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**GOLD MEDALIST'S RIDE DERAILED**



**OLYMPIC BMX CHAMPION LOSES EQUIPMENT IN VAN BREAK-IN**

Reigning Olympic BMX freestyle champion Logan Martin had some of his equipment stolen by thieves who broke into a team van in a "crazy start" to the Australian's title defence. Martin posted video on Instagram showing the passenger side window of the vehicle smashed. Martin, who won gold in Tokyo ahead of Venezuela's Daniel Dhers, also lost his wallet. The incident occurred in Brussels, where the Australian team was at a training camp before leaving for Paris.

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**ROUND-UP**

# Paris Olympics kicks off with chaos and crowd trouble

Morocco beat Argentina but only after a late equaliser for the South American side was disallowed

AFP  
Paris

The sporting programme at the Paris Olympics endured a chaotic start yesterday as men's football kicked off and a huge police operation.

Two days before the opening ceremony, Morocco beat Argentina 2-1 in Saint-Etienne, but only after a late equaliser for the South American side was disallowed and the final minutes were played out in an empty stadium following crowd trouble.

Argentina thought they had escaped with a 2-2 draw when Cristian Medina scored in the 16th minute of added time. But as their players celebrated, projectiles including bottles and plastic cups rained down from the stands and several spectators entered the pitch, with the referee promptly blowing the whistle.

The teams left the playing area, but the referee had not blown for full-time and the outcome of the match was unclear until the sides finally reappeared two hours later to play out three more minutes in a stadium that was by now emptied of spectators. Medina's goal was eventually disallowed for offside following a review and Morocco celebrated a 2-1 win.

Silver medallists in Tokyo three years ago, Spain opened their bid for gold with a 2-1 win over Uzbekistan in Group C at the Parc des Princes in Paris. The Spain team featured two members of their Euro 2024-winning squad in Alex Baena and Fermin Lopez, but it was Marc Pubill who gave them the lead just before the half-hour mark.

Uzbekistan drew level from the penalty spot in first-half added time following a foul by Pau Cubarsi, with Roma forward Eldor Shomurodov converting the kick. Sergio Gomez then had a penalty saved early in the second half, but the former Manchester City player netted Spain's winner just after the hour mark.

Group rivals Egypt and the Dominican Republic drew 0-0. The pick of last night's later games saw hosts France face the United States in Marseille in Group A, with Thierry Henry's team hoping to win a medal despite failing in their attempts to enrol the services of Kylian Mbappe. New Zealand defeated Guinea 2-1 in the



Morocco's Soufiane Rahimi (L) celebrates with teammates Eliesse Ben Seghir (C) and Bilal El Khannouss after scoring a penalty against Argentina during group B football match at the Paris Olympic Games in Saint-Etienne, France, yesterday. (AFP)

same section with Plymouth Argyle's Ben Wayne getting the winner. Japan beat 10-man Paraguay 5-0 in Group D.

A packed Stade de France cheered on Antoine Dupont - arguably the world's best rugby player and a pin-up of the Paris Games - but he was unable to lead the hosts to victory in a 12-12 draw with the United States. "It's always a lot of emotion when you play with all your supporters so it's important to deal with that and to be better even with the pressure," admitted the 27-year-old. Australia laid down a marker to France and double champions Fiji with a 21-14 win over Samoa at a

packed Stade de France.

As the clock ticks down towards tomorrow's opening ceremony along the Seine, Olympic chiefs awarded the 2030 Winter Games to the French Alps and the 2034 event to Salt Lake City. But in a dramatic twist they warned the US city could be stripped of the Games if American authorities kept up their feud with the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).

John Coates, the chairman of the IOC's legal commission, said the host city contract confirming Salt Lake's right to stage the Olympics had been altered to allow the IOC to strip it of the Games if US authori-

ties did not respect the "supreme authority" of WADA. The US anti-doping agency (USADA) has been a vocal critic of WADA for much of the past decade and tensions escalated this year after reports in April revealed that 23 Chinese swimmers had tested positive for a banned substance ahead of the 2021 Tokyo Olympics, but were subsequently cleared to compete at the Games.

USADA chief Travis Tygart accused Olympic bosses of "stooping to threats". "Today's demonstration further showed that as it stands today, WADA is just a sport lapdog, and clean athletes have little

chance," said Tygart.

The Olympics lost a top star when tennis world number one Jannik Sinner withdrew with tonsillitis with the Italian admitting he was "sad and disappointed".

Preparations for tomorrow's historic opening ceremony were in full swing with an unprecedented security operation for the athletes' parade along the River Seine. Around 6,000-7,000 athletes are set to sail down a six-kilometre (four-mile) stretch of the river towards the Eiffel Tower, on 85 barges and boats.

Up to 500,000 people are set to watch in person from specially built stands, on the river banks and from the overlooking balconies and apartments. The area around the river has been locked down before the ceremony, with snipers positioned along the route and frogmen deployed to prevent a waterborne attack.

The entertainment line-up for the ceremony, the first time a Summer Olympics has opened outside the main stadium, is yet to be fully announced. But videos posted online showing US pop star Lady Gaga in Paris sparked rumours she will be among the performers. American rapper Snoop Dogg will carry the Olympic flame tomorrow as it makes its final rounds before the ceremony.

In the first scandal of the Games, a video emerged showing the mistreatment of a horse by one of Britain's most decorated Olympians, dressage specialist Charlotte Dujardin, who has been suspended. The film showed the three-time Olympic champion walking alongside a horse and repeatedly whipping the animal while apparently training a young rider.

Dujardin, 39, has won six Olympic medals and was aiming to become Britain's most successful female Olympian by winning further medals in Paris. In a further scandal, an assistant coach and an analyst with the Canadian women's football team were sent home for their part in spying on rivals. The analyst, 43-year-old Joey Lombardi, was also given a suspended eight-month prison sentence for flying a drone over a New Zealand training session.

Lombardi pleaded guilty when he appeared in court in Saint-Etienne on Wednesday, the court said. The assistant coach was Jasmine Mander, to whom Lombardi reported.

**SPOTLIGHT**

## Afghan cyclist sisters defy Taliban to fulfil Olympic dream

Reuters  
London

When Afghan cyclists Yulduz and Fariba Hashimi used to train on the dusty roads at home, men would hurl stones and insults, but their years of hard graft have now paid off, winning the sisters a place at the Paris Olympics. The Hashimi siblings are the first cyclists - male or female - to represent Afghanistan at the Games. But taking part is about far more than chasing medals.

"I want to represent the 20mn Afghan women who lack even the most basic rights," Yulduz, 24, said by video call from Switzerland, where the sisters now live. "I hope to be their voice and show the world the conditions Afghan women face and how, despite these challenges, they can achieve great feats."

The Paris Games are the first summer Olympics since the Taliban seized the country in August 2021. The administration has since imposed harsh restrictions on girls and women, banning them from education, jobs and sport. With all eyes on Paris, the sisters want to "present a new image of Afghanistan and Afghan women to the world".

The six-person team - three women, three men - was announced in June: the gender-equal squad a clear message to



Yulduz (left) and Fariba Hashimi are based in Switzerland.

Kabul. They will compete in the red, green and black of Afghanistan's tri-colour flag, which the Taliban have replaced.

The team was drawn up following talks between the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and senior figures from Afghanistan's National Olympic Committee living in exile. Yulduz will compete in the women's time trial on Saturday.

On Aug 4, both sisters will line up with the world's top cyclists near the Eiffel Tower for the women's road race - a grueling 158-km (98-mile) route with multiple climbs. The Taliban government does not recognise the female athletes - the Hashimi sisters and sprinter Kimia Yousofi. No

members of the Taliban have been invited to the Games.

Yulduz and Fariba, 21, grew up in Faryab, a deeply conservative, northern province bordering Turkmenistan. When the sisters decided to enter a local cycling competition as teenagers they did not even know how to ride a bike and had to borrow one to learn. "No one ever thought that women would ride bicycles in Faryab," said Fariba. "We thought it would be a small contest, but it caused quite a stir."

Afraid their parents would disapprove, they kept the race secret, disguising themselves in loose clothes and sunglasses. They came first and second - and were

immediately hooked. The sport gave them a feeling of liberation missing in their day-to-day lives. "When I rode a bicycle for the first time, I felt a sense of freedom," Yulduz said.

Far from disapproving, their father, a doctor, and housewife mother were both supportive. Others were not - so the sisters would often train in the evening, with fewer people around to object. "Some people said cycling wasn't suitable for girls and accused us of encouraging women and girls into immoral activities," Yulduz added. "We were afraid something bad might happen to us, and someone might harm us."

And indeed someone did - a rickshaw driver rammed Yulduz while she was training, breaking her wrist. Another time, bystanders - incensed by the sight of women and men training together - pelted them with stones and abuse.

The sisters were invited to join Afghanistan's national women's cycling team in 2020. But fears for the safety of women cyclists grew as the Taliban swept through the country in 2021. By that time, Yulduz was studying literature at university and Fariba was hoping to study medicine.

The sisters fled after the fall of Kabul with the help of Italian former world champion cyclist Alessandra Cappellotto. They settled in northern Italy, where they resumed their training on the twisty mountain roads of the Little Dolomites.

Cappellotto arranged everything from language lessons to contracts with an Italian cycling team.

In 2022, Fariba was crowned Afghan women's cycling champion after inching ahead of her sister at the Women's Road Championships of Afghanistan - a contest held in Switzerland for 50 Afghan cyclists living in exile. The race was hosted by the UCI, the world governing body for cycling. The Hashimis have since joined the UCI World Cycling Centre's women's team in Switzerland.

The sisters doubt the Taliban-controlled media will broadcast their Olympic debut, but hope that family and friends will catch highlights on social media. They said they felt energised by the many messages of support they had received from their compatriots, including women cyclists still in the country.

"They told me to go and bring victory under Afghanistan's flag," Fariba said. "My sister and I might be among the first girls to go to the Olympics, but I hope we'll open a path for other Afghan girls."

Cappellotto, who has become a mother figure to the sisters, will be in Paris cheering them on. "They are very strong," she said. "They've made amazing progress. They've learnt in two years what European girls learn in 10." Cappellotto said the sisters were such phenomenal climbers that they could one day win the mountain stage of the women's Tour de France.



BASKETBALL

# Durant 'feeling good' as USA arrive in Paris

Coach Steve Kerr says no plan of replacing the Phoenix Suns star

AFP  
Lille, France

**K**evin Durant, who missed all five of the USA's warm-up games with a calf strain, practised yesterday upon the team's arrival in France ahead of the defence of their Olympic basketball title.

The Phoenix Suns star, a former NBA MVP and three-time Olympic gold medallist, suffered the injury in June, but coach Steve Kerr has said there was no thought of replacing Durant on the roster.

"The plan is for him to get in the scrimmage and see how he handles that," Kerr told reporters in Lille after the team held an hour-long practice session. "He looked good today and he did everything, he got a lot of shots up and told me he's feeling pretty good."

Durant, 35, missed the win over Canada earlier this month as well as the two exhibition games in Abu Dhabi. He was deemed not quite ready to return for the two most recent games in London either.

"It starts with the scrimmage tomorrow and we'll see what the training staff says after that," Kerr said of the plan for easing Durant back into action.

The Suns and Durant's representatives will also be involved in any decision-making, Kerr insisted.

"This is not going to be like us going out and saying, 'Hey,



US forward Kevin Durant (centre) practices during a training session at the Pierre-Mauroy stadium in Villeneuve-d'Ascq, northern France, ahead of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. (AFP)

let's just throw him out there." Whether or not Durant will feature in Team USA's tournament opener against Serbia remains unclear, but Kerr can call upon LeBron James who is back at the Olympics for the first time since 2012.

James is set for his fourth

Games appearance in Paris, where he will serve as the United States flagbearer alongside tennis star Coco Gauff in tomorrow's opening ceremony on the Seine.

"I just like coaching him rather than coaching against him, he's incredible and it's so fun to see him up close and get to know him

a little bit and watch him with his teammates," said Kerr.

"I mean there's a reason he's LeBron James.

"To see him at 39 doing everything he's doing, dominating games, leading practices, setting an example for everybody, he's incredible."

ANNOUNCEMENT

# Gauff joins LeBron as flag-bearers for US at opening ceremony



US forward LeBron James (centre) and teammates take part in a training session at the Pierre-Mauroy stadium in Villeneuve-d'Ascq, northern France, ahead of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. (AFP)

AFP  
Paris

**T**ennis star Coco Gauff will be the woman flag-bearer for the United States at the opening ceremony of the Paris Games, US Olympic chiefs said yesterday.

The reigning US Open champion will join NBA superstar LeBron James as the US flag-bearers for tomorrow's ceremony along the Seine river.

"I never thought in a million years I would have the honour of carrying the American flag for Team USA in the opening ceremony," Gauff said in a statement.

"I could not be more proud to lead my teammates with LeBron as we showcase our dedication and passion on the biggest stage there is, at a moment where we can bring athletes and fans together from around the world."

The 20-year-old Gauff will be competing at the Olympics for the first time after a breakthrough 12 months which saw her claim her maiden Grand Slam title at the US Open last September.

Gauff has risen to a career-high two in the world rankings and also won her first Grand Slam doubles title at the French Open after part-

nering Katerina Siniakova from the Czech Republic.

Gauff and James were chosen as flag-bearers after a vote by fellow Team USA members.

Gauff will play singles while partnering Jessica Pegula in doubles when the Olympic tennis gets under way at Roland Garros on Saturday.

The US youngster was originally selected for the pandemic-delayed 2021 Olympics in Tokyo but did not compete after testing positive for Covid.



Coco Gauff of the US is seen during a training session at the Roland Garros Stadium, Paris, France, yesterday. (Reuters)

CONTROVERSY

# Canadian coach, analyst kicked out of Games after drone incident

Reuters  
Paris

**C**anada coach Bev Priestman removed herself from their opening match duties at the Paris Olympics while an assistant coach and a team analyst were kicked out of the Games yesterday after a spying scandal engulfed the women's soccer tournament.

Global soccer's governing body FIFA said it had begun disciplinary proceedings after New Zealand's women's team said their training session on Monday had been disrupted by a drone flown by a staff member of their opening Group A opponents Canada.

The Canadian Olympic Committee (COC) said yesterday it had taken action to remove two mem-

bers of staff from their Olympic squad, who were gold medallists at the Tokyo Games, while Priestman would not take charge against New Zealand today. "Joseph Lombardi, an unaccredited analyst with Canada Soccer, is being removed from the Canadian Olympic Team and will be sent home immediately," COC said in a statement.

"Jasmine Mander, an assistant coach to whom Mr. Lombardi reports to, is being removed from the Canadian Olympic Team and will be sent home immediately."

Lombardi was handed an eight-month suspended jail term and his material was confiscated, a French court said. FIFA said yesterday it had "opened proceedings against Canada Soccer, Ms Beverly Priestman, Mr Joseph Lombardi and Ms Jasmine Mander due to the potential breach of article 13 of the FIFA

Disciplinary Code and article 6.1 of the Regulations Olympic Football."

"The matter will be submitted for the consideration of the Disciplinary Committee in the next days," FIFA explained in a statement.

Priestman apologised for what had happened and said ultimate responsibility lay with her.

"On behalf of our entire team, I first and foremost want to apologise to the players and staff at New Zealand Football and to the players on Team Canada," she said.

"This does not represent the values that our team stands for. I am ultimately responsible for conduct in our programme.

"Accordingly, to emphasise our team's commitment to integrity, I have decided to voluntarily withdraw from coaching the match on Thursday. In the spirit of ac-

countability, I do this with the interests of both teams in mind and to ensure everyone feels that the sportsmanship of this game is upheld."

The incident was reported by the NZOC to the police and to the International Olympic Committee's integrity unit.

"The NZOC and New Zealand Football are committed to upholding the integrity and fairness of the Olympic Games and are deeply shocked and disappointed by this incident, which occurred just three days before the sides are due to face each other in their opening game of Paris 2024," NZOC said in a statement.

"At this time the NZOC's main priority is to support the New Zealand women's football athletes and wider team as they start their campaign."



Bev Priestman is seen during a press conference prior to the Canadian team landing in Paris for the Olympic Games. (Canada Soccer)

## Qatar Motorsports Academy drivers participate in Formula 4 testing



Qatar Motorsports Academy team drivers Bader al-Sulaiti, Taha Hassiba and Tamim Hassiba participated in the Formula 4 testing held at the Barcelona-Catalunya Circuit. The two days of intense training is part of the plan initiated by the Qatar Motor and Motorcycle Federation (QMMF) to develop academy's drivers and to gain broader experience in circuit racing. The team will also undergo two additional days of training at the Barcelona-Catalunya Circuit next week after which the team will join a training camp in France from August 5 to 10.



FOCUS

# Germany to bid for 2040 Olympic Games

AFP  
Berlin

**T**he German government said yesterday it wanted the country to host the 2040 Summer Olympics, picking a date that avoids a centennial reference to the edition held in Nazi Germany.

Berlin and several other German states had previously mulled a bid for the 2036 Games, 100 years after the capital hosted the 1936 edition, which became known as the Nazi Games. Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government is eyeing another date.

"The federal government favours the year 2040 for the Games in Germany - 50 years after German reunification (in 1990)," said the government, which has signed a memorandum of understanding with the German Olympic Sports Federation and interested regions and cities.

The anniversary year was a chance to show "what values our liberal democracy stands for", Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said in the statement. Germany, which recently staged the men's European football championships, was a "great host for international sporting events", Faeser said.

Germany's bid would "use existing sports

facilities in various cities - without building new stadiums for a lot of money", Faeser added.

Among the memo's signatories were Berlin, Dusseldorf, Hamburg, Leipzig and Munich, as well as the regions of North Rhine-Westphalia and Bavaria.

The government said it would back the bid with almost €7mn (\$7.6mn) of funding between 2024 and 2027. Germany's previous experience with hosting the Summer Olympics ended badly. Germany last hosted the event in Munich in 1972, which was overshadowed by a hostage crisis and a subsequent massacre of Israeli athletes.

## Orrin Bizer of the US scores a try in Rugby Sevens clash against Fiji



Orrin Bizer of the US scores the first try against Fiji during a Rugby Sevens Pool C game at Stade de France, Saint-Denis, France, yesterday. (Reuters)

TENNIS

# Nadal, Alcaraz feel edgy ahead of doubles bid

Spain's clay kings are short of doubles practice in recent times

Reuters Paris

Rafael Nadal and Carlos Alcaraz tempered expectations for Spain's dream team yesterday as they looked ahead to playing together in the Paris Olympics.

Alcaraz, winner of this year's French Open and Wimbledon, and 22-Grand Slam winner Nadal who has struggled with injuries for two years, have been the main focus of the Olympic tennis competition starting on Saturday and running to Aug. 4.

"I understand a little bit the morbid illusion of seeing us play together but let's not think that this translates into success, I think it's a mistake. Carlos hasn't played many doubles and I haven't played many doubles or many singles lately," the 38-year-old Nadal told reporters.

"We are going to do our best to try, at least, to leave with the peace of mind of having done everything possible to get where we can get (but) obviously, we have not been able to prepare together for a tournament like this, where there are other doubles teams that have been preparing," he added.

The former world number one, who expects to retire at the end of this year after missing almost all of 2023 with a hip problem, conceded that adapting their game in a different competition would be difficult. "Things happen much faster, the reflexes have to be ready and the movements are not automatic when one has not played for a long time, there are doubles movements that are completely different from the individual ones," the Spaniard said.

Alcaraz, 21, was confident that playing on the red clay where he won just weeks ago would be a plus. "I have not had the opportu-



Carlos Alcaraz (left) of Spain shakes hands with Rafael Nadal during training at Roland Garros Stadium, Paris, France, yesterday. (Reuters)

nity to play many doubles tournaments, but obviously having the illusion of returning to Roland Garros, to these courts that I have always enjoyed playing... makes it easier," he said. "We also have days of training, individually and doubles to adapt as best as possible again, for my part to return to clay and be able to gain confidence to start the tournament in the best possible way," he added.

Nadal, who won an Olympic singles gold medal in 2008 and the doubles gold in 2016,

suggested that the Games were even more special than Grand Slams.

"Unfortunately I have missed Tokyo and London due to injury and it is something that has hurt me more than missing Grand Slams," he said. "In the end they are unique experiences, of which there are few in the world, in one's career. The others are very important tournaments for us, but in the end we experience them every year, and well, I value being here very much."

## Top-ranked Sinner out of Olympics with tonsillitis

Milan, Italy: Men's tennis number one **Jannik Sinner** withdrew from the Paris Olympics yesterday, days before it begins, after falling ill with tonsillitis. The Italian said he was "sad and disappointed" to drop out, adding that he had started feeling unwell on Monday after a practice week in Monaco.

"After seeing my doctors on Tuesday and waiting an extra day to give myself some more time to see if my condition would improve, things unfortunately got worse," Sinner, 22, said in a statement.

"I was looking forward to competing with my teammates and the rest of the Italian team, but for now that will have to wait," he said.

"As advised by my medical team, I will now take some time to rest and recover to full health. I'd like to wish the whole team Italia the best for this important event and hope to be back stronger in the future."

Sinner said the Olympics had been "one of my main goals for this season" and was due to play in the men's singles and the doubles with Lorenzo Musetti. Wimbledon semi-finalist Musetti will now have to play in the men's doubles tournament with either Luciano Darderi or Matteo Arnaldi.

Italian media reported that Andrea Vavassori, ranked 207 in the world, will replace Sinner in the men's singles.

Sinner dropping out deprives Italy of a great shot at a medal. He has long been the great hope of Italian tennis and after finishing runner-up to Novak Djokovic at the ATP Finals in November last year, he has moved up a level.

Sinner won his first Grand Slam at the Australian Open at the start of this year and then became the first Italian to top the world rankings after his recent run to the semi-finals at the French Open. He has also won three other tournaments this year, including his second Masters 1000 crown in Miami.

Sinner withdrew from the Madrid Open before the quarter-finals



with a hip injury and missed the tournament in Rome in the run-up to Roland Garros, where the Olympic tennis will be played between July 27 and August 4. He needed a lengthy medical timeout after feeling dizzy and appearing to almost lose his balance during his quarter-final defeat to Daniil Medvedev at Wimbledon.

### De Minaur raring to go in Paris after recovering from hip injury

Australia's Alex De Minaur said he is ready to fulfil his Olympic dream after shaking off a hip injury that cut short his Wimbledon campaign and threatened his participation at the Paris Games. The world number six pulled out of his Wimbledon quarter-final against Novak Djokovic earlier this month after sustaining a cartilage tear in his hip in the closing stages of his fourth-round win over Arthur Fils.

De Minaur was unable to play at the Tokyo Games three years ago after contracting Covid.

"To finally be able to represent Australia in the Olympics is a dream come true," De Minaur said.

"I'm very passionate when I play for my country and wear the green and gold, so this is another one of those moments."

"I'm extremely excited to lace up for Paris 2024."

De Minaur spearheads an Australian team that also includes Alexei Popyrin, Ellen Perez, Matthew Ebden, John Peers, Olivia Gadecki, Ajla Tomljanovic, Daria Saville and Rinky Hijikata.

SPOTLIGHT

## Whitlock relishing chance at history in final Olympic rodeo

AFP Paris

British gymnastics star Max Whitlock said yesterday he was relishing his "shot at history" in his final Olympics.

Pommel horse specialist Whitlock is bidding to become the first gymnast to medal on the same apparatus at four Olympics.

"I scrolled through Wikipedia a lot just to confirm that," the 31-year-old laughed after an impressive training session at the Paris Bercy Arena where he will bid for a seventh Olympic medal starting in Saturday's men's qualifying.

"That history can be made was one of the reasons that got me excited as well. Especially when I was in that period where I didn't know if I wanted to come back," said Whitlock.

"When I thought about coming back, I looked up stuff like this. Every tiny bit of motivation helps. The opportunity to try to make history is what I want."

Whitlock won two gold medals at the 2016 Rio Olympics on the pommel horse and floor, as well as the all-round bronze. He successfully defended the pommel horse title in Tokyo three years ago.

The British gymnast also won two bronze medals at the London



Britain's Max Whitlock practices on the pommel horse at the Bercy Arena, in Paris, ahead of the start of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games. (AFP)

Games in 2012 in the men's team event and pommel horse.

"I nearly stopped gymnastics altogether after Tokyo, so for me to be in this position here I feel massively grateful," he said.

"I'm back and giving myself the chance to give it a good shot and have the opportunity and challenge ahead. That almost reduces a bit of the pressure for me."

The British men's team will also be bidding to make the podium with Russia not competing.

Whitlock will be joined by Joe Fraser, back from injury, reigning vault world champion Jake Jarman, Harry Hepworth, and European floor gold medallist Luke Whitehouse.

Yesterday, Whitlock earned applause for his pommel horse routine as the men trained for

the first time at the competition arena. "I think the whole team enjoyed that a lot. I think we got some good stuff," he said.

Having his family and five-year-old daughter Willow - a budding gymnast herself - in the audience also motivated his return after the Tokyo Games behind closed doors.

"I'm mega-excited because Willow can watch an Olympic Games for real, rather than watching videos. That means a lot to me," he said.

"She's doing competitions herself. We don't force gymnastics but she fully understands it. She just seems to love it, which is amazing for me."

"It almost feels like everyone is just taking it in a little bit more because this is my last one."

## THE PARIS 2024 MEDALS



### RIBBON

The Eiffel Tower also inspired the unique design of the ribbon. The medal ribbon will be adorned with the crosspieces of the Eiffel Tower. By bringing the pieces of ribbon together, the line formed gives a glimpse of the shape of the famous monument. The sober blue of the Olympic medal ribbon is contrasted by the deep red of the Paralympic medal ribbon.

Rear view of Olympic medals tells the story of the revival of the Games in Greece.

Front view of a gold medal featuring iron from the iconic Eiffel Tower, designed by jeweller Chaumet.

85 mm DIAMETER  
5,084 MEDALS  
18g EIFFEL TOWER INSERT  
9.2 mm THICKNESS

Chaumet is bringing the medal into the world of high jewellery with a design based on three inspirations: the hexagon, radiance and the setting.

### THE HEXAGONE



On the medal, the original iron of the Eiffel Tower is cut into a hexagon, the geometric shape that evokes France to the point of being its nickname. This symbol recalls the mobilisation of an entire country, beyond its capital, to stage historic Olympic and Paralympic Games. Stripped of its "Eiffel Tower brown" paint, the puddle iron has been restored to its original colour. Placed in the centre and embossed with the emblem of the Olympic Games Paris 2024, this piece of heritage blends elegantly with the gold, silver and bronze to give the medals a two-tone side.

### RADIANCE

Also on the same side of the medal, fine lines project at regular intervals around the iron hexagon. Struck rather than engraved, these rays add a 3D effect and sparkle to a medal that is far from smooth. This creative idea represents both the radiance of France during the Olympic and Paralympic Games and the radiance of the athletes whose performances will sparkle in the eyes of the world.



### THE SETTING

Bringing together the two icons, the Eiffel Tower and the Games medal, and combining iron with gold, silver or bronze, required a skill that was just as symbolic. As a tribute to French jewellery, the medal not only includes the piece of iron, but it is actually encrusted with it. The hexagon is linked to the medal by a "claw setting", traditionally used by the House of Chaumet for its high jewellery creations. Six metal appendages are stamped on the surface and placed at the six corners of the hexagon to enclose the piece of iron against the medal. For the Paris 2024 Games, claws in the shape of "Clous de Paris" were naturally chosen, reminiscent of the famous rivets on the Eiffel Tower.



## Doping agency says 90% of Paris entrants tested in 2024

PARIS: Nearly 90 per cent of all entrants in the Paris Olympics have been tested this year as part of a pre-Games anti-doping programme, the International Testing Agency (ITA) said yesterday. ITA said it had conducted more than 32,600 doping controls this year, an increase of around 45 percent on tests of athletes in the previous six months.

It said the testing "led to over 85 cases of potential anti-doping rule violations, resulting in many sanctions and cases that are still ongoing or under review." The agency said it had focused on "high-risk disciplines" in which 75 per cent of Olympic entrants had been tested at least three times. Those include weightlifting - which represents a quarter of positive cases in the history of the Summer Olympics - as well as triathlon and open water swimming, where every athlete was tested at least once. Gymnastics follows at 99 per cent. In track and field - which historically has produced

the most failed Olympic tests - the number is 89 per cent. ITA statistics suggest Chinese athletes have been particularly targeted by testers as doping controversy continues to swirl in Paris following the revelation, in April, that 23 Chinese swimmers tested positive ahead of the Tokyo Games three years ago but World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) accepted that they were victims of food contamination.

The testing agency's stats for the top 25 national delegations show that 98 per cent of Chinese Olympic competitors have been tested multiple times this year. Only the Individual Neutral Athletes (AIN) from Russia and Belarus and Hungarians come close, both at 97 per cent. World Aquatics said on Tuesday that Chinese swimmers competing in Paris have been tested "on average 21 times each since January 1", compared to six times for the Americans, five for the Italians, four for the Australians, British and French.

Source: Paris 2024



## SPOTLIGHT

## Ledecky demands transparency over Chinese doping cases

AFP  
Paris

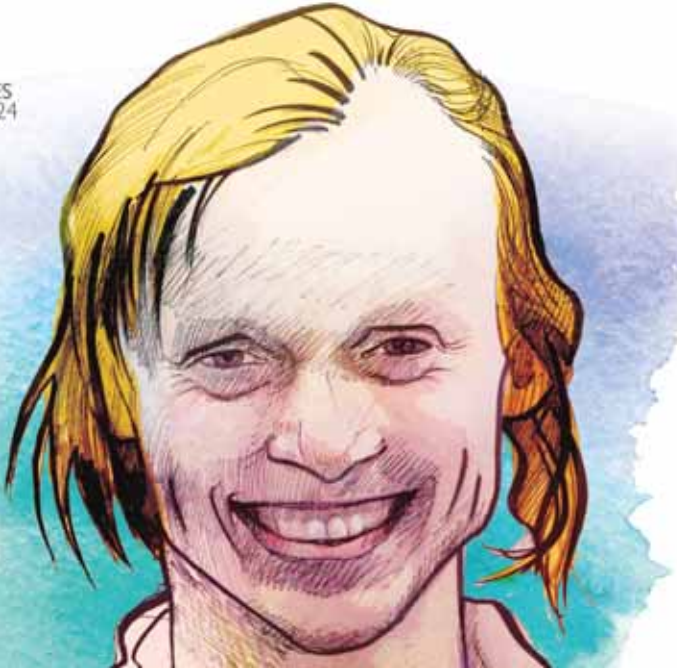
Multiple Olympic gold medallist Katie Ledecky said yesterday that questions remain over the case of Chinese competitors who failed doping tests, urging transparency from authorities.

The New York Times reported in April that 23 Chinese swimmers, two of whom competed against Ledecky and her US teammates in Tokyo, had tested positive for a banned substance just seven months before the Covid-delayed 2021 Games in Japan. None of the swimmers were suspended or sanctioned after the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) accepted the conclusion of Chinese authorities that the case was caused by food contamination at a hotel where they had stayed.

WADA's stance has been strongly criticised by a number of leading swimmers, including seven-time gold medallist Ledecky, who said previously that her faith in the anti-doping system was at an "all-time low".

Ledecky said there were issues still to be resolved when asked at a USA swim team press conference if she felt races at the 2024 Paris Games would be fair. "I hope everyone here is going to be competing clean this week. But what really matters also is, were they training clean?" she told reporters. "Hopefully that's been the case.

Key Note  
GULF TIMES  
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Hopefully there's been even testing around the world. And I think everyone's heard what the athletes think. They want transparency. They want further answers to the questions that still remain."

Ledecky said that the anti-doping process was not an issue that athletes should have to concern themselves with. "At this

point, we're here to race. We're going to race whoever's in the lanes next to us and we're not the ones paid to do the testing," she said. "So we hope that the people that are, follow their own rules. And that applies now and into the future. And we want to see some change for the future so that you don't have to ask us that question."

Ledecky said it was important to remember why athletes are tested outside of competition time. "I think if you're trying to get an advantage, you can do it any time. So if people are training with things in their system that shouldn't be in their system, then they're getting an advantage," she said.

"That's why we're tested frequently, randomly. Our whereabouts, you know, we have to keep them up to date constantly when we're training, when we're here, all that. So we're following all those rules. Again, all that we ask is that those rules are being applied fairly and consistently worldwide."

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) has backed WADA after a report said it had not mishandled the Chinese case. The support from the IOC came after strongly worded attacks from Travis Tygart, the head of the US Anti-Doping Agency (USADA), who accused the body of covering up the Chinese cases.

## LEDECKY 'LIKES HER CHANCES' IN BLOCKBUSTER 400M FREESTYLE

Meanwhile, Katie Ledecky threw down the gauntlet to Ariarne Titmus and Summer McIntosh ahead of a blockbuster 400m Olympic freestyle showdown, warning: "I like my chances."

The American will start one of the Olympic's most anticipated races on Saturday at La Defense Arena as the underdog based on times this year. But the 27-year-

old has long proved she can never be written off and was in a fighting mood when asked about her chances.

"I'm looking forward to the 400 free, day one. I like my chances," she said. "I feel like I'm prepared and ready to race and that's all you can ask for."

Ledecky, who is the undisputed queen over 800m and 1500m, will have to raise her game to better Australia's Titmus in the shorter distance. Titmus dethroned her in Tokyo three years ago, snatched her world record a year later and swam the second fastest time in history, 3min 55.44sec, last month.

Ledecky's best time this year is almost three seconds slower than the Australian, as is Canada's McIntosh, herself a former world record holder. "They're great athletes and I've had the chance to race them quite a few times over the years now, especially Summer who has been training in the US," she said. "It's always fun to race the best. We are the top three performers ever in that race, that just makes for a great field, a great race."

The trio are so dominant that they share the 27 fastest times in history with New Zealand's Erika Fairweather the only other current swimmer to breach four minutes.

Ledecky said Titmus and McIntosh drove her to keep improving. "Those two have continued to raise the game, raise my game, and I know I have to bring my best," she said. "I think they know they also have to bring their best."

## SWIMMING

## Australia ready to pounce as USA bid to shore up dominance

USA have long-owned Olympic swimming, collecting 30 medals at Tokyo Games

AFP  
Paris

Katie Ledecky and Caeleb Dressel spearhead the United States' bid to retain supremacy in the Olympic pool from Saturday against a formidable and confident Australia, amid simmering tensions over a Chinese doping scandal.

The mighty USA have long-owned Olympic swimming, collecting 30 medals, including 11 gold, to top the table at the pandemic-delayed Tokyo Games, ahead of Australia with nine gold and 20 in total. They are unbeaten on the gold medal front since 1988, but Australia stunned them by claiming more titles at the world championships last year to set up a blockbuster showdown over an intense nine days in La Defense Arena.

Adding spice, the US contested that they won the duel at the worlds in Fukuoka, claiming they were best courtesy of their higher overall medal count. That saw recently-retired Australian legend Cate Campbell brand them "sore losers", which prompted 23-time Olympic gold medallist Michael Phelps to encourage his compatriots to "make them eat every word" in France.

Australian head coach Rohan Taylor attempted to dial down the rivalry, and expectations. "I think the Americans are the standard of the sport," he said last week. "As a whole, in every event, they'll have somebody who can get on the podium. We want to be as good as them."

The decorated Ledecky, a seven-time gold medallist, is still the woman to beat in the 800m and the 1500m freestyle, but has lost her invincibility over 400m. Six swimming world records tumbled in Tokyo and the first in Paris could come on the opening night with Ledecky attempting to reclaim her 400m crown against Australia's Ariarne Titmus and Canada's Summer McIntosh.

Known as "The Terminator", Titmus beat Ledecky in a thrilling Tokyo final then broke the American's long-standing world record in 2022, only for McIntosh to better the mark last year. The Australian hit back to



Australian swimmers and support staff get into a huddle before a training session at the Paris La Defense Arena in Nanterre, France. (Reuters)

reclaim the world record months later and swam the second fastest time in history last month. "I don't think about the result or the magnitude of the Olympic Games," said Titmus. "I just think about putting together eight great laps."

Titmus will also race the 200m freestyle – as world record holder – and 800m where she will also face Ledecky in the American's quest for a fourth straight title. More world records will be on the line in the women's 100m and 200m backstroke, with Australia's Kaylee McKeown and American Regan Smith dominant and at the peak of their powers.

Superstar Dressel won five gold medals in Tokyo but stepped away from the sport in 2022 to tend to his mental health.

While the 27-year-old will not defend his 100m freestyle gold, he qualified for the 50m free and 100m butterfly and remains a

significant contender in both.

Another big-name veteran looking to turn back the clock is British breaststroke king Adam Peaty. Like Dressel, he took time out to deal with depression but is back and in form as he seeks to become the first swimmer since Phelps to win the same race at three consecutive Olympics, in the 100m. "Obviously now I do it to win, I want to be the best. I am the best," Peaty said.

But a crowded field is planning to dethrone him, led by China's Qin Haiyang who won all three breaststroke events at the 2023 world championships. Qin is one of 23 Chinese swimmers implicated in a major doping scandal which only came to light this year and continues to hang over Paris. They all tested positive for trimetazidine – which can enhance performance – ahead of the Tokyo Olympics,

but were not sanctioned.

Instead, WADA accepted the explanation of Chinese authorities that the results were caused by food contamination. An independent investigation cleared the world anti-doping agency of any wrongdoing, but not before an ugly war of words with the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA).

Eleven of the Chinese swimmers, including butterfly specialist Zhang Yufei, who won two golds in Japan, and another gold medallist in Wang Shun, are in France. The hosts have their own star in Leon Marchand after his sizzling 4:02.50 in the 400m medley last year shattered Phelps' 15-year-old world record.

A five-time world champion, Marchand will also be heavy favourite in the 200m medley and 200m butterfly as he bids to cement a burgeoning reputation.

## Dancers call off strike threat to Paris Olympics ceremony: Union

Paris: Hundreds of dancers who were threatening to strike during the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics tomorrow have called off their protest after receiving a new pay offer, their union said.

The performers secured a rise in compensation for broadcasting rights during a final round of talks with Paris 2024 organisers yesterday, the SFA-CGT union said in a statement. "This period has concluded with a victory, which although it is not total, is nonetheless a response to the urgent issues raised," it said.

The union, which says it represents around 10 percent of the 3,000 performers involved in the opening ceremony, filed a strike notice last week over what it said were "outrageous disparities" in pay between dancers. The deal agreed yesterday means that the lowest-paid dancers would receive between 160-240 euros (\$150-\$260) extra for their performance on Friday evening, a union member involved in the negotiations said.

Some of them had protested on Monday during rehearsals by the river Seine by stopping and holding their fists aloft for eight minutes. The threat was an unwelcome development for organisers and risked deepening France's reputation for labour disputes just as the eyes of the world fall on Paris for the start of the Games.

A whole host of French public sector workers have threatened strikes or stopped work ahead of the Olympics to demand bonuses for working over the July 26-August 11 event, which coincides with the summer holidays.

One-off payments of up to 1,900 euros have been agreed for police and municipal workers in Paris. The opening ceremony is set to take place over a six-kilometre (four-mile) stretch of the river Seine, with around 6,000-7,000 athletes expected to sail down the river on 85 boats.

It will be the first time a summer Olympics has opened outside of the main athletics stadium.

A small union at Paris airport operator ADP has also filed a strike notice for tomorrow. ADP management reached an agreement last week with most labour groups to end a dispute over Olympic bonuses.

## FOCUS

## Salt Lake handed 2034 Winter Olympics but with IOC warning

AFP  
Paris

The International Olympic Committee awarded the 2034 Winter Olympics to Salt Lake City yesterday but warned they could be stripped of the Games if US authorities maintain their feud with the World Anti-Doping Agency. The success

of Salt Lake City's bid was a foregone conclusion given the Utah city, which hosted the Games in 2002, was the only candidate.

But in a dramatic twist shortly before members approved the bid by 83 votes to six, Olympic chiefs said the Games could be revoked if US lawmakers and the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) were not brought into line, especially over the case of 23 Chi-

nese swimmers. Outspoken USADA chief Travis Tygart accused the IOC of "stooping to threats".

John Coates, chairman of the IOC's legal commission, said the host city contract confirming Salt Lake's right to stage the Games had been altered to allow the IOC to take them away if US authorities did not respect the "supreme authority" of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). Speaking in Paris

ahead of the opening of the Games on Friday, Coates said it was "a must, and I stress the word must" for the US authorities to respect WADA.

"The IOC has reinforced the current language of the Olympic host contract in order to protect the integrity of the international anti-doping system and to allow the IOC to terminate – to terminate – the Olympic host contract

in cases where the supreme authority of the World Anti-Doping Agency... is not fully respected or if the application of the World Anti-Doping code is hindered or undermined," Coates said.

The warning stunned seasoned observers of the IOC and sports politics. USADA has been a vocal critic of WADA for much of the past decade. Those tensions spiked this year after reports in April re-

vealed that 23 Chinese swimmers had tested positive for a banned substance ahead of the 2021 Tokyo Olympics, but were subsequently cleared to compete at the Games.

Tygart has consistently accused WADA of covering up the cases, which China blamed on unintentional food contamination. Eleven of the 23 Chinese swimmers are in Paris. WADA has angrily rejected the criticism from USADA.