

# A van Niekerk 'massacre'

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

South African Wayde Van Niekerk smashed Michael Johnson's long-standing 400m record when he stormed to Olympic gold on Sunday.

Van Niekerk, running in the unfavoured lane eight, blasted off the final corner to time 43.03sec, 0.15sec quicker than Johnson's previous world best set in Seville in 1999, a record that had taken on mythical-like standing.

"I believed I could get the world record," the 24-year-old South African said.

"I've dreamed of this medal since forever. I am blessed."

Defending champion Kirani James of Grenada took silver in 43.76sec, with American Lashawn Merritt bronze (43.85).

"Congrats to Wayde on the new world record. I'm happy to be part of a race that made history. We have put this sport on a pedestal," James said, adding that 400m runners normally have the habit of tying up as they hit the home stretch.

"Usually that's what happens, the guys slow down a bit! But when you keep going like that, there's going to be world records. It shows that there's always room for guys to improve. He just did that and exemplified that."

Despite Van Niekerk being world champion, his underwhelming heat runs had meant all eyes were on James and Merritt.

The Grenadian set off fast in lane five, Merritt on his coat-tails on the inside with Van Niekerk running solo out wide.

The trio had produced one of the races of the year in the 400m final at the 2015 world championships in Beijing, all going under

44 seconds as the South African emerged victorious.

And it was the same again in Rio, Van Niekerk exploding off the last bend and holding his form through the line in an extraordinary run as all eight runners finished under 44.61sec.

"I have never seen anything like that," Johnson told BBC, for whom he works as an analyst.

"It is amazing. That was a massacre by Van Niekerk. This young man has done something truly special. He could go under 43 seconds -- I tried and failed.

"Being out in lane eight helped him, he was away from James and Merritt. He was running a time-trial.

"That was some style he broke it in," Johnson said of Van Niekerk, who made sprint history by becoming the first athlete to dip under benchmark times in the 100, 200 and 400m.

Having already clocked 19.94 seconds and 43.48sec in the 200 and 400m, Van Niekerk timed 9.98sec in the 100m in March to set an athletics first.

Merritt, who was Olympic champion at the Beijing Games in 2008 before serving a 21-month ban for testing positive for a banned steroid in 2010, hailed Van Niekerk.

"It was a crazy race, a great moment in history. The world record was broken, the best man won," Merritt said.

"I didn't handle the last part as well as I wanted to. But I got a medal, I'll take it, get my day's rest and get ready for heats of the 200m.

"I knew it was going to be fast but I didn't think it was going to be 43.00-fast. He ran his heart out."



South Africa's Wayde van Niekerk celebrates winning the men's 400m final smashing a 17-year world record during the Rio 2016 Olympic Games at the Olympic Stadium on Sunday.

PHOTO: AFP



US gymnast Simone Biles competes in the women's vault final of the Artistic Gymnastics at the Olympic Arena during the Rio 2016 Olympic Games on Sunday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Three in a row for Biles

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

US superstar Simone Biles claimed her third gold in Rio on Sunday in the women's vault as Max Whitlock gave Britain their first Olympic gymnastics crown in the men's floor.

The 19-year-old Texan, bidding for an unprecedented five women's gold in Rio, added to her all-around and team titles with the beam and floor finals to come next week.

She scored a combined 15.966 after two powerful vaults -- 15.900 and 16.033 -- to take gold ahead of world champion Maria Paseka of Russia (15.253).

Swiss Giulia Steingruber (15.216) took bronze in the Rio Olympics Arena.

Earlier Whitlock claimed a first gold for his country as Japanese star Kohei Uchimura had to settle for fifth

best on the floor.

The 23-year-old Whitlock scored 15.633 points to achieve his fourth Olympic medal and second in Rio after all-around bronze.

Whitlock could claim more gold on Sunday as he competes on the pommel horse on which he is the reigning world champion.

Brazilian duo Diego Hypolito (15.533) and Arthur Mariano (15.433) won silver and bronze respectively to the delight of the home crowd in the Rio Olympic Arena.

"For me this is a gold," said an emotional Hypolito, a world champion on floor in 2005 and 2007 but who fell during the event in Beijing 2008 and London 2012.

"Winning a medal today was the most important thing in my life," the 30-year-old added.

Uchimura had been bidding for a third gold in Rio following team and all-around but complaining of a sore back he was clearly off form as he hopped off the mat during his routine. He scored 15.241 to finish fifth.

Two-time world floor champion Kenzo Shirai of Japan dropped to fourth (15.366) after an error-strewn performance.

"This felt very different to when I was doing the team event," said Shirai, who helped Japan to the team title.

"When I was doing the team, I felt that we were pushing each other's backs, propelling each other along. This one I felt like I was very much alone."

The only apparatus final Biles failed to qualify for was the uneven bars which takes place later Sunday.

## Jebet strikes gold for Bahrain

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Kenyan-born Ruth Jebet produced an astonishing piece of front running to win Bahrain's first Olympic gold when she claimed the women's 3000m steeplechase on Monday.

Jebet timed an Asian record of 8min 59.75sec, missing out on the world record by less than a second.

Reigning world champion Hyvin Kiyeng Jepkemoi of Kenya took silver in 9:07.12, with American Emma Coburn claiming bronze (9:07.63).

"I'm happy to be a gold medallist, it was my first attempt to have a medal and I'm happy," said Jebet.

"Today it was too hot for the athletes, it was not easy to run a good time but I tried my best and the track is good."

"Yesterday I saw the new record in the 400m (by Wayde van Niekerk) and in the 10,000m also a new world record so I thought why not a world record for me."

Chebet said Bahraini team officials had been confident she could medal.

"It's the first gold medal for Bahrain," she said.

"They saw how I ran in the Diamond League and how I did there, and they told me when I was coming that 'we're sure of you, you're going to have a medal'."

## Smith, Marsh give Aus hope

AFP, Colombo

Centuries from skipper Steve Smith and Shaun Marsh gave Australia hope of a consolation victory in the final Test against Sri Lanka Monday before being pegged back by their bogeyman Rangana Herath.

Smith and Marsh put on a record 246 runs for the second wicket, raising Australian hopes of building a match-winning lead in response to Sri Lanka's first innings total of 355 before the veteran Herath put the brakes on with a six-wicket haul.

Australia were eventually all out for 379, a lead which was reduced to just two runs by the close of play as Sri Lanka reached 22 at stumps.

### SCORES IN BRIEF

SRI LANKA: First innings 355

AUSTRALIA: First innings 379 (S Marsh 130, Smith 119, M Marsh 53; Perera 2-129, Herath 6-81)

SRI LANKA: Second innings 22 for 1 (Karanaratne 8 not out, K Silva 6 not out)

## Podolski quits int'l football

AFP, Berlin

German striker Lukas Podolski announced on Monday his retirement from international duty for the Mannschaft after appearing 129 times for the World champions and scoring 48 goals.

The Galatasaray forward is the second German veteran to announce his retirement in the last two weeks after Manchester United midfielder Bastian Schweinsteiger also announced his retirement.

"I told the manager (Joachim Low) that from now on I won't be playing for the national side anymore," Podolski wrote on his Facebook page, saying it was a "very difficult decision". Podolski made his debut for Germany in 2004 against Hungary when Rudi Voller was manager. In 2006 he was named the World Cup's best young player after scoring three goals.

## Iniesta out for 2 weeks

AFP, Madrid

Barcelona captain Andres Iniesta will be out for two weeks after picking up a knock in the the 2-0 first leg Super Cup win over Sevilla this weekend, the club said on Monday.

The injury means the 32-year-old picked up a strained knee in the first game of the season on Sunday, and will miss the return leg at Camp Nou on August 17.

Jeremy Mathieu also tore a thigh muscle in the game and Barcelona said the defender would be out for around three weeks.

## Redemption for Wlodarczyk

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Poland's Anita Wlodarczyk smashed her own world record on her way to victory in the women's hammer throw on Monday -- four years after being denied gold by Russian dope cheat Tatyana Lysenko.

Wlodarczyk, widely regarded as the greatest women's hammer thrower of all-time, heaved a monumental 82.29m on her third attempt to crush the competition at the Olympic Stadium.

Zhang Wenxiu of China took silver with a throw of 76.75m while Britain's Sophie Hitchon claimed bronze with 74.54.

Wlodarczyk's winning effort was more than one metre further than her own previous world record of 81.08 set in 2015.

With her fifth attempt of the final, the 31-year-old produced the second longest throw in history, 81.74, which would also have beaten her 2015 world record.

It clinched a deserved victory for Wlodarczyk, who was effectively robbed of gold by Russia's Lysenko in the 2012 Olympic final.

## Potkonen stuns Taylor

AFP, Rio de Janeiro

Finland's Mira Potkonen on Monday sprang the first major upset of the Rio Games women's boxing when she defeated Ireland's Olympic champion Katie Taylor.

Potkonen was the vast underdog in their lightweight quarterfinal but Taylor, who made history at the London Games in 2012 when women's Olympic boxing made its debut, struggled to find her rhythm despite loud support from Ireland's colourful travelling fans.

The Finn burst into tears when she was awarded the bout on a stunning split-points decision, as the Irish fans looked on in horror.

## Suarez fires Barca

AFP, Madrid



Luis Suarez and Munir El Haddadi shot down Sevilla to give Barcelona a comfortable victory in the first leg of the Spanish Super Cup final on

Sunday.

The Uruguayan opened the scoring early in the second half, making amends for two misses earlier in the game, before Munir sealed the win when he ran on to a Lionel Messi through-ball.

Having been beaten 4-0 by Athletic Bilbao in the first leg of last year's final, Barcelona were determined to improve on that showing and have set themselves up nicely for the second leg at Camp Nou on August 17.

Luis Enrique sprang a surprise with his selection, picking Jeremy Mathieu at left-back and Arda Turan at left-wing in place of the absent Neymar, with all four summer signings left out. Sergi Roberto was also chosen out of position at right-back, ahead of Aleix Vidal.

However, by the 35th minute both Lucas

Digne and Denis Suarez had to be brought on for their official debuts, with Jeremy Mathieu and Andres Iniesta injuring their hamstring and knee respectively.

Iniesta was making his 594th appearance for Barcelona, taking over from Carles Puyol as the player with the second most appearances for the club, behind Xavi Hernandez, but it was ended prematurely after a fierce challenge by Gabriel Mercado.

The first period saw few chances created, although the best of them fell to Luis Suarez in the sixth minute. Sergio Busquets played him in and after spinning masterfully away from the defence his low strike was saved well by goalkeeper Sergio Rico.

At the other end Jorge Sampaoli's team worked their way into the game but despite plenty of possession in dangerous areas, they couldn't create any clear-cut chances to worry Claudio Bravo.

After Gerard Pique half-cleared the ball Vitolo fired in a stinging drive but Javier Mascherano was alert, bravely blocking the forward's effort.

## Golf is back, and Rose strikes gold

ATIQUE ANAM from Rio de Janeiro

The last time golf was part of the Olympic Games was back in 1904. For the last 112 years, the 'game for the elite' was shelved. When the International Olympic Committee (IOC) approved a return for golf in the 2016 Olympics, there were many doubters. Some top players skipped the event under the pretext of fear of the Zika virus, yet the event assembled a stellar field of 60 from around the world.

There were no hefty paychecks here for the taking, no sponsored sports cars for firing albatrosses or hole-in-ones. What there was was pride; pride of winning an Olympic medal; pride of being in the same bracket as Usain Bolt and Michael Phelps; pride of seeing the national flag raised to the anthem.

And after three days of riveting contest at the purpose-designed Rio Olympic Golf Course, an intriguing final day vindicated golf's return to the games as Britain's Justine Rose nicked the title by two strokes from Sweden's Henrik Stenson.

"Honestly this is just a dream come true. I have been thinking about Rio for a long, long time. It is just crazy, just so good," Rose told reporters afterwards at the press conference.

After having gone to the final hole tied

with Rose, Stenson cracked at the final hole with a poor chip, leaving the door open for the Brit, who surged to victory with a tap-in birdie following a majestic chip.

The 36-year-old Rose, who had got the crowd on their feet on the opening day with the Olympic Games' first hole-in-one -- said that the exciting finale in front of big crowds should guarantee the game's spot beyond Tokyo 2020.

"To anybody making the decision going forward, I would just ask them, were you in Rio on Sunday?" Rose said. "I think it was a sell-out which is more than some of the other events I'm watching on TV where there's been a lot of open spots in stadiums," Rose added.

As the Union Jack was raised with the 'God Save The Queen' playing in the background, Rose said he felt extremely emotional and proud to be able to be at this position and to have achieved what he did on Sunday. "That was a really surreal moment," Rose said. "It's a moment we've seen in other sports. It felt very different to any other tournament. Obviously when the national anthem goes up, it's a very profound moment. It's a very proud moment when you are able to share this moment with people back home."



Britain's Justin Rose celebrates his gold medal win in the men's golf at the Olympic golf course on Sunday.

PHOTO: REUTERS