Biles inspires USA to Olympic gold as Irish swimmer makes history

AFP- Simone Biles won the fifth Olympic gold of her legendary career as she led the United States to an emphatic victory in the women's gymnastics team final on Tuesday, as Daniel Wiffen made Irish history in swimming.

On a sweltering day in Paris where temperatures reached 35 degrees Celsius (95 Fahrenheit), the hottest ticket in town was at the Bercy Arena where Biles was attempting to lay the ghosts of Tokyo 2021 to rest.

The 27-year-old American – considered the greatest gymnast of all time – and her team did just that to add to her four gold medals at the 2016 Rio Games.

Three years ago in Tokyo Biles battled a disorientating mental block that gymnasts call the "twisties", and without her the USA had to settle for silver.

But with Biles back to her brilliant best, she and teammates Jordan Chiles, Jade Carey and Sunisa Lee led wire-to-wire to reclaim gold ahead of Italy, with Brazil taking bronze.

For Biles it marks a return to the Olympic summit after a two-year break as she focused on her mental health. Lee, the all-around champion in Tokyo, has since dealt with two career-threatening kidney ailments.

Biles said her second team gold – eight years after her first – felt different.

"It was just like we were a little young and naive," she said of 2016. "So it didn't hit the way that it does now.

“Now that I’m much older, we have so much more experience and we’re out here really having fun and enjoying what we’re doing.”

Once again the stars were out for Biles.

Serena Williams, Nicole Kidman and Bill Gates were in attendance, as was Biles’s husband, NFL player Jonathan Owens, in a T-shirt emblazoned with his wife’s name and picture.

– Irish history –

Wiffen was in tears on the podium at La Defense Arena after becoming the first Irishman ever to win an Olympic swimming gold.

“I don’t normally cry, so I really hope that nobody’s gonna see that,” he said.

The 23-year-old powered home in the 800m freestyle in 7min 38.19sec, the fifth-fastest time ever, ahead of American defending champion Bobby Finke and Tokyo silver medallist Gregorio Paltrinieri of Italy.

Wiffen, who was born in England and is the world champion, will also contest the 1,500m freestyle and 10km open water swim in Paris.

Kaylee McKeown retained her crown in the women’s 100m backstroke, producing a blistering second lap to beat world record-holder Regan Smith of the USA.

It was Australia’s fourth gold in the pool in Paris.

Britain triumphed in the men’s 4x200m freestyle relay.

In punishing heat at Roland Garros, Rafael Nadal kept alive his dream of a third Olympic gold as he powered into the men’s doubles quarter-finals alongside Carlos Alcaraz.

Andy Murray, who has said he will quit tennis after the Games,

delayed his retirement with another thrilling doubles win with Dan Evans, saving two match points.

But women's world number two Coco Gauff crashed out of the singles in a stormy defeat to Croatian Donna Vekic.

Vekic won 7-6 (9/7), 6-2 to reach the quarter-finals after Gauff claimed she was "getting cheated" in an argument with the chair umpire over a line call.

New Zealand's women defended their Olympic rugby sevens title after roaring back to beat Canada 19-12 in front of a near-capacity 69,000 crowd at the Stade de France.

In men's football, Thierry Henry's France set up a potentially explosive quarter-final showdown with Argentina.

And NBA star Victor Wembanyama scored 18 points and grabbed 11 rebounds to help France scrape past Japan 94-90 and into the quarter-finals in the men's basketball.

Japan ended day four top of the overall medals table with seven golds, with China and Australia on six, and France and South Korea on five.

– More Seine doubts –

Earlier, in a massive blow to Olympic organisers who have repeatedly vowed that the River Seine would be safe to swim in, Tuesday's men's triathlon race was called off hours before the start after last-minute water-quality tests.

A joint statement from Paris 2024 and World Triathlon blamed the spike in pollution levels on the heavy rain that drenched Paris on Friday and Saturday.

The men's triathlon has been rescheduled to Wednesday, immediately after the women's event, leaving Games chiefs keeping their fingers crossed.

After the intense heat of the day, a major storm was forecast late on, raising fresh doubts over whether Wednesday’s rescheduled events could go ahead.

Heavy downpours still overwhelm the city’s underground drains and sewage system, leading to untreated effluent being released into the waterway.

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