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CRICKET | Page 2

Pandya fitness issues cost him India captaincy, says Agarkar



FOCUS | Page 4

Is Coe a future IOC president? Ask Lausanne, he says

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TENNIS

Rafael Nadal 'not comfortable' ahead of Olympics bid

Page 3

FOCUS

IOC expects Paris Games to be spectacular in ever-divisive world, Bach says

'Like billions of people around the world we are awaiting with impatience the youngest, most inclusive, most urban and most sustainable Games'

Reuters
Paris

The Paris Olympics will be a spectacular event at a time of historic global disruptions and growing divisive forces, International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach said yesterday, four days before the Games opening ceremony.

The Olympics in the French capital will see several firsts, with an opening ceremony on barges along the river Seine instead of the traditional ceremony in an Olympic stadium.

The Games will also incorporate the city's major landmarks, including the Eiffel tower, into the competitions, many of which will be staged in urban areas across the city.

It will also be the first Olympics to have gender parity, with equal numbers of men and women participating.

"Like billions of people around the world we are awaiting with impatience the youngest, most inclusive, most urban and most sustainable Games," IOC president Thomas Bach said at the opening of his organisation's session in the French capital.

"We are convinced that together with the entire world we will experience spectacular Olympic Games," he said, with French President Emmanuel Macron in attendance.

More than 10,500 athletes representing 206 national Olympic Committees will compete at



International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Thomas Bach controls a ball while touring the athletes village in Saint-Denis yesterday, ahead of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. (AFP)

the 16-day multi-sports event, 100 years since the last time the French capital staged them, with more than 30,000 security officers

on duty. Bach also highlighted the global sports body's challenges in what he called a new world order.

"We are witnessing a new world order in the making," he said. "Historic disruptions are upending the system of international re-

lations that has been in place since the second World War." "The trends are clear: decoupling of economies; beggar-thy-

neighbour; narrow self-interests trumping the rule of law; "Global South" vs "Global North". Everywhere you look, multilateralism is on the back foot."

He said the IOC's focus on solidarity, which will be fuelled by increased revenues over the next years that are to be distributed to national Olympic committees, international federations and other stakeholders, was crucial.

Bach said the IOC had already secured \$7.3bn for the years 2025-28 and had raised \$6.2bn in deals for the period 2029-2032.

He said changing lifestyles of young people in a digital world risked alienating the Olympic movement from a young generation. "We can and we must change before we are being changed," Bach said.

"For this change we need to change our mindset. We need the mindset of the digital natives. We have to go where the young people are, in the real world and the digital world."

"If we want to remain relevant in their digital lives we must engage with this digitally native generation in their digital way of living," he said.

The IOC is pushing through with the creation of Olympic Esports Games in a 12-year deal with Saudi Arabia in an effort to tap in to a younger audience and connect them with the Olympic brand. "In these difficult times there are so many divisive forces tearing humanity apart," Bach said. "In this world of division the athletes personify our shared hope for a better future."

SPOTLIGHT

Qatar Chess Association president al-Mudahka honoured in Paris

Agencies
Paris

The International Chess Federation (FIDE) honoured president of the Qatar Chess Association (QCA) Mohamed al-Mudahka on the occasion of the celebration of World Chess Day (July 20th) that took place in the French capital.

The World Chess Day also commemorates the centenary of the founding of FIDE.

FIDE president Arkady Dvorkovich presented a special shield to al-Mudahka as well as to Qatar's International Master and former world champion Zhu Chen, also FIDE treasurer, in appreciation of their efforts in supporting and developing the game of chess in Qatar and at international levels.

As part of the centenary celebrations, FIDE organised many events around the world through the year including the torch tour which started from India and travelled to various parts of the world.

Al-Mudahka expressed his delight at being honoured, expressing gratitude for the great trust he received from the international chess family.

In a statement, al-Mudahka affirmed his commitment towards continuing to work on spreading and developing chess in Qatar, Asia and around the world, pro-



Qatar Chess Association president Mohamed al-Mudahka being honoured by FIDE president Arkady Dvorkovich in Paris.

viding opportunities for everyone talented and interested in this game, supporting champions and motivating young people to be part of the large chess family.

The president of the Qatar Chess Association, who holds the position of Director of International Relations at FIDE, also appreciated the great work provided by Zhu Chen during the past years, noting that she provided different solutions towards improving the game at all levels and worked to develop the international federation's competitions and the ex-

pansion of the sport in developing countries.

Al-Mudahka explained that the upcoming strategy aims to continue advancing chess at the Arab and Asian levels, as well as continuing the efforts of QCA to support the game locally in co-operation with the International Federation.

He stated that chess is a global game that encourages integrity, inclusion and mutual respect, and contributes in creating an atmosphere of tolerance and understanding between peoples and nations.

PSG's al-Khelaifi carries Olympic flame through the streets of Vigneux



Accompanied by numerous Parisian supporters, football club Paris Saint-Germain's (PSG) Nasser al-Khelaifi carried the Olympic flame through the streets of Vigneux (Essonne), suburbs of Paris in France, yesterday. He later passed the torch to Marie-Rolande Biro, president of the local judo club. In a few days, many PSG athletes will defend the colours of ten different nations during the Paris Games. Al-Khelaifi later said, "It was an immense honour to carry the Olympic Torch and Flame of Paris 2024, representing such powerful symbols of unity, friendship and peace. Paris Saint-Germain is so proud that 26 of our male and female athletes - across men's and women's football, handball and judo - are competing at the 2024 Games, and we look forward to a magnificent sporting spectacle in our home city of Paris."



COMMENT

Pandya fitness issues cost him India captaincy: Agarkar

New India coach Gambhir backs Kohli, Rohit to play 2027 World Cup



India's Hardik Pandya arrives at the Bandaranaike International Airport in Colombo yesterday for the upcoming Twenty20 and ODI series against Sri Lanka. (AFP)



India's players Suryakumar Yadav (second from left), Rinku Singh (right) and Riyan Parag (left) arrive at the Bandaranaike International Airport in Colombo. (AFP)



Newly appointed India head coach Gautam Gambhir (left) and chairman of the BCCI selection committee Ajit Agarkar pose in Mumbai yesterday.

Agencies
Mumbai

Hardik Pandya lost out on India's T20 captaincy to Suryakumar Yadav because of concerns over his availability after frequent injury absences, India's chief selector Ajit Agarkar said yesterday. Explosive middle-order batsman Suryakumar, 33, was last week named Rohit Sharma's successor in the T20 format for India's white-ball tour of Sri Lanka, which begins on Saturday. All-rounder Pandya, 30, was Rohit's deputy during India's T20

World Cup triumph last month but he has suffered from fitness problems and missed the 50-over World Cup last year with an ankle injury. "Fitness has been something that he's struggled with," Agarkar told reporters in Mumbai alongside new coach Gautam Gambhir. "As selectors, it becomes difficult then. The thought behind it was that we want someone who is likely to be available more." India begin their Sri Lanka trip with the first of three Twenty20 internationals on Saturday and Pandya has reportedly opted out of the three subsequent one-day internationals.

He was "still a very important player," Agarkar said. "And that's what we want him to be, those skill sets are hard to find." Agarkar praised Suryakumar's captaincy credentials. "He is one of the best T20 batsmen in the world," said Agarkar. "We feel that Surya has all the necessary qualities to be a good captain. "We wanted a captain, who is likely to play all the games." Suryakumar would remain solely a T20 player, said Agarkar. Rohit has retained the 50-over captaincy. Gambhir explained his coaching

philosophy, speaking to reporters for the first time since succeeding Rahul Dravid. "I think it is important to give players the freedom, that's what I believe in," he said. "The best relationship is built on trust. I can promise that the most important thing is that they will always have my back." Gambhir also believes veteran batsmen Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma can both continue playing until the 2027 World Cup if they remain fit but said that the decision was entirely up to them. Rohit, 37, and his opening partner Kohli, 35, quit Twenty20 Internationals last month after the

team's victory in the World Cup final against South Africa in Bridgetown but both men will continue to play Test and 50-overs cricket. Speaking in his first press conference since replacing Rahul Dravid at the helm of the national team this month, Gambhir said the two stalwarts still had plenty to offer. "I think they've shown what they can deliver on the big stage, whether it's the T20 World Cup or the 50-over World Cup," Gambhir told reporters. "One thing I can be very clear of is that both those guys have a lot of cricket left in them. More importantly, with the Champions

Trophy (in 2025) and a big tour of Australia (from November 2024), obviously they would be motivated enough. "Then, hopefully, if they can keep their fitness, the 2027 World Cup as well. But this is a very personal decision. I can't say how much cricket is left in them. Ultimately it's up to the players. How much can they contribute to the team's success. "Ultimately, it's the team that's important. But looking at what Virat and Rohit can deliver, I think they still have a lot of cricket. They're world class players and any team would want to have both of them for as long as possible."

FOCUS

English cricket open to IPL investment in Hundred competition

AFP
Nottingham, United Kingdom

English cricket chiefs confirmed yesterday they have held talks with Indian Premier League (IPL) owners about acquiring a stake in their domestic Hundred competition. The fourth edition of the controversial 100-balls per side tournament, which features eight specially created teams - each with a men's and women's side - rather than the traditional 18 first-class English counties, starts today. Its future remains uncertain, with the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) looking to secure private investment in a bid to cement its position in the global calendar and boost the finances of the domestic game. The ECB are trying to balance a desire for a cash injection while retaining control of the Hundred by selling off a 49 percent stake in each team to private investors, with host teams retaining the remaining 51 percent of shares. But the hosts could sell part or all of their shares. "Control comes at different levels, it comes at team level and it comes at competition level - that's not something we are ceding control of," ECB chief executive Richard Gould told reporters during a conference call. "Different investor groups have different needs, for some it is about control of what happens on the field, for others it's the commercial element. "You're right about the strength of the Indian market - it represents probably 90 percent of the revenues coming



ECB chief executive Richard Gould.

into the ICC (International Cricket Council) and we have seen the proliferation of IPL teams moving outside of their home market into other national markets. I think that's to be welcomed," he added. The cash-rich T20 IPL, a multi-million dollars spectacle underpinned by the mass enthusiasm for cricket in India, the world's most populous nation, has changed the sport's global landscape, with players no longer needing to go through the grind of five-day international Test matches in order to enjoy lucrative careers. There is a view that IPL owners, such as the billionaire Ambani family who are in charge of the Mumbai Indians, would only be interested in full control of a Hundred team. "There is certainly the opportunity for people to have potentially 100 percent ownership," said Gould. "It depends on the capabilities they can bring both in terms of finance and operation delivery." The ECB's director of business

operations Vikram Banerjee said while he had spoken to IPL owners about the Hundred, he was also open to offers from American Football's NFL. "I've now met and spoken to, a number of times, all the IPL owners and WPL (Women's Premier League) owners that don't overlap and there is interest there, from what they've told me, which is fantastic and lends into a very exciting process," Banerjee said. "I would really hope we have a level of partnerships with some IPL teams, I think that would be brilliant. They have done a great job and know cricket very well." He added: "At the same time, we've just sent out a document and video to some NFL owners that explains what cricket is and what the rules are. "In terms of fan engagement, how they can build stadia experience and bring in the next generation, those guys are amazing. "So, we can bring that blend together, which I think is what we hope to do and that can work really well."

Scotland's pacer Cassell sets record with sensational ODI debut

Charlie Cassell broke the record for the best bowling figures by a men's one-day international debutant as he took seven wickets for 21 runs during Scotland's eight-wicket rout of Oman in Dundee yesterday. Pace bowler Cassell surpassed the six for 16 that Kagiso Rabada took for South Africa on his ODI bow against Bangladesh in 2015. Oman were 49-2 in the Cricket

World Cup League 2 clash at Forthill when Cassell was introduced in the 12th over. He made a stunning impact, taking wickets with his first two deliveries and another with his fourth en route to a triple-wicket maiden. He would go on to add four more scalps, passing Rabada and West Indies' paceman Fidel Edwards as the only players to take six wickets on ODI debut, as

the visitors were skittled for just 91 in 21.4 overs. Cassell's figures are the seventh best in men's ODI history overall, with Sri Lanka bowler Chaminda Vaas still leading the way with his eight for 19 against Zimbabwe in 2001. Cassell was added to the Scotland squad for the matches against Oman on July 15, as a replacement for fast bowler Chris Sole who was unavailable for personal reasons.

ICC puts USA Cricket on notice for 'non-compliance'

The International Cricket Council put USA Cricket on notice yesterday to comply with the world body's membership rules, just weeks after the country co-hosted the T20 World Cup. The US board and Cricket Chile "have been formally put on notice and have 12 months to rectify their current non-compliance with the ICC Membership Criteria", the ICC said in a statement following its annual conference in Colombo. "Neither member is considered to have in place a fit for purpose detailed governance and administrative structure and systems." It did not give further details but said the board "will reserve its right to suspend or expel the Member for continued non-compliance." The move comes with cricket set to return to the 2028 Olympics in Los Angeles in the T20 format - the theme of the four-day ICC conference was "capitalising on the Olympic opportunity". The administrative structure of American cricket has long faced problems and the former governing

body, USA Cricket Association, was expelled in 2017. The US played host in June to top teams in the T20 World Cup co-hosted by the West Indies with matches held in New York, Dallas and Florida. But there were issues with playing elite cricket at the venues. The wicket in New York, developed in Florida and "dropped in" shortly before the tournament, was criticised for its uneven bounce and unpredictability which led to low-scoring games. The ICC said there would "a review into the delivery of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2024", following calls by some directors for an investigation into expenses incurred during the tournament. The review committee will be overseen by three directors Lawson Naidoo (South Africa), Imran Khawaja (Singapore) and Roger Twose (New Zealand). The ICC highlighted their long-time commitment to balance men's and women's games and confirmed the expansion of the women's Twenty20 World Cup in 2030 from 12 to 16 teams.

SPOTLIGHT

England rising star Bashir 'still learning tricks of the trade'

AFP
Nottingham, United Kingdom

Julian Guyer Shoaib Bashir may already be a Test-match winning bowler but the 20-year-old off-spinner insists he's still learning "the tricks of the trade". The towering Bashir ripped through the West Indies in the second Test at Trent Bridge, taking 5-41 on Sunday's fourth day as the tourists lost all 10 of their second-innings wickets in 23 overs, with England winning by 241 runs to take an unassailable 2-0 lead in the three-match series. Bashir had only made six first-class appearances when he was catapulted into the Test side during a tour of India earlier this year and he responded with two five-wicket hauls on pitches renowned for aiding spinners. But his progress appeared to have stalled at the start of the English county season, with Bashir kept out of the Somerset side by a more experienced England spinner in Jack Leach. Bashir went on loan to county rivals Worcestershire in a bid to get more game time but England captain Ben Stokes and coach Brendon McCullum kept faith all the same. "A lot has happened in the last few years," said Bashir. "I can't get ahead of Leachy at Somerset, understandably, he's obviously played a lot more cricket than I have. Jack was over the moon for me (getting selected for England). We had a chat and he just told me to enjoy it. He's a class spinner and I've learned a lot off



England's Shoaib Bashir celebrates taking the wicket of West Indies Alick Athanaze on the fourth day of the second Test at Trent Bridge in Nottingham on Sunday. (AFP)

him. There's always so much to learn. I'm only 20, I'm still learning the tricks of the trade. "There's a lot to work on, in cricket you never complete the game. Going on loan was a decision I had to make to play cricket at a high level, that's part of the journey." He added: "I didn't have too many expectations going into this game, I'm still trying to comprehend what's happened." Bashir has now taken a highly promising 24 wickets at an average of 29.83 in five Tests compared to a modest return of 16 at 70.68 in 10 domestic first-class matches. But the current England selectors are not overly concerned by statistics, with team management identifying Bashir's height and ability to get drift, in

addition to bowling an attacking line, as qualities that made him suited to international cricket. "Bowling spin in England is pretty tough, but I'm grateful I'm a 6ft 4in (1.93 metres) spinner because it's a nice attribute to have," he said. "The extra bounce helps. We saw it here (at Trent Bridge), if you land the ball in the right areas, a few will bounce and a few will skid on. I've got experienced guys in the team that help me make judgments on the pitch, what lines to bowl and what paces to bowl. "I'm just grateful to be in the position I am. I'm always going to stay grounded, stay humble, and I'm just trying to enjoy every moment I have in an England shirt."

TENNIS

Nadal 'not comfortable' ahead of Olympics bid

'THE LEVEL WAS SO FAR FROM WHAT IT SHOULD BE. PROBABLY THE ENERGY TOO'

AFP
Bastad, Sweden

Rafael Nadal will head to the Paris Olympics chasing a third gold medal but admitted his "level was so far from what it should be" after losing in the Bastad clay-court final on Sunday.

The 38-year-old Spanish great went down to a straight-sets defeat to Portuguese journeyman Nuno Borges in his first final since capturing a 14th French Open in 2022.

"The level was so far from what it should be. Probably the energy too," said Nadal.

"It has been a long week with long matches. Even if my body, I don't have damage, that's important - but mentally and physically, I am not used to playing four days in a row and playing long matches."

Nadal was playing his first tournament since an opening round exit at the French Open in May.

He skipped Wimbledon to focus on his clay-court bag of tricks ahead of the Olympics which are being played at Roland Garros, the site of 14 of his 22 Grand Slam triumphs.

At the Games, Nadal will be looking to add to his singles gold from the 2008 Olympics in Beijing and doubles victory at Rio in 2016.

As well as singles, in Paris he will team up with French Open and Wimbledon champion Carlos Alcaraz.

"I played the final, that's positive. I was able to play long matches without having an injury, that's good," added Nadal of his week in Sweden.

The former world number one has played just six tournaments in 2024 due to injury while his ranking has slumped to 261.

"In some way I felt that I arrived here practising much better than what I played on the tournament during the whole week. That's something that I am not satisfied with," he explained.

"I arrived here with the feeling that I was playing a good level and I was not able to show that during the whole week. That is something that I am not happy with."



Vondrousova and Hurkacz pull out due to injury

Olympic silver medalist Marketa Vondrousova has withdrawn from the Paris Summer Games due to a hand injury, the Czech 25-year-old said yesterday, with Poland's Hubert Hurkacz also withdrawing. Vondrousova reached the women's final in Tokyo three years ago as an unseeded player, losing to Swiss ninth seed Belinda Bencic. The Swiss, who gave birth to a daughter in April, will not be in Paris to defend her title. "I am very sorry, but due to health reason I will not be participating in this year's Olympic Games in Paris," Vondrousova posted on Instagram. "I hoped until the last moment that I could go at least in doubles, but problems with my hand

won't allow me on the court." Katerina Siniakova, who won gold at the last Olympics in doubles and is a nine-times Grand Slam champion in women's doubles, will replace Vondrousova in the singles and Linda Noskova will play doubles with Karolina Muchova. Vondrousova won her first Grand Slam at Wimbledon last year, the first unseeded woman to win the singles title, but earlier this month she became the first defending Wimbledon women's champion to exit in the first round for 30 years. Hurkacz was forced to retire from his Wimbledon second round match earlier in July when he dived for a volley but landed badly and injured his knee, and has not recovered in

time to compete in Paris. "My rehabilitation is going very well, and I am making continuous progress. However, my team and I have decided that I am unable to compete in the Olympic Games in Paris," Hurkacz said in a video posted on Instagram. "This was a very, very difficult decision because I have always dreamed of representing Poland at the Olympics, being able to win a medal for the national team, but unfortunately, my health does not allow it this year." Other notable absences from the tennis at the Games include world number three Aryna Sabalenka, Ons Jabeur, Emma Raducanu, Ben Shelton and Tokyo men's bronze medal winner Pablo Carreno Busta of Spain. (Reuters)

"Anyway it's a final, so I can't say it's a bad result because it's the first final since a long time ago. But I was not able to feel myself comfortable enough during the whole

week to be satisfied with the week of tennis that I played." "I don't know what to say. I think I was wishing for this moment for a while already," said Borges in his

post-match interview. "It's crazy, in tennis it doesn't happen when you expect it sometimes. I know we all wanted Rafa to win, a part of me wished that too, but some-

thing even bigger inside of me really pushed through today... I'm just really happy overall. I really don't know what to say, I'm very emotional."

Tour de France winner Pogacar pulls out of Olympics

Tour de France winner Tadej Pogacar yesterday pulled out of the Paris Olympics citing "tiredness", his Slovenia team announced. "Unfortunately Tadej Pogacar has cancelled his participation because of a state of extreme fatigue," Slovenian Olympic cycling coach Uros Murn said in a statement. Pogacar won a third Tour de France title in Nice on Sunday. Victory also gave him the first Giro d'Italia-Tour de France double since Marco Pantani in 1998. But the 25-year-old, a bronze medallist in the road race at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021, had been angered by his girlfriend Urska Zigart not being selected for the Slovenian women's cycling team for the Paris Games. He said he was "angry" and "speechless" in a message posted on his Facebook account. "I need a little rest after the Tour and I'm not sure what I'll be doing next," Pogacar had said on Sunday. "And I want to relax and rest and spend some time with my girlfriend." When asked about the Olympics on Sunday, he remained very evasive, preferring to mention his "dream" of one day wearing the rainbow jersey of world champion. At the worlds in September in Zurich, the Slovenian is aiming for a triple of the world title, the Giro and Tour, only held by two men, Ireland's Stephen Roche and Belgian Eddy Merckx. Pogacar will be replaced on the national team by Domen Novak. "Once again Tadej, congratulations for Tour de France win!" Team Slovenia said.



MOTORSPORT

Childish' radio remark not about Verstappen, says Horner

Reuters
Budapest

Red Bull team boss Christian Horner has clarified a radio exchange in which Max Verstappen's race engineer appeared to call the triple world champion childish during Sunday's Hungarian Grand Prix.

Gianpiero Lambiase (GP), who has worked with Verstappen for some eight years and is known for standing up to the driver in forthright fashion, had a series of exchanges with an increasingly unhappy Dutchman at the Hungaroring.

Verstappen had complained about Mercedes' seven-times world champion Lewis Hamilton's driving after they collided, with the Red Bull pitched on its nose and off the track in a battle for third.

"I am not even going to get into

a radio fight with the other teams, Max," Lambiase said.

"We'll let the stewards do their thing. It's childish on the radio, childish."

The comment raised eyebrows for its tone, between individuals with one of the closest driver-engineer relationships.

Horner said Lambiase was not actually referring to Verstappen, however, but the radio traffic from members of rival teams seeking to push the stewards into penalising him.

"I don't think GP's reference at that point was in reference to Max," he told reporters. "Others (were) obviously goading for penalties because obviously the stewards are listening to the radio as well."

Verstappen, who finished fifth after seeing stewards who took no further action, was not backing down afterwards when questioned about his radio messages and the

swear words bleeped out for the global television audience.

"I don't think we need to apologise," he said. "I just think we need to do a better job."

Horner said the team would discuss behind closed doors what they should have done better.

He added that Mexican Sergio Perez had done a good race, one of his best in months, in going from 16th on the grid to seventh.

"He had good pace and made some good passes and hopefully will have taken a lot of confidence out of that," Horner said of a driver whose future remains uncertain, despite recently signing a contract extension.

Perez has scored only 21 points from the last seven races, compared to Verstappen's 129 in the same period, and is now seventh in the standings.

The Mexican is also the only one of the top eight without a win this season.

McLaren boss never doubted Norris as a team player

McLaren boss Andrea Stella said he never doubted Lando Norris would hand back the lead to winning team mate Oscar Piastri in Sunday's Hungarian Grand Prix despite the Briton's clear reluctance. The Italian made clear also that the consequences of ignoring team orders would have been severe. "I know Lando enough...I know enough and well enough that inside Lando we have the race driver and the team player," he told reporters after McLaren's one-two finish at the Hungaroring. "I would be extremely concerned if Lando had not demonstrated 'I am a race driver' here, because that's the impulse you need to fight hard. He demonstrated the spirit of the race driver," said Stella. Norris started on pole position on Sunday but Piastri seized the lead at the start and remained ahead until the second round of pitstops, when McLaren brought in Norris first to cover against rivals behind.

Piastri then lost out in his later stop, with Norris ahead, and the team asked for the positions to be reversed - something the Briton eventually did three laps from the end after rising tension over the team radio. The win was 23-year-old Australian Piastri's breakthrough first in Formula One, in his second season, while Norris was chasing his second, and is also keen to shrug off a reputation as an increasingly regular runner-up. Norris is the closest challenger to Red Bull's championship leader Max Verstappen, albeit 76 points adrift, with Piastri only fifth and 40 points further back. Stella said the drivers had been reminded before the race about the team's principles and values. "The interests of the team come first. If you mess up on this matter, you cannot be part of the McLaren Formula One team," said Stella.

(Reuters)

CYCLING

Cavendish confirms he has ridden his last Tour de France



Reuters
Nice

British cyclist Mark Cavendish has confirmed that he has taken part in his last Tour de France, having finally broken the all-time record for most stage wins at the Tour.

Cavendish had been level on 34 stage wins with Eddy Merckx since 2021 but this year he sprinted to victory on stage five to make the record his own, and now the 39-year-old can bow out in style. "I think now it's time. I've done 15 Tours de France and I've created some incredible memories of the Tour de France," Cavendish told Reuters.

"This race has given me a life I could only dream of. It's given me the highest of highs and the lowest of lows."

Cavendish was able to relax in Sunday's final stage, an individual time trial from Monaco to Nice, a change from the usual sprint finish in Paris due to the upcoming Olympics in the French capital.

"This year was a different finish to normal. Normally, Tour de France has this incredible finish on the Champs-Elysees in Paris and as a sprinter it's always pressure," Cavendish said.

"It's the world championships for sprinters on the Champs-Elysees so to get there you still have the pressure on the last day you still have to try and perform."

"A time trial is not something I have pressure for because I'm not going to win so I could really enjoy it. I was able to really enjoy the crowds and really enjoy, absorb what the Tour de France offers without any pressure on the last day."

Cavendish had announced his retirement last year but changed his mind in an attempt to go out the way he wanted having crashed at last year's Tour.

"Yeah we carried on. I love riding my bike. I'm so fortunate to get to do what I love as a job," he said.

"So I get to ride my bike for another year, I get to target the most incredible sporting event on the planet which is the Tour de France and I got to finish it off how I wanted so it was well worth it."

He may never ride another Tour, but cycling is definitely going to be a part of Cavendish's future. "I'll never leave the sport that's for sure, I love cycling. It's given me what I have," Cavendish said.

"Right now I'm just going to spend time with my family as I do after every Tour de France."

FOCUS

Is Coe a future IOC president? Ask Lausanne, he says

'Look, I think there's a huge deal of uncertainty about what is happening in Lausanne at the moment'

AFP
Paris

Sebastian Coe has been portrayed by some as a potential successor to Thomas Bach as president of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) but the athletics legend suggested to AFP it is out of his hands.

Bach, who like Coe is an Olympic gold medalist, will oversee the Paris Olympics that start on Friday but is due to step down next year having served the maximum two terms since being elected in 2013. There have though been calls from some IOC members that Bach should seek a third term, although that would require a change in the Olympic Charter.

The two-term limit was one of the anti-corruption reforms imposed following the Salt Lake City scandal in the 1990s.

Coe, who at 67 is three years younger than Bach, has been credited with transforming the image of the sport since being elected World Athletics president in 2015.

"Look, I think there's a huge deal of uncertainty about what is happening in Lausanne (the site of the IOC headquarters) at the moment," Coe told AFP in an interview this month when asked

about whether he would run to be IOC president.

"I think those questions are probably best directed at other people."

The Briton, whose third and final term as athletics chief ends in 2027, had his work cut out when he took over WA. His predecessor Lamine Diack was embroiled in a cover-up of Russian doping cases in exchange for bribes and was sentenced by a French court to four years in prison, of which two were suspended, and fined 500,000 euros (\$544,000). Coe, who was a Conservative Party lawmaker from 1992-97, said his close friend William Hague, Britain's former foreign minister, told him that in comparison to other jobs the head of Monaco-based World Athletics would be "a calmer, quieter atmosphere".

"I did remind him not long ago over supper that that quieter period ended up with me sitting in a Monaco police station for five hours, where my predecessors had gone and subsequently been arrested," Coe said.

He insisted that he did not go for the World Athletics top job because he was sure he would get it.

"I've never done things because I think there's any certainty of outcome," he said.

"I've tended to do things that

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I've found interesting or the need to do them."

Coe, who won the 1500m Olympic title twice in 1980 and 1984, has earned credit for taking

a hardline stance in banning Russian and Belarusian athletes in response to the 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Equally he attracted flak from

some fellow federation presidents for taking the revolutionary step of saying Olympic track and field gold medalists will receive \$50,000 prize money.

However, Coe says while such decisions are partly informed by his "moral compass", they are not taken unilaterally.

"They are not individual long runs for hope," he said. "You know, I have a Council."

"One thing about our sport it is properly governed. It's probably better governed than any sport out there."

"Both those decisions that we made were unanimously supported and in part co-created by a very active Council."

Coe says his Council members - he is proud that they are gender-balanced at 13 each - are extremely well-qualified, both in terms of athletics and also in having served their countries in other areas.

"A large chunk of the Council is made up of Olympic champions, world champions, world record holders."

"So they're not empty suits sitting around a council chamber. They really actually understand the nature of the sport."

"We're the only international federation with an entirely gender-balanced council."

"Already you can see that the quality of the discussion and the subsequent decision is at a higher level than it's ever been on that Council."

ATHLETICS

McLaughlin-Levrone chases historic hurdles double

AFP
Los Angeles, United States

From the moment she qualified for her first Olympic Games as a 16-year-old high school student, Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone has never paid much attention to conventional wisdom.

For more than three decades since Soviet hurdler Marina Stepanova became the first woman to run the 400m hurdles in under 53 seconds in 1986, the athletics world had wondered when, or if, the 52-second barrier would be broken. Yet in the space of a few seasons, McLaughlin-Levrone has obliterated that longstanding benchmark, redefining notions of what was possible in her event.

In 2021 she clocked a world record 51.90sec at the US Olympic trials in Eugene, Oregon, to become the first woman under the 52-second mark. She followed that up by shaving a massive 0.44sec off her own record when she stormed to victory at the Tokyo Olympics in 51.46sec.

In 2022, she bettered that mark at the US trials in Eugene with a time of 51.41sec, before clocking a jaw-dropping time of 50.68sec on her way to victory at the World Championships a month later. After dabbling with the flat 400m in 2023, McLaughlin-Levrone returned to her specialist event this season and has once again returned to her record-breaking ways.

She booked her place in Paris with another world record at the US Olympic trials last month, storming home in

50.65sec with a performance that appeared to take even herself by surprise.

"I was not expecting that," McLaughlin-Levrone said after her victory in Eugene. "I'm just amazed, baffled and shocked."

It was the sort of performance that suggests McLaughlin-Levrone is more than ready to make more history in Paris, where she could become the first woman ever to successfully defend the 400m hurdles title with a victory.

She is likely to face a stiff challenge in the form of the Netherlands' Femke Bol, who won gold at last year's world championships in Budapest in the absence of the injured American and has just become only the second woman to break the 51-second barrier for the event.

UNBEATEN STREAK

But McLaughlin-Levrone has demonstrated she's rarely more

dangerous than when pushed by a competitor, citing her early career rivalry with 2016 Olympic champion Dalilah Mohamed as helping push her to new heights, a case of "iron sharpening iron" as she describes it.

Few would bet against McLaughlin-Levrone retaining her Olympic crown at the Stade de France on August 8, a day after she turns 25.

As well as her Olympic title, McLaughlin-Levrone will also be defending a five-year unbeaten streak in her event. Her last defeat over the 400m hurdles came in the final of the 2019 World Championships in Doha, where she was pipped for victory by her compatriot Mohamed.

Born in New Jersey in 1999, track and field was embedded in McLaughlin-Levrone's DNA.

Her father, Willie McLaughlin, reached the semi-finals in the 400m at the US trials for the 1984 Olympics, while her

mother Mary was a respectable half-miler.

As a young girl, McLaughlin-Levrone watched the 2008 Beijing Olympics, and her idol Allyson Felix, and determined that she would one day perform on the same stage.

After qualifying for her first Olympics as a teenager in 2016, McLaughlin-Levrone's progression continued steadily before her breakthrough Olympic crown in 2021, her improvements coming rapidly after linking up with new coach Bobby Kersee in 2020.

In Tokyo, she added another gold medal after forming part of the relay 4x400m relay squad, where she raced in a quartet alongside Felix.

"Since I was eight years old, that's something I had aspired to do, and for it to finally come to fruition felt like a weight off my shoulders," McLaughlin-Levrone said of her 2021 gold.

Victory in Paris would raise the prospect of McLaughlin-Levrone targeting a third straight Olympic gold at the 2028 Los Angeles Games.

While Los Angeles remains a long way distant, McLaughlin-Levrone says she sees herself running well beyond this summer's Olympics.

"It does get harder as the years go by," she said in an interview with *Women's Health* magazine.

"You're pushing your body to its limits. It's a part of sports that can be physically draining, mentally draining, and that's why taking breaks and remembering why you love it is so important."

"Track is not going to last forever, so I'm trying to continue to enjoy it. I don't want to take anything for granted."

GETTING READY



Qatar's beach volleyball player Ahmed Tijan and his partner Cherif Younousse during a training session at the Olympics Village in Paris yesterday.



Onana joins Villa from Everton

Aston Villa signed Belgium midfielder Amadou Onana from Everton in a deal worth a reported £50mn (\$64mn) yesterday. Onana agreed a five-year contract with Villa, who had been searching for a replacement for Douglas Luiz after the Brazilian's move to Juventus. The 22-year-old failed to make an impact at Everton after arriving from Lille two years ago. But, after featuring for Belgium at Euro 2024, Onana has been given the chance to revive his Premier League career by Villa boss Unai Emery. "Aston Villa is delighted to announce the signing of Amadou Onana from Everton," the club said on their website. Capped 17 times by Belgium, Onana made 72 appearances for Everton, scoring four goals. He joins Villa with the club looking forward to their first Champions League campaign since 1983 after last season's fourth-place finish in the Premier League. It has been a busy close season for Emery, who had already signed Ross Barkley from Luton, Juventus duo Samuel Iling-Junior and Enzo Barrenechea, Sheffield United's Cameron Archer, Ian Maatsen from Chelsea, former Hull winger Jaden Philogene and Everton's Lewis Dobbin.

(AFP)



USA's Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone reacts after taking second place in the women's 400m event during the IAAF Diamond League at the Charlety Stadium in Paris on June 9, 2023. (AFP)