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AGE IS JUST A NUMBER FOR MARTINEZ
VENEZUELAN SHOOTER RETURNS TO THE OLYMPICS 40 YEARS AFTER COMPETING IN 1984 LOS ANGELES GAMES
It's been a while – 40 years to be exact – since Venezuelan trap shooter Leonel Martinez last competed at the Olympics. He was only 20 when he took part in the Los Angeles Games in 1984, but says he's in better shape now, at 60, as he prepares to compete in Paris after the second-longest gap between Olympic appearances in history. Only Japanese dressage rider Hiroshi Hoketsu waited longer to return to the Olympics. He first competed in Tokyo in 1964 and returned to the Games in Beijing in 2008.

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SPOTLIGHT

Qatar has gone from strength to strength at Olympic Games

Qatar first participated in the Olympics at Montreal Games in 1976 with an administrative delegation only

QNA
Doha

Qatar has maintained a strong presence in the Olympic Games since its debut at the Los Angeles in 1984. The country has shown significant progress from one edition to the next, earning a prominent position among Gulf and Arab nations through the medals won by its athletes over the years.

Qatar's total Olympic medal tally stands at eight: two golds, two silvers and four bronzes. The Qatari delegation is optimistic about increasing this historic haul in Paris, thanks to the unwavering support and continuous development of Qatari sports, which have propelled the nation to the top rank in the Gulf region and fifth among Arab countries in terms of Olympic medals.

Qatar first participated in the Olympics at the Montreal Games in 1976 with an administrative delegation only. On March 14, 1979, the Qatar Olympic Committee was established, joining the International Olympic Committee in 1980 and the Olympic Council of Asia in 1981.

Qatar's active participation began at the Los Angeles Olympics in 1984, competing in football, athletics, and shooting. The football team made a notable debut by drawing 2-2 with France, which went on to win the gold medal. Despite this strong performance, losses to Chile and Norway prevented Qatar from advancing to the quarter-finals.

In the 1988 Seoul Olympics, Qatar sent a delegation of 12 members, including eight athletes in athletics. This participation was crucial for gaining experience, especially as it was only the second Olympic Games held in Asia, following the 1964 Tokyo Olympics.

Qatar achieved its first Olympic medal at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, where 31 athletes participated. Mohamed Suleiman won the bronze medal in the men's 1500 metres, outpacing a field of renowned global athletes and marking a historic moment for Qatar and the Gulf region.

The football team also excelled, reaching the quarter-finals for the first time. They secured a 1-0 victory over Egypt, drew 1-1 with Colombia, and lost 2-0 to eventual champions Spain, advancing as

Qatar's total Olympic medal tally stands at eight: two golds, two silvers and four bronzes.



the second team in their group but falling to Poland 2-0 in the quarter-finals.

At the 1996 Atlanta Games, Qatar's 12-athlete delegation competed in athletics, shooting, volleyball, and table tennis. This edition marked the Olympic debut of shooter Nasser Saleh al-Attiyah, who would go on to achieve significant milestones in Qatari sports history. Additionally, Hamad al-Hamad participated in table tennis, having earned his spot by winning the West Asia Championship.

Qatar's fifth consecutive Olympic par-

icipation came at the 2000 Sydney Olympics in Australia. This marked the first appearance of Qatari swimmers in the Olympic Games. Qatar was represented by a delegation of 17 athletes competing in athletics, weightlifting, table tennis, shooting, and swimming. At the Sydney Olympics, Qatar secured a bronze medal in weightlifting through athlete Asaad Saif in the 105kg category, marking the country's second Olympic medal.

In the 2004 Athens Olympics in Greece, Qatar competed in five sports: shooting,

wrestling, weightlifting, swimming, and athletics. Shooting champion Nasser al-Attiyah carried the Qatari flag during the parade. This participation was the largest for Qatar compared to previous Olympic editions, with a total delegation of 41 members, including 20 athletes.

At the 2008 Beijing Olympics in China, Qatar participated in six sports: athletics, shooting, swimming, weightlifting, fencing, and taekwondo. The number of participating athletes increased to 22, along with the administrative delegation.

This Olympic edition saw the largest Qatari athletics delegation to date, with 14 athletes, marking the largest compared to previous Olympic participation.

The 2012 London Olympics marked a new milestone for Qatar with the achievement of two medals: a silver by Mutaz Barshim in the high jump and a bronze by al-Attiyah in the skeet shooting event. This brought Qatar's total medal tally to four: one silver and three bronzes. Qatar participated in shooting, athletics, swimming and table tennis at the London Olympics, with four Qatari women athletes making their debut, and shooting champion Bahia al-Hamad carrying the Qatari flag at the opening ceremony.

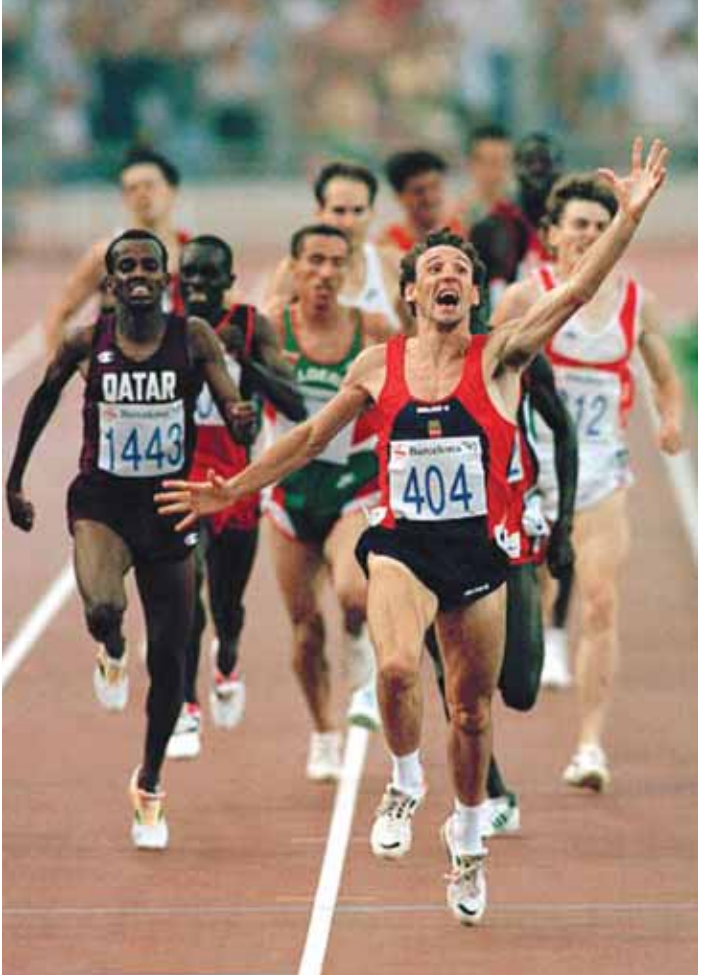
At the 2016 Rio Olympics in Brazil, Qatari successes continued with Barshim winning a silver medal, giving Qatar its fifth Olympic medal. Qatar's delegation included 38 athletes representing 10 sports federations: athletics, handball, shooting, equestrian, boxing, beach volleyball, swimming, table tennis, judo and weightlifting.

The 2020 Tokyo Olympics in Japan marked another significant achievement for Qatar, recording its most successful participation ever.

Qatar won two gold medals through Barshim in the high jump and Fares Ibrahim in weightlifting, along with a bronze in beach volleyball through duo Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan, marking the first time an Arab team sport won an Olympic medal. This brought Qatar's total Olympic medal count to eight, with aspirations for more success in future Olympic Games.

At the Paris Olympics, which will begin from Friday, Qatar is aiming to surpass its three medals won in Tokyo. This time around, there are more athletes – 14 in total – than there were three years ago in Tokyo, increasing the chances of improving the medal tally. The fourteen athletes representing Qatar at Paris 2024 are:

Mutaz Essa Barshim, Abderrahman Samba, Abubaker Haydar, Bassem Hemeida, Ismail Dawood, Ammar Ismail, Saif Mohamed and Shahad Mohamed in track and field, Saeed Abu Sharab and Rashid Saleh al-Athba in shooting, Fares Ibrahim in weightlifting, Cherif Younousse and Ahmed Tijan in beach volleyball and Abdulaziz al-Obaidly in swimming.



Qatar won its first Olympic medal when Mohamed Suleiman (left) claimed a bronze in the 1500 metres at 1992 Barcelona Games.



FROM THE ARCHIVES: Gulf Times' August 9, 1992 edition coverage of Mohamed Suleiman winning the historic bronze at Barcelona Games.



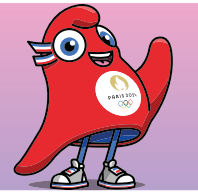
Nasser al-Attiyah won bronze in the skeet shooting at the 2012 London Olympics.



High jump legend Mutaz Barshim will once again carry Qatar's hopes of medal success in his fourth Olympic Games in Paris.



Weightlifter Fares Ibrahim will be back to defend the middle-heavyweight title he won three years ago.



QATAR STARS LEAGUE

Al Sadd rope in Sanchez as new coach



QNA
Doha

Al Sadd has officially announced the appointment of **Felix Sanchez** as the head coach of its football team.

The contract, effective from the upcoming 2024-2025 Qatar Stars League (QSL) season, spans two years, concluding in the summer of 2026.

Sanchez, 48, will join the team in their current pre-season training camp in Malaga, Spain, which continues until July 29.

Prior to this role, Sanchez gained extensive experience coaching Qatar's youth national teams at the

Aspire Academy. He subsequently led the Qatar national football team from 2017-2022.

Distinguished coaching career

Sanchez has had a distinguished coaching career, marked by significant achievements with Qatar's national teams.

He guided the Qatari youth team to victory in the 2014 AFC U-19 Championship, defeating North Korea in the final with a goal from Akram Afif, a player Sanchez later guided to dizzy heights.

Subsequently, he led the Qatari Olympic team to the final of the AFC U-23 Championship. Sanchez's crowning achievement came in 2019 when he led the Qatari national team to their first-ever

Asian Cup title, defeating Japan 3-1 in the final.

The team also reached the semi-finals of the CONCACAF Championship in 2021.

Following Qatar's early exit from the 2022 FIFA World Cup, Sanchez stepped down as the national team's coach.

He subsequently took charge of the Ecuadorian national team but was dismissed after their round-of-16 defeat at the Copa America.

Meanwhile, Al Sadd, fresh off a domestic double (QSL and Amir Cup), is gearing up for the new season.

The club has strengthened its squad with the signing of Spanish striker Rafa Mujica on a four-year deal.



Qatar Stars League (QSL) side Al Wakrah have signed former Qatar defender Abdulkarim Hassan (right) until the end of 2027 season, it was announced yesterday. The 30-year-old has played for Al Sadd and Persepolis in the past. Hassan won the AFC Player of the Year award in 2018.

TENNIS

Murray confirms retirement after Paris Olympics

The Briton has won 46 titles and banked \$65mn in prize money

AFP
Paris

Andy Murray confirmed yesterday that he will retire after the Paris Olympics, closing another chapter in tennis's golden age.

The 37-year-old, a two-time Olympic champion, is planning to play in the singles and doubles at his fifth Games.

"Arrived in Paris for my last-ever tennis tournament @Olympics," the three-time Grand Slam champion and former world number one posted on social media.

"Competing for Great Britain has been by far the most memorable weeks of my career and I'm extremely proud to get to do it one final time."

Murray has been ravaged by injuries in recent years, slumping to 121st in the world.

The Scot has played with a metal hip since 2019 and suffered ankle damage earlier this year before undergoing surgery to remove a spinal cyst, which ruled him out of singles at Wimbledon.

Instead, he played doubles with brother Jamie and was defeated in the first round before an emotional tribute arranged by tournament chiefs.

"It's hard because I would love to keep playing but I can't," admitted Murray at the All England Club. "Physically it is too tough now, all of the injuries, they have added up and they haven't been insignificant."

Murray famously ended Britain's 77-year wait for a men's champion at Wimbledon when he triumphed in 2013, defeating career-long rival Novak Djokovic in the final.

He added a second title in 2016, taking his career majors total to



Andy Murray of Great Britain during training for the Paris 2024 Olympics tennis competition at Roland-Garros Stadium, Paris, France. (Reuters)

three after breaking his duck at the 2012 US Open. Murray won gold at the 2012 Olympics on an emotional day at the All England Club when he defeated Roger Federer just weeks after he had lost the Wimbledon final to the Swiss on the same Centre Court.

Four years later, he defeated Juan Martin del Potro to become the first player, male or female, to win two Olympic singles golds.

Murray also led Britain to the Davis Cup title in 2015, the country's first in 79 years.

He has won 46 titles in all and banked around \$65mn in prize money.

International Tennis Federation president Dave Haggerty said Murray had "lived and breathed the values of tennis throughout his long career, championing equality and helping to send the

message that our sport is for everyone".

Scotland's First Minister John Swinney hailed Murray as "our greatest-ever sportsman".

"Heartfelt thanks to @andy_murray for an outstanding and inspiring career which has made a profound impact on so many," he posted on X.

Murray's mother, Judy, commented in a post on X: "5th Olympics. Final tournament," followed by a symbol representing an explosion.

The British star's success came in an era dominated by Federer, Djokovic and Rafael Nadal.

The so-called 'Big Three' have hoovered up 66 Grand Slam titles between them but time is catching up with the icons of the sport.

Federer won 20 majors before he retired in 2022. Nadal, a 22-

time Grand Slam winner, is 38 years old and has played just six tournaments all year as he battles injury. Djokovic, 37, the holder of 24 majors, has been deposed as Australian Open and Roland Garros champion in 2024.

Jannik Sinner, the 22-year-old Italian, succeeded him as champion in Melbourne and took his world number one ranking.

Carlos Alcaraz, 21, won the French Open and successfully defended his Wimbledon title, sweeping Djokovic off court in a one-sided final earlier this month.

If Djokovic loses his US Open title in September, it will be the first time since 2002 that at least one of the three giants has failed to win a Slam title.

The tennis competition in Paris begins at Roland Garros on July 27 and ends on August 4.

Leagues and unions take legal action against FIFA over international calendar

Paris: Two major bodies representing footballers and football clubs in Europe are filing a complaint to the European Commission accusing FIFA of abusing its position.

Football's world governing body has taken "unilateral decisions" and its conduct "infringes EU competition law and notably constitutes an abuse of dominance", FIFPro Europe and the European Leagues body said in a statement yesterday. FIFPro is the global players' union while European Leagues brings together more than one thousand clubs from 33 countries around Europe. Its member leagues include the English Premier League, as well as the leagues in Italy, Germany and France.

They say FIFA's conduct with regards to the international match calendar has "harmed the economic interests of national leagues and the welfare of players" and argue FIFA's role as a regulator and competition organiser is a conflict of interest. FIFA has been accused of a failure to consult over recent changes to the calendar, such as the introduction of a 32-team Club World Cup. The first edition of the expanded Club World Cup is set to take place in the United States in June and July next year and 12 European clubs are due to feature. Many of the continent's leading players will therefore be obliged to participate at a time when they would otherwise have been afforded a long close-season break, a year ahead of the expanded 48-team World Cup in North America.

'Unanimously approved'
"The international match calendar

is now beyond saturation and has become unsustainable for national leagues and a risk for the health of players," FIFPro and European Leagues said.

"FIFA's decisions over the last years have repeatedly favoured its own competitions and commercial interests, neglected its responsibilities as a governing body, and harmed the economic interests of national leagues and the welfare of players."

"National leagues and player unions, which represent the interests of all clubs and all players at the national level, and regulate labour relations through collectively agreed solutions, cannot accept that global regulations are decided unilaterally."

"Legal action is now the only responsible step for European leagues and player unions to protect football, its ecosystem and its workforce from FIFA's unilateral decisions."

The statement refers to the Super League judgement from the European Court of Justice last December, which required FIFA and other governing bodies to exercise their regulatory functions in a way that is transparent, objective, non-discriminatory and proportionate.

FIFA's conduct over the calendar, they allege, "falls well short of these requirements". FIFA responded via a statement published on X, in which it said "the current calendar was unanimously approved by the FIFA Council, which is composed of representatives from all continents, including Europe, following a comprehensive and inclusive consultation, which included FIFPro and league bodies".

Simpson is first US vice-captain for Ryder Cup

New York: Former US Open champion Webb Simpson will serve as one of Keegan Bradley's vice-captains on the US Ryder Cup team who will try to reclaim the trophy from Europe next year at Bethpage Black in New York, the PGA of America said yesterday.

The 38-year-old Simpson, a seven-times PGA Tour winner who played on three losing Ryder Cup teams in 2012, 2014 and 2018, is the first vice captain to be appointed by Bradley.

"Webb is someone who I have

long admired and respected as a competitor and friend," Bradley, who was announced as captain two weeks ago, said in a news release.

"He possesses a wealth of team golf experience and knows what it takes to win. Webb will be a valuable member of our leadership team and a trusted resource for me as we prepare for Bethpage Black next September."

The 2025 Ryder Cup will mark Simpson's first significant stint as a vice captain in the biennial team event.

CRICKET

Top order bat Pope says 600 runs in a day within England's reach

AFP
Nottingham, United Kingdom

Ollie Pope believes England could yet score 600 runs in a single day of Test cricket in the right circumstances for Ben Stokes' men.

Pope was one of three century-makers for the hosts as England won the second Test against the West Indies at Trent Bridge by 241 runs, with Harry Brook and Joe Root following him to three figures in a series-clinching success.

Victory in Nottingham was also the first time England had passed 400 in both innings in the 147-year history of Test cricket.

Pope was one of four batsmen to score a hundred when England piled up 506-4 on the first day against Pakistan at Rawalpindi in December 2022, despite facing a mere 75 overs.

And the England vice-captain believes the team now have the capacity to surpass that feat, but also an ability to adapt to more bowler-friendly conditions as they

refine their aggressive 'Bazball' approach. "I think when Baz (England coach Brendon McCullum) and Stokes took over, we were a batting unit with, not a lack of experience, but a lack of confidence at the time," said Pope.

At the time it was about building confidence, now it's about hopefully becoming more and more ruthless.

"Sometimes we might score 280-300 in a day but that's OK and probably because we're reading situations."

The 26-year-old Surrey star added: "We saw at Trent Bridge, when the lights were on and it started swinging more that was the time just to manage the game a little bit and that's something we want to keep getting better and better at."

"But there might be a day where we go and get 500 or 600 at some point in the future as well. That's a cool thing to have."

England, who previously thrashed the West Indies by an innings and 114 runs at Lord's, have now won a Test series for the first time since 2022 as they lead 2-0 ahead of this week's finale at the Edgbaston ground in Birmingham.



Drawn campaigns against New Zealand and Australia in 2023, and this year's 4-1 loss in India, checked England's progress.

They have since undergone a significant revamp of the team, with England record wicket-taker James Anderson, 100-cap veteran Jonny Bairstow, wicketkeeper Ben Foakes and experienced spinner Jack Leach all making way for fresh talent.

The newcomers have all made impressive starts, with fast bowler Gus Atkinson

taking 12 wickets at Lord's, off-spinner Shoaib Bashir grabbing a five-wicket haul at Trent Bridge and Jamie Smith shining as wicketkeeper-batsman.

"I think there were some big calls and some tough calls to make on guys, but it feels at the minute that we've got a really nice balanced attack and batting line-up as well," said Pope.

"We want to give guys confidence and that we're building the team around them, but at the same time, in international cricket there's always going to be pressure for spots. It's been shown in the last few weeks that the guys who have come in have done beautifully and we can keep building from here."

Asalanka to lead Sri Lanka in T20s against India

Sri Lanka named all-rounder Charith Asalanka as captain of their Twenty20 side yesterday ahead of a three-match series against world champions India starting this weekend.

The 27-year-old replaces Wanindu Hasaranga, who stepped down as skip-

per in the shortest format after Sri Lanka failed to make the Super Eight stage of the T20 World Cup in the US and West Indies last month.

Sri Lanka and India will play three T20s in Pallekele from Saturday before meeting in three one-day internationals.

Kusal Mendis leads Sri Lanka's ODI side while Dhananjaya de Silva is the test captain. De Silva and veteran Angelo Mathews were not included in the 16-man T20 squad but there was a place for Hasaranga.

India will also have a new captain in Suryakumar Yadav, who took charge of the T20 team after the retirement of Rohit Sharma following their triumphant World Cup campaign.

T20I squad: Charith Asalanka (captain), Pathum Nissanka, Kusal Perera, Avishka Fernando, Kusal Mendis, Dinesh Chandimal, Kamindu Mendis, Dasun Shanaka, Wanindu Hasaranga, Dunieth Wellalage, Maheesh Theekshana, Chamindu Wickramasinghe, Matheesha Pathirana, Nuwan Thushara, Dushmantha Chameera, Binura Fernando.

SPOTLIGHT

World Aquatics keep an eye on Chinese swimmers in Olympic Games build-up



World Aquatics president Husain al-Musallam.

AFP Paris

World Aquatics has carried out its most rigorous drug testing programme ever in the lead-up to the Paris Olympics, with Chinese swimmers targeted.

Since the beginning of January, 2,145 anti-doping tests have been conducted on Games athletes, overseen by the International Testing Agency.

Including tests by other organisations, swimmers have been tested an average of 3.4 times, with 4,774 samples taken in total.

"It is our top priority that our athletes compete in a clean and fair competition," World Aquatics president Husain al-Musallam said yesterday.

"Our rigorous testing programme reflects our dedication to upholding the highest standards of integrity in aquatic sports and we are grateful for the ITA's partnership in conducting it."

Chinese swimmers were a key focus, with the 31 competing in Paris each tested at least 10 times by World Aquatics. It follows revelations in April that 23 Chinese swimmers failed tests for banned heart drug trimetazidine in 2021.

They were allowed to compete at the Tokyo Olympics, where they won three golds, after anti-doping agency WADA accepted China's explanation that the positive results were caused by food contamination at their hotel.

Eleven of them are scheduled to swim in Paris. The incident, uncovered in April by the New York Times and German broadcaster ARD, sparked global

uproar, with US anti-doping authorities accusing WADA of a cover-up.

An independent investigation overseen by a retired Swiss prosecutor cleared the agency of any wrongdoing this month. World Aquatics said it had conducted 418 tests on Chinese swimmers since January, independent of any other

anti-doping organisation and using a WADA-accredited laboratory based in Europe.

Including tests conducted by other organisations, Chinese swimmers were tested on average 21 times.

In contrast, Australian swimmers were tested an average of four times in the same period, and US swimmers an average of six times. Testing will continue during the nine-day swimming programme at La Defense Arena, which starts on Saturday

FOCUS

Doping ban overshadows Kenya's Paris campaign

I'm not wishing it (doping ban) to happen to someone else'



10km specialist Rhonex Kipruto, pictured in 2019, has been banned for six years for doping. (AFP)

AFP Nairobi

Kenya's vaunted distance runners head to the Olympics struggling to emerge from beneath the shadow of a lengthy list of doping scandals that have tarnished the African nation's proud reputation as a track and field powerhouse.

Marathon runner Beatrice Toroitich became the latest Kenyan athlete to fall foul of anti-doping rules last month when she was banned for life following a third positive drugs test.

That case followed a six-year sanction imposed on world 10km road race record holder Rhonex Kipruto earlier in June, while long-distance runner Rodgers Kwemoi was also banned for six years for anti-doping violations in May. In total nearly 100 Kenyan athletes, mainly long-distance runners, have been sanctioned for drugs offences since 2017, caught in a sweeping crackdown waged by the Anti-Doping Association of Kenya (ADAK) in the wake of doping scandals at the 2016 Rio Olympics.

"Kenya is making big strides in the fight against doping," ADAK chief executive Sarah Shibutse told AFP in an interview. "We're not relenting in this fight that's at the heart of our national pride."

Kenyan athletes competing in Paris have been subjected to a stringent testing regime, undergoing three out-of-competition tests in the 10 months leading up to the Olympics.

Kenyan anti-doping chiefs have enlisted the support of the independent Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU), the Kenyan sports ministry and the country's law enforcement bodies to help in the investigation and testing of athletes.

Shibutse said that in turn has led to the closure of several pharmacies in the Rift Valley - the spiritual heartland of Kenyan distance running - suspected of funneling performance-enhancing drugs to athletes.

'For their own good'
Testing meanwhile has intensified dramatically, with 2,000 tests carried out in the past year. ADAK aims to triple that number to 6,000 per year eventually. Shibutse says the volume of tests will continue to increase until "athletes get to understand that we're doing this for their own good."

"We are having more samples being collected which means more positive doping cases are being detected than before. This is a sign that the process is working," Shibutse said.

During a fact-finding trip to Kenya in March 2023, AIU chief Brett Clothier warned that ath-

letes needed to brace themselves for tougher action against drug-taking in the sport.

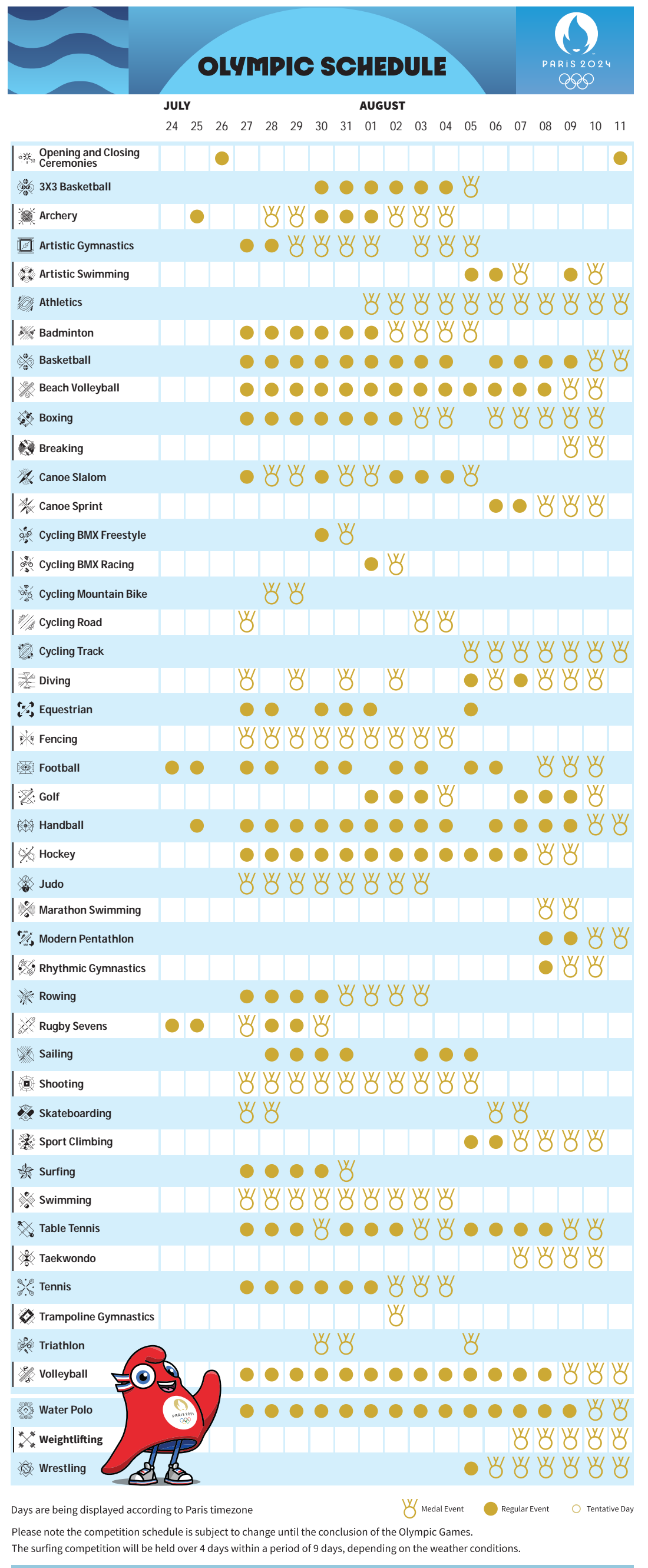
"One thing that everyone should be aware of is that with more testing, more cases will be reported, but that doesn't mean more doping. That is what is coming but it is the pathway to address this problem once and for all," Clothier said.

ADAK head of anti-doping education and research Martin Sisa Yauma said the use of the Athlete Biological Passport (ABP), which tracks an athlete's blood values over time, has been used effectively to nab recent dopers including Kipruto, the world junior 10,000m champion Rodgers Kwemoi and former Commonwealth and African 10,000m champion Joyce Chepkirui.

For those athletes attempting to rebuild their careers after being caught doping, the road back to elite competition is often a struggle.

Mark Otieno, a former national 100m champion, who was banned for two years for using the prohibited anabolic steroid methasterone before the Tokyo Olympics, made a return last November to try and qualify for the Paris Olympics.

"I'm not wishing it (doping ban) to happen to someone else," said Otieno, after failing to make the Olympic 100m qualifying time of 10.00sec.



Days are being displayed according to Paris timezone. Please note the competition schedule is subject to change until the conclusion of the Olympic Games. The surfing competition will be held over 4 days within a period of 9 days, depending on the weather conditions.



SPOTLIGHT

Dujardin out of Olympics after 'error of judgement'

AFP
London

British dressage star Charlotte Dujardin withdrew from the Paris Olympics yesterday after a video emerged showing her making "an error of judgement" during a coaching session.

Dujardin, a three-time Olympic champion and joint most decorated British woman Olympian, said she had withdrawn from all competition while authorities investigated the incident.

"A video has emerged from four years ago which shows me making an error of judgement during a coaching session," she said in a statement, days before the Games.

It was not immediately clear what the video showed.

"Understandably, the International Federation for Equestrian Sports (FEI) is investigating and I have made the decision to withdraw from all competition - including the Paris Olympics - while this process takes place.

"What happened was completely out of character and does not reflect how I train my horses or coach my pupils, however there is no excuse. I am deeply ashamed and should have set a better example in that moment."

Dujardin was eliminated from the European Championships in 2019 after blood was found on her horse, Mount St John Freestyle, in a post-competition check. The FEI said the action taken then did

not imply there was any intent to injure the horse. Dujardin, 39, could have become Britain's most decorated woman Olympian in Paris. A medal of any colour would have taken her clear of Laura Kenny, with whom she is currently tied on six medals.

"I will cooperate fully with the FEI, British Equestrian Federation and British Dressage during their investigations, and will not be commenting further until the process is complete," she said.

Dujardin was due to compete in both the individual dressage and the team event alongside Carl Hester and world champion Lottie Fry at the Paris Games. She is expected to be replaced in the team by Becky Moody. Dujardin won individual and team golds at London

2012 while riding Valegro, with the pair retaining the individual title and winning silver in the team event at Rio 2016.

Olympic and equestrian authorities have taken an increasingly strict line against alleged improprieties relating to the treatment of animals in recent years.

During the delayed Tokyo Games in 2021, at which Dujardin won two bronze medals on Geo, a German modern pentathlon coach was thrown out for striking a horse. Authorities launched a review of the sport, resulting in the equestrian element being removed and replaced with an obstacle course in Los Angeles in 2028. The dressage competition at Paris 2024 begins on July 30 at the Chateau de Versailles.



Britain's Charlotte Dujardin rides Gio in the dressage grand prix freestyle individual finals during the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games at the Equestrian Park in Tokyo on July 28, 2021. (AFP)

FOCUS

US vow to keep pressure off Biles at Paris Olympics

'She seems to be in a really good place and she's been a great leader'



Simone Biles warms up during a training session in Le Bourget on Monday, ahead of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. (AFP)

AFP
Paris

United States gymnastics chiefs said yesterday they want to keep the pressure off Simone Biles as she bids for six gold medals at the Paris Olympics.

US women's team technical leader Chellsie Memmel said Biles must not feel they are "relying" on her and she has the option of not competing on all four apparatus in the women's team final. "I don't say, 'You are keeping us all together, we're relying on you and you alone,'" Memmel told journalists days before the Games begin in the French capital.

Biles's coach Cecile Landi approached coaching staff to discuss expectations on the four-time Olympic champion, who disclosed her mental health struggles during the Tokyo Olympics. "If she doesn't feel like it's going

to be in her best interest to do all four events that day, is that an option for her?" Memmel said Landi asked. "And we said: absolutely. If that's what she needs to continue to be at her best for her team and for herself, then that's what we're going to do because there are still four other members on our team."

Biles, 27, returns to the glare of the Olympic spotlight in women's qualifying on Sunday with the team final on Tuesday, three years after struggling with the disorienting mental block that gymnasts call the "twisties".

Biles dazzled at the 2016 Rio Games, winning gold in all-around, vault, floor exercise and team events. She arrived at the pandemic-delayed Tokyo Games with superstar billing and history in her sights. She withdrew from the majority of her events but came back to win team silver and bronze on the balance beam.

Mommel said that the team did not want Biles to feel she was

the glue holding them together. "So I think for her, just knowing that she has that option...now whether she takes it or not, it's going to be completely up to her. We also talked about that with her at worlds last year, and she ultimately decided to do all four events during team finals. But I think just for her, knowing that that is a possibility, that helps."

The US women's team includes three-time world medalist and Tokyo all-around gold medalist Suni Lee; reigning Olympic floor gold medalist Jade Carey and 2020 Olympic team silver medalist Jordan Chiles, along with 16-year-old newcomer Hezly Rivera. "It's like that double-edged sword for someone where she wants to be able to help but also wants to be able to be at her best," said Memmel of Biles.

The US trials earlier this month had been "pretty rough," said former Olympic medalist Memmel of injuries to Skye Blakely,

Shilese Jones and Kayla DiCello. "Simone has been doing great, she's been solid in training, she seems to be in a really good place and she's been a great leader for this team. I know together as a team they're all really looking forward to the competition and it is kind of their redemption tour you know from the previous Olympic Games, so they're excited they're all coming together for it and Simone has been a big part of that."

Yesterday, 23-times world champion Biles looked relaxed as she went through her workout at Le Bourget Exhibition Centre training hall to the north of Paris. Her Taylor Swift music blared for her floor routine as the six-time world champion on the apparatus hit a spectacular triple-twisting double back flip. The American stopped her balance beam routine to watch the uneven bars and cheer 17-year-old Algerian Kaylila Nemour, the reigning world silver medalist on the apparatus.

LADY GAGA IN PARIS, SPARKING OPENING CEREMONY RUMOURS

Video of Lady Gaga in Paris just days before the start of the Olympic Games has sparked rumours the US pop star could feature in Friday's opening ceremony. The 38-year-old was seen arriving at a hotel in the French capital in videos posted on social media.

The music for the opening ceremony, to be held along the river Seine rather than in the athletics stadium for the first time in the history of the Olympics, is yet to be fully announced.

Franco-Malian R&B star Aya Nakamura is widely tipped to perform despite criticism from far-right politicians, including Marine Le Pen who suggested an appearance by her would "humiliate" France. Celine Dion has also been spotted in Paris, fuelling rumours she too could take part in either the opening or closing ceremony. French electro superstars Daft Punk said they had turned down an invitation to play in the opening ceremony, while globe-trotting French DJ David Guetta has been overlooked - much to his irritation. In the ceremony, around 6,000-7,000 athletes are set to sail down a six-kilometre (four-mile) stretch of the river Seine from the Austerlitz bridge in the east to the Eiffel Tower, on 85 barges and boats.

Hurdler Amusan to be Nigeria's Olympics flagbearer

World record sprint hurdler Tobi Amusan has been named Nigeria's flag bearer for the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics, the country's sports ministry said.

Amusan becomes the first member of the athletics team to be given the honour in 20 years after Mary Onyiah carried the flag at the 2004 Athens Games. The Nigerian Olympic Committee also announced badminton player Anuoluwapo Opeyori as the general team captain. Amusan, 27, was only cleared to take part in the Paris Olympics in June after the Court of Arbitration for Sport dismissed appeals against the decision to clear her of a doping offence. She was charged in July 2023 with missing three anti-doping tests in a period of 12 months, but was cleared of the offence by a disciplinary tribunal of the

sport's governing body, World Athletics. Amusan set the 100 metres hurdles world record of 12.12sec at the 2022 world championships in Eugene, Oregon and went on to win the world title.

She is the current Commonwealth and African champion in that event. Opeyori won the African Championships and African Games in the singles event in 2019.

He also won gold in the men's singles at the 2023 African Games, and a silver medal in the men's singles at Accra 2023. His first Olympics was in Tokyo 2020.

Cuba demands expulsion of canoeist from refugee team

Cuba's Olympic Committee demanded the expulsion of citizen Fernando Jorge, a champion sprint canoeist, from the refugee team taking part in the Paris Olympics.

Jorge, who fled the communist-run island two years ago to the United States, won a gold medal in Tokyo in 2020 for Cuba. He is one of two Cubans on the International Olympic Committee (IOC) refugee team, which has included citizens from the nation for the first time since it first competed in Rio in 2016.

The COC in a statement published in local media demanded "the immediate expulsion of the aforementioned athlete from the Paris 2024 Olympic Games."

According to the statement, Jorge, 25, violated "the rules that govern the International Olympic Movement" by making "disrespectful and false political statements against his country, his people and the sports movement that allowed him to be Olympic champion in Tokyo-2020."

The COC also denounced the decision to include Cubans on the refugee team, even though the IOC recognises "that none of these athletes...are uprooted by war or persecuted."

The Olympic refugee team includes 36 athletes from 12 countries. The other Cuban citizen is weightlifter Ramiro Mora, who is based in Great Britain. Cuba's bleak economic circumstances have pushed some five percent of the population to flee in recent years, many to the United States.

BOTTOMLINE

Star names in short supply in men's Olympic football tournament

AFP
Paris

Kylian Mbappe wanted to take part in this year's Olympics in his home city, while there were hopes that Lionel Messi would feature for Argentina, but instead the men's football tournament at the Paris Games will be largely devoid of star attractions.

As captain of France and the most famous athlete in the country hosting this year's Games, Mbappe's presence in coach Thierry Henry's Olympic squad would have been an enormous boost for organisers as well as for the team's chances of winning gold. But Mbappe, 25, had to accept that his new club Real Madrid would not allow him to participate

immediately after he played in the French side that reached the semi-finals of Euro 2024 in Germany. That is the problem for the men's football competition, which begins today and runs until August 9.

Clubs are not obliged to release players for a tournament held outside an official FIFA window for international football, following straight on from the European Championship and Copa America.

Messi, now 37 and part of the Argentina team that claimed Olympic gold in Beijing in 2008, ruled himself out of Javier Mascherano's squad for Paris shortly before the Copa America in the United States, which his country won. "I spoke with Mascherano, and we immediately agreed on the situation," Messi said. "At my age, I don't want to play everything and I need to make the right choices."



France players during a training session in Marseille yesterday. (Reuters)

Henry, a French footballing great, also missed out on several other players he had hoped to call up. "The last time I had so many rejections was when I was at high school," he joked when announcing a team in which the most recognisable names are Alexandre Lacazette, the 33-year-old Lyon striker, and new Bayern Munich

signing Michael Olise. The competition is restricted to players aged under 23, apart from a maximum of three overage players per squad. As well as the superstar names, the tournament is also missing Brazil, who won gold in Rio de Janeiro in 2016 and retained the title in Tokyo three years ago, beating Spain in the final.

They failed to qualify, but Argentina must fancy their chances of ensuring a sixth straight Latin American winner of the men's football gold medal. "Obviously our objective is to try to compete and go all the way, and I think we will have a team that can do that," coach Mascherano, who won as a player in 2004 and 2008, said in an interview with South American confederation CONMEBOL.

In Julian Alvarez, the Manchester City striker who won the 2022 World Cup and the recent Copa America, they will have one of the highest-profile players taking part. Argentina are in Group B with Iraq, Ukraine and a Morocco side who have secured the services of Paris Saint-Germain right-back Achraf Hakimi. France kick off their campaign against the United States before also playing Guinea

and New Zealand in Group A. Winners in 1992 and silver medalists in Tokyo, Spain are targeting gold after their triumph at Euro 2024. Luis de la Fuente, coach of Spain's Euros-winning side, led the team to the final at the last Olympics. Santi Denia, his assistant three years ago, is in charge now.

Leading names from the European Championship such as Lamine Yamal are not involved, but another prodigious young Barcelona talent will feature, in 17-year-old centre-back Pau Cubarsi. "He is really proud to be getting the experience of the Olympics. You never know if you will get another chance, even being so young," Denia said of Cubarsi. Spain are in Group C with Uzbekistan, the Dominican Republic and Egypt, who did not secure the services of Liverpool's Mohamed Salah.