



BIRMINGHAM: Ghana's Abigail Kwarteng competes in the women's high jump qualifying rounds athletics event at the Alexander Stadium, in Birmingham on day seven of the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, central England, on August 4, 2022. —AFP

Thompson-Herah and Wightman sprinkle Commonwealth stardust

Australia's Titmus stars in pool

BIRMINGHAM: Double Olympic sprint champion Elaine Thompson-Herah and men's 1500 meters world champion Jake Wightman both sailed through their heats at the Commonwealth Games on Thursday. Thompson-Herah's hopes of adding 200m gold to the 100m title she won on Wednesday will partly rest on whether Namibia's Olympic silver medalist Christine Mboma shakes off rustiness due to a lack of training.

Both came through their heats without a hitch in front of another sizeable crowd at Alexander Stadium in Birmingham. The women's 200m is one of the standout events at the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham, featuring the two first home in the Olympic final. Thompson-Herah and Mboma. Thompson-Herah had a quick turnaround from winning the 100m but she barely broke sweat in winning her heat in 22.80sec.

The 30-year-old is on the first step of what she says is her bid to return to the top after a disappointing world championships last month. Thompson-Herah topped the podium at last year's Tokyo Olympics in both the 100m and 200m, retaining the titles she had won in Rio. But she only took bronze in the 100m behind compatriots Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce and Shericka Jackson at this year's worlds in Eugene, Oregon, and finished seventh in the 200m final. Fraser-Pryce and Jackson opted to skip the Commonwealths, although Fraser-Pryce is in Birmingham as she trains with the team ahead of next week's Monaco Diamond League meeting.

'Hype'

Mboma has been restricted to the 200m since World Athletics, the sport's governing body, ruled she cannot run distances from 400m up to 1600m because of her

naturally high testosterone levels. The 19-year-old - Namibia's first-ever female Olympic athletics medalist - eased into the second round, timing 23.20sec. They go again on Friday in the semi-finals, with the final scheduled for Saturday.

Wightman qualified for Saturday's men's 1500m final, where he will be in the unusual position of being the hunted and not the hunter after his stunning success in the world championships. "That was the bit I was most looking forward to," said the Scottish runner, referring to the enormous roar that swept around the stadium when his name was announced. The men's 1500m should be a face-off between Scotland and Kenya.

In the Kenyan corner is 2019 world champion and Olympic silver medalist Timothy Cheruiyot and Abel Kipsang, who was fourth at last year's Tokyo Games. In the blue corner for Scotland are Wightman and Olympic bronze medalist Josh Kerr. Wightman, 28, said he did not care that he now has a target on his back. "I don't feel any more pressure but a bit more hype around it, for sure," he told the BBC. Canada's Camryn Rogers set a new Games record throw of 74.68 metres in the women's hammer throw.

Titmus stars in pool

Meanwhile, Australia's Ariarne Titmus completed a stunning individual freestyle treble on the last night of swimming action. Kenya's Ferdinand Omanyala won the men's 100m in a time of 10.02 while Scotland's Eilish McColgan emulated her mother Liz McColgan in winning the women's 10,000m. On the final night of action at the Sandwell Aquatics Centre, 400m world record holder Titmus beat a high-class field after her earlier triumphs

in the 200m and 800m freestyle. The 21-year-old dominated the race, touching in 3min 58.06sec to see off the challenge of Canada's 15-year-old Summer McIntosh.

The Olympic 200m and 400m champion skipped the world championships in Budapest in June, where she would have faced US star Katie Ledecky, to focus on the Commonwealths. She leaves Birmingham with four golds in total after being part of Australia's winning team in the women's 4x200m freestyle relay. "I came here with the goal to win all four. I believed I had the capacity to do that and I'm happy I did," she said. Titmus said it was crucial to have race practice in a high-pressure situation. "I think that, back home, Australia really prides itself on success in the pool at the Comm Games," she said.

"Potentially there's more pressure here to win than at the Olympics sometimes because we are so dominant. Performing under that pressure is tough." England's Ben Proud won his third straight Commonwealth men's 50m freestyle title, dominating the field to win in 21.36sec. "It's a year ago since I was giving my interviews and burst into tears because of a bad swim at the Olympics," said the world champion, who also won the 50m butterfly in Birmingham. "So much has changed. This is really my redemption year. Something has clicked."

Emma McKeon won a record-extending 20th Commonwealth medal as Australia brought the swimming events to a close by winning the women's 4x100m medley relay. The 28-year-old has won six gold medals in Birmingham to take her overall tally of golds to 14. England's Olympic 200m freestyle champion Tom Dean finally got his hands on a gold medal after six silvers, touching 0.08sec ahead of Australia's Kyle Chalmers in the men's 4x100m medley relay. Australia finished with



BIRMINGHAM: Gold medalist Jamaica's Elaine Thompson-Herah celebrates after the Women's 100m final athletics event at the Alexander Stadium. —AFP

25 swimming gold medals out of a total of 52, with the overall tally including swimming and para-swimming events.

Elsewhere on day six of the Games, England's Georgina Kennedy beat Canada's Hollie Naughton in four games to win the women's squash final. New Zealand's Paul Coll won the men's event, beating Joel Makin of Wales in a five-game nail-biter. New Zealand also took gold and silver in the men's cross-country mountain biking, with Samuel Gaze just edging out Ben Oliver while England's Evie Richards won the women's event. Australia lead the way in the overall medals tally with 46 golds, seven ahead of England, with Canada in third place on 16. —AFP

Mbappe effect keeps PSG out of reach as Ligue 1 woos investors

PARIS: Kylian Mbappe's decision to stay at Paris Saint-Germain was hailed as a boon for French football but it surely rules out any slim chance of a title race as the new Ligue 1 season kicks off this weekend. France coach Didier Deschamps said Mbappe was "shining a positive light on the championship abroad" by choosing to sign a new three-year contract to stay in his home country, a decision which President Emmanuel Macron admitted he advised the striker to take.

French league president Vincent Labrune insisted Mbappe's new deal had sent "a strong message for the present and future of our league". In reality, a move abroad will still probably happen before long for a player who looks certain to one day win the Ballon d'Or. Yet the possibility of leading Qatar-owned PSG to Champions League glory will motivate Mbappe this season, alongside defending the World Cup with France in Qatar in November and December.

Mbappe is the dominant figure in Paris despite the presence of Lionel Messi and Neymar and the arrival of a new coach at a club whose title triumph last season was overshadowed by their Champions League last-16 exit against Real Madrid. Coach Mauricio Pochettino and sporting director Leonardo have been replaced by Christophe Galtier and Luis Campos respectively.

Portuguese super scout Campos was named in the post of football advisor. He built the last two sides to deny PSG the domestic title: Monaco in 2017 and Lille in 2021. Galtier, the finest French manager of the last decade, was the coach of that Lille side and spent last season in charge of Nice, but he knows the pressures in Paris will be altogether greater.

'Win everything'

"When you come to PSG you have an obligation to get results," he told sports daily L'Equipe. "We need to break records. In all modesty, I have come to Paris to win everything." For PSG's domestic rivals, the reality is that second-and



TOKYO: Paris Saint-Germain's French forward Kylian Mbappe greets a Japanese fan during a press conference in Tokyo. —AFP

automatic Champions League qualification-is the best they can hope for in Ligue 1. Marseille were runners-up last season but it has been a tumultuous summer for the club owned by American tycoon Frank McCourt.

Fiery Argentine coach Jorge Sampaoli has left and been replaced by former Croatian international Igor Tudor. Key men in Boubacar Kamara, William Saliba and Steve Mandanda have departed and pre-season results have not been encouraging. Monaco had to settle for third last season and must come through Champions League qualifying as a result. If they can safely negotiate that they will be well placed for a successful campaign, despite losing outstanding midfielder Aurelien Tchouameni to Real Madrid.

The sides who completed last season's top five have big ambitions again. Rennes, owned by billionaire Francois Pinault, should be competitive, while Nice's British owners Ineos will hope to push for a Champions League place under Swiss coach Lucien Favre, who has returned for a second spell in charge. Meanwhile, Lyon are bidding to break back into the top three after finishing eighth in the last campaign.

They have brought back two former stars in Alexandre Lacazette and Corentin Tolisso, and it has also been a busy summer in the boardroom. American businessman John Textor, who owns Brazilian club Botafogo and has a stake in Crystal Palace, agreed a deal to become Lyon's majority shareholder. —AFP

LIV Golf players file anti-trust lawsuit against PGA Tour

SAN FRANCISCO: Eleven LIV Golf players, including Phil Mickelson and Bryson DeChambeau, filed an anti-trust lawsuit on Wednesday against the US PGA Tour, some seeking a restraining order to compete in next week's playoffs. The lawsuit, filed in federal court in the Northern District of California, challenges the indefinite suspensions imposed by PGA commissioner Jay Monahan upon those who played in any of the Saudi-backed upstart tour's first three events.

The lawsuit begins a legal showdown between the rebel series and the established PGA Tour and whether the golfers are free agents or as tour members are subject to rules and punishments of the PGA Tour. With LIV Golf events offering record \$25 million purses and some players reportedly offered fat signing bonuses as well, some top names joined the circuit despite criticism over Saudi human rights abuses.

"As the tour's monopoly power has grown, it has employed its dominance to craft anti-competitive restraints to protect its long-standing monopoly," the lawsuit claimed. "Threatened by the entry of LIV Golf and diametrically opposed to its founding mission, the tour has ventured to harm the careers and livelihoods of any golfers... who have the temerity to defy the tour and play in tournaments sponsored by the new entrant."

"The tour has done so in an intentional and relentless effort to crush nascent competition before it threatens the tour's monopoly." Australian Matt Jones and Americans Talor Gooch and Hudson Swafford want a temporary restraining order to be able to compete in next week's first PGA Tour FedEx Cup playoff event at Memphis. They qualified based on season points before joining LIV Golf and being banished.

Other players filing the lawsuit include Mexico's Abraham Ancer and Carlos Ortiz, England's Ian Poulter and Americans Jason Kokrak, Pat Perez and Peter Uihlein. A memo from PGA commissioner Jay Monahan to players obtained by The Golf Channel said the tour

was confident in its legal position regarding the suspensions. "We have been preparing to protect our membership and contest this latest attempt to disrupt our tour and you should be confident in the legal merits of our position," the memo stated.

"These suspended players, who are now Saudi Golf League employees, have walked away from the tour and now want back in. "With the Saudi Golf League on hiatus, they are trying to use lawyers to force their way into competition alongside our members in good standing. It's an attempt to use the tour platform to promote themselves and to free ride on your benefits and efforts."

"To allow entry into our events compromises the tour and the competition to the detriment of our organization, our players, our partners and our fans." LIV Golf backed the lawsuit in a statement to The Golf Channel. "The players are right to have brought this action to challenge the PGA Tour's anti-competitive rules and to vindicate their rights as independent contractors to play where and when they choose," the LIV Golf Series statement said. "Despite the PGA Tour's efforts to stifle competition, we think golfers should be allowed to play golf."

'It's frustrating'

The move came on the eve of the PGA's Wyndham Championship at Greensboro, North Carolina, and sparked emotional reactions. "It just feels like a quick cash grab for those guys," said American J.T. Poston. "The money that's being used to fight those lawsuits are coming out of our pockets." As for LIV Golf players possibly in the PGA playoffs, Poston added, "I don't know if there will be hostility but I know there are some bridges that have been broken. Some guys will not appreciate that."

US 2023 Ryder Cup captain Zach Johnson called the lawsuit "extremely unfortunate," adding, "it's sad it has come to this. You should pick one and that's the route you should have to go." "You can't have it both ways," said American Will Zalatoris. "We've been grinding all year and they are doing something detrimental. I think a lot of guys would be pretty frustrated if they are allowed to do both. Deep down all of us share the same feelings." "It's frustrating," said American Billy Horschel. "They made a decision to leave the PGA Tour. They should follow their employer. A lot of guys are not very happy." —AFP