



BAREGA STRIKES GOLD as athletics underway

AFP, Tokyo

Ethiopian distance runner Selemone Barea stormed to a brilliant 10,000m victory to claim the first gold medal of a spectator-less Olympic athletics competition at the Tokyo Games on Friday.

Barea, 21, ran a superb tactical race to hold off world champion Joshua Cheptegei and Ugandan compatriot Jacob Kiplimo to win in 27min 43.22sec. Cheptegei took silver, with Kiplimo third.

It completed a subdued start to the 10-day track and field competition, which got under way in a mostly empty 68,000-capacity Olympic Stadium with spectators barred due to Covid-19 restrictions.

Barea's upset win was a rare blip on a first day that largely followed the form book as athletes adjusted to the unique surroundings of this year's pandemic-delayed competition.

Unrelenting high-tempo music,

an echoing public address tannoy, screeching cicadas and the odd cry of encouragement provided the soundtrack at the sparsely populated arena.

But the ghostly atmosphere did not faze Jamaica's history-chasing Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, who safely negotiated the first round of the 100m.

The Netherlands' long-distance star Sifan Hassan also advanced in the 5,000m, while Venezuela's triple jump world champion Yulimar Rojas eased into Sunday's final.

However there was an upset in the 4x400 relay, an event making its Olympic debut, when the powerful United States' quartet was disqualified for an illegal changeover.

American teenager Athing Mu -- a gold medal hope in the 800m -- played down the lack of fans after a composed win in her morning heat.

"I've never been to an Olympics so I don't know how the stadium would be if it was packed with

people," she told AFP.

"But then again I've run a couple of meets in the collegiate season where we didn't have spectators allowed so it was kind of the same."

And Australian high jumper Brandon Starc said he was unconcerned by the empty rows in the cavernous stadium.

"I don't really worry about it," said the Commonwealth champion. "I can't do anything about it, so why focus on that?"

But Qatar's 400m hurdler Abderrahman Samba said it was "really, really difficult. I really missed the crowd."

Yet the lack of fans provided no hindrance to Jamaica sprint queen Fraser-Pryce, who would become the oldest women's 100m champion in history if she wins Saturday's final.

The 34-year-old is also aiming to become the first woman to win a single individual Olympic athletics event three times, to add to the 100m victories she claimed in 2008 and 2012.

Fraser-Pryce sailed through to

the semi-finals in 10.84 seconds, easing up well before the finish line.

The Jamaican veteran is the fastest woman over 100m this year, clocking 10.63sec in June. Fraser-Pryce believes she can go faster in Tokyo.

"If you notice the heats, there's some really quick running," she said. "It's definitely a fast track."

Her compatriot Elaine Thompson-Herah is the defending champion in both the 100 and 200m, and surged through her heat in temperatures of 34 degrees Celsius (93 Fahrenheit).

It was a similar tale for Britain's Dina Asher-Smith, world 200m champion and silver medallist in the 100m in Doha in 2019, and Ivory Coast's Marie-Josee Ta Lou, the latter in an African record 10.78sec.

One of the headline events of the Olympic track events is the men's 400m hurdles, trumpeted as a battle royale between two-time world champion Karsten Warholm of Norway and American rival Rai Benjamin.

'Djokovic can't win everything'

REUTERS, Tokyo



Novak Djokovic "can't have everything" summed up Alexander Zverev on Friday after he stopped the Serbian's bid to become the first man to complete the

Golden Slam.

World number one Djokovic had been the overwhelming favourite to win the singles gold medal at the Olympics after he arrived in Tokyo having won the season's first three majors -- the Australian and French Opens as well as Wimbledon.

Djokovic needed to win a maiden Olympic singles gold and the U.S. Open in September to complete the feat of capturing the four slams and the Olympic gold in the same year.

But Friday's unexpected defeat to Zverev abruptly ended those lofty ambitions.

With Djokovic already owning 20 Grand Slam titles, a men's record he shares with Roger Federer and Rafa Nadal, and 36 Masters 1000 titles, Zverev said the Serb already had more than enough.

"I feel sorry for Novak but at the end of the day, he's won 20 Grand Slams, he's won 550 (sic) Masters series or whatever it is, so you can't have everything," Zverev, who came from a set and a break down to win the semi-final 1-6, 6-3, 6-1, told reporters.

"As I said, he is the greatest player of all time and he will win the most Grand Slams out of anybody on tour. But I am also happy I am in

the finals, so what more can I say."

The 24-year-old Zverev sobbed for several minutes courtside following his win over the Serbian, who had beaten him in five consecutive meetings dating back to 2018 and appeared set to extend the streak before the German fought back. "Obviously, yeah, it's an amazing feeling knowing that you're going to bring the medal back to your house, back home to Germany," Zverev said.

"It's incredible beating the best player in the world undoubtedly right now and in this season."

"It seemed it was impossible to beat him at this event, so I'm very happy right now. But yet there's still one match to go."

The fifth-ranked German will meet Karen Khachanov of the Russian Olympic Committee in the gold-medal contest. The 25th-ranked Khachanov outgunned Spain's Pablo Carreno Busta 6-3, 6-3 with his trademark power-hitting.

Khachanov, who made the Wimbledon quarter-finals earlier this month, described the match as a highlight of a memorable summer.

"I play tennis for those moments, I practise for these kind of matches and when you get there, when it's paying off, it's just a pure pleasure to be here..." he said. "(It's) the kind of memories that will stay forever."



DRESSEL, MCKEON fire up the pool

AFP, Tokyo



Sprint machine Caeleb Dressel blasted a 21.32 seconds 50m freestyle heat in his bid to earn the world's fastest swimmer title Friday, while 100m champion Emma McKeon set a new Olympic record to top the women's timesheets.

The explosive Dressel has been untouchable over the splash and dash for the past two seasons and is overwhelming favourite in Tokyo, with Brazilian Cesar Cielo's 2009 world mark of 20.91 within reach.

The 6ft 3ins American has won two gold in Japan and will go for a third in the 100m butterfly on Saturday, with the 50 final on the last day of competition Sunday.

"You certainly can't let off the gas too much," he said. "I knew where I was in that race, I didn't want to expend more energy than I needed to. It's about managing your energy mentally and physically."

Dressel didn't suit up for the 4x100m medley relay heats that followed, but could still swim the final on Sunday.

He is also in with a chance to compete in the 4x100 mixed medley relay decider on Saturday, leaving a possible six gold medals on the table if he chooses to do so.

Dressel admitted it had been hard to put the emotion of winning 100m freestyle gold on Thursday behind.

"I had to recoup pretty fast, there's a lot of emotional energy that goes into these meets physically, but emotionally it'll drain you quicker than the physical," he said.

"I tried to have a nap (today) but couldn't so emotions are still high." Just three men have won the Olympic 50m title twice -- Alexander Popov, Anthony Ervin and Gary Hall Jr -- and France's Florent Manaudou is the only one in Tokyo with a



chance to join them.

But he hasn't been under 21.50 since the 2016 Olympics, where he came second to Ervin and then retired and switched to a handball career. He came back to the sport in 2019 and clocked 21.65 to be second behind Dressel, with Greek Kristian Gkolomeev third.

McKeon returned to the pool after storming to win the 100m crown in the morning session, carrying her electric form into the evening.

She backed up with 24.02 in her heat, a new Olympic record.

McKeon, team-mate Cate Campbell and Dutch 2012 Olympic champion Ranomi Kromowidjojo are the only women to crack 24 seconds this year, making them top contenders.

Campbell, who won the 100m bronze, was third fastest into the semi-finals in 24.15, with defending champion Pernille Blume of Denmark second best in 24.12.

World record holder Sarah Sjöström came fourth with Kromowidjojo eighth.

Blume denied she was feeling any pressure as the title holder.

"No, that's five years ago. It doesn't matter what you have done or haven't done. We are all here on an equal basis," she said.

Distance star Gregorio Paltrinieri would ordinarily be a favourite in the men's 1500m as defending champion and second fastest ever behind China's Sun Yang.

But the Italian was struck down with glandular fever in June, hampering his built-up.

He qualified only third in his heat and fourth overall, behind Ukrainian Mykhailo Romanchuk (14:45.99), American Robert Finke, the 800m champion, and Germany's Florian Wellbrock.

After China upset them in world record time to win the 4x200m freestyle relay, Australia and the United States were keen to make amends in the women's 4x100m medley heats.



Ariful, Junayna register their personal bests

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh swimmers Ariful Islam and Junayna Ahmed managed to put their best performances in their respective 50m freestyle heat events at the Tokyo Olympics yesterday. However, their individual best timings were not enough for them to qualify for the next round.

Ariful finished 51st among 73 competitors after clocking 24.92 seconds, having bettered his previous best of 28.81 made in 2019 World Championships. However, his score was far behind that of Pawal Juraszek, who secured the final spot to qualify for the 16-swimmer semifinal with a time of 21.97 seconds.

England-born swimmer Junayna also suffered the same fate in women's 50m freestyle heat event after finishing 68th among 81 competitors. The teenage swimmer crossed the distance with a time of 29.78 seconds, some 5.01 seconds more than Dutch swimmer Femke Heemskerk, who was the last one to enter the 16-swimmer semifinal with a time of 24.77 seconds.

The 18-year-old swimmer, however, improved on 30.96 seconds, the timing she had clocked during the 2019 World Championships in Korea.

OLYMPICS MEDALS TABLE (TOP FIVE)

COUNTRY	GOLD	SILVER	BRONZE	TOTAL
China	19	10	11	40
Japan	17	4	7	28
USA	14	16	11	41
ROC	10	14	10	34
Australia	9	2	11	22

Potential injuries from tight schedule concern Tigers

SPORTS REPORTER



The Bangladesh national team are about to venture into a hectic schedule of international fixtures as they prepare to participate in the five-match T20I series against Australia in the span of only eight days, starting from August 3.

Previously the Tigers travelled to Zimbabwe in the first week of July, right after taking part in the month-long Dhaka Premier League T20 competition, amid few injury concerns in the team.

During the Zimbabwe tour, the Tigers played seven international games -- a Test match followed by a three-match ODI and a three-match T20I series -- in just 17 days.

ODI skipper Tamim Iqbal had to miss the Test match as he had been struggling with his knee injury. Although Tamim managed to take part in the ODI series despite tackling pain, the left-hander eventually had to return home ahead of the T20I series and was prescribed to rest for at least two months. This meant that he had to be ruled out for the upcoming Australia series along with the New Zealand and England series as well.

Left-arm seamer Mustafizur Rahman also suffered an ankle injury during the warm-up game ahead of the Test series against Zimbabwe which led to the pacer missing out a majority of the matches in tour.

Liton Das, who is also ruled out for the upcoming Australia series, opted himself out after the series due to personal reasons before which, he suffered a thigh injury during the first T20I in Zimbabwe.

It is bound to be a daunting task for the Tigers to remain fit and also juggle with the workload keeping the compressed schedule ahead. Moreover, New Zealand are expected to arrive in early September to play five T20Is before England travel for three T20Is and three ODIs.

A Bangladesh Cricket Board official, requesting anonymity, said, "Obviously it's a huge challenge for the cricketers and to make things even tougher, the prolonged stay inside the closed environment of the bio-secure bubble makes it difficult to avoid fatigue and maintain focus, both mentally and physically."

"In any sport, injuries are part of the game and we don't want to overthink in this regard. But yes, we are trying to manage everyone's workload keeping the tight schedule in mind and the players are also aware of it. This is another reason behind our attempt to create a bigger pool of cricketers so that we can rotate them accordingly."