SPORT ↘14

PHILIPSEN WINS TOUR DE FRANCE SPRINT, GIRMAY FALLS BUT RETAINS GREEN JERSEY



SPORT ↘15

'CLASS ACT' SOUTHGATE QUITS AS ENGLAND MANAGER AFTER EURO DISAPPOINTMENT



'Dream comes true' as Mbappe joins Real



French forward Kylian Mbappe greets fans next to French former football player Zinedine Zidane (left), Real Madrid Honorary President Jose Martinez Pirri and Real Madrid's President Florentino Perez (right) during his first appearance at the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium. AFP

MADRID: French superstar Kylian Mbappe was officially unveiled as a Real Madrid player yesterday, telling 80,000 fans "my dream has come true".

"I've slept for many years with the dream of playing for Real Madrid and today my dream has come true," Mbappe told fans gathered in record numbers to greet him at the club's Santiago Bernabeu stadium.

The striker, who had completed his medical earlier on Tuesday morning, signed a five-year contract and was handed a No. 9 shirt by club president Florentino Perez.

Accompanied by his parents watching from the crowd and with a former French hero of the club, Zinedine Zidane, in attendance, Mbappe was emotional as the crowd chanted his name, and at one point kissed the jersey of the reigning Spanish and European champions.

"My family is happy and my mum is crying," said the 25-year-old former Paris Saint-Germain player.

"My dream is to measure up to this club, the greatest club in history," he told the fans. "I will give my life for this club and this crest."

"I'd like to send a message to the children," he continued.

"I was like you, I had a dream and today I have fulfilled it. I want to give some advice and that is that with passion you can do anything you want. Today I'm here and next time it could be one of you."

The unveiling of Real's latest Galactico allowed its fans to continue celebrating following Spain's Euro 2024 triumph on Sunday.

"We would like to welcome an exceptional player who has come to help us continue our winning ways," said Perez. "Welcome to your home." Real had courted Mbappe since his early teens.

"I know you will never forget that day in December 2012, when Zinedine Zidane invited you to visit Real Madrid City and meet the players you admired so much," said Perez.



French forward Kylian Mbappe greets fans. AFP



> *My dream is to measure up to this club, the greatest club in history. I will give my life for this club and this crest. I'd like to send a message to the children. I was like you, I had a dream and today I have fulfilled it. I want to give some advice and that is that with passion you can do anything you want. Today I'm here and next time it could be one of you.*
> ***Kylian Mbappe***

Tens of thousands gathered to catch a glimpse of the new signing, matching the record numbers 15 years ago when Cristiano Ronaldo was unveiled.

The free tickets were snapped up rapidly with some fans reportedly trying to resell them to take advantage of the hype surrounding the arrival of arguably the world's best striker.

At Real, Mbappe will form part of an offensive trio alongside England midfielder Jude Bellingham and Brazil attacker Vinicius Junior under the watch of veteran Italian coach Carlo Ancelotti.

That prospect is already exciting fans of the club who won their 15th Champions League title in June.

Although his new teammates began training on Monday, the forward, who captained France during their unsuccessful Euros campaign, will have a few more days off before kicking off his season in the Spanish capital.

Los Blancos begin the defence of their La Liga crown with a match against Real Mallorca on the weekend of August 17-18.

Mbappe's debut might have to wait until the following week when Real Madrid face Real Valladolid who were recently promoted from the second division.

Number 9 Mbappe shirts went on sale last Thursday in Real's club shops which are covered with his image.

Mbappe arrives after a personally disappointing Euros campaign, where he was overshadowed by Spain's new teenage sensation Lamine Yamal of Madrid's rivals Barcelona and France lost to the Spanish in the semi-finals.

That followed a season with PSG following his decision not to renew his contract.

The club is hoping to offset the costs - a salary of at least €15m ($16.3m) per season and a signing bonus of more than €100m - through sponsorship deals and ticket and merchandise sales.

Mbappe is hoping the move will finally see him win a Champions League and the Ballon d'Or, two of his lifelong objectives. — ***AFP***

LIC to host 2024 MENA Karting Championship Nations Cup

THE PENINSULA

DOHA: Lusail International Circuit (LIC) will once again set the stage to host the MENA Karting Championship Nations Cup, this time from December 17-21. This thrilling event brings together the top karting talent from across the Middle East and North Africa region straight to Qatar, the heart of motorsports in the region.

Building on the tremendous success of last year's championship, which saw 165 drivers from 15 countries compete, the 2024 edition promises even more adrenaline-fueled action and fierce competition. Racers will compete across six categories, ranging from Micro Max (ages 8-11) to DD2 Masters (31+), showcasing the depth of karting talent in the MENA region.

Last year's event saw Morocco claim the overall MENA Nations Cup, with the United Arab Emirates and Qatar taking second and third places respectively. The 2024 championship aims to build on this success, providing a platform for drivers to display their skills on an international stage.

Spectators can look forward to an action-packed schedule featuring practice sessions, qualifying heats, and nail-biting finals across all categories. The event will kick off with an opening ceremony and drivers' parade, celebrating the diversity and unity of the participating nations.

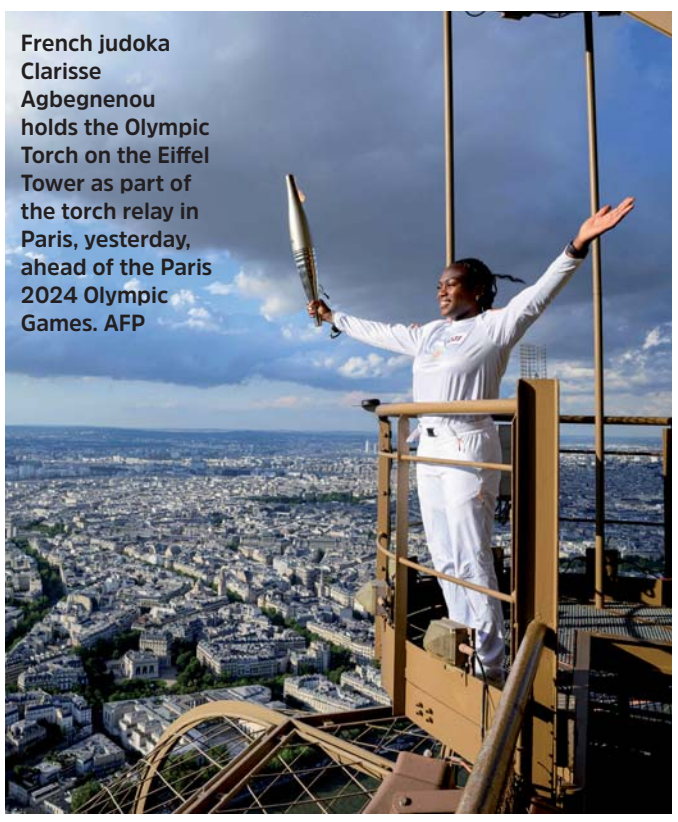
Further information on the 2024 MENA Karting Championship Nations Cup, including ticket details and the full event schedule, can be found on the LCSC website (https://www.lcsc.qa/en/7/Event/KARTING) or LIC social media accounts.



Action during last year's MENA Karting Championship Nations Cup.

PARIS 2024

9 DAYS TO GO



French judoka Clarisse Agbegnenou holds the Olympic Torch on the Eiffel Tower as part of the torch relay in Paris, yesterday, ahead of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. AFP

Al Duhail seal comfortable win in Austria as Qatari teams gear up for new season

CHINTHANA WASALA
THE PENINSULA

DOHA: With the new Ooredoo Stars League season's kick-off fast approaching, Qatari clubs revved up their preparations while taking part in training camps in Europe.

Among them, Al Duhail and Al Sadd clinched victories in friendlies, while several clubs geared up to face European opponents in the coming days.

On Monday, former champions Al Duhail defeated Hungary's Csikszereda 3-1 in a friendly encounter in Lebring, Austria. The match was played as part of their preparatory camp in Europe.

The Red Knights will also play four more friendly matches as they gear up for the new season.

They will take on Austria's Sturm Graz on July 19, UAE's Ittihad Kalba on July 24, Saudi Arabia's Al Khaleej on July 28, and Saudi Damac on July 31.



Al Duhail players celebrate after scoring a goal against Csikszereda.

Al Duhail will kick off the new season when they face Qatar SC in the opening round of the Ooredoo Stars League on August 19 at the Khalifa International Stadium.

Earlier, on Monday, the reigning Qatar Stars League champions Al Sadd secured a crushing 8-0 victory over Manchester 62 from Gibraltar. It was the Wolves' first friendly match during their pre-season camp which is currently underway in Malaga, Spain.

Gonzalo Plata scored a hat-trick, Rafa Mujica netted a brace while Abdullah Al Yazidi, Pedro Miguel, and Giovanni Henrique added a goal to contribute to the huge win at Banus Training Centre in Malaga.

Meanwhile, Al Ahli are set to play three friendly matches during their pre-season training camp in the Netherlands.

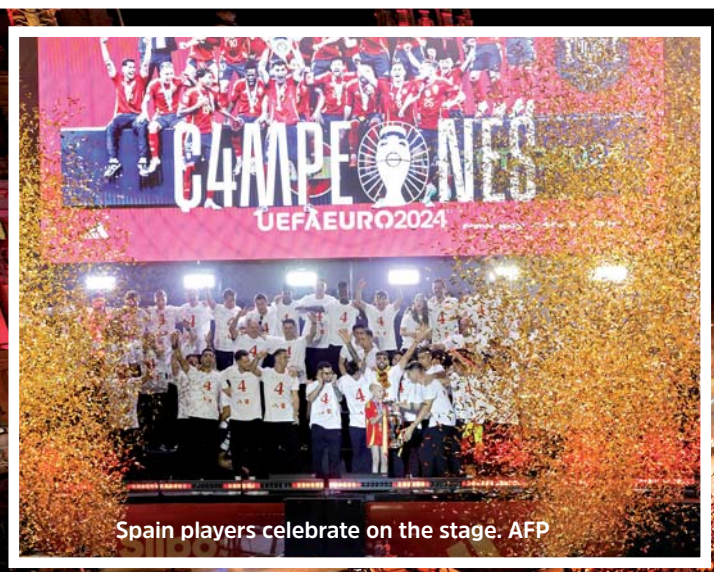
The team will face the Eindhoven U23 squad on Saturday, and will also meet UAE's Al Wasl on July 24, concluding with a game against Belgian club Lommel Sportkring.

Al Ahli will continue to train in Eindhoven until August 2 before returning to Doha ahead of their opening Ooredoo Stars League against Al Wakrah on August 11 at the Al Janoub Stadium.

Meanwhile, Al Shamal SC, who are also undergoing training in the Netherlands, officially announced the appointment of Portuguese coach Nuno Almeida. Almeida, who previously served as an assistant coach at Al Sadd under Jesualdo Ferreira, fills in for Swedish coach Poya Asbaghi who moved to Al Rayyan.



Spain celebrates Euro 2024 heroes



Spain players celebrate on the stage. AFP




Thousands of fans gather at Cibeles Square to celebrate Spanish players on Monday after the team returned following their Euro 2024 victory. AFP

MADRID: Thousands of people in Madrid welcomed Spain's squad home after they beat England to win Euro 2024. After receptions with King Felipe VI and prime minister Pedro Sanchez, La Roja were paraded through the capital city on an open-top bus.

It was adorned with the message "it's only the beginning" and the trophy sat at the front of the bus. "We want a lot," Sanchez said. "We want more," he added.

The likes of Lamine Yamal, Nico Williams and Sunday's match-winner in Berlin, Mikel Oyarzabal, wore white t-shirts with the number four on them in reference to the record number of times Spain have won the European Championship.

"For now, we're not realising yet what we have accomplished," Williams said.

The attacker, who scored the opening goal of the 2-1 victory, was also eager to thank Spain's fans "for the love and warmth they brought the team".

The team bus took them to Plaza Cibeles in central Madrid where thousands more fans waited to celebrate the success, following on from victories in 1964, 2008 and 2012. -*AFP*

Southgate resignation: Who said what

I want to say a special thank you to the boss for always believing in me during his time with us and I would like to wish him all the best in his next steps. Thank you Gareth: ***Goalkeeper Jordan Pickford***

It has been a privilege to play for England under your guidance. Memories that will stay with me forever. All the best in your next adventures: ***Midfielder Declan Rice***

We are closer than ever to achieving what we dream of and that is hugely down to what you have created. I wish you all the best for the future.: ***England midfielder Eberechi Eze***

You made us all believe again -- memories that will last forever. Thank you boss: ***Harry Maguire***

Thank you for showing humility, compassion, and true leadership under the most intense pressure and scrutiny. And thank you for being an all-round class act. You should be incredibly proud of what you've achieved. W: ***Heir to the British throne Prince William, president of the Football Association***

His legacy is successful, there's no doubt about that. I think he's handled himself absolutely fantastically well. And I think eight years is an awful long time to cope with the pressures that this job brings: ***Southgate's predecessor Sam Allardyce***

"He brought pride, respect and a togetherness to England that we hadn't seen for a long time. He was close, very close to footballing immortality and he always did the job with humility, decency and dignity. Thank you, Gareth: ***Gary Lineker***

Gareth has done messages for people for many years when I've asked him. He's just a nice guy. He's not your typical footballer, he's not got an edge. He's just a solid guy and wants to nurture the young players: ***Southgate's former Crystal Palace teammate Geoff Thomas***

'Class act' Southgate quits as England manager after Euro disappointment


Gareth Southgate announced his resignation as England manager yesterday, two days after they lost to Spain in the Euro 2024 final. AFP

LONDON: Gareth Southgate resigned as England manager yesterday, two days after they lost to Spain in the Euro 2024 final, with Prince William describing him as an "all-round class act".

"It's time for change, and for a new chapter. Sunday's final in Berlin against Spain was my final game as England manager," Southgate said in a statement.

William, who attended the 2-1 defeat to Spain in his role as Football Association president, paid a fulsome tribute to Southgate on social media.

"Thank you for showing humility, compassion, and true leadership under the most intense pressure and scrutiny," said the heir to the British throne.

"And thank you for being an all-round class act. You should be incredibly proud of what you've achieved. W." The names immediately mentioned as 53-year-old Southgate's successor are Newcastle manager Eddie Howe, and two former Chelsea managers, Graham Potter and Mauricio Pochettino.

Former international defender Southgate took over in 2016 when England's fortunes were at a low ebb -- they had exited the Euros after defeat to Iceland and then Roy Hodgson's successor Sam Allardyce had to resign over a scandal.

Southgate steadily introduced change and led England to three semi-finals and to the last two European Championship finals.

Prior to his appointment, the Three Lions had reached just three major tournament semi-finals and one final in their history, when they won the 1966 World Cup.

But despite changing the fortunes of the England team, Southgate was unable to land a first trophy in over half a century as England first lost to Italy in the Euro 2000 final and then came up short to a sparkling Spain team on Sunday.

"Gareth has made the impossible job possible and laid strong foundations for future success," said FA CEO Mark Bullingham in a statement.

"We came so close to winning the Euros in London and securing the first trophy for our men's team for over 50 years -- and came so close again in Berlin on Sunday."

Southgate, who is also credited for restoring pride to the team as well as turning the players into role models off the pitch, said the job had been a dream of a lifetime for him.

"As a proud Englishman, it has been the honour of my life to play for England and to manage England," he said.

"It has meant everything to me, and I have given it my all."

'So proud of them'

However, not all was rosy at Euro 2024 as England were one of the pre-tournament favourites in Germany but showed resilience more than skill in reaching the final.

Southgate admitted the stinging criticism that came his way -- fans threw beer cups at him after a 0-0 group-stage draw with Slovenia -- had taken its toll.

But he leaves behind a squad filled with young players of huge talent.

The likes of Cole Palmer, Jude Bellingham, Bukayo Saka and Phil Foden, who are all 24 or under, and 26-year-old Declan Rice will all still be in their prime for the 2026 World Cup should they qualify.

"The squad we took to Germany is full of exciting young talent and they can win the trophy we all dream of," said Southgate.

"I am so proud of them." Southgate's overall record was 61 wins in 102 matches with 24 draws and 17 defeats.

He ranks third for all-time victories as England manager and only two previous England managers have taken charge of more matches than him.

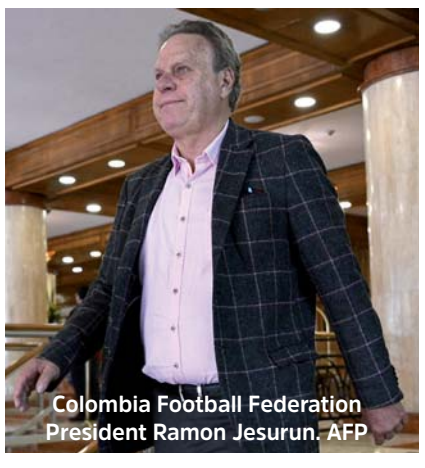
Four of the players who played in the loss to Spain, led by captain Harry Kane, who was capped 81 times under Southgate, were to be the backbone of his team through his reign -- Kyle Walker had 70 caps and goalkeeper Jordan Pickford and John Stones had 68.

Bullingham did not drop any hints about who will succeed Southgate and said there would be no rushed decision even if England's next match against the Republic of Ireland is on September 7.

"The process for appointing Gareth's successor is now under way and we aim to have our new manager confirmed as soon as possible," he said.

"Our UEFA Nations League campaign starts in September, and we have an interim solution in place if it is needed." — ***AFP***

Colombian football chief released following arrest at Copa final


Colombia Football Federation President Ramon Jesurun. AFP

MIAMI: Colombian Football Federation president Ramon Jesurun has been released on bail following his arrest at Copa America final, according to videos published in Colombian media on Monday.

A Miami-Dade County police file indicated Jesurun had been arrested on charges of "assault on officer/employee" on Sunday night at Hard Rock Stadium.

Security guards refused Jesurun access to the field, with his son and other family members, for the awards ceremony after Argentina defeated Colombia 1-0, a scuffle broke out and Jesurun and his son were arrested, Colombian newspaper El Tiempo reported.

"This badge says 'full access' and a security guard ... disregarded it," Jesurun said, pointing to his official credentials after he was released having reportedly posted $2,000 bail.

"I insisted (to the security guard) that I should enter and he pushed me and a ridiculous, unnecessary melee broke out," the 71-year-old Jesurun told the El Heraldo newspaper.

There was chaos at the match, which was delayed by 82 minutes, as spectators stormed the gates at the home of the NFL Miami Dolphins, with people pushed to the ground and others trying to sneak into the stadium through air-conditioning ducts. Argentina won the match with a goal in extra time by Lautaro Martinez.

Police said there were 27 arrests and 55 ejections from the stadium.

"I'm very proud of our officers' response to a volatile situation and for their hard work in keeping our community safe as well as our law-enforcement partners who provided key support," said Miami-Dade police director Stephanie Daniels.

South American football governing body CONMEBOL suggested security procedures, such as setting up an outer perimeter to screen ticketless fans, had not been followed by organizers.

The Copa America had been marred by earlier incidents off the pitch.

On Wednesday, Uruguay players were involved in a brawl with Colombian fans in the stands after their 1-0 semi-final defeat. — ***AFP***

Liverpool owners pull out of talks to buy troubled Bordeaux

BORDEAUX: Bordeaux's problems deepened yesterday when Fenway Sports Group (FSG), owners of Liverpool, announced it was ending negotiations with the French club which is facing relegation to the third tier.

Bordeaux, which is appealing its demotion from Ligue 2 because of financial problems, said it had "been informed by Fenway Sports Group of its intention not to pursue discussions".

"This decision is explained in particular by the significant cost of the stadium in the coming years, but also by the general economic context of French soccer," the statement continues.

FSG had been in contact with Bordeaux owner Gerard Lopez for several weeks and took part in the club's hearing with French football's financial watchdog the DNCG on July 9.

"Following extensive and constructive discussions with all stakeholders, Fenway Sports Group has made the decision not to pursue the acquisition of FC Girondins de Bordeaux," the US group, which owns baseball's Boston Red Sox and the Pittsburgh Penguins ice hockey club as well as Premier League giants Liverpool, said in a separate statement.

Sources close to the talks said the cost of running Bordeaux's Matmut Atlantique stadium, as well as the disappointing outcome of the Ligue 1 television rights negotiations, played a part in the decision.

The Girondins need to find 40 million euros ($43.6 million) to balance their accounts before trying to convince the DNCG to spare them.

"The club and its shareholder are now putting all their energy into finalising a financing plan for the 2024-25 season in preparation for the appeal hearing", scheduled for July 23 or 24. — ***AFP***

Nadal sweeps past Borg in Bastad

BASTAD: Rafael Nadal swept past Leo Borg, son of tennis great Bjorn Borg, to advance to the second round of the Bastad Open yesterday as he builds towards the Paris Olympics.

It was Nadal's first singles match since the 38-year-old fell in the opening round at Roland Garros on May 27, and he eased to a 6-3, 6-4 win in wet conditions.

Both Nadal and the 21-year-old Borg, currently ranked 461 in the world, were wild card entries to the Swedish clay-court tournament.

Despite an early scare with the former world number one slipping on the wet white line, Nadal broke for 3-1, hitting four aces to take the first set in 43 minutes.

An immediate break gave the Spaniard a foothold in the second, sealing the match on his second match point after 1hr 25min on court for his eighth ATP tour match win this season.

"It's good, I'm finally defending my title," joked Nadal, who has not played in Bastad since winning the title aged 19 in 2005.

"I haven't been playing a lot of tennis in the last few months.

"The feelings are great, playing on front of a full crowd means a lot to me and lucky to have been able to play without rain.

"Even in the tougher moments, I have been able to keep going with the help of the team, but of course the fans have a huge impact on that. They give me amazing energy." The 22-time Grand Slam winner praised his rival, the son of the long-retired former world number one Bjorn Borg, now 68.

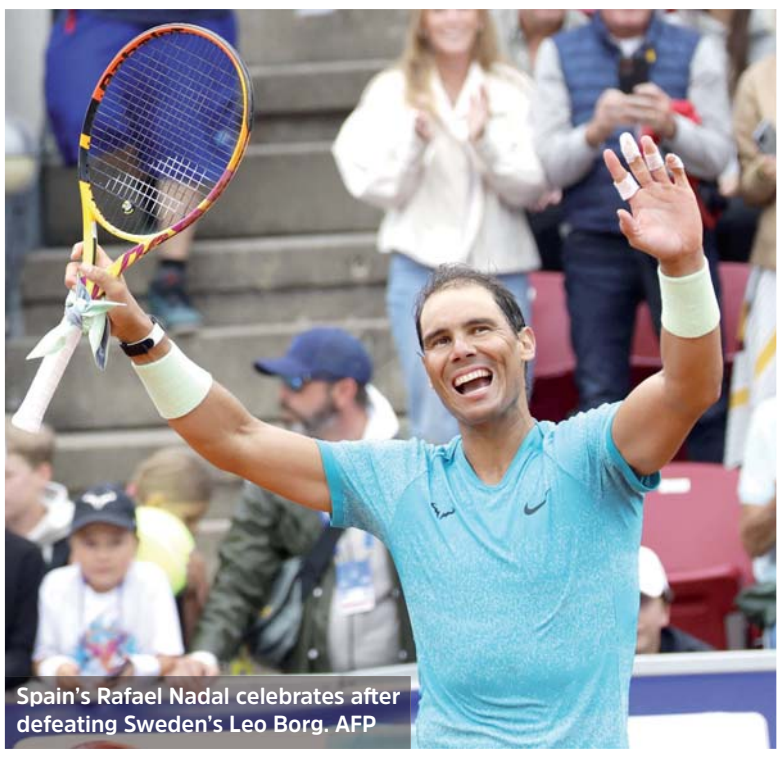
"It's a huge honour to play against the son of one of the biggest legends in the history of our sport," said Nadal.

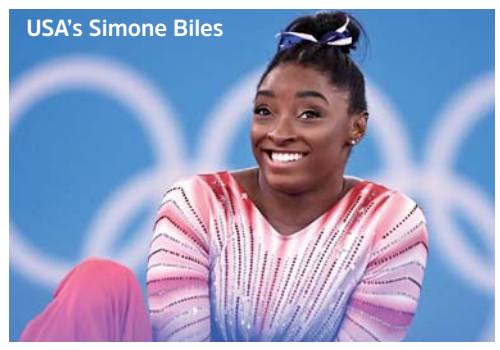
"I think he played quite well, he has a great future in front. I wish him all the very best." Nadal will next play fifth seed Cameron Norrie in the second round after the British player beat Slovak Jozef Kovalik 7-6 (7/4), 6-4.

Nadal skipped Wimbledon to focus on the Olympics which will be played at Roland Garros where he won 14 French Open titles.

On Monday, Nadal also teamed up with Casper Ruud for a doubles win on clay in Bastad two weeks ahead of the Paris Games.

Top seed Andrey Rublev starts his campaign on Wednesday against 121st-ranked Thiago Tirante of Argentina. — ***AFP***


Spain's Rafael Nadal celebrates after defeating Sweden's Leo Borg. AFP


USA's Simone Biles

Biles poised to reclaim Olympic throne after Tokyo tumult

LOS ANGELES: Simone Biles is headed to Paris poised to cement her legacy as gymnastics' Greatest of All Time, an Olympic icon who transcends her sport in both triumph and defeat.

The diminutive dynamo dazzled at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Games, winning gold in all-around, vault, floor exercise and team events.

She arrived at the pandemic-delayed Tokyo Olympics with superstar billing and history in her sights, but withdrew from the majority of her events as she struggled with the disorienting and "petrifying" mental block that gymnasts call the "twisties".

Hailed by many as a mental health trailblazer but criticized by a few as a quitter, Biles has returned from a two-year hiatus, at the age of 27, as good as or even better than ever.

In 2023 she took her tally of world and Olympic medals to 37 -- a cache she started with her first all-around world title in 2013, when she was just 16. Now the owner of a record six world all-around crowns, Biles remains a must-see sensation even among such superstars as NBA legend LeBron James and pop diva Taylor Swift.

More than seven million Instagram followers basked in the fairytale photos of Biles's wedding to NFL player Jonathan Owens, who has received special dispensation from the Chicago Bears to miss a few days of training camp to watch her in Paris. Swift took a moment during her Eras tour in Europe to tweet her approval when Biles chose a phrase from Swift's "...Ready For It" to kick off her floor routine at the US Olympic trials.

But Biles's ascent has featured as many twists as one of her signature tumbling moves.

Biles, who will be the oldest woman gymnast to compete for the US since Marie Margaret Hoesly in 1952, had to laugh when she was reminded that she poked fun at a 22-year-old Aly Raisman as the "grandma" of the 2016 US team.

"I definitely have to apologize to Aly for calling her grandma because, whew, I feel like I'm way older now," said Biles, noting that nowadays her body feels it after a big competition.

"Back in Rio, I could do anything," Biles said.

"I'd never needed tape, nothing. I was just like a little hamster on a wheel, always running."

Biles also pays meticulous attention to her mental health, "religiously" continuing the weekly therapy sessions she says are key to her successful return.

Olympics broadcaster NBC calculated that one tumbling pass in her trials floor routine saw her soar 12 feet above the mat.

She's made the Yurchenko double pike vault -- a vault so difficult no other woman has attempted it in competition -- a staple and it's now the fifth skill to be named for her.

"I think we always knew she could be better," says coach Cecile Landi, who with husband and co-coach Laurent Landi has shepherded Biles through her return.

Biles is joined on the US Olympic team by WCC buddy and Tokyo Olympic teammate Jordan Chiles. Tokyo Olympic all-around gold medalist Suni Lee and floor gold medallist Jade Carey and 16-year-old newcomer Hezly Rivera round out the squad. Biles, who was honored with the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2022, knows that she and her teammates will still face haters who "want to see us fail".

But she's glad to be back on her own terms. "Nobody's forcing me to do it," Biles said. "I wake up every day and choose to grind in the gym and come out here and perform for myself. Just to remind myself that I can still do it -- that's my why." — ***AFP***

Wood replaces Anderson in England team for second Test

LONDON: England called up Mark Wood yesterday to replace the retired James Anderson for this week's second Test against the West Indies at Trent Bridge.

Fast bowler Wood is the only change from the side which romped to an innings victory in the opening match at Lord's.

Anderson's retirement from international cricket was announced earlier this year and he took four wickets in the first Test to end his five-day career on 704 wickets, behind only Muttiah Muralitharan and Shane Warne on the all-time list.

The 34-year-old Wood, who was with England at last month's T20 World Cup, has taken 108 wickets in 34 Tests, the last of which was against India in Dharamsala in March.

Anderson will start his new role as a fast-bowling mentor in Nottingham.

"He said he's going to bowl in the nets. I just hope he's going to bowl cross-seam. I've faced enough seam up balls from him," said England opener Zak Crawley.

England can secure a series victory with another win, ahead of the third and final Test at Edgbaston later this month.

ENGLAND TEAM FOR SECOND TEST: Zak Crawley, Ben Duckett, Ollie Pope, Joe Root, Harry Brook, Ben Stokes (capt), Jamie Smith (wkt), Chris Woakes, Gus Atkinson, Mark Wood, Shoaib Bashir. — ***AFP***

Ferrari extend F1 engine contract with Haas

PARIS: Ferrari will continue to supply engines to the Haas Formula 1 team until at least the end of the 2028 season, the American outfit announced yesterday.

Ferrari have provided power units since Haas made their Grand Prix debut in 2016.

"I'm thrilled to extend our relationship with Scuderia Ferrari until 2028," Ayao Komatsu, the Team Principal said. "As an organisation we've only ever raced with Ferrari power units and to have that continued stability moving into the next set of power unit regulations is a key part of our on-going development."

F1 is introducing power unit new rules in 2026 emphasising hybrid components and running fully on sustainable fuels. Haas are seventh, out of the 10 teams, in the constructors' championship, with 27 points ahead of the 13th round of the season in Hungary this weekend. In addition to Haas, Ferrari also provide engines for Sauber, but that will become an Audi works team in 2026. — ***AFP***

Philipsen wins Tour de France sprint, Girmay falls but retains green jersey

NIMES: Belgian Jasper Philipsen won a bunch sprint on stage 16 of the Tour de France at Nimes yesterday while his green sprint points jersey rival Biniam Girmay fell in the final dash.

Overnight leader Tadej Pogacar has a 3 minute 09 second advantage over defending champion Jonas Vingegaard while Remco Evenepoel remains third at 5min 19sec.

Last year's green jersey winner Philipsen and Girmay both have three stage wins each, but the Eritrean leads the rankings for the green jersey this year on 376pts to 344pts.

Girmay, however, fell at a roundabout less than 2 kilometres out with two Education First riders and was unable to compete in the sprint for the line.

His elbow was bleeding but the 24-year-old managed to remount and cruise home with a couple of team-mates, albeit ashen-faced.

"It's close, so we'll be playing it day by day now... You don't like to see anyone fall, I hope he can carry on," said Philipsen, who topped 70kph (43mph) as he raced over the line.

"Victories are hard to come by on the Tour de France so a third one is amazing," added the Belgian, who was led out by world champion Mathieu van der Poel.

Van der Poel is one of the favourites for the Olympic Games road race in Paris in two weeks' time.

Because of the Olympics, this year's Tour de France will finish in Nice on Sunday -- meaning there will be no final day dash down the iconic Champs Elysees.

Pogacar mentioned this after yesterday's race.

"It's a shame for the sprinters not to have the final day sprint, they don't have that much motivation to finish the race but I hope they come all the way with us," said the yellow jersey holder.

Germany's Phil Bauhaus was second and Norway's Alexander Kristoff was third. Kristoff rides for Norwegian outfit Uno-X, two of whose team cars narrowly avoided a crash at a roundabout late in the race.

One of those cars had Johannes Kulset right behind it riding at 60kph.

The 24-year-old Evenepoel, on his first Tour de France, leads the white jersey standings -- for the outstanding young rider -- by over six minutes from Ineos' Spanish rider Carlos Rodriguez.

The Tour de France race organisers extended the feared time cut Sunday to allow Mark Cavendish and other haggard stragglers to remain on the race and compete in yesterday's flat stage, where 152 survivors of the first 15 stages departed.

Yesterday's race was the last of the sprint stages with mountains galore on the menu from now on.

The race left the Gruissan salt basin with the mercury tipping 30 degrees Celsius (86 Fahrenheit) as the peloton rolled through the vineyards of the Aude region at speeds that fluctuated with the direction of the wind. — ***AFP***


Alpecin-Deceuninck team's Belgian rider Jasper Philipsen (centre) reaches the finish line to win the 16th stage of the 111th Tour de France, in Nimes, southern France, yesterday. AFP

TOUR DE FRANCE RESULTS (STAGE 16)

1. Jasper Philipsen, Belgium, Alpecin-Deceuninck, 4h 11m 27s
2. Phil Bauhaus, Germany, Bahrain Victorious, same time
3. Alexander Kristoff, Norway, Uno-X Mobility, same time
4. Sam Bennett, Ireland, Decathlon AG2R La Mondiale, same time
5. Wout van Aert, Belgium, Visma-Lease a Bike, same time
6. Pascal Ackermann, Germany, Israel-Premier-Tech, same time
7. Bryan Coquard, France, Cofidis, same time
8. Soren Waerenskjold, Norway, Uno-X Mobility, same time
9. Ryan Gibbons, South Africa, Lidl-Trek, same time
10. Danny van Poppel, Netherlands, Red Bull-Bora Hansgrohe, same time

OVERALL LEADERS

1. Tadej Pogacar, Slovenia, UAE Team Emirates, 66h 7m 51s
2. Jonas Vingegaard, Denmark, Visma Lease a Bike, 3m 9s behind
3. Remco Evenepoel, Belgium, Soudal Quick-Step, 5m 19s
4. Joao Almeida, Portugal, UAE Team Emirates, 10m 54s
5. Mikel Landa, Spain, Soudal Quick-Step, 11m 21s

Tiger talks up Open chances, dismisses retirement

TROON: Five years after winning his last major championship, Tiger Woods has said he is "busting it" in the gym and ready to mount a challenge for the Claret Jug when the British Open gets underway at Royal Troon tomorrow.

The 48-year-old also dismissed suggestions that he should retire from the game.

Woods won the last of his 15 majors at the 2019 Masters with his most recent professional victory coming later that year at the Zozo Championship.

And there is little doubt he has struggled since 2021 when he was in a car accident that almost led to him losing his right leg.

When he missed the cut at last month's US Open, former world number two Colin Montgomerie, who famously never won a major, suggested it was time for the 82-time PGA Tour event winner to quit.

"There is a time for all sportsmen to say goodbye, but it's very difficult to tell Tiger it's time to go," said the Scotsman.

"Obviously, he still feels he can win. We are more realistic." When asked about those comments ahead of the Open at Royal Troon, Woods replied: "Well, as a past champion, I'm exempt until I'm 60. Colin's not.

"He's not a past champion, so he's not exempt, so he doesn't get the opportunity to make that decision. I do.

"I'll play as long as I can play and I feel like I can still win the event." Asked if that belief had wavered during his struggles over the last two years Woods replied: "No." Woods' press conference comments prompted a swift response from Montgomerie.

"If golf writers want my thoughts on Tiger please ask me direct, rather than taking a quote from an interview out of context. Wishing Tiger an enjoyable and successful week," he posted on X.

In spite of Tiger's fighting talk there is no denying he is far from the player who dominated the game so brilliantly for two decades.

His hopes of turning back the clock have not been helped by tournaments favouring the biggest hitters in the game as driving distances get longer but that is also key to his belief that Royal Troon may smile on him.

Accuracy has an edge over distance on the links course, boosting Woods' chances of at least making the cut.

"The older you get the less you can carry the golf ball but over here, you can run the golf ball 100 yards if you get the right wind and the right trajectory," said Woods, who won the Open in 2000, 2005 and 2006.

"I think that's one of the reasons why you see older champions up there on the board because they're not forced to have to carry the ball 320 yards any more.

"I've been training a lot better. We've been busting it pretty hard in the gym, which has been good.

"The body's been feeling better to be able to do such things, and it translates on being able to hit the ball better." During his press conference Woods also backed Keegan Bradley to be a "great leader" as Ryder Cup captain after turning down the role himself.

"I think Keegan is going to be a great leader," said Woods. "He's very passionate about the event." Bradley was a surprise choice to lead the home side at Bethpage Black in September 2025 after Woods told PGA of America officials he did not have the time to commit fully to the job.

"I'll put my hat in the ring again when I have more time and I feel like I can devote myself to a Ryder Cup," said Woods.

"Right now I've got so many different things I'm juggling and trying to get right at the same time for all the players that are a part of the PGA Tour.

"It's one of those things where you just can't get it wrong." — ***AFP***


US golfer Tiger Woods attends a press conference ahead of the 152nd British Open Golf Championship, yesterday. AFP