

## Phelps not ready to move over

AFP, Paris

Olympic great Michael Phelps said he was ‘greedy’ to hold onto his one remaining individual swimming world record faced with the threat of ‘hungry kid’ Leon Marchand.

Marchand is not far off the 400 IM world record Phelps has held for two decades and trains with the Americans’ long-time coach Bob Bowman.

The 20-year-old French swimmer posted the second-fastest men’s 400m medley time in history with 4min 4.28sec to win the world gold in Budapest in August.

“Leon is one to watch” Phelps, 37, said at the “Demain Le Sport” (Sports Tomorrow) event in Paris.



“He’s just a hungry little kid, he’s eager to be the best, to break the world record, and obviously he’s within a couple of 10ths of it, so...”

“But hopefully, fingers crossed, I’m going to be greedy and try and keep the record for one more year to go to 21 years.”

Phelps first broke that record with 4:11.09 in Fort Lauderdale in August 2002 and lowered it for the last time 04:03.84 on his way to gold at the Beijing Olympics in 2008.

“Time will tell. He’s definitely equipped with a lot of tools,” continued Phelps, who holds the all-time records for Olympic medals with 28 of which 23 are in gold.

“He’s such a great racer. He reminds me a lot of myself with the competitiveness when you get into it, kind of dogfight in a race.

“It’s all about tempo, stroke, he’s with a great coach Bob who coached me my entire career, so he’s in good hands.

“I’m looking forward to seeing not only what he does at the world championships next year but also what he does here in Paris (Olympics).”

Phelps set 29 world records over two decades, but now only holds two, with his second in the men’s 4×100m freestyle relay achieved with the US team on the way to Olympic gold in Beijing.

Hungarian Kristof Milak has twice lowered the record in the 200m butterfly which Phelps had held for a decade until 2019.

“I’m happy I’m not swimming the 200 fly any more because Milak would be crushing me. Watching him go 1.50 is impressive,” said the American who retired in 2016.

But he believes Romanian David Popovici is the sports’ rising star having broken the 100m freestyle record with 46.86 at worlds in August.



Bangladesh women's football team captain Sabina Khatun holds the SAFF Women's Championship trophy as she is paraded through Satkhira on Friday. The veteran striker was given a hero's welcome in her hometown where people thronged the streets to see a glimpse of the champion footballer. Satkhira district administration and district sports association accorded a reception for the captain, who led Bangladesh to their first ever regional title.

PHOTO: STAR

## ‘Aspiring girls won’t face barriers anymore’

**Sanjida Akhter has been one of the poster girls of Bangladesh football since she began her journey with Bangladesh’s Under-16 side in 2014. The 21-year-old forward, now studying economics at a private university but struggling to attend classes due to training sessions, became the centre of discussion after an emotional Facebook status ahead of the SAFF Women’s Championship final won the nation’s hearts. The Daily Star’s Anisur Rahman talked to her regarding that status alongside different aspects of women’s football. The excerpts are below:**

ANISUR RAHMAN

**The Daily Star:** What was going through your mind as you wrote that status on Facebook?

**Sanjida Akhter:** I have been in these camp over the years and I have listened to my teammates, understood their feelings and watched different things unfold in our society. Of course, my personal feelings from the area I come from were also reflected. Sometimes it is not possible to discuss your feelings with others, so I disclosed my feelings through Facebook. But I never thought that the status would get such attention.

**DS:** You said that you wanted to answer back at the ridicule from society by winning the SAFF Women’s Championship. What kind of ridicule did you face on your journey?

**SA:** All of my teammates are from rural areas and came this far despite ridicule from society. When we started playing with shorts, people around us would hurl abuse towards us and our family. They may not have understood the impact of their comments, but they should never have said such things. I have heard a lot of ridicule, even about how my parents would arrange my marriage. However, some people praised us, the young girls who brought electricity and development to Kalsindur village through football.

**DS:** You also mentioned that you wanted to deliver the trophy to some dedicated individuals who helped bring you into football. Who are they?

**SA:** They are those at the grassroots level, who defied societal barriers and taught

us how to play football. They are likes Mofiz Sir, Minoti Rani madam, Razib dada and Jewel bhai in our village. Mofiz sir and Minoti madam urged my parents to allow me to play football. They took all the responsibility. The people in our village also helped raise funds to send the girls to play in different districts. There are other people like Mokbul Sir, Borhan Sir, Salahuddin Sir and Sultan Sir. But the message was meant for everyone, including all our fans and followers.

**DS:** Do you believe the triumph will inspire more aspiring girls to play football?

**SA:** I have seen comments on social media from people wanting advice on how to get their girls involved in football. I don’t think anybody will create barriers for aspiring girls anymore.

**DS:** What was the experience of the four-hour journey on an open top bus on your homecoming?

**SA:** I did not demand an open top bus, but we got it. The journey was really exciting as thousands of people turned up. We thought only cricket had huge support in our country, but the response from the fans on our arrival proved us wrong. It was a memorable day for all of us.

**DS:** When did you start believing you could become champions, especially considering the coach and captain said their target was to reach the semifinals before departure?



**SA:** Our target was actually to play the final but we did not disclose it to media. We wanted to show it on the ground instead of openly declaring it. We made a good start to the tournament and the win over India doubled our confidence. We wouldn’t have any regrets if we lost since we had achieved our target. In the final, when the left-winger and left-back began to mark me, we sensed Nepal were fearful.

So we started playing attacking football. We also made a good start and the early goal from Shamsunnar gave us more confidence.

**DS:** We know you have worked tremendously hard over the years, but what specifically does your routine look like?

**SA:** Generally, we wake up at 5:00am for a two-hour training session. Each players gets a GPS and must record between 5,000-11,000 meters of movement on a normal day. There are of course other exercises. After returning to the dormitory, we have a gym session for one hour. There is also yoga, studies and tactical sessions. The day is full of football-related activities.

**DS:** What the main strength of this team?

**SA:** Previously, we had deficiencies in terms of the goalkeeper, defence or further upfield, but now we are not lacking in any department. The biggest thing is the bond we share since we have been together for nine years. So we know how each individual’s tendencies very well.

## Federer irreplaceable, says McEnroe

AFP, London

John McEnroe says Roger Federer and Serena Williams are “irreplaceable” but that tennis “goes on no matter what” as the Swiss prepares to play his final match on Friday.

Federer, a 20-time Grand Slam singles champion, will bring the curtain down on his glittering career in the Laver Cup at London’s O2 arena alongside long-time rival Rafael Nadal.

The two players, representing Team Europe, will take on Team World’s Frances Tiafoe and Jack Sock in doubles in the evening session on the first day of the event.

The 41-year-old Federer’s retirement comes hot on the heels of a similar decision by Williams, who won 23 majors in singles.

McEnroe, who is captain of Team World, admitted the sport would miss the two players but is optimistic about the future, just weeks after 19-year-old Spaniard Carlos Alcaraz won the US Open.

“These two players are irreplaceable,” he said. “I don’t think there is any question about that.”

But he added: “The sport goes on no matter what, and we have witnessed that in every sport over time.



“The opportunity is there to market these young kids in a way that I don’t think we have successfully done before.”

McEnroe, who won seven Grand Slam singles titles, said Williams had “brought electricity” to the recent US Open, where she lost in the third round.

But he said other players such as Alcaraz and America’s Tiafoe, who lost to the Spaniard in the semi-final at Flushing Meadows, made it an “electrifying event”.

Canadian star Felix Auger-Aliassime believes there are exciting times ahead with “a lot of new players playing very good, very intense and entertaining tennis”.

But he hopes Federer and Williams stay around the game.

Nadal, 36, said he did not need the retirement of his long-time adversary to remind him that “the end is closer”.

“You know, the normal cycle of life is this,” he said. “Some people leave and others need to come.

“Nothing new. History repeats always. Just this time it’s us, and in this particular case is probably one of the most if not the most important player in the history of this sport that is leaving after a super great and super long career.”

Andy Murray, another veteran member of Team Europe, admitted thoughts of retirement had crossed his mind.

“As you get older as athletes and with some of the physical issues you do think about what if or when should you stop and when is the right moment and how would you like it to be,” said the three-time Grand Slam champion.

“I have thought about it myself, but I don’t think there’s many better ways to go out than like this.”

## ‘Hamza can have huge impact for Bangladesh’

AGENCIES

Hamza Choudhury can become a beacon of inspiration for the next generation if he chooses to play international football for Bangladesh, said Watford head coach Rob Edwards.

The Loughborough-born former England U21 midfielder, who has Grenadian and Sylheti heritage, last week opened the door to the possibility of playing for Bangladesh in an interview with Nujum Sports, where he became the Muslim athlete support group’s latest ambassador.

Watford boss Edwards confirmed he had read the story on Sky Sports digital platforms, and said Choudhury can give the next generation of youngsters a renewed sense of belief if he decides to play for Bangladesh.

“I think it could be a fantastic thing if that’s what he chooses to do,” Edwards said when asked about the impact Choudhury could potentially make.

“I think he can be a real beacon for

young Bangladeshi kids, who could look to him and say I can do that.

“Hamza can be a real shining light as someone, who can encourage others to take up the sport. If he chooses to do it, I think it could be really positive for a lot of people.”

Choudhury struggled for minutes at Leicester last season but has been a mainstay in Edwards’ side since joining the Hornets on a season-long loan with an option to buy.

Edwards added: “He’s been a joy to work with. He is someone who absolutely gives 100 per cent every single day. He’s very positive and you can see that in his performances. I can’t speak highly enough of him.

“Definitely [the best is yet to come from him], no doubt about it. He’s a very good young player and a very good person as well.”

Choudhury’s arrival at Watford last month was greeted with delight by the club’s East and South East Asian fans’ group, ESEA Hornets, who said they were thrilled to welcome a British Asian to the football club.



Bangladesh Army’s Imranur Rahman and Bangladesh Navy’s Shirin Akter hold their teams’ flags following their victories in the 100m sprint events on the first day of the Sultana Kamal-Oliia Group 16th National Summer Athletics Championship at the Army Stadium in Banani yesterday. England-based Imranur defended his crown with a timing of 10.29sec while Shirin regained her crown with a timing of 11.95sec, a new national record. Navy’s Umme hafsa Rumki, meanwhile, set a new record in high-jump by clearing 1.74 metres.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED