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GOLDEN GOODBYE
I DON'T SEE MYSELF AT LA 2028, SAYS BASKETBALL STAR JAMES
LeBron James, who helped the United States defeat France in the men's basketball gold medal game on Saturday, said he could not imagine himself playing at the next Summer Olympics in Los Angeles in 2028. Asked if he would contemplate playing in the next Olympics on US soil, the 39-year-old said: "No, I can't see myself playing in LA, but I also didn't see myself playing in Paris. Four years from now, no, I can't see myself (playing at the Olympics)." James, the LA Lakers star who is often regarded as one of the greatest players in the history of basketball, had 14 points, six rebounds, 10 assists and two steals against France.

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SPOTLIGHT

Paris bids triumphant 'au revoir' to Olympics

A dazzling closing ceremony culminated with Hollywood star Tom Cruise abseiling off the roof

AFP
Paris

Paris bade a triumphant "au revoir" to the Olympics yesterday as the curtain came down on its widely praised staging of the global sporting spectacular. A dazzling closing ceremony that culminated with Hollywood star Tom Cruise abseiling off the roof of the Stade de France in front of 71,500 spectators was the crowning glory of what has been broadly acclaimed as one of the greatest Olympics ever held.

International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Thomas Bach said the Paris Games had been "sport at its best". "These were sensational Olympic Games from start to finish," Bach said. "Or dare I say: Seine-sational Games," the IOC chief quipped in a pun about the river flowing through Paris which was the scene of the opening ceremony. "Dear French friends, you have fallen in love with the Olympic Games. And we have fallen in love with all of you," Bach added.

Around 9,000 athletes flooded into the stadium to be entertained by 270 performers and artists in a ceremony billed as a celebration of humanity and the unifying power of sport. "We knew you would be brilliant, but you were magic," Paris 2024 organising chief Tony Estanguet told athletes. "You made us happy; you made us feel alive - the world needed this moment so much."

France's swimming hero Leon Marchand - winner of four gold medals at these Games - kicked off the festivities, collecting the Olympic flame from the cauldron in the Tuileries Gardens to begin its journey to the Stade de France. French rugby hero Antoine Dupont - who led the host nation to a rugby sevens gold medal in one of the early highlights of the Games - carried a tricolour flag into the stadium as partying athletes swarmed the field.

The closing spectacle marked the beginning of the four-year countdown to the Los Angeles Olympics, and American gymnastics icon Simone Biles joined Los Angeles mayor Karen Bass as the Olympic flag was formally handed to the Californian city. A preview of what the world can expect when the Olympics heads to Tinseltown in 2028 then saw "Mission Impossible" star Tom Cruise abseil into the stadium before collecting the Olympic flag and heading off on a motorbike to the delight of athletes and fans.

A pre-filmed segment showed Cruise weaving through Parisian streets before boarding a plane and skydiving into Los Angeles and emblazoning LA's iconic Hollywood sign with the Olympic rings. Los Angeles band Red Hot Chili Peppers and



American actor Tom Cruise rides a motorbike with the Olympics flag during the closing ceremony of Paris Olympics Games at the Stade de France yesterday. (Reuters)

singer Billie Eilish then performed a mini-concert on a beach.

The ceremony followed 17 days of frequently breathtaking sporting action set against the backdrop of iconic Parisian landmarks from the Eiffel Tower to the Chateau de Versailles. In contrast to the rain-soaked opening ceremony on the River Seine, Sunday's festivities began as a golden sunset bathed the French capital.

The last day of sporting action, meanwhile, saw the United States pip China for top spot in the battle for medals after the US women's basketball team squeezed past France 67-66 to clinch the last gold of the Games. The win - the eighth consecutive Olympic women's basketball title won by the USA - ensured the Americans finished level with China on 40 golds each. The USA however finished on top of the overall medal table with a total of 126 medals, with China in second place on 91.

The last day's action began with a gripping women's marathon victory by the Netherlands' long-distance running star Sifan Hassan. Hassan had taken on what many considered to be a crazy gamble in Paris, competing in the 5,000m, the 10,000m and the marathon.

But in a jaw-dropping sprint finish, Hassan overhauled Ethiopia's Tigst Assefa to take gold by three seconds in an Olympic record of 2hr 22min 55sec. She fell to the ground on the blue carpet in front of the golden dome of the Invalides memorial complex in the heart of Paris before grabbing a Dutch flag to celebrate an extraordinary achievement.

Hassan was presented with her gold medal in yesterday's closing ceremony. Wrestling, weightlifting, water polo, volleyball, modern pentathlon, handball, and track cycling were the other sports to crown Olympic champions on the last day.



Athletes at the closing ceremony at the Stade de France.



The Golden Voyager character stands atop a pile of masked dancers during a performance at the Paris Games closing ceremony. The character is a tribute to a number of references from France's historical heritage. (Reuters)



French swimmer Leon Marchand takes the Olympic flame from the cauldron at the Jardin des Tuileries in Paris, before the start of the closing ceremony of the Paris Olympic Games. (AFP)



Pianist Alain Roche plays during the closing ceremony. (Reuters)



Qatar delegation at the closing ceremony.



SPOTLIGHT

Athletics has moved on from Bolt, says Coe

AFP
Paris

Track and field chief Sebastian Coe has hailed the emergence of an "extraordinary" group of athletes at the Paris Olympics who have gone some way to filling the void left by Jamaican legend Usain Bolt.

Bolt was a transformational figure in athletics, winning eight Olympic and nine world gold medals as he dominated the sprints during his stellar career.

Talk since his retirement after the 2017 world championships in London has always been about who might step into his shoes as the leading pin-up for the sport.

But Coe insisted the narrative wasn't just about one athlete alone to fill the void. "We are no longer a sport about one person," he told reporters in Paris yesterday, all the while praising Bolt.

"That one person was Her-

culean, that one person transformed the popularity of our sport for a very clear period of time, and he consistently did that."

Coe likened Bolt's legacy to that of Muhammad Ali in boxing.

"You don't replace Muhammad Ali, you don't replace Usain Bolt. But I did say, 'Mark my words, other athletes will come through.'"

"I cannot remember a generation of more talented athletes.

"The way they've come through has been extraordinary. We've now got a greater bandwidth of talent across a broader range of disciplines than we've ever had in the sport."

More than one million tickets were sold for the Olympic athletics programme at the Stade de France that saw athletes from 75 different countries bag top-eight finishes. Swedish pole vaulter Armand Duplantis, American 400m hurdler Sydney McLaughlin-Levrone and the US mixed 4x400m

relay team all set world records. There were also 13 new Olympic records and the World Athletics seating area for guests featured a daily selection of celebrities keen to watch the action.

"I did slightly feel the globe wobbling the other night when I had Snoop Dogg one side of me and Simone Biles the other side and trying to explain the finer points of the 1500m," Coe said. "And I'm still smiling at the response from Simone, who looked up the track and said, 'I have no idea people ran that quickly!'"

"I said, 'How do you think we feel when we're sitting at the side of the gymnastics auditorium? How on earth do you do what you do?'"

Coe said the "sport became cool!"

"It's the first time my kids have actually thought anything I've done on the planet has been cool!"

Coe also underlined the reach

of track and field, dubbing it the "definitive definition of a global sport", with one eye already on the Los Angeles Games in 2028.

"We had our 105th country in the history of the Olympic Movement winning a medal in Paris and that has been sensational," he said.

Saint Lucia's Julien Alfred (women's 100m), Pakistan's Arshad Nadeem (men's javelin) and Dominica's Thea LaFond (women's triple jump) all won their countries' first gold medals.

"Tell me any other sport on the opening day of a competition is celebrating a medal for Ecuador, so that for me tells me the sport is moving in the right direction," Coe said. "It is really important we do not take our foot off the accelerator."

"I said after (last year's world championships in) Budapest that the red carpet is out in front of us. We continue down that carpet right the way through to LA, which will be a huge and important moment for the sport."



Sweden's Armand Duplantis passes 6.25m and sets the new world record in the men's pole vault final at the Paris 2024 Olympic Games at Stade de France in Saint-Denis on August 5, 2024. (AFP)

HANDBALL

Denmark claims gold as Hansen retires on a high

'We couldn't reach our normal level of performance, we played really bad'



Gold medallists Denmark's players celebrate during the men's handball podium ceremony of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games in Villeneuve-d'Ascq, northern France, yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters
Lille

Denmark clinched their second men's Olympic handball gold medal when they beat Germany 39-26 in the final as one of the sport's greatest, left back Mikkel Hansen, retired on a high yesterday.

It was Denmark's second title in the last three Games, having played in all three finals in Rio - where they won - Tokyo and Paris.

Germany, who knocked out de-

fending champions France in the quarter-finals, were never in the mix and trailed throughout after levelling for 1-1.

Spain edged out Slovenia 23-22 in the bronze medal match earlier on Sunday.

The Tokyo silver medallists racked up goals at breakneck speed while the Germans struggled to break through the Danish defence, trailing by nine points after 30 minutes - the biggest ever halftime deficit in an Olympic gold medal match.

Germany, who won bronze in

Rio, tried to make headway as the game wore on. Centre back Juri Knorr poured in six points while right back Renars Uscins and line player Jannik Kohlbacher each contributed four.

But they were no match for the undefeated Danes, notably right back Mathias Gidsel who scored 11 goals.

"From the start to the end they were the better team and we couldn't reach our normal level of performance, we played really bad and of course it's like a nightmare, we don't understand how this

could happen ... we maybe played our worst game in a long time," said Germany's top scorer Knorr.

It was the first time since Croatia won gold at the Athens Games in 2004 that a handball team had won the gold without losing a single Olympic match.

"We just showed our character, and I think we just showed the whole world which team is the best right now and dominated the game throughout, from the first minute," said Danish centre back Rasmus Lauge, who poured in five points.

FOCUS

Serbia win Balkan battle for another water polo gold

Reuters
Paris

Serbia extended their reign over Olympic water polo by beating arch-rivals Croatia 13-11 for a third successive gold in the men's event in front of a roaring crowd at La Defense Arena.

The Balkan battle was spirited and physical, with both teams committing a slew of fouls and occasionally putting an errant hand onto an opponent's head.

In the end, the Serbians were too strong though, leading for all but a handful of minutes to become the second men's team to win three golds in a row after Hungary's treble from 2000-08.

"It's incredible. This is the power of unity," said Serbia's veteran defender Dusan Mandic, who played in all three gold medal wins. "This is the team spirit. This is defence, defence, defence until the end, sacrificing for each other."

After the final whistle, track-suited Serbia staff jumped into the pool to celebrate with the players. They all sang a victory song and a Serbia flag was hung from a cross-bar of one of the goal-cages until removed before the medal ceremony.

Croatia came into the com-

petition with confidence after claiming the world title in Doha in February but ended up suffering another final defeat to their long-standing foes.

Eight years ago, their title defence was ended by Serbia in the gold medal decider in Rio. The Croatia players were a picture of gloom as they mounted the medal podium with furrowed eyebrows and heavy sighs. Most applauded the Serbians sportingly, though, when they climbed up next to them and raised their arms in triumph.

"We just did not show up for the start of the game," said Croatia goalkeeper Toni Popadic. "I'm proud of my team, no matter the result. I think we achieved a great deal."

The United States took bronze and were delighted with it, having beaten Hungary in a shootout to claim their first medal in the men's event in 16 years. With the scores locked at 8-8 at the end of regular time, the Americans played the shootout to perfection.

Hannes Daub, Max Irving and Alex Bowen all nailed their shots but the Hungarian trio failed to find the net. "I'm just super proud of my team," said Daub.

"They kept telling me, 'You got this, you got this,' until the fourth quarter, and I happened to deliver for my guys."



Serbia's players celebrate with their gold medals after the water polo final against Croatia during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games at the Paris La Defense Arena in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

BOTTOMLINE



Dominant Li lifts China's 5th weightlifting gold

AFP
Paris

China's Li Wenwen eased to victory yesterday in the women's heavy-weight class to give her nation a fifth gold in the Olympic weightlifting competition in Paris - hoisting her coach in the air to celebrate.

In the event for women with a bodyweight above 81 kilograms, the 150kg Li, who also won the superheavyweight category at the Tokyo Games, dominated.

She was so far ahead after two lifts in both the snatch and clean and jerk that she was able to pass on her final attempt in both categories. At the end, with victory assured, she came out for the final lift of the Paris Olympic weightlifting competition and instead of picking up the bar, lifted her coach, Wu Meijin.

"A lot of people said online that I should lift my coach," Li said. "I didn't know if he would get angry, but I did it anyway."

The 24-year-old finished with a total of 309kg, 10kg ahead of Park Hye-jeong of South Korea, with Tokyo silver medallist Emily Campbell of Britain another 11kg behind. Traditionally the men's superheavyweights close the Ol-

ympic programme. In their place, the women spent the morning hamming for the crowd who responded with raucous support.

Campbell did a cartwheel on stage after her last attempt.

"We've got big characters in our group. I think that's what people respond to," Campbell said. "It's the last day of the Olympics. I think everyone's just having one last big party."

"I don't think they'll be putting the men on last again."

While the Chinese took half the ten weightlifting golds with the United States tied for second, the sport, practised in sweaty gyms at all levels of society around the world, did spread the success.

Several large Olympic countries lying in the lower reaches of the

medals table, notably Colombia, Thailand and Indonesia, lifted their small totals, as did traditional weightlifting powers Bulgaria and Georgia.

Ecuador's two bronzes came from sisters Neisi Dajomes and Angie Palacios. After her victory, Dajomes said she and her sister were the Venus and Serena Williams of Olympic weightlifting. For years weightlifting dominated Olympic doping headlines, but three years ago in Tokyo returned no positives.

As women started the last event in Paris yesterday, the International Testing Agency said that no weightlifters had so far failed tests, but added it would be one or two days before their labs processed all the samples collected on Saturday and Sunday.

China's gold medallist Li Wenwen poses on the women's +81kg weightlifting podium yesterday.

BASEKTBALL

US survive French fright to win gold medal thriller

'We were just resilient and when we needed to we just kept going'



USA players celebrate with their basketball gold medals during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games at the Bercy Arena in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

AFP Paris

The United States held off France 67-66 to win an unprecedented eighth successive women's Olympic basketball gold yesterday and extend their run of victories at the tournament to 61 games.

A'ja Wilson scored a game-high 21 points for the Americans who won the title for the 10th time overall, surviving a buzzer-beating shot from France's Gabby Williams. The hosts needed a three to force overtime in Paris but Williams' foot was on the three-point line as she let go of the ball, so her shot counted for just two points in a dramatic finale.

"It's all a blur right now," said Wilson, who also registered 13 rebounds and four blocks. "We were just resilient and when we needed to we just kept going."

Kelsey Plum and Kahleah Copper both scored 12 points off the bench for the US. Williams led France with 19. An eighth straight

triumph gave the US women the record for most consecutive gold medals in any team sport at the Olympics, breaking a tie with the US men, who won seven basketball titles in a row from 1936 to 1968.

"That was an absolutely incredible basketball game. Two teams that left it all out there," said US coach Cheryl Reeve. "Coming home with gold, I can't think of anything greater in life than what we just did together."

For the 42-year-old Diana Taurasi it was a record sixth Olympic gold, moving her one ahead of Sue Bird. The US women got support from LeBron James, who sat courtside wearing his gold medal and was joined by teammates Bam Adebayo and Derrick White, after they won the men's gold by beating France 98-87 in Saturday's final.

It was the first time in Games history the men's and women's finals featured identical match-ups.

A low-scoring first quarter saw a cold-shooting France muster

just nine points, but the US only fared marginally better and led by six after 10 minutes.

Nevada-born Williams, who qualifies to play for France through her mother, trimmed the gap to a point with a three early in the second period before a basket from Valerieane Ayayi tied the game at 20-20.

Marine Fauthoux drained a three from near midcourt with the shot clock expiring to send the Bercy Arena crowd wild, but Napheesa Collier's putback ensured the teams headed into the break level at 25-25.

France strung together a 10-point run to start the third period as Fauthoux and Ayayi both nailed threes. The US hit back to lead 45-43 going into the final quarter, with Plum connecting on a pair of threes, one after Marine Johannes took a nasty blow from Wilson that went unpunished, to France's fury.

Wilson belatedly found some rhythm offensively after a difficult first half, but France had an answer

each time and went back in front, 51-49, on Marieme Badiane's lay-up. The US nudged back ahead, Wilson getting a kind bounce off the backboard and Plum sinking a pair of free throws to leave them leading by three with two minutes to play.

Williams' jumper made it a one-point contest before Copper drove to the basket to keep the US on top.

A travelling call against Wilson gave the ball back to France with around 45 seconds left, but Fauthoux's desperation three came up well short under pressure from Breanna Stewart.

Wilson then made a free throw to extend the lead to four and Plum looked to have clinched the win with a pair of foul shots, but Williams kept France alive with a clutch three.

Copper held her nerve to sink two more free throws for the US to restore their cushion to three.

They needed every point as Williams nearly pulled off a miraculous escape act as the buzzer sounded, only to be denied by a matter of centimetres.

HORSE RACING

Al Shaqab Racing's Al Hakeem gets back to winning ways with a Gr 3 victory

Runner-up of the Gr 3 La Coupe on return, the five-year-old Al Hakeem (Siyouni) went back to the winning enclosure to land the Gr 3 Prix Gontaut-Biron Hong Kong Jockey Club at Deauville yesterday.

Having his second run of the year, the Al Shaqab Racing owned - Al Hakeem missed the rest of 2023 after an injury in the Gr 2 Prix d'Harcourt. The homebred is trained by Jean-Claude Rouget.

Ridden by Cristian Demuro, Al Hakeem travelled in second just ahead of Feed The Flame (Kingman).

With Sacaya (The Grey Gatsby) leading at a good pace, the

talented horse looked to be in a comfortable rhythm.

Entering the home straight, the son of Siyouni kept on well to win by half a length. Woodchuck (Birchwood) stayed on in second. Elusive Princess (Martinstonborough) took third.

"They've done well to get him back today," said the winning jockey after the race. "The whole team has done a very good job and I thank them. He is only 80% ready, that's only his second start this year, he will improve from that."

Bred by Al Shaqab Racing, he is out of a Gr 3 placed Jadhaba (Galileo), who is a daughter of multiple Gr 2 winner Naissance Royale (Giant's Causeway).



Romanian gymnast Barbosu to be awarded Chile's Olympic floor bronze: IOC

Romanian gymnast Ana Barbosu will be awarded the Olympic floor exercise bronze medal originally given to Jordan Chiles, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said yesterday. The IOC decision follows a Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) ruling on Saturday which cancelled the re-evaluation of Chiles' score on the grounds that the appeal of her degree of difficulty was lodged by the US team four seconds after the regulatory deadline, set at one minute. After the review, the score for Chiles, who won team gold with the United States, was upgraded to 13.766 points, meaning she moved from fifth to third position. That was enough to earn bronze behind Brazil's Rebeca Andrade and US superstar Simone Biles.

WRESTLING

Kiyooka and Kagami underline Japan's mat mastery in Paris



Gold medalists Japan's Kotaro Kiyooka and Yuka Kagami pose with their respective wrestling medals at the Champ-de-Mars Arena during the Paris 2024 Olympic Games, in Paris yesterday. (AFP)

Reuters Paris

Wrestling powerhouse Japan bagged two freestyle golds through Kotaro Kiyooka and Yuka Kagami on the final day at the Paris Olympics yesterday to boost their bumper harvest at the Champ de Mars Arena.

The Asian nation finished their campaign with eight golds - three more than in Tokyo three years ago - with Iran, Bulgaria and the United States all trailing far behind on the medal table with two apiece.

Bahrain's Akhmed Tazhudinov, who competed for Russia until 2022, won Sunday's other gold confirming his growing stature in the 97kg class. Kiyooka was under pressure to de-

liver having beaten compatriot and Tokyo gold medalist Takuto Otoguro in the wrestle-off for a place in Paris. The 23-year-old with a mop of bristling hair did not disappoint as he beat Iran's Rahman Amouzadkhalili 10-3 in the gold medal bout. Amouzadkhalili was the first to open his account but Kiyooka killed the contest stone-dead in the first period when he scored a takedown and four turns for a 10-1 lead. Sebastian Rivera of Puerto Rico and Albania's Islam Dudaev took bronze. Kagami won the women's 76kg gold by beating Kennedy Blades of the US 3-1. Kagami scored a takedown out of bounds in the second period and hung on to it despite desperate efforts by her opponent in the remainder of the bout. Milaimy Marin of Cuba and Tatiana Renteria of Colombia won bronze.

CYCLING

Lavreysen seals golden hat-trick

Reuters Saint Quentin-En-Yvelines

Harrie Lavreysen cemented his status as the king of men's track cycling with the Dutchman completing a golden hat-trick as the curtain came down on seven days of fast and furious racing at the Olympic velodrome yesterday.

The 27-year-old had already emulated his sprint and team sprint titles from Tokyo but this time the man nicknamed The Beast went one better as he pedalled to victory in the keirin as well. With an army of orange-clad Dutch fans roaring him on, he poured on the power as the bell rang for the final lap and held off Australia's Matthew Richardson.

"It's incredible, this was my biggest dream to go for gold three times," Lavreysen, who cloaked himself in a Dutch flag before kissing the wooden boards, said of his feat.

"I felt really strong the full week. This morning, I thought, 'It is possible' - but I needed to ride the perfect final, and I was really close (to perfect) until the end."

Lavreysen was not the only rider to add to their gold collection on a frenetic final day of action.

Ellesse Andrews continued rewriting New Zealand cycling history as she became the nation's first Olympic track sprint gold medalist, adding to her gold in the keirin. American Jennifer Valente retained her Olympic omnium title, having also been part of the



Netherlands' Harrie Lavreysen celebrates his gold medal victory with his total of three gold medals on the podium after winning the men's track cycling keirin event of the Paris 2024 Olympic Games yesterday. (AFP)

U.S. team pursuit triumph. Lavreysen's heroics meant the Netherlands finished top of the track cycling medals table in terms of golds won with three, followed by New Zealand and the United States with two apiece.

Britain, for so long the dominant force on the boards, won the most medals, eight, but only one gold - the lowest number since they also managed one in Sydney in 2000.

Lavreysen missed out on a hat-trick in Tokyo when he could only finish third in the keirin. When he qualified behind Richardson in the first semi-final on Sunday, some of his fans might have feared his-

tory would repeat itself.

Come the final, however, it was business as usual for the former BMX rider as he emulated British sprint greats Chris Hoy (2008) and Jason Kenny (2016) by winning all three sprint golds on offer at a single Games.

He is also the first male Dutch athlete to win five Olympic golds with only speed skater Ireen Wust (6) ahead of him.

Lavreysen's hat-trick moment was overshadowed by crash involving Malaysia's Muhammad Shah Firdaus Sahrom, Japan's Shinji Nakano and Britain's Jack Carlin, who were all sent tum-

bling across the track, although all walked away.

Australian Matthew Glaetzer grabbed the bronze. If Lavreysen has dominated the men's events, New Zealand's Andrews reigned supreme in the women's.

She comfortably beat Britain's world champion Emma Finucane in the semi-final and then outclassed German favourite Lea Freidrich in the final - winning both matches 2-0.

"It's been a massive week, and I'm just so proud of how I've managed to carry myself to the end of the competition," Andrew, whose keirin gold on Thursday was the first Olympics track title in 20 years for New Zealand, said.

Finucane beat Dutch rider Hetty van de Wouw for bronze, the 21-year-old becoming the first British woman to win three medals at one Games since Mary Bignall-Rand in 1964.

"I left my heart out on the track," Finucane, who powered Britain to its only gold in the team sprint, said.

Valente was dominant across the multi-discipline omnium, winning the scratch and elimination races and having a comfortable cushion ahead of the points race. "I don't think an omnium race is ever under control, a lot of things can happen," the 29-year-old said. "I just took each race as a stand-alone and came out swinging for each one."

Poland's Daria Pikulik ended with the silver medal and New Zealand's Ally Wollaston was third.



ATHLETICS

Hassan wins marathon as Olympic endurance gamble pays off

Ethiopian-born Dutch athlete earns third medal and sets Olympic record

AFP
Paris

Sifan Hassan's endurance gamble at the Paris Games finally paid off after she sprinted away for Olympic marathon gold in the French capital yesterday.

The Ethiopian-born Dutch athlete came into the marathon on the back of two bronze medals won in the 5,000m and 10,000m in an astonishing bid for podium placings in three events. And Hassan did not disappoint, holding off Ethiopian Tigst Assefa for victory in an Olympic record of 2hr 22min 55sec.

It mirrored Hassan's efforts in the Covid-hit Tokyo Games three years ago when she also won three medals: two golds (5,000m, 10,000m) and a bronze (1,500m). She also became the first athlete since Emil Zatopek in 1952 to take medals in the 5,000m, 10,000m and marathon in a single Games. Assefa took silver in 2:22.58, with Kenya's Hellen Obiri claiming bronze (2:23.10).

"It was not easy," said Hassan, whose treble bid equated to more than 62 kilometres of running across 10 days in Paris. "Every moment in the race I was regretting that I ran the 5,000m and 10,000m. I was telling myself if I hadn't done that, I would feel great today. From the beginning to the end, it was so hard. Every step of the way. I was thinking, 'Why did I do that? What is wrong with me?' I've never pushed myself through to the finish line as I did today."

Hassan, who won the 2023 London Marathon on her debut at the distance and then produced the second-best time ever in winning the Chicago Marathon in October in 2:13.44, said the Olympic gold was a crowning glory. "I was so happy in the London Marathon, but today I'm more happy, I can't believe I'm Olympic marathon champion!" she said.

"The marathon is something else. When you do 42 kilometres in more than two hours and 20 minutes, every single step you feel it so hard and so painful. When I finished, the whole moment was a release. It is unbelievable. I have never experienced anything like that. Even the other marathons I have run were not close to this."

The 42km-long marathon course headed out of central Paris on a loop to Versailles, mimicking a key moment from the French



Netherlands' gold medallist Sifan Hassan sprints to cross the finish line to win the women's marathon at the Paris Olympic Games. (AFP)

Revolution: the Women's March on Versailles, on October 5, 1789, which led to French King Louis XVI finally agreeing to ratify the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen. The route included a 436m climb and 438m descent. The maximum gradient on the route was 13.5 per cent.

The 31-year-old Hassan suffered on the gruelling ascent at the 1:38 mark and it looked like that might have been it for her bid for a historic treble. But Hassan is nothing if not a doughy competitor and she quickly reeled in the lead group on the perilous descent.

Assefa and teammate Amane Beriso Shankule pushed on. The Kenyan trio of Sharon Lokedi, defending champion Peres

Jepchirchir and Obiri stuck with the two Ethiopians as they went through 30km in 1:43.59.

Hassan was toe-to-toe with the east Africans and at the 33km mark, the pack was down to five, Jepchirchir dropping off the pace. Shankule also faded with 2km to run, leaving a gang of four for three podium places. Like a sprint stage of the Tour de France, the quartet came into the last kilometre sizing each other up, Obiri surging, eyes flicking left and right, all four ready to react to the slightest acceleration.

Hassan probed as the winding finale to Invalides continued, Lokedi failing to match the pace. And then there were three: Hassan, Assefa and Obiri. Assefa launched one

last attack, dropping Obiri. It came down to Hassan vs Assefa. The Dutch athlete surged around one corner, actually clashing with the Ethiopian.

The pair regained their rhythm and Hassan delivered a perfect sprint finish for a memorable gold. "At the end I thought, 'This is just a 100m sprint. Come on, Sifan. One more. Just feel it, like someone who sprints 200m'"

Hassan's American coach Tim Rowberry added: "For her to get two medals in track alone was incredible. But to finish with a gold and finish on such a high note is the best. I can't say I'm surprised because this is what we were hoping for and you have to be crazy to hope for something like this. I thought she came for three medals, not for the gold."

MEDALS TALLY

TEAMS	G	S	B	T
1. United States	40	44	42	126
2. China	40	27	24	91
3. Japan	20	12	13	45
4. Australia	18	19	16	53
5. France	16	26	22	64
6. Netherlands	15	7	12	34
7. Great Britain	14	22	29	65
8. South Korea	13	9	10	32
9. Italy	12	13	15	40
10. Germany	12	13	8	33
11. New Zealand	10	7	3	20
12. Canada	9	7	11	27
13. Uzbekistan	8	2	3	13
14. Hungary	6	7	6	19
15. Spain	5	4	9	18
16. Sweden	4	4	3	11
17. Kenya	4	2	5	11
18. Norway	4	1	3	8
19. Ireland	4	0	3	7
20. Brazil	3	7	10	20
21. Iran	3	6	3	12
22. Ukraine	3	5	4	12
23. Romania	3	4	2	9
24. Georgia	3	3	1	7
25. Belgium	3	1	6	10
26. Bulgaria	3	1	3	7
27. Serbia	3	1	1	5
28. Czech Republic	3	0	2	5
29. Denmark	2	2	5	9
30. Azerbaijan	2	2	3	7
30. Croatia	2	2	3	7
32. Cuba	2	1	6	9
33. Bahrain	2	1	1	4
34. Slovenia	2	1	0	3
35. Taiwan	2	0	5	7
36. Austria	2	0	3	5
37. Hong Kong	2	0	2	4
37. Philippines	2	0	2	4
39. Algeria	2	0	1	3
39. Indonesia	2	0	1	3
41. Israel	1	5	1	7
42. Poland	1	4	5	10
43. Kazakhstan	1	3	3	7
44. Jamaica	1	3	2	6
44. South Africa	1	3	2	6
44. Thailand	1	3	2	6
47. Ethiopia	1	3	0	4
48. Switzerland	1	2	5	8
49. Ecuador	1	2	2	5
50. Portugal	1	2	1	4
51. Greece	1	1	6	8
52. Argentina	1	1	1	3
52. Egypt	1	1	1	3
52. Tunisia	1	1	1	3
55. Botswana	1	1	0	2
55. Chile	1	1	0	2
55. Saint Lucia	1	1	0	2
55. Uganda	1	1	0	2
59. Dominican Rep 1	0	2	3	5
60. Guatemala	1	0	1	2
60. Morocco	1	0	1	2
62. Dominica	1	0	0	1
62. Pakistan	1	0	0	1
64. Turkey	0	3	5	8
65. Mexico	0	3	2	5
66. Armenia	0	3	1	4
66. Colombia	0	3	1	4
68. Kyrgyzstan	0	2	4	6
68. North Korea	0	2	4	6
70. Lithuania	0	2	2	4
71. India	0	1	5	6
72. Moldova	0	1	3	4
73. Kosovo	0	1	1	2
74. Cyprus	0	1	0	1
74. Fiji	0	1	0	1
74. Jordan	0	1	0	1
74. Mongolia	0	1	0	1
74. Panama	0	1	0	1
79. Tajikistan	0	0	3	3
80. Albania	0	0	2	2
80. Grenada	0	0	2	2
80. Malaysia	0	0	2	2
80. Puerto Rico	0	0	2	2
84. Cape Verde	0	0	1	1
84. Ivory Coast	0	0	1	1
84. Peru	0	0	1	1
84. Qatar	0	0	1	1
84. Refugee Team	0	0	1	1
84. Singapore	0	0	1	1
84. Slovakia	0	0	1	1
84. Zambia	0	0	1	1

READ AS: G- Gold, S- Silver, B- Bronze, T- Total

SPOTLIGHT

Bhutan's runner gets standing ovation for last-place finish

Reuters
Paris

The last athlete to finish yesterday's marathon, an hour and a half after the winner, did so to a standing ovation on the final day of the Paris Games. Bhutan's Kinzang Lhamo finished the hilly and hot course in three hours, 52 minutes and 59 seconds, slowing to a walk at points but encouraged through the last kilometres by spectators cycling and running alongside her.

As she ran down the home straight, fans in the stands in front of the Invalides monument got to their feet to cheer her on as she crossed the finish line, the

80th woman to complete the course. Spectators around the world saw Lhamo as an embodiment of the Olympic spirit - the idea that the Games are not about winning but about taking part.

Lhamo, 26, was participating in her first international competition, and was the Himalayan nation's flagbearer in the opening ceremony as well as being the only woman in Bhutan's delegation of three athletes.

She took up running after joining Bhutan's army. She won the Bhutan marathon last year and this year, clocking 3 hours and 26 minutes in March, and came second in 2022 in the Snowman Race, an extreme event covering 203km (126 miles) through the Himalayan mountains.

"It has always been one of my dreams, to compete at such a stage," Lhamo had said ahead of her Olympic debut, in an interview. "My first goal is to complete the marathon and then break my own personal record," she said. While her time yesterday was slower than her personal best, she certainly finished in style.

To some, Lhamo's grit and determination in completing the Paris course also brought to mind Tanzania's John Stephen Akhwari who was injured but still limped to the finish line of the Olympic marathon in 1968.

He was asked why he had carried on, and his reply went down in history. "My country did not send me 5,000 miles to start the race," he said. "They sent me to finish the race."



Kinzang Lhamo of Bhutan finished the hilly and hot course in three hours, 52 minutes and 59 seconds.

FOCUS

Boxing fights for Olympic future after gender-row 'disaster'

AFP
Paris

The boxing competition at the Paris Olympics is over but the fight now starts for its inclusion at the 2028 LA Games after a damaging gender controversy placed the sport under renewed scrutiny.

Boxing is a staple of the modern Olympics, making its debut in 1904 and contested at every Games since, apart from in 1912. Muhammad Ali, Sugar Ray Leonard, Floyd Mayweather and Lennox Lewis, to name just a few, all started out at the Olympics. Boxing at the Paris Games took place in mostly packed houses.

And yet when the Los Angeles Olympics comes around four years from now, it is not certain that it will be on the programme. That was even before a gender eligibility row broke out in the French capital, overshadowing the action in the ring and only adding to the scrutiny of the sport and how



Lin Yu-ting, one of two boxers at the heart of a gender dispute at the Paris Games, beat Poland's Julia Szeremeta to become Taiwan's first gold medallist in boxing. (Reuters)

it is run. "I think it has hurt Olympic boxing at a crucial time where its future is still being discussed," Steve Bunce, a veteran British boxing journalist, said on the BBC. "It's an absolute disaster!"

Spencer Oliver, a British former boxer

who was in the French capital as a radio pundit, agrees. "It's just a mess because boxing comes into the spotlight again," Oliver said. "But it's for the wrong reason."

At the heart of boxing's problems is a protracted and open dispute between the

International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Russian-led International Boxing Association. Boxing at the pandemic-delayed Tokyo Games in 2021 went ahead only after the IOC stepped in to run it and the IOC again organised the sport in Paris, having effectively frozen the IBA out of the Olympic movement.

IOC president Thomas Bach has warned that boxing's national federations need to find a new and "reliable" international partner for the IOC to be sure the sport features on the programme for 2028. Bach said on Friday that the IOC would take the decision on its inclusion in the first half of 2025. The clock is ticking. The IBA's main contribution in Paris was to stage a chaotic press conference that was intended to clarify why it disqualified Algeria's Imane Khelif and Taiwan's Lin Yu-ting from its world championships last year. IBA president Umar Kremlev, a Kremlin-linked oligarch, claimed that the two fighters had "genetic testing that shows that these are men".

The IOC cleared them to compete and expressed doubts about the IBA's testing and motivations. Khelif won gold on Friday and afterwards declared that "I am a woman like any other".

"They hate me and I don't know why," she said of the IBA. "I sent them a message with this medal!"

Taiwanese sports officials have threatened legal action against the IBA. Lin also won gold in her weight category. Those within the sport say that excluding boxing from the Olympics would have multiple repercussions. Ireland's Kellie Harrington, who retained her title in Paris, fears that countries will pull funding for their boxing programmes if there is no Olympics to aim for. "So that would be a crying shame. I think everybody needs to do a little bit more to keep it there," she said. Oliver noted how many of Britain's best professional boxers, including former heavyweight world champion Anthony Joshua, had used the Olympics as a springboard to success.