivals - except Pogacar, of course.

"What we achieved is what we were aiming for, to get the stage win and then finishing on the podium, like in 2024," he said.

"But now it was two stage wins, two very nice second places as well in very hard stages.

"That really shows that I've gone up a step in terms of climbing level and in performance on the hardest stages."

He had said earlier this year that his overall goal was still to win the Tour de France one day - something which seemed like a pipe dream given the competition.

Pogacar is only one year older than Evenepoel and continues to look unbeatable at the Tour.

And even when he retires, the next generation are already performing at an elite level.

Del Toro is 22 and Seixas is 19, and both have a greater scope for improvement than Evenepoel.

Seixas, in particular, was riding a three-week Grand Tour for the first time and visibly ran out of steam in the latter stages.

He will likely be an altogether different proposition next year at the Tour.

But Evenepoel is now convinced that his ultimate goal is an attainable one.

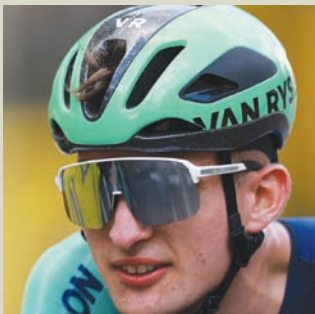
"After this result, I think I've shown towards myself, my team and also to the outside world that I deserve to dream and aim for that," he said.

Del Toro, Seixas show glimpse into Tour de France future

PARIS: Tadej Pogacar romped to another dominant Tour de France victory but cycling fans were treated to a glimpse into the future with the battle for the best young rider's white jersey. After a close contest which began right from the Grand Depart in Barcelona, Mexican Isaac Del Toro, 22, edged 19-year-old French prodigy Paul Seixas both to third place and the white jersey. Pogacar may go on dominating the sport for many more years, but at the very least he is likely to face some stiffer opposition as younger rivals mature and progress. "The next genera-

tion is looking very sharp," said Pogacar, pointing to his friend and team-mate Del Toro. "A lot of other riders are coming up super strong, it's a good future for cycling what's coming in the next years."

Del Toro eventually finished just over two minutes ahead of Seixas but that gap belied how close their arm-wrestle had been, with just 24 seconds separating them at the start of Saturday's Queen stage in the Alps. Seixas may feel some disappointment in missing out on the podium after he "cracked" on Saturday, but the magnitude



Paul Seixas

of his achievement cannot be understated. He was the youngest rider to start a Tour since

Adrien Cento in 1937. Del Toro, by contrast, was riding in his third Grand Tour and last year had come within a whisker of winning the Giro d'Italia.

So to push the Mexican all the way and finish fourth in what is cycling's toughest race - and on top of that, one made materially harder by 10 days of heatwave - is a quite astonishing result.

"In a few days, with a bit of air, there will be some pride," said Seixas. He comfortably beat the likes of Juan Ayuso and Tom Pidcock, who have both finished on the Vuelta a Espana podium in recent years.

FORMULA 1

Norris feels he's doing a better job than last year

'I CERTAINLY WANT TO BELIEVE THAT WE CAN CONTINUE IT'

Reuters
Budapest

Formula One champion **Lando Norris** feels he is driving better than last year even though Sunday's Hungarian Grand Prix was McLaren's first win of the season. The Briton is fifth overall, a massive 91 points behind Mercedes' championship leader Kimi Antonelli who has won six of 11 rounds, as the sport goes into its August break.

Norris also won in Hungary last year, his fifth victory by that point of the campaign although that was round 14 then, and was second overall and nine points behind teammate Oscar Piastri, who had won six and looked the more likely to win the title.

"I feel like I'm doing a better job this year than I was last year...I've said that for a while. It just doesn't mean you win the races," Norris said after winning from pole position at the Hungarian in his upgraded car, his first win since last November in Brazil.

"I certainly want to believe that we can continue it," he said. "This is maybe as good as it can look for now, but I certainly believe we can still win races."

NORRIS HAS GROWN AS A DRIVER

McLaren have more upgrades to come but Mercedes and Ferrari are multiple winners this season and Max Verstappen's second



place on Sunday, after also finishing second in Austria in June, showed that Red Bull are knocking on the door.

Sunday was only Norris's third podium of the season, after second in Miami and third in Barcelona.

Team boss Andrea Stella said the 26-year-old had grown as a driver since winning the title.

"I've been quite impressed by Lando following the way he has

reacted to the first one third of the season last year...there were clear learning points and he embraced the challenge," Stella said. "So I think what we see here is just the continuation of this trajectory."

"Lando is much more confident. I think he's much more aware of his tools that he has in his driving. How to deploy those tools. And I think he's also, let me say, more in control of his emotions."

"When he was behind Oscar (on Sunday) he said a couple of times that he had pace in hand but he didn't get overly frustrated."

"And the fact that he wasn't overly frustrated I think then allowed him to use the pace at the right time and led him to the victory."

"So I think we've seen a great trajectory of development for Lando and this is honestly the same with Oscar."

ATHLETICS

'Just cramp' - Lyles pulls up in 200m US title bid

AFF
New York

US sprint star Noah Lyles pulled up with cramp in the 200m final at the US athletics championships on Sunday, his bid for a title double undone as Garrett Kaalund claimed the victory.

Lyles, who won the 100m on Friday in a world-leading 9.79sec, pulled up as he came off the turn and jogged to the line, telling reporters he felt a grabbing sensation in his right thigh.

"I'm like, yeah, there's no reason to keep pushing that," he said. "I just decided to cut it off."

Fans at Icahn Stadium in New York were stunned, but the 2024 100m Olympic gold medallist downplayed potential injury concerns.

"It's just cramp. I've got some electrolytes here, I'm going to chug them down. I'm going to rest."

Lyles walked over to give Kaalund a congratulatory hug after the 22-year-old captured the title in 20.04sec.

"It's kind of crazy," Kaalund said.

Brandon Hicklin was second and Maximilian Thomas third, both credited with a time of 20.29sec.

Melissa Jefferson-Wooden, a treble gold medallist at last September's world championships, won the women's 200m in 21.69sec - just one-hundredth off her personal best.

Jefferson-Wooden came off the turn in front and powered home with Cambrea Sturgis second in 22.22 and Camryn Dickson third in 22.58.

Jefferson-Wooden had opted out of the 100m, which was won by Sha'Carri Richardson.

In a year with no world championships or Olympic team berths on the line, some well-known names opted out of the national championships or tweaked their programs, but there were still



Noah Lyles congratulates Garrett Kaalund for winning the 200m final during the 2026 USATF Outdoor Track & Field Championships at Icahn Stadium in New York. (AFP)



Valarie Sion competes in the discus throw final. Sion won the gold medal. (AFP)

plenty of familiar winners. Tara Davis-Woodhall pushed her long jump winning streak to 19 competitions in dramatic style, unleashing a leap of 7.16m on her sixth and final attempt to triumph.

Davis-Woodhall hasn't lost in the event since a runner-up finish at the 2023 world championships, a streak that includes 2024 Olympic gold and last year's world title.

Her final jump carried her past Alyssa Jones, who settled for second on 6.96, and Monae' Nichols, who took bronze in 6.92. "Today I was like, 'Let's try to do one and done, please,'" Davis-Woodhall said. "And of course it never works out that way. It was a battle for sure."

CLOSE CALL

Cordell Tinch, the 110m hurdles world champion, won his first national title by the narrowest of margins, edging Bradley Franklin by four one-thousandths of a second. Both were credited with a time of 13.00sec, but when the times were expanded Tinch got the nod at 12.993 to Franklin's 12.997.

Tinch said he knew at the line he'd bagged the win.

"I knew when we crossed the line it didn't matter how close he was," he said. "I knew I took first."

Two-time reigning Olympic

champion and last year's world champion Valarie Sion won her eighth straight women's discus title with a throw of 69.54m.

She held off Cierra Jackson, who took second at 67.40 just a week after topping Sion at the London Diamond League.

And Cooper Lutkenhaus, the 17-year-old sensation who won the indoor 800m world title and has bagged two Diamond League victories this year, won his first outdoor 800m national title in 1min 43.48sec.

Lutkenhaus made his move with 200m to go and pulled away for a crushing victory over Wes Ferguson, who clocked 1:44.55.

"It was amazing," said Lutkenhaus, who let out a mighty roar as he broke the tape to achieve his goal of winning both the indoor and outdoor US titles this year in his final race of the season.

GOLF

New pro Koivun holds off Scheffler to win PGA 3M Open, bags \$1.58mn



Jackson Koivun of the United States poses with the Elemental Swing trophy after winning the 3M Open at TPC Twin Cities in Blaine, Minnesota, on Sunday. (AFP)

AFF
Washington

Jackson Koivun, playing only his third PGA Tour event as a professional, held off top-ranked Scottie Scheffler in Sunday's final round to capture the 3M Open in record fashion.

The 21-year-old American fired a five-under par 66 to finish 72 holes in a tournament record 25-under par 259 at TPC Twin Cities in Blaine, Minnesota, to defeat Scheffler by three strokes.

Koivun got richer by \$1.58mn.

"I played a great round of golf," Koivun said. "Had some nerves coming down 18. All throughout the crowd I kept hearing, 'Scottie's coming, Scottie's coming!'"

"I just tried to tune that out and keep playing the golf I knew I could and was able to find some good putts coming down the stretch."

American Lee Hodges set the prior 3M Open scoring record at 24-under 260 to win in 2023.

Former world amateur number one Koivun, who didn't miss a putt inside five feet all week, fired a 61 on Saturday to lead by three on the way to his first PGA triumph in just 24 days as a pro, poised and calm under pressure.

Koivun took some of his aggressive shotmaking from words written on his glove - confidence, trust and dominate.

"Dominate is a word I came up with in college because I wanted to see how good I can play," Koivun said. "It helped me a lot in college golf with my mindset and I just kept doing it."

Scheffler, a four-time major winner, fired a bogey-free 63 to finish second on 262 with Brian Harman, the 2023 British Open champion, fellow Americans Denny McCarthy and Chandler Phillips and Japan's Hideki Mat-

suyama, the 2021 Masters winner, sharing third on 264.

Scheffler birdied six of his first 12 holes but the 30-year-old American came up short in what would have been the greatest last-round comeback of his career, having started six adrift.

"Not everything I hoped for," said Scheffler. "I did what I could today. I was close... put up a good fight. Played nice today."

Scheffler, who won in January in the California desert, now has five runner-up efforts, including the Masters, among 11 top-four finishes this year.

At the first, Koivun landed his approach inches from the hole and tapped in for birdie.

Scheffler birdied three of the first eight holes to join a second-place pack. Koivun, however, sank an 11-foot birdie putt at the par-three fourth and a tap-in birdie at the par-five sixth to grab a five-shot edge.

Scheffler began the back nine with three birdies, holing a four-foot putt at 10, a 28-foot putt at 11 and another from just outside 12 feet at the par-five 12th to reach 20-under and pull within three of the lead.

Koivun answered with a par putt from just inside 15 feet at nine to keep that margin at the turn.

Koivun sank a 10-foot birdie putt at 12, but Scheffler, who lipped out a five-foot birdie putt at 14, responded with a birdie putt from just inside five feet at 16 to stay three adrift. Scheffler birdied the par-five 18th from just inside five feet to reach the clubhouse two off the lead.

Koivun drove the green at the par-four 16th and birdied from just outside five feet to restore his three-stroke edge, then parred 17 and closed with a par putt at 18 from just inside 14 feet for the victory.

FOCUS

Langton feared for gymnastics future after horror fall at Games

AFF
Glasgow

English gymnast **Gabriel Langton** admitted he feared for his future in the sport after a "freak" horror fall at the Commonwealth Games.

The 19-year-old fell head-first from three metres after missing his catch on the horizontal bar during the men's team event in Glasgow, spending the night in hospital.

"I knew that I could talk still, I could move a lot of things but I was just hoping that I could do gym again really," said Langton, after scans revealed nothing worse than soreness and swelling.

"With other injuries like a leg injury, it's not nice but you know most of the time that those things will heal. I suppose neck injuries are to be taken seriously, so I was just hoping that it wasn't anything too bad. When I got the scans back, it was a big relief. My thought process switched quite quickly to being 'I should be back in the gym quite soon.'"

Langton returned to the team hotel on Saturday, where he was reunited with his England teammates and presented with a silver medal.

The gymnast, who was not concussed and never lost consciousness during the incident, said he did not expect the accident to have a lasting impact.

"I've done that skill so many times - probably about 10,000 times - and this has happened once," he said. "I think you can see that this was just a freak accident



and it was just a shame that it happened under these circumstances.

"I'm pretty confident that I can put it to one side and trust in my gymnastics again."

Before his fall, Langton was attempting to move into a handstand position on the high bar but lost his grip and fell head first on to the mat.

"Once I went up and both hands have left the bar that is not the best," he said.

"From that moment, I knew 'oh this isn't going to be comfortable'."

The England team went on to secure a silver medal behind Canada in the competition, *BBC* reported.

The teenager did not receive his medal until he returned to the team hotel on Saturday evening, with the other members of the team gathering to applaud him.

"That was incredible," he said.

"Seeing all of the team-mates, coaches and getting my medal. I saw my personal coach from Birmingham. It was so nice."

"I trust in my gymnastics capability," he said. "It was really just a freak accident."

FOOTBALL

Pirlo bitter over debate that cost him Italy coaching job

Conte is back in the frame for the job of coaching Euro 2020 champs

AFP
Rome

Former Italy playmaker **Andrea Pirlo**, who was favoured for the national coaching post, expressed his bitterness on Monday over the debate which has led to him no longer being a candidate.

The 47-year-old had, to many Italian fans' surprise, become the favourite to be tasked with reviving the national side's fortunes after they failed for the third successive time to qualify for the World Cup.

He had benefitted from Spanish great Pep Guardiola declining an offer.

Despite the latest setback, Giovanni Malago, president of the Italian Football Federation (FIGC), said later on Monday that the new coach would be named "soon".

Whilst Pirlo had a stellar playing career - including being a key member of the 2006 World Cup-winning side - his coaching CV is short on success.

A contract with a Russian betting firm had only added fuel to misgivings, with several Italian politicians saying over the weekend that his appointment would be inappropriate.

"(I) learned yesterday evening that I am no longer a candidate to be coach of the national side," Pirlo wrote in a post on Instagram, adding that he felt the need to "clarify certain points".

'Great bitterness'

According to Italian media, he was due to be named this week despite his only trophy success since turning to coaching in 2020 being a single Italian Cup.

Presently coach of United Arab



Emirates side Dubai United, he failed to deliver when in charge of Juventus - for whom he had sparkled as a player - Sampdoria and Turkish outfit Karagumruk.

Pirlo said in his post that he was angry at being judged not on his sporting record but on the wider issue over his links to Russia.

He and fellow 2006 World Cup winner Marco Materazzi had taken part in May at an event held by the betting firm in the Luzhniki Stadium in Moscow, signing autographs.

"I have followed with great bitterness the debate surrounding my candidacy," he wrote, whilst thanking Italy's technical director and former AC Milan teammate Paolo Maldini and his advisor Le-

onardo for their "esteem and confidence (in him)".

"I regret that a decision which is based on sporting criteria rapidly became a public controversy, in which intentions and ideas which do not reflect my personality were attributed to me."

According to Italian media, whilst Leonardo and Maldini preferred Pirlo to the prickly but significantly more successful Antonio Conte, newly-installed federation chief Malago had been against the appointment from the start.

Conte - who has won the Serie A title with three different clubs and also the Premier League with Chelsea - is back in the frame for the job of coaching the Euro

2020 champions, according to *la Gazzetta dello Sport*.

Conte, who turns 57 on Friday, previously coached Italy from 2014-16, guiding the Italians to the Euro 2016 quarter-finals where they lost to Germany on penalties.

Maldini is apparently threatening to resign, after just three weeks in the job, if either Conte or another former national coach Roberto Mancini, who coached them to Euro 2020 success, is appointed.

The former AC Milan and Italy legend's preferred choice now is Brazil-born former Italy international Thiago Motta, who has coached Bologna and Juventus, amongst other clubs.

BASKETBALL

Qatar beat Kuwait to stay top in Asia Cup Gulf Qualifiers

By Sports Reporter
Doha

Qatar continued their impressive run in the FIBA U18 Asia Cup Gulf Qualifiers with a commanding 81-53 victory over Kuwait at the Al Gharafa Indoor Hall yesterday, strengthening their bid for a place at the continental finals in Ahmedabad, India, this August.

The hosts produced another dominant display to register their second successive win and move to the top of the standings with four points, level with Bahrain but ahead on points difference. The victory further underlined Qatar's credentials as one of the leading contenders for the two qualifying berths on offer.

Fresh from an exciting 80-76 opening-round win over Saudi Arabia, Qatar once again showcased their growing confidence, tactical discipline and defensive intensity. The team controlled the contest from the outset, combining organized defense with swift transition play and clinical finishing to overpower Kuwait.

Qatar seized the initiative by taking the opening quarter 20-14 before extending their

advantage with a 26-13 second-quarter performance to establish a comfortable half-time lead. The hosts maintained their momentum after the break, dominating the third quarter 25-14 to put the result beyond doubt. Kuwait managed to edge the final period 12-10, but the outcome was never in doubt as Qatar cruised to a convincing 28-point victory.

Abdullah Yassin starred for Qatar with a game-high 21 points, while Kuwait's Ali al-Hindal led his side with 11 points.

In the other second-round match, Bahrain also remained unbeaten after routing Oman 94-49. Bahrain dominated throughout, taking the first three quarters 22-12, 30-10 and 25-9 before Oman narrowly won the fourth 18-17. The emphatic victory followed Bahrain's opening 62-54 success over Saudi Arabia.

After two rounds, Qatar and Bahrain lead the standings with four points each, while Oman and Kuwait are third and fourth on three points apiece. Saudi Arabia are fifth with two points, leaving the race for the two qualification spots wide open heading into the remaining matches of the round-robin competition.



Action from Qatar-Kuwait FIBA U-18 Asia Cup Gulf Qualifiers match held at the Al Gharafa Indoor Hall yesterday.

FOCUS

Alonso says 'great signing' Rogers can rejuvenate Chelsea

AFP
Sydney

New Chelsea manager Xabi Alonso on Monday said Morgan Rogers was "a great signing" who would make the club more competitive and expected the England midfielder to "link really well" with Cole Palmer.

The versatile Rogers was signed from Aston Villa last week for £117mn (\$157mn), a record for a British player.

Alonso said he was "delighted" to lure the 23-year-old to Stamford Bridge ahead of his first match in charge, a pre-season friendly against Western Sydney Wanderers on Tuesday.

"It's a great signing. I think that in that position, we needed an important player, and I'm sure that there were not many more better options than Morgan," the Spaniard told reporters.

"So we are delighted. It means a lot for everyone."

The swoop is a significant statement of intent from Chelsea, who finished 10th in the Premier League last season and missed out on Europe.

Alonso will have to find a way to accommodate Rogers, Palmer, Pedro Neto, Estevao Willian and another close-season signing, Geovany Quenda, into his attacking midfield positions.

"I have a plan. I have an idea. I can see them linking really well," Alonso said on how Morgan could fit in alongside Palmer. The pair are close friends who have similar playing styles.

"You need to have a good mix, good stability players, and players that can play with more freedom," Alonso added.

"And if we get that balance right, and we get those special players in the right positions, with good control, I think that we will



Chelsea's manager Xabi Alonso speaks during a press conference in Sydney yesterday. (AFP)

be more competitive with the ball and against the ball."

Chelsea had reportedly been chasing Rogers for two years and beat Arsenal to his signature after the Premier League champions refused to match the eye-watering fee demanded by Villa.

His transfer surpassed the previous record fee for a British player set by Manchester City when they signed England midfielder Elliot Anderson from Nottingham Forest for £116 million earlier this month.

"I think that one of his best qualities is that he's flexible," Alonso said of Rogers, who is not on their pre-season trip to Australia after helping England to finish third at the World Cup.

"I think that he can play in

that pocket position, close to the striker, close to the turn, but he's played as well on the right. But I think more coming from the left.

"We (will) play him where he feels he is enjoying his game, that he feels his flow. I'm sure that he will have good connections with the other players that he can have around him."

"So if we get those connections right, those little associations between them that they look for each other and they connect well, I think that it will be a great step forward in the quality of our game."

Chelsea will also play fellow London club Tottenham Hotspur on Saturday in Sydney, before flying to Hong Kong for a match against Juventus on August 5.

SPOTLIGHT

De Zerbi wants 'soul and passion' from new-look Tottenham

AFP
Sydney

Tottenham manager Roberto De Zerbi urged his team on Monday to play with "soul and passion" as the London club rebuild after narrowly avoiding relegation from the Premier League.

Spurs have embarked on an aggressive summer of spending to boost their fortunes after avoiding the drop by coming 17th, but it was a nail-biting outcome that went down to the wire. Big-money signings include midfielders Mateus Fernandes from West Ham and Sandro Tonali from Newcastle. De Zerbi also raided his old club Brighton for centre-back Jan Paul van Hecke.

Full-back Andy Robertson, centre-back Marcos Senesi and goalkeeper Martin Dubravka have all arrived on free transfers as the squad takes on a new look.

De Zerbi, in Sydney on a pre-season tour, said he expected more when the new campaign begins on August 22 and outlined that he wanted to "build a new team with the qualities, with big players, but with soul, with passion, with all the values we have".



Tottenham Hotspur's Micky van de Ven (left) poses with Sydney FC's Jordan Courtney-Perkins during an official event in front of the Sydney Opera House yesterday. (AFP)

The Italian added: "Football now is not just on the pitch, it's not just with the ball, it's before, it's in life. It's how many hours during the day you think about your job."

Spurs opened their pre-season tour with an entertaining 2-0 win over A-League champions Auckland FC in New Zealand on Sunday with goals from Dane Scarlett and Richarlison.

They face Sydney FC on Wednesday then meet London rivals Chelsea in Sydney three days later.

De Zerbi started with a host of younger players in Auckland, before more of a first team feel

in the final 30 minutes when the likes of Fernandes, Richarlison, Conor Gallagher and Ben Davies all got a run.

"We didn't concede, we didn't suffer any injuries and this is big news, important news, especially for the beginning of the season," said De Zerbi. He suggested there could be more signings before the transfer window closes.

"I think we can be happier at the end of this transfer market because I spoke a lot of time with the owner, with the board and they want to build a very strong team for this season, to make the days for the future become great again," he said.

NEWCASTLE'S BARNES SIGNS LONG-TERM CONTRACT EXTENSION

Harvey Barnes has committed his future to Newcastle after signing a new "long-term" contract with the Premier League club yesterday. Barnes had two years remaining on his previous deal but Newcastle convinced the England international to extend his stay at St James' Park ahead of the new season. He had been linked with a move to Aston Villa, who are looking for new forwards after selling Morgan Rogers to Chelsea. Barnes's decision is a major boost for Newcastle after Anthony Gordon's move to Barcelona and Sandro Tonali's switch to Tottenham earlier in the close-season. Newcastle are also hoping to keep

captain Bruno Guimaraes amid Arsenal's interest in the Brazil midfielder. "It feels great to sign this new contract so early before the new season starts. It's been an amazing journey so far and I'm delighted to continue that," Barnes said. "When I first joined the club I quickly learned what a special place it is, but after three years here I know that even more. I love everything about it - the city, the stadium, the people - and I'm really happy extending my time here." Barnes, who joined Newcastle from Leicester in 2023, enjoyed a fine campaign last season, with 16 goals in 57 games in all competitions.