

Conquest complete

REUTERS/AFP, Athens



Throughout the chilly Moroccan winter one dream burned bright for Hicham El Guerrouj as he trained in the thin air of the Atlas mountains.

Tuesday, August 24, represented the 29-year-old's last realistic chance of the Olympic 1,500 gold which would confirm he is the finest middle distance runner in history.

The four-times world champion and world record holder rose to the challenge. Striding to the front after 800 metres he held off Kenyan Bernard Lagat to win the Olympic title at his third attempt.

He took 3min 34.18sec to fulfill a promise he had made to his baby daughter Hiba while rocking her in her cot.

On winning a gaunt-looking El Guerrouj held his hands to his face before falling to his knees on the ground and weeping with relief and joy.

Getting to his feet he went over and hugged his baby girl, born earlier this year and to whom he had pledged the gold medal.

"This is the type of test that makes a great athlete," El Guerrouj said after an emotional victory lap wrapped in the Moroccan flag. "I have come back through my will power and the help of those around me."

Three races embellish the Olympic track programme, each with their special challenges.

The 100 metres is an exhibition of pure speed with the winner traditionally acclaimed as the world's fastest man. At the other extreme the marathon is the ultimate test of endurance.

In the middle the 1,500 metres provides the perfect balance of speed, stamina and intelligence, qualities El Guerrouj possesses in abundance.

"The 1,500 is still the biggest, although the 100 metres is closing the

gap," Britain's twice Olympic champion Seb Coe said this week.

Despite his consecutive gold medals, Coe believes El Guerrouj is the best runner ever over 1,500, or its imperial equivalent the mile.

Coe, whose career was interrupted

by illness and injury, never won a world title. Australian Herb Elliott, who broke the world record in the 1960 Rome Olympic final never had the opportunity.

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PHOTO: AFP

FINALLY! Hicham El Guerrouj of Morocco (L) thanks the Almighty after he had won the men's 1500m final, ahead of Kenya's silver winner Bernard Lagat (R) at the Olympic Stadium in Athens on August 24. This was the first Olympic gold for the 29-year-old four-time world outdoor champion after missing out in Atlanta and Sydney.

'Chick with the Stick'

AFP, Athens



When Yelena Isinbayeva planted the pole and vaulted over a bar set at a shade under five metres in the Olympic final it was the seventh time she had pushed up the limits of the event this year.

The 22-year-old Russian dominated the Olympic competition in only the second time it has been contested, defeating arch-rival Svetlana Feofanova on Tuesday before pursu-

ing her personal battle with the record books.

Women were banned from pole vaulting until the mid-1990s but since its introduction the event has seen an unending pattern of progress.

With many of women's track and field world records deep frozen in the Cold War era -- the 400 metres mark of East Germany's Marita Koch for example has stood for 19 years -- Isinbayeva and Feofanova consistently serve up the record-chasing excitement that spectators want to see.

Try telling the enthralled crowd in the Olympic Stadium on Tuesday that Isinbayeva's 4.91 metre world record

clearance should be seen in the context of a recently introduced event.

No money is paid for world records at the Olympics, but Isinbayeva earned a 50,000 dollar bonus for raising the bar to a then world record 4.86m in the World Indoor Championships in Budapest in March.

And the promoters of international meetings are responsible for rewarding her for subsequent records in Gateshead, Birmingham and Crystal Palace. Add in bonuses from her shoe company and Isinbayeva is set to become

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Videocon Cup Aussie-Pak tie washed out

AFP, Amstelveen

Rain forced the Videocon Cup triangular series match between Australia and Pakistan to be abandoned without a ball being bowled here Wednesday.

It had already rained persistently here Tuesday and further heavy rain Wednesday saw the umpires call off the match an hour-and-a-half before the scheduled time start.

The result effectively ended India's lingering hopes of qualifying for Saturday's final which will instead feature world champions Australia and Pakistan.

Beaten by Pakistan by 66 runs in last Saturday's rain-affected tournament opener India had seen their second match, against Australia on Monday, washed out at the half-way stage.

That meant they had to rely on

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U-19s' second 1-dayer today

SPORTS REPORTER

The second limited-overs match between visiting Bangladesh under-19 cricketers and England under-19s takes place today at Hove.

The first game of the three-match series at Arundel was washed out on Tuesday. The last match will be held at the same venue on August 27.

'The Champions Trophy could give us a start'

AL MUSABBIR SADI

After a dismal Asia Cup, damage limitation appear to be the first objective when the Bangladesh cricket team leave for England today to play in the ICC Champions Trophy.

The Tigers will also be without their captain Habibul Bashar, who will have to undergo an operation on his fractured right thumb injured during a net session last week. This has compounded the problems for coach Dav Whatmore who desperately looks for a way out of the Tigers' perennial batting crisis.

Having failed to cross the 200-mark in their last four games, Bangladesh have included three players from the Under-19 squad including two batsmen to strengthen the line up for England, where they have fond memories of the famous one-day international victory against Pakistan in the 1999 World Cup.

Whatmore however felt that this tour would be as tough as they get considering Bangladesh's recent



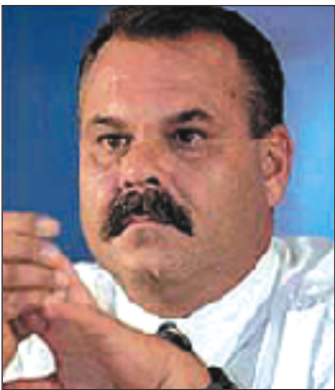
PHOTO: AFP

NO HURDLE COULD STOP HER! Joanna Hayes (L) of the United States clears a hurdle on her way to the 100m hurdles gold at the Olympic Stadium in Athens on August 24.

performance. The 50-year-old Sri Lankan-born Australian had a candid talk with *The Daily Star* prior to the departure of the team.

Following are the excerpts of that cajole cogitation:

Daily Star (DS): You are certainly



DAV WHATMORE

going to miss Bashar?

Dav Whatmore (DW): It's never nice to lose your captain especially when he is your top batter as well. It's difficult playing without an important member of the team. Leadership is also very important but these things happen and you have to accept things as they come.

DS: Your top players have not been among the runs for long. Do you consider this as your failure to motivate them or are there other reasons?

DW: Look, the past is history. The Asia Cup was just one tournament where most of the batsmen failed. I believe whoever plays for the team is capable of scoring runs. They had small problems but I am looking forward to this tournament (Champions Trophy) to sort things out.

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Drama as Hayes hurdles to glory

AFP, Athens



Joanna Hayes of the United States won a dramatic Olympic Games women's 100 metres hurdles gold medal here on Tuesday

breaking the 16 year-old Olympic record held by Bulgaria's Yordanka Donkova.

The 27-year-old timed 12.37 seconds to make her the sixth fastest performer of all time while Olena Krasovska of Ukraine won silver in 12.45sec and Melissa Morrison of the United States took bronze in 12.56sec.

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However, the race was turned on its head as race favourite and world champion Perdita Felicien fell heavily at the first hurdle and in a vain attempt to cushion her fall the Canadian's right arm caught Russia's Irina Shevchenko, bringing her down as well.

A distraught Felicien said it would take a long time for her to rid herself of the psychological scars.

"The first hurdle came and I reached for it," she said. "Before I knew it I was on the ground. It is going to take four years before it sinks in."

"I have been praying for the race but I did not ask for gold I asked just to finish it. However it is also going to be a motivating factor for me," she added.

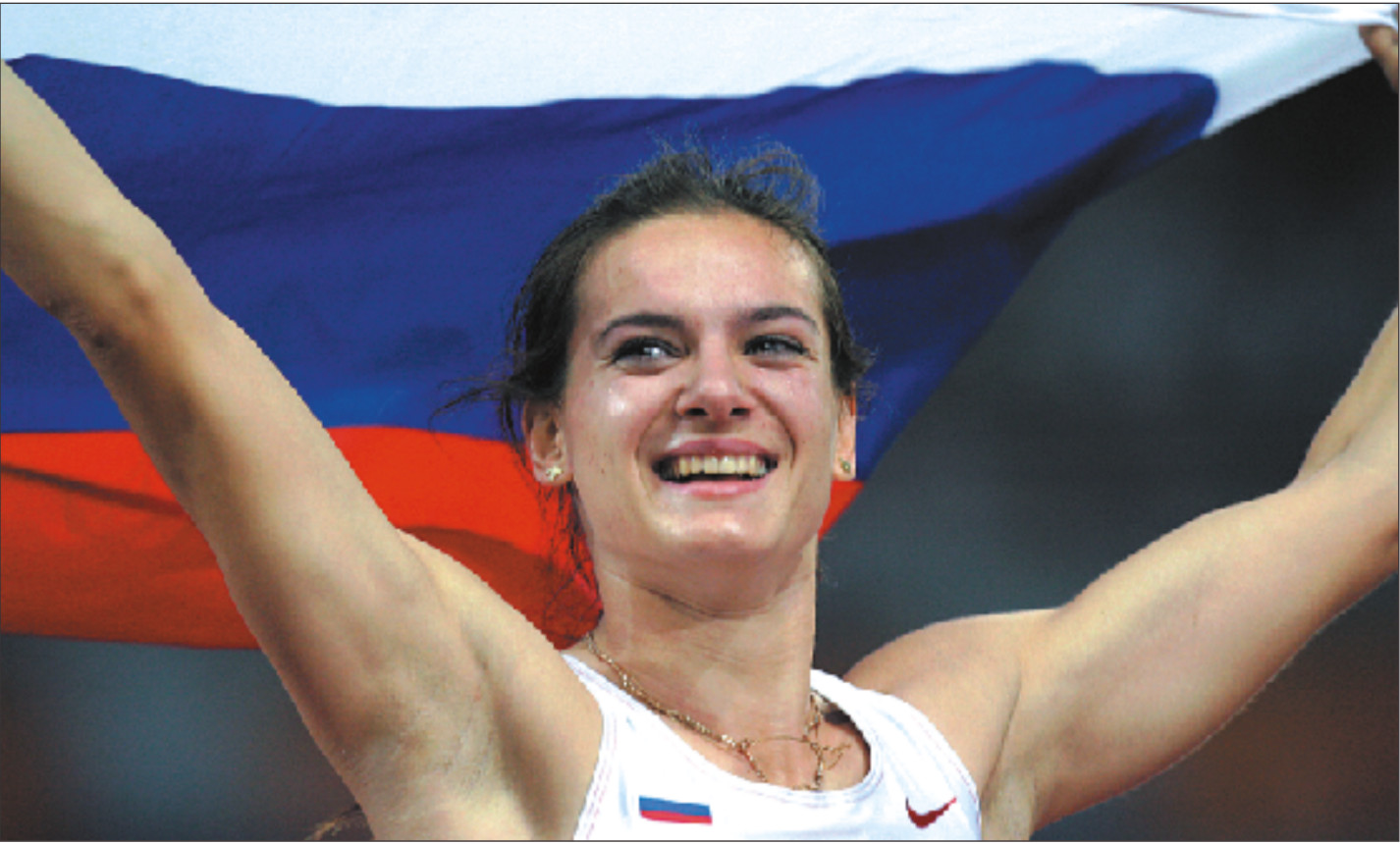


PHOTO: AFP

ON TOP OF THE WORLD: Russia's Yelena Isinbayeva is all smiles as she carries her country's flag after winning the women's pole vault final by setting a new world record at the Olympic Stadium in Athens.

THE TALLY				
Country	G	S	B	Total
United States	25	28	20	73
China	24	16	12	52
Japan	15	8	10	33
Australia	14	10	14	38
Russia	10	18	21	49
France	10	7	9	26
Germany	9	10	13	32
Italy	8	6	8	22
Romania	8	4	4	16
Ukraine	8	3	6	17
Great Britain	7	8	8	23
South Korea	6	10	5	21
Greece	5	3	2	10
Netherlands	3	7	8	18
Hungary	3	6	1	10
Sweden	3	0	2	5
Turkey	3	0	1	4
Canada	2	4	1	7
Belarus	2	3	6	11
Poland	2	2	4	8
Slovakia	2	2	1	5
Bulgaria	2	1	5	8
Ethiopia	2	1	1	4
Georgia	2	1	0	3
Thailand	2	0	2	4
Chile	2	0	1	3
New Zealand	2	0	0	2
Norway	2	0	0	2
Spain	1	7	3	11
Austria	1	4	1	6
Kenya	1	4	1	6
Czech Republic	1	3	3	7

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JFA Cup soccer in September

SPORTS REPORTER

The first-ever JFA Cup under-16 football competition will be held at different venues across the country from the third week of September.

A total of 44 teams have already confirmed their participation in the knockout first round. The tournament committee, expecting to draft in more teams, has requested interested teams to enter their names as early as possible.

The tournament committee, headed by Abdur Rahim, took the decision in a meeting on Monday.

The Japan Football Association has assured all financial support for the age-group tournament.

LATEST

SPORTS REPORTER

Sri Lanka wrapped up the five-match one-day series against South Africa when they beat the tourists by four wickets at Dambulla yesterday to take an unassailable 3-0 lead.

Captain Marvan Atapattu led from front with an unbeaten 97 as the home side reached 192-6 in 47.4 overs in reply to South Africa's 191.



PHOTO: AFP

BEACH PARTY! US women's beach volleyball pair Kerri Walsh (L) and Misty May celebrating with fans after winning the gold medal by beating Brazil in Athens..