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**SPLASHY EXIT**



**SOUTH KOREA SWIMMERS LEAVE ATHLETES VILLAGE DUE TO LONG COMMUTE IN HOT BUSES**

Six South Korean swimmers competing at the Paris Games have left the Olympic village and moved into a hotel near the swimming arena to avoid the long commute in hot buses. The men's 4x200m freestyle relay team moved into a hotel that is a five-minute walk from Paris La Defense Arena, where the swimming events will be held. Chong received complaints that the buses the swimmers used to travel to the arena had no air-conditioning while the windows were taped shut.

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**OPENING CEREMONY**

# Historic parade on River Seine launches 2024 Paris Olympics

French track legend Perec and three-time Olympic judo champion Riner lit the Olympic cauldron

AFP  
Paris

A historic boat parade down the River Seine launched the Paris Olympics with spectacular French flair yesterday, as the City of Light welcomed the world's greatest athletes for a sporting extravaganza. Braving torrential rain, some 300,000 people lined the river banks to cheer on the armada carrying competitors past the city's iconic sights: the Eiffel Tower bearing the five Olympic rings, the Louvre and Notre-Dame Cathedral.

The wildly ambitious display was the first time the Olympic opening ceremony has been staged outside the main stadium, making it the biggest-ever launch for the "Greatest Show on Earth". But that gamble also made the ceremony hostage to the weather and spectators, VIPs, and athletes alike found themselves drenched or huddling in transparent ponchos.

Some spectators refused to let the downpour get them down. "I've got such an adrenaline rush. It's very exciting," said Selene Martinez, 42, who had travelled from Mexico for the ceremony.

But others were less stoic about the heavy rain on the parade, with some leaving the ceremony early to seek shelter. "It's a great idea. The performances are awesome. I just wish it wasn't raining," said Pauline Brett, 69, who had come from Chicago with her family.

In the City of Love, the ceremony stressed togetherness and unity in a world that has suffered wars, massacres, and political upheaval since the Covid-delayed Tokyo Olympics. Four jets from the French air force display team drew a large pink heart in the Paris sky to set the tone.

For just over a fortnight, organisers hope the superhuman performances of stars like gymnast Simone Biles, tennis champion Novak Djokovic or sprinter Noah Lyles will provide the world with much-needed distraction. Beach volleyball at the Eiffel Tower, breakdancing in Place de la Concorde, equestrian sport at the Palace of Versailles: 100 years since Paris last staged the Olympics, the city will provide a stunning backdrop to the sport.

"I declare open the Games of Paris celebrating the 33rd Olympiad of the modern era," said President Emmanuel Macron. After a stunning light show at the Eiffel Tower, French track legend Marie-Jose Perec and three-time Olympic judo champion Teddy Riner lit the Olympic cauldron which formed the base of a hot-air balloon.

Canadian superstar singer Celine Dion closed the show with a solo performance from the platform of the Eiffel Tower, returning to the spotlight after revealing she was suffering from a rare illness.

Paris 2024 organiser Tony Estanguet had said the opening ceremony needed to "push the limits as far as possible", show-



Overview of the Trocadero venue, with the Eiffel Tower looming in the background while the Olympic flag is being raised, during the opening ceremony of the Paris Games. (Reuters)

ing from the start France's ambition for the Games. And from Moulin Rouge performers doing the cancan to a video showing dancers on the scaffolding of fire-damaged Notre Dame, it was a colourful celebration of French culture, history, and art.

Led out by Greece through jets of water cascading from a bridge, accompanied by an accordion player, around 7,000 athletes cruised down a six-kilometre (four-mile) stretch of the Seine to the Eiffel Tower on 85 boats. The unprecedented ceremony sparked a colossal security operation in a city where memories of the November 2015 Islamist attacks are still raw.

Around 45,000 police and paramilitary officers were on duty to protect the ceremony, along with 10,000 soldiers and 22,000 private security guards. Snipers, specialist frogmen, and AI-augmented cameras were deployed, with airspace closed and the area around the Seine virtually locked down. Residents, business owners grumbled about disruption and lost earnings but organisers hope to win them over when the sport starts.

Sporting royalty mingled with celebrities and world leaders on and off the Seine, which will host triathlon and the swimming marathon after a historic clean-up to make it swimmable. Lady Gaga added global musical star power, with Franco-Malian R&B star Aya Nakamura also per-

forming, defying criticism from far-right politicians who suggested her appearance would "humiliate" France.

The ceremony kicked off with a video of French football legend Zinedine Zidane, who took the torch on an offbeat journey through the Metro, and the Paris catacombs. Basketball icon LeBron James and tennis player Coco Gauff carried the flag for Team USA, which has topped the medal table at every Olympics since Beijing in 2008.

True to its slogan "Games Wide Open", the Paris Olympics can boast gender equality for the first time ever - for Paris 1924, the last time the Olympics took place in the city, four percent of athletes were women. But the ceremony did not shy away from the chaos in the world - to the strains of John Lennon's "Imagine", the city was plunged into darkness in an invitation to reflect.

With extra security for Israeli athletes, plus a call from the Palestinian team for Israel to be excluded over the Gaza War, geopolitics has been an unwelcome intruder in the run-up. Russian athletes have been banned from the Paris Olympics over the Ukraine invasion, and possible Russian destabilisation efforts sparked fears ahead of the Games.

But with the Games now open, the stage is set for the 10,500 athletes to fulfil their



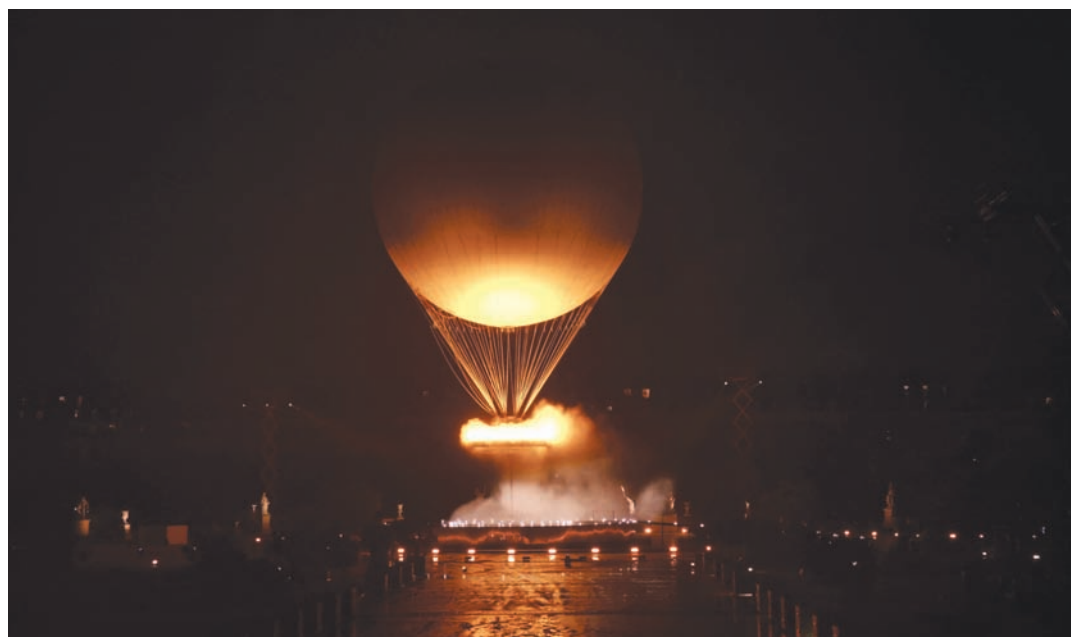
Qatar's flagbearer and defending Olympic high jump champion Mutaz Barshim takes a selfie with the Qatar delegation before the Paris Games opening ceremony yesterday.

dreams and turn in the performance of their lives. Can US legend Biles bounce back from her "twisties" heartbreak in Tokyo? Will Lyles establish himself as the rightful sprinting heir to Usain Bolt?

LeBron James on the basketball court, Carlos Alcaraz on the Roland Garros clay, France's swimming hope Leon Marchand in the pool: the stars are aligned for sporting brilliance.



Tennis star Rafael Nadal holds the Olympic torch alongside Serena Williams on a boat on the river Seine ahead of lighting the Olympic cauldron during the opening ceremony in Paris. (Reuters)



Olympic cauldron, suspended on a hot-air balloon, is seen after it was lit by France's three-time Olympic gold medallists Marie-Jose Perec and Teddy Riner. (Reuters)

FOOTBALL

# Canada coach leaves after drone drama

AFP  
Paris

Canadian soccer chiefs yesterday pleaded with FIFA not to deduct points from their women's Olympic football team as a drone-spying scandal led to head coach Bev Priestman being dramatically kicked out of the Paris Games.

Canada Soccer chief executive Kevin Blue said Canadian players had not seen any footage produced by the drone used to spy on a New Zealand training session and should not be punished by global governing body FIFA.

Reigning Olympic champions Canada defeated New Zealand 2-1 in their opening match of the women's football tournament on Thursday despite the turmoil around the squad. Canada Soccer announced early yesterday that English coach Priestman had been suspended with immediate effect after initial investigations into the scandal

revealed drone-spying that pre-dated the Paris Olympics.

Canadian Olympic Committee chief executive David Shoemaker said separately yesterday that Canada's victory at the pandemic-delayed Tokyo Olympics might also have been stained by spying tactics.

Priestman's departure came a day after assistant coach Jasmine Mander and analyst Joey Lombardi were also sent home for their roles in the scandal.

Blue told reporters there had been "frankly unacceptable shortcomings of ethical incidents" by members of the Canadian coaching team.

However, he pleaded with FIFA not to slap Canada with a points deduction, which could potentially blow a hole in the defence of their Olympic crown.

"The players themselves have not been involved in any unethical behaviour," Blue said. "And frankly we ask FIFA to take that into consideration if contemplating any further sanctions."

"Specifically we do not feel that a de-

duction of points in this tournament would be fair to our players."

Blue said preliminary investigations had unearthed indications of what appeared to be "systemic ethical shortcomings" but was unable to clarify how long Canada's coaching staff had been using drones to spy on rival training sessions.

"I received new internal information from internal sources that gave me reason to think further about the potential that this type of behaviour was systemic," Blue said. "Concrete information I received yesterday made me consider the possibility that this matter is much more extensive."

Asked if the tactic had been used at last year's Women's World Cup, at which Canada failed to progress from the group stage, Blue said he was unable to say at this stage.

"This is all happening in real time," he said. But Canada Olympic chief Shoemaker said "there now appears to be information" that suggested illegal drone spying may have been used in Canada's upset gold

medal in Tokyo three years ago. "It makes me ill," Shoemaker said. "It makes me sick to my stomach to think that there could be something that calls into question one of my favourite Olympic moments in history - that women's team winning that gold medal against all odds in those Covid restrictions."

Canada Soccer chief Blue was adamant that none of Canada's players had access to the footage obtained in France.

"I am stating right now that the team has not seen any of that footage," he said.

Canada's players had insisted they were innocent of wrongdoing after their opening victory over the New Zealanders.

"There was a lot of emotion, frustration and humiliation because as a player, it doesn't reflect our values and what we want to represent as competitors at the Olympics," defender Vanessa Gilles said.

"The Games represent fair play. As Canadians, these are not our values or those of our country. We are not cheats. It was very hard but we knew how to be united."



Canada Soccer chief executive Kevin Blue.

TENNIS

# Habib, Ebden eye Alcaraz and Djokovic shocks

'HOPEFULLY I CAN INSPIRE LOTS OF PEOPLE IN LEBANON'

AFP  
Paris

When Carlos Alcaraz was winning \$3.5mn for lifting the Wimbledon trophy, Hady Habib was more than 5,000km away, collecting a meagre \$1,350 at a low-level tournament in Canada.

Two weeks on, the 25-year-old from Lebanon now finds himself taking on the world number three in the first round at the Olympics.

"I was in shock when I heard," the Texas-born player told AFP yesterday.

"Hopefully I can inspire lots of people in Lebanon."

Habib, ranked a lowly 275 in the world, was only scheduled to play doubles at the Olympics alongside Benjamin Hassan.

However, following a series of injury pullouts, he moved into the singles draw as an alternate.

"The day after that, I'm drawn to be playing Carlos Alcaraz. So this has been an interesting five days for me."

He added: "I was at the practice courts when I got the email. All happened so fast. Life can just change in an instant. You could say it's a fairytale."

Habib's career has been spent on the second-tier circuit since he turned pro in 2021 after studying at a university in Texas.

Now he will be the first man from Lebanon to represent his country in tennis at the Olympic Games.

The whole experience has left him starstruck.

"The first day I arrived, I was walking around a little bit lost just opening a door and going in somewhere."

"When I walked in the gym the



Carlos Alcaraz of Spain during training at the Roland-Garros Stadium, Paris, France, ahead of his first match at the Paris 2024 Olympics. (Reuters)



Hady Habib

first day, I saw Rafael Nadal, Andy Murray, Novak Djokovic and I was

just, 'Wow, this has to be a dream. Someone wake me up?'

Australia's Matthew Ebden, who hasn't played a singles match for two years, was another to benefit from being granted an alternate spot when a gap in the draw opened up.

His reward? A clash with top seed and 24-time Grand Slam champion Novak Djokovic who has enjoyed plenty of success at Roland Garros with three French Open titles.

"They asked if I would be keen, and I thought, 'Hey, I would love the opportunity to play singles at the Olympics and officially re-

tire my singles career,'" said the 36-year-old who no longer has a singles ranking. "I've played

Andy Murray many times, Rafa Nadal a few times, Roger Federer as well, but I never got to play Novak in singles, which I regretted a bit," added Ebden. "But now this is magically coming about to play him in singles on Court Philippe Chatrier, as my last singles match. It'll be fun."

Ebden, who won the doubles with India's Rohan Bopanna at the Australian Open in January, is also entered in men's doubles with John Peers in Paris and Ellen Perez in mixed.

## JUDOKA FAILS DOPING TEST IN FIRST CASE AT PARIS OLYMPICS

PARIS: An Iraqi judoka has tested positive for banned anabolic steroids at the Paris Olympics, the International Testing Agency announced yesterday - the first positive doping test at the Games.

The ITA said a sample collected from Sajjad Sehen had "returned an adverse analytical finding for the non-specified prohibited substances metandienone and boldenone".

Both drugs are banned by the World Anti-Doping Agency. The sample was collected by the ITA during an out-of-competition anti-doping control on Tuesday in Paris, with the result reported by the WADA-accredited laboratory of Paris on Thursday. The 28-year-old first-time Olympian had been due to compete next week in the men's 81-kilogram class.

The ITA statement said the athlete had been provisionally

suspended until the resolution of the matter.

"This means that the athlete is prevented from competing, training, coaching, or participating in any activity during the Olympic Games Paris 2024," it said.

The manager of Iraq's delegation, Herda Raouf, told AFP that Sehen and his coach would be questioned by doping chiefs on Saturday.

"It is worth noting that the player had previously undergone a surgical operation, which may have caused him to take some type of medication," Raouf said. The ITA said Sehen had the right to challenge his provisional suspension at the Court of Arbitration for Sport and can also request an analysis of the B sample. The ITA manages an independent anti-doping programme for the Olympics in Paris on behalf of the International Olympic Committee.

SPOTLIGHT

## Biles to unveil unique uneven bars skill

AFP  
Paris

US gymnastics great Simone Biles is aiming to have a sixth unique skill named for her, a new move on the uneven bars that she will unveil at the Paris Olympics.

The International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) said yesterday that Biles had submitted the original skill to the technical committee. If she completes it successfully during the Games it would be the sixth skill named for Biles and give her one on every apparatus.

She has two skills named for her on vault, two eponymous tumbling skills on floor exercise and one balance beam dismount.

"I wake up every day and choose to grind in the gym and come out here and perform for myself - just to remind myself that I can still do it," Biles said recently.

FIG described the skill as "a clear hip circle forward with 1 1/2 turns to handstand", saying it was a variation on a skill first done by Canadian Wilhelm Weiler.

The move would see her circle her body below one bar, rising back into a handstand and then pirouetting

1 1/2 times before stopping in the handstand.

The federation said Biles is likely to do the new skill at the beginning of her uneven bars routine. If Biles completes the skill, she'll be the only active female gymnast to have at least one skill named for her on all four apparatuses.

Skills are named for the first gymnast who does them successfully at a major international meet.

Biles, the winner of four gold medals in Rio de Janeiro whose Tokyo Olympics was cut short by a debilitating bout of the "twisties," launches her Paris campaign tomorrow in the women's qualifications.

Nellie Kim, a five-time Olympic gold medalist for the former Soviet Union, is the woman with the most eponymous skills, with seven named for her. Other women aiming to have original elements named for them in Paris included Brazilian Rebeca Andrade, who has submitted a Yurchenko triple twisting vault. Lieke Wevers and Naomi Visser of the Netherlands will both attempt a triple turn with one leg held horizontally on floor exercise. If the two teammates both complete the move the element will bear both their names.



FOCUS

## 'French Phelps' Marchand says he is ready for the Paris pool craze



A giant advertising poster of swimmer Leon Marchand of France is seen on the Montparnasse Tower on the eve of the opening ceremony of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games yesterday. (Reuters)

Reuters  
Paris

Being the child of swimming Olympians and dubbed the "French Michael Phelps", living up to the hype may be the biggest test for Leon Marchand when the home hero dives into the Paris pool.

Marchand has been hot property since destroying Phelps's 400 metres individual medley (IM) world record last year at a stunning World Championships in Fukuoka where he scooped three individual world titles to add to his two from Budapest in 2022.

A teenage Ian Thorpe generated a similar mania in swimming-mad Australia before the 2000 Sydney Games - and duly delivered by winning the 400 metres freestyle gold and two relay titles at them. The Marchand madness may be at another level.

As the Fukuoka world champion in the 200m, 400m IM and 200m butterfly - and also a con-

tender for the 200m breaststroke title - Marchand could emerge from Paris with four individual gold medals.

Such a feat would put the Toulouse-born 22-year-old in rare company, with only Phelps, Mark Spitz and Kristin Otto having won four or more at a single Games.

Phelps, of course, won a record five at the 2008 Olympics and his career total of 13 individual titles may never be bested.

But Marchand's similarities with Phelps are enough to get French fans excited.

He has been coached by Bob Bowman, who turned Phelps into a gold medal machine, for years in US college swimming and competes in the same events as the American great.

The converted La Defense Arena can hold 15,000 spectators and Marchand's events, which start with the 400m IM tomorrow, may be the Games' hottest tickets.

Little wonder the 22-year-old Marchand feels pressure to perform.

"It's not easy at all," he told reporters. "I've

adapted pretty well to this craze for two years. It's a disproportionate scale, for swimming at least. But I get used to it, it will be OK."

He may have the best support team of any of the swimmers to cope with it all. Despite also preparing American swimmers, Bowman will be close at hand throughout the Olympic meet as an assistant coach on the French Olympic swim team. Both Marchand's parents were medley swimmers, with father Xavier having won a world championship silver in the 200m medley and mother Celine Bonnet representing France at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics.

"My parents play a great role in all of this," said Marchand. "They have experienced the Olympics...and help me to handle the pressure."

Marchand is comfortable with being the gold medal favourite in most of his events and said he pays no heed to the "billions of scenarios" that could unfold for him over the next week-and-a-half. "I can't predict what will happen next week. It's a present and I will open it Sunday and the days after."



**OFFICIAL TIMEKEEPER**

At the Olympic and Paralympic Games Paris 2024, focus will be on the athletes striving for gold. Léon Marchand is already a World Record breaker and swimming prodigy who will be hoping to claim his first medal on the greatest sporting stage. OMEGA is proud to support Léon and all the athletes as they pursue their dreams. For the 31st time in history, our role as Official Timekeeper will ensure precision and expert performance at the critical moments that count.



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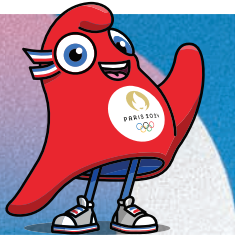


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**PARIS 2024**



**LADY GAGA, CELINE DION ADD SPARKLE TO STAR-STUDDED OLYMPIC SHOW**

Lady Gaga, Celine Dion and French-Malian singer Aya Nakamura joined dancers, an opera diva and even a heavy metal band in an opening ceremony for the Paris Olympics that sought to proudly showcase French culture. The first-ever opening ceremony held outside a stadium - on the River Seine - had to battle driving rain that cast a pallid gloom over the City of Light. Tokyo Games gold medallist in high jump Mutaz Barshim and women's 100m sprinter Shahd Ashraf carried Qatar's flag in the boats along the Seine River.

