

## Sports

# Rugby league joins swimming in banning 'transgender' athletes

## 'Welfare, legal and reputational risk'

**SYDNEY:** The sport of rugby league on Tuesday joined swimming by banning transgender players from international competition, as world athletes said it was also considering a rule change. Rugby league authorities said transgender athletes would be "unable to play" in international matches while they undertook consultations and research to finalize a new policy for 2023.

They cited the "welfare, legal and reputational risk" to the game and players in taking their decision. The 13-a-side game's governing body acted a day after international swimming effectively banned transgender athletes from women's races, placing them instead in a new "open category".

World athletics hinted at tougher policies on transgender athletes taking part in women's events, with president Sebastian Coe saying fairness is more important than inclusion.

Sports are drawing up new regulations on participation after the International Olympic Committee last year announced guidelines while asking federations to produce their own "sport-specific" rule. The issue has ignited into a fractious debate between those fighting for transgender athletes' rights to compete freely as women and those arguing they enjoy an unfair physiological advantage.

The International Rugby League's announcement means transgender athletes will be banned from this year's Women's Rugby League World Cup in England in November. "The IRL reaffirms its belief that rugby league is a game for all and that anyone and everyone can play our sport," it

said in a statement. But the sport said it had to balance each player's right to take part against the perceived risk to other players "and to ensure all are given a fair hearing".

### 'In the gutter'

The rugby league governing body said it would work with the eight nations taking part in the Women's Rugby League World Cup for a "future trans women inclusion policy in 2023", taking into account the "unique characteristics" of rugby league. Transgender former New South Wales rugby player Caroline Layt criticized the league's decision. "We are human beings, we have feelings, and we feel like we are being singled out," Layt told AFP. "Basically what they're saying is: 'We don't want you.'"

Swimming's governing body FINA made its decision to exclude transgender swimmers from women's races after setting up legal, medical and athletes' committees to examine the issue. FINA decided that male-to-female transgender athletes could only join women's races if they had not experienced any part of male puberty. It said its medical committee found that males acquired advantages in puberty, including in the size of their organs and bones, that were not lost in hormone suppression.

World Athletics president Coe hinted Monday that track and field could follow swimming in bringing in a tougher policy on transgender athletes competing in women's events. "My responsibility is to protect the integrity of women's sport and we take that very seriously, and if it



**BUDAPEST:** France's Analia Pigree competes in a heat for the women's 50m backstroke during the Budapest 2022 World Aquatics Championships at Duna Arena in Budapest on June 21, 2022. —AFP

means that we have to make adjustments to protocols going forward, we will," said Coe, who attended the swimming world championships in Budapest on Sunday.

"I've always made it clear: if we ever get pushed into a corner to that point where we're making a judgment about fairness or inclusion, I will always fall down on the side of fairness."

Under World Athletics rules, transgender women have to show they have low testosterone levels for at least 12 months before competition. Cycling's governing body, the UCI, has also toughened its rules on transgender eligibility by doubling the time period before a rider transitioning from male to female can compete. —AFP

### News in brief

#### Players can leave Ukraine

**LAUSANNE:** FIFA has extended until June 2023 the possibility for foreign players and coaches based in Ukraine and Russia to unilaterally suspend their contracts and move to another club. "The Bureau of the FIFA Council has decided to extend the temporary employment rules established in the Regulations on the Status and Transfer of Players (RSTP) with the aim of effectively assisting players, clubs and coaches impacted by the war in Ukraine," FIFA said in a statement Tuesday. The decision follows changes made to the transfer rules in March following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. "Should clubs affiliated to the Ukrainian Association of Football (UAF) or the Football Union of Russia (FUR) not reach a mutual agreement with their respective foreign players and coaches before or on 30 June 2022... these players and coaches will have the right to suspend their employment contracts with their clubs until 30 June 2023," FIFA added.

#### Napoli probed over Osimhen

**MILAN:** Napoli are being investigated for potential false accounting in the transfer deal which brought Nigeria's Victor Osimhen to the Serie A club, prosecutors confirmed on Tuesday. Prosecutors in Naples said in a statement that Italian finance police searched Napoli's Castel Volturno and Rome offices to collect documents regarding Osimhen's 70 million euros (\$73.9 million) move from Lille in 2020. They added that the searches come following requests from both Italian and French judicial authorities, with Lille having been also the subject of a search in last month. Italian media report that club owner Aurelio de Laurentiis was also under investigation. Osimhen's transfer was one of dozens of suspicious deals looks by Italian Football Federation (FIGC) investigators in a probe into allegedly inflated transfer values designed to artificially boost clubs' balance sheets. The deal stood out as it involved four players valued at just over 20 million euros moving to Lille as part of the deal.

#### Saudi-backed LIV Golf

**LOS ANGELES:** Four-time major champion Brooks Koepka is set to become the latest star to join the Saudi-backed LIV Golf series, media reports said on Tuesday. The 32-year-old American world number 19 is expected to make his debut on the lucrative circuit at its maiden US event in Oregon next week. Koepka's management team did not immediately respond when contacted by AFP on Tuesday. But multiple reports in Britain and the United States said Koepka - who removed "PGA Tour" from his Twitter profile on Monday - will follow the likes of Dustin Johnson and six-time major-winner Phil Mickelson by joining LIV. The upstart series, which is bankrolled by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, has plunged the golf world into turmoil since its emergence. The circuit, which launched in Britain earlier this month, offers some of the richest purses in golf tournament history, with \$25 million on offer at each of its events - roughly double the prize money of other majors.

#### Alaphilippe set for comeback

**PARIS:** Double world road cycling champion Julian Alaphilippe will make his return after two months out injured at Sunday's French Championships, his Quick-Step Alpha Vinyl team announced on Tuesday. Frenchman Alaphilippe, 30, suffered multiple fractures during April's Liege-Bastogne-Liege. His team-mate Remco Evenepoel will also race this weekend, but in Belgium. "The week of the National Championships is one of the best of the year," Quick-Step's sports director Tom Steels said in a statement. "You've got a lot of racing happening in many countries and our riders are all motivated to get some good results," he added. Alaphilippe's return on a 241.7km run starting and finishing in Cholet, near Nantes, will come a matter of days before the Tour de France begins in Copenhagen on July 1. His presence on the Tour, at which he has worn the race leader's yellow jersey in the last three editions, is uncertain. —AFP

## 'So much pain in my heart': Tennis star helps Ukraine

**PARIS:** Former women's tennis world number three Elina Svitolina has told AFP she hopes one day to return and see her octogenarian grandmother who has been trapped in the Black Sea port of Odessa since Russia invaded Ukraine. "I hope that this will end one day and I can come back and see her," said Svitolina. The 27-year-old was speaking a week after she and Ukrainian Champions League-winning football legend Andriy Shevchenko were asked on a Zoom call by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to become ambassadors for United24.

The charity was launched by Zelensky to collect donations to cover Ukraine's most pressing needs: Defence and de-mining, medical aid and to rebuild the country which has been devastated since Vladimir Putin launched the invasion in February. Svitolina is expecting her first child - a baby girl - in October with French tennis star Gael Monfils but says that happy news is offset by her anxiety for family members who remain in Ukraine.

Svitolina's parents and brother managed to leave but aside from her grandmother Tamara, her uncle and his family remain in Odessa. The city, a multi-cultural crossroads of a million inhabitants, is under de facto Russian blockade and has found itself isolated. Svitolina, a Wimbledon and US Open semifinalist in 2019, says it is especially harrowing for her grandmother's generation who experienced the Nazi invasion in 1941.

"It is tough for older people to get through

another war," she said. "The deficit of food, staying at home or in a basement for days... for them it is extremely stressful and very, very tough mentally. I try to keep contact with her in Odessa and try and help her as much as I can. She was way too old to move." Svitolina says her grandmother has an unlikely savior. "She is with her cat who she says is her biggest defender!"

"My uncle and his family live not so far from her. They see each other when it is possible to leave the house and this is a big help. "Our friends are also helping by volunteering to go and see her." Despite not having lived in Ukraine for years, Svitolina said "it feels like home" and she used to visit three or four times a year.

### 'Drop of help'

Hence her desire to do something to help her country like other leading Ukrainian sports personalities such as fellow tennis player Sergiy Stakhovsky and Sheriff Tiraspol manager Yuriy Vernydub, who returned to join up. "A lot of my friends have come back and taken up weapons to defend the country," she said. "So many people are struggling right now that is why I feel like through (United24) we can do something that will help all Ukrainians and military and children who are in need. "It is a small part to play that will hopefully make a difference."

Svitolina admits she was nervous when she joined former Ukrainian national manager Shevchenko for the call with Zelensky. "It was such an honor and I was really worried like never before. Even when I was in the Wimbledon semifinals I was not that worried," she said. She and Shevchenko will raise funds through charity events and publicize it through their social media platforms. Svitolina though can no longer play in exhibition matches due to her pregnancy, howev-



**NEW YORK:** Ukraine's Elina Svitolina serves to Canada's Leylah Fernandez during their US Open Tennis tournament women's quarter-finals match at the USTA Billie Jean King National Tennis Center in New York. Svitolina was asked on a Zoom call by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to become an ambassador for United24. —AFP

er. She says her "mission" is the least she can do given the example in leadership Zelensky had set since the outset.

"He gave me this hope that we will win this war, that we will come through this," she said. "That is why with his example he gives all this hope to Ukrainians. "It is a huge example of respect for President Zelensky for his bravery in staying in the country. He has surpassed all expectations." Svitolina says after several months of war and no end in sight it was important to keep people's minds focused on the conflict. "I have so much pain in my heart seeing how many cities destroyed and how many people young and old have lost their lives in one moment," she said. "They need help and I can be the one who can add a drop of help to the ocean for them." —AFP

## Muguruza gets a much-needed win in Eastbourne

**EASTBOURNE:** Garbine Muguruza kickstarted a difficult season as the former Wimbledon champion beat Poland's Magdalena Frech 6-1, 7-6 (9/7) to reach the last 16 of the Eastbourne International on Monday. The number five seed earned just her third win on the WTA Tour since February. "The conditions were hard today. I feel like I fought hard against the wind, and I haven't played many matches on grass either," said Muguruza. "I could see today that if I didn't fight as hard as I can, I wasn't going to win."

Muguruza next faces the winner of the second round match between 12th seed Camila Giorgi and Canadian lucky loser Rebecca Marino, who got the better of Britain's Heather Watson 7-6 (7/1), 6-4. Magda Linette produced an upset to beat 17th seed

Alison Riske in a marathon encounter lasting over three hours. World number 66 Linette came from a set down to outlast Riske 6-7 (3/7), 6-3, 7-6 (7/4). All eyes on Tuesday will turn to Serena Williams' return to court as she pairs up with world number three Ons Jabeur in the doubles.

Williams, a 23-time Grand Slam singles champion, has not played since suffering an injury during her first-round match at Wimbledon 12 months ago, plummeting to 1,204th in the world rankings. However, the 40-year-old has been handed a wildcard to return to singles action at Wimbledon next week and is getting some match practice this week at Eastbourne. "Many players were jealous because I'm playing with her. Honestly, Serena is Serena. She is a legend and always will be," said Jabeur.

Williams and Jabeur begin their partnership against Spain's Sara Sorribes Tormo and Marie Bouzkova of the Czech Republic. In the men's event, Australia's Alex de Minaur began the defence of his title with a 6-3, 6-3 win over Chilean Cristian



**PARIS:** Spain's Garbine Muguruza returns the ball during her women's singles match against Estonia's Kaia Kanepi at the Court Simonne-Mathieu on day one of the Roland-Garros Open tennis tournament in Paris on May 22, 2022. —AFP

Garin. America's Sebastian Korda (7/5). Millman will next play pulled out of Wimbledon due to "terrible shin splints" after he lost in straight sets to John Millman 6-3, 7-6

don't know, we can't really verify. "We don't believe it's the number mentioned in France, which was more or less 30,000 to 40,000," he added.

Keller said other factors caused the problems at the Stade de France, in mayhem that saw the French police use tear gas at close range, even against children. "It wasn't only the paper tickets that created chaos in front of the gates," he said. "The reasons are numerous: a transport strike, poor reaction from stewards, police, there were delinquents and an extremely big flux of people in front of the stadium without a ticket or with fake tickets," he added. Liverpool and Real Madrid supporters are due to give evidence to the Senate later in the day. —AFP

## UEFA rubbish French minister's Champions League fake tickets

**PARIS:** A senior UEFA representative said on Tuesday he did not believe French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin's claims about the number of fake tickets in circulation during the chaotic scenes before last month's Champions League final between Liverpool and Real Madrid.

Following the game on May 28, Darmanin claimed that between 30,000 and 40,000 fake tickets in the hands of Liverpool fans was the cause of problems as police funneled thousands of fans into overcrowded underpasses around the stadium, leading to the kick-off being delayed by more than 30 minutes.

Martin Kallen, general director of UEFA Events, who are in charge of the body's commercial events, told a hearing at the French Senate, which is investigating the incidents, the figure was much lower. "We know there were around 2,600 tickets taken to the turnstiles which were fake," Kellen said. "But a lot of tickets didn't get to the turnstiles... How many? We