

Sports

Gatlin upstages Lyles in Monaco, while Hassan and Amos set records

Experience beats youth in the head-to-head US sprint battle

MONACO: Controversial American Justin Gatlin out-sprinted up-and-coming compatriot Noah Lyles in the 100 meters at Friday's Diamond League meet in Monaco where Sifan Hassan set a new world best in the women's mile. In balmy conditions at a packed Stade Louis II, the 37-year-old Gatlin kept both his nerve and form after an average start to streak through the finish line in 9.91 seconds, just one-hundredth of a second ahead of much-vaunted Lyles, 21.

"It was a technical race tonight," said Gatlin, the 2004 Olympic gold medalist and current world champion who served a doping ban between 2006-10. "I just kept focused as I knew Noah would be coming after me like a bat out of hell!" Gatlin said. There was an outstanding performance in the women's mile, which is not an Olympic or world distance, as Ethiopian-born Dutch runner Hassan came home in 4min 12.33sec, smashing by 0.23 seconds the previous best set in 1996 by Russian Svetlana Masterkova.

Hassan, twice European champion over 1500m and once 5000m gold medalist, cracked the field with two laps to go and streaked through the line with teeth gritted, collapsing as the timer flashed up her feat. "The first 800m were a bit slow so I wasn't thinking it would be a world record," said Hassan. "When I crossed the line I was so surprised." "After you run the last 400m like that and set a world record it gives you so much confidence over 5000m," said Hassan, who will aim for a 1500-5000m double in the September 28-October 6 world championships in Doha.

Another experienced campaigner, Botswana's Olympic silver medalist Nijel Amos, produced a stunning meet record in winning the men's 800m in 1:41.89 ahead of Kenya's Ferguson Rotich, France's world

champion Pierre-Ambroise Bosse only managing ninth in a high-quality race. Only four runners have gone faster than Amos' time, which was the 15th fastest ever run over the distance. "Everything has been good in the last few weeks and I knew I could run 1:41 today," said Amos. "The world record is not on my mind but if I'm patient, it will come."

Lisek vaults 6.02m

Another star showing came in the men's pole vault where Poland's in-form Piotr Lisek again went over the mythical 6m barrier, winning with a best of 6.02m, going close three times at 6.06. Kenyan Timothy Cheruiyot cruised to victory in the men's 1500m in 3:29.97, European 1500 and 5000m champion Jakob Ingebrigtsen — still just 18 — coming in second.

American teenager Sydney McLaughlin kicked off the evening in impressive style, setting a world-leading 53.32sec in the 400m hurdles. The 19-year-old led from the first hurdle and scorched around the track in muggy conditions, with temperatures of 28 degrees Celsius (82F) and high humidity. There was further US success as world indoor champion Kendra Harrison streaked to a 100m hurdles win in a season's best 12.43sec.

There was no Caster Semenya in the women's 800m won by American Aje Wilson. The South African double Olympic is not appearing in the Principality despite having been cleared to run during her appeal at attempts by the Monaco-based world governing body for athletics, the IAAF, to introduce rules requiring female athletes in events between 400 and the mile to take medication to reduce high testosterone levels.

In her absence, Wilson won easily in 1:57.73, almost three seconds off Semenya's best for the season. A



MONACO: First placed (from L) Poland's Piotr Lisek in the Men's pole vault, Botswana's Nijel Amos in the Men's 800m, EL Morocco's Soufiane El Bakkali in the Men's 3000m steeplechase, Netherland's Sifan Hassan in the Women's 1 mile and US Justin Gatlin in the Men's 100m pose, with their gold medals, on the podium, during the price ceremony at the end of the IAAF Diamond League competition. — AFP

lead field in the women's 200m saw Shaunae Miller-Uibo of the Bahamas, the reigning Olympic 400m champion, win in 22.09sec ahead of Jamaica's Elaine

Thompson, who won the sprint double in Rio, and two-time defending world 200m champ Dafne Schippers of the Netherlands. — AFP



KUWAIT: Acting Director General of Public Authority for Sports Dr Saqer Al-Mulla recently received the Secretary of Kuwait National Students Union in the United States Al-Marzouq Thunayan Al-Ghanim and union member Usama Al-Daihani.

Bottas takes pole as Mercedes lock out front row

SILVERSTONE: Valtteri Bottas upstaged his team-mate Lewis Hamilton yesterday when he secured pole position as Mercedes locked out the front row of the grid for Sunday's British Grand Prix. The Finn, who is 31 points adrift of defending world champion Hamilton in this year's title race, clocked a track record fastest lap in one minute and 25.093 seconds to outpace the local hero by just 0.006 seconds.

"It was really good and it reminds me of why we do this," said a smiling Bottas after securing his first British pole position and tenth of his career. "It's been really close with Lewis all weekend and I am really happy to get such a good lap and pole." Hamilton, who is hunting a record sixth victory in his home event, said: "Congratulations to Valtteri — he did a really good job. It wasn't quite good enough... But this is the best Grand Prix of the year because of the energy this crowd and all these people bring."

It was Mercedes' 64th front-row lock-out of the grid for a Grand Prix. Charles Leclerc of Ferrari was third, just 0.079 seconds adrift of Bottas, ahead of Max Verstappen and his Red Bull team-mate Pierre Gasly with four-time champion Sebastian Vettel sixth in the second Ferrari. Leclerc said: "I think Mercedes turned up the engine a little bit and they were so good in the corners, which we know we need to work on."

Daniel Ricciardo was seventh for Renault ahead of rookies Lando Norris of McLaren and Alexander Albon of Toro Rosso. Nico Hulkenberg was 10th in the second Renault. Two weeks after the heat-wave conditions in the Styrian Alps, the session began in cool and overcast conditions in front of packed grandstands with a little hint of sunshine. The track temperature fell to 28 degrees, around 30 below that recorded in Austria.

Leclerc proved his speed in the damp morning practice was no fluke with a series of quick record laps, on medium compound tyres, to top the times before Hamilton, on softer rubber, took over. His best lap in 1:25.513 was only 0.020 seconds faster than



SILVERSTONE: Mercedes' Finnish driver Valtteri Bottas gestures after securing pole position in the qualifying session at Silverstone motor racing circuit. — AFP

Leclerc's, suggesting a close scrap was in prospect later in qualifying and also for Sunday's race. Verstappen was third for Red Bull, promising a possible three-team tussle.

As they progressed to Q2, Kevin Magnussen in the unpredictable Haas, topped the drivers who failed to make the cut ahead of Daniil Kvyat of Toro Rosso, Lance Stroll of Racing Point and the two Williams men, George Russell and Robert Kubica. Bottas led Hamilton out for Q2, both on mediums, but Leclerc, also on mediums, was soon on top again in 1:25.646 followed by the two Mercedes and Verstappen.

Unexpectedly, Leclerc made a late switch to join Vettel on softs in the closing minutes, trimming his time to 1:25.546 to finish top ahead of Bottas and Hamilton, Verstappen and Vettel. Most teams had estimated that the durability of the soft compounds was uncertain with them forecast to last no more than around 10 race laps, making it appear Ferrari had chosen a deliberately risky strategy.

After a final flurry of action, the two Alfa Romeos of Antonio Giovinazzi and Kimi Raikkonen were eliminated along with Carlos Sainz of McLaren, Romain Grosjean in the second Haas and Sergio Perez of Racing Point. On his first flying run in Q3, Bottas set a benchmark 1:25.093, 0.25 ahead of Hamilton who had a 'moment' after running deep at Brooklands. The championship leader narrowed the gap but couldn't overhaul his teammate. — AFP

KOCC gives letter of thanks to Chairman of Boxing Federation

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: Kuwait Olympic Committee Chairman Sheikh Fahad Nasser Al-Sabah yesterday received the Chairman of Kuwait Boxing Federation Mohammad Mansi Al-Enezi. The meeting was held to give Al-Enezi a letter of thanks on behalf of the KBF board, its workers and all those associated with KBF, for his patronage of the Asian Boxing Championship set to be

hosted in Kuwait between August 1st and 9th which sees more than 25 countries participating.

Sheikh Nasser was briefed on the preparations of the Higher Organizing Committee, as well as the efforts being exerted to ensure the success of the championship. Sheikh Nasser also asked about the national team and its training in Azerbaijan, adding that all obstacles must be removed so achievements can be made in the name of Kuwait.



Vegas leads PGA event, Glover soars on albatross wings

WASHINGTON: Venezuela's Jhonattan Vegas fired a nine-under par 62 to seize the lead after Friday's second round of the PGA John Deere Classic while American Lucas Glover made a rare albatross. Vegas fired the second-lowest round of his PGA career, his lowest total since a 60 at the 2016 Barbasol Championship, to stand on 13-under 129 after 36 holes at TPC Deere Run in Silvis, Illinois.

American Andrew Landry fired his second 65 to hold second on 130 while Glover was another stroke adrift. Glover, the 2009 US Open champion, holed out at the par-5 10th on his approach from 255 yards with a 3-iron for the albatross, putting him in the hunt for his first PGA victory since 2011. "I was trying to hit it short and left and I pushed it and it went in," Glover said. "I hit it solid. I was just trying to make birdie and got lucky and made a two." Glover's ball bounced four times before rolling on the 10th green and into the cup.

Vegas, 34, seeks his fourth PGA title after wins at the 2011 Bob Hope Classic and the 2016 and 2017 Canadian Opens. He would also like the British Open berth available to the best top-five finisher not already qualified for next week's final major of the year at Royal Portrush. He missed the cut in the Open the past two years, the only major in which he has not

reached the weekend.

Vegas made a swing breakthrough on the driving range this week that has made a big difference in his game. "Probably the best I've felt all year, to be honest," Vegas said. "I hit the ball extremely well, kind of what I've been struggling with a little bit the past few months. My game is in a good place."

'It was magical'

A posture adjustment paid big dividends for Vegas. "Phenomenal round. I felt absolutely in control with my irons the whole round. It has been a long time since I felt this good," Vegas said. "I decided to reset my posture, get in a little bit different posture, and it was magical. Everything started to go in." It marked the sixth consecutive US PGA round with a player firing a 62. Since 2000, TPC Deere Run has surrendered more birdies than any other tour course.

The success comes as Vegas' wife, Hildegard, is expecting to give birth to the couple's second child, a boy, early next month. Vegas, who began on the back nine, opened with a 14-foot birdie at the 10th and added a 12-footer to birdie the 13th. Six-footers for birdie followed at the 14th and par-3 16th and he dropped his approach to three feet to set up a birdie at the par-5 17th. — AFP

Westbrook 'eternally grateful' to OKC, Harden vows 'fun'

WASHINGTON: Russell Westbrook declared Friday he would be "eternally grateful" to Oklahoma City Thunder supporters while his new NBA Houston Rockets teammate James Harden predicted "a lot of fun" next season. The comments served to confirm Thursday reports that former NBA Most Valuable Player Westbrook was being traded to the Rockets in exchange for Chris Paul, two first-round NBA Draft picks and a swap of two more future draft selections.

"I can't even begin to put into words all of the emotions I have right now. It's been one heck of a journey Oklahoma!" Westbrook posted on his Instagram account. "You have supported me through all of the ups and the downs, and stood by me through the good times, and tough times. For that I am eternally grateful to you. I'm leaving Oklahoma with so many friends and so much gratitude. I could never thank you all enough for sticking with me. It's been a dream and a whirlwind."

In 2016, Westbrook became the first NBA player since Oscar Robertson in 1962 to average a triple-double for an entire season. He has now done that for three consecutive campaigns. Now he joins a Rockets backcourt alongside NBA scoring leader James Harden, a former NBA MVP and Westbrook's ex-Thunder teammate who has been the scoring spark for Houston since leaving Oklahoma City in 2012.

"When I left OKC, I was sad. Then Houston made a home for me," Harden said Friday, according to ESPN. "Rockets is my home. And now an opportunity came available where Russ wasn't happy. Now we're back. It's going to be a lot of fun this year, I guarantee you that. Believe it." Earlier reactions to the move worried that one basketball game might not be enough for two players who are accustomed to handling the ball much of the time and producing the bulk of their club's scoring.

The pairing unites the NBA's two top scorers over the past five seasons. But reports said both players wanted the deal, suggesting they understand they would need to adapt to create the most formidable force for opponents. Harden often draws double teams from defenders while Westbrook's versatile playmaker skills could make the Rockets more difficult to stop beyond Harden's scoring heroics. Westbrook's posting also spoke of how much he has grown over 11 seasons in Oklahoma City, one of the NBA's smaller markets.

"When I came here, I was 18 years old, bright eyed, and completely unaware of all the amazing things that would soon take place," Westbrook said. "I grew up in Oklahoma with an amazing bunch of people. The people here are what makes this place so special... You are all what makes Oklahoma such a beautiful place, and the reason I've loved playing here all of this time. I've met so many amazing people who have helped shape me into the man that I am today. I hope I have impacted the Oklahoma community as much as Oklahoma has made an impact on me and my family." — AFP