

# Yavi shines in Xiamen thriller



Kenya's Faith Cherotich edges Bahrain's Winfred Yavi in the women's 3,000m steeplechase

## A Whisker Away

**Olympic champion opens 2026 campaign with season-best run in tightly contested Diamond League steeplechase**

Hussain Almaskati  
TDT | Manama

Bahrain's Winfred Yavi made her season debut on the international athletics circuit yesterday at the Wanda Diamond League meeting in Xiamen, China, finishing second in a high-quality women's 3,000m steeplechase decided by just 0.48 seconds.

The Olympic champion lined up in an elite 18-athlete field featuring reigning world champion Faith Cherotich and Tokyo 2021 Olympic champion Peruth Chemutai, in what developed into one of the most closely contested races of the early 2026 season.

Chemutai claimed victory in a meeting record and world lead of 8:51.06, narrowly holding off Yavi, who produced a season's best of 8:51.54. Cherotich completed the podium in 8:52.53, just under a second further back, highlighting how tightly matched the trio were

throughout.

From the opening stages, the leading group set a controlled but aggressive rhythm, passing 400m in around 1:07 and 800m in just over 2:18 while remaining tightly packed at the front. The pace stayed consistent through the middle laps, with splits holding in the mid-35 to low-36 second range, signalling a high-quality but tactical race rather than an early burn-up.

Through 2000m, Chemutai, Yavi, and Cherotich remained inseparable as they gradually increased pressure heading into the closing stages. The decisive phase came over the final 600m, where all three responded to each other's surges in a sustained kick for the line.

Chemutai ultimately proved strongest in the final stretch, edging clear to take the win in 8:51.06, with Yavi second in 8:51.54 and Cherotich third in 8:52.53.

## "I am pleased with second"

After the race, Yavi said she was satisfied with her performance and emphasized her focus on improving her finishing strength.

"I am pleased with second. I'm very proud of my performance. Coming into this race, I really wanted to execute well in the last hundred meters. I'll review and check how I did," Yavi said. "Winning the silver medal last year in Tokyo shows that I had a great season, and it helped me realize that if I can keep my consistency, there will be chances for greater results. I'm looking forward to running an amazing season this year."

The race marked the first time Yavi, Chemutai, and Cherotich have competed together since last season's World Championships final, where Cherotich narrowly beat Yavi for gold. The Xiamen showdown again highlighted how evenly matched the

trio remain heading into the 2026 campaign, with all three separated by just over a second at the finish.

Yavi enters the season with a personal best of 8:44.39, the second-fastest time in history, underlining her status as one of the leading contenders in the women's steeplechase.

## Birhanu Balew

Meanwhile, Bahrain's Birhanu Balew also competed in Xiamen yesterday, finishing seventh in the men's 5,000m in a strong field of 21 athletes.

The race was won by Ethiopia's Addisu Yihune in 12:57.32, with Balew crossing the line in 13:07.75 after a competitive but challenging outing. Looking ahead, Yavi and Balew are also expected to spearhead Bahrain's medal challenge at the Asian Games in Aichi and Nagoya, Japan, from September 19 to October 4.

## Russell resists Antonelli in Canadian GP F1 sprint race

AFP | Montreal

Pre-season title favourite George Russell delivered a consummate lights-to-flag drive to win Saturday's sprint race at the Canadian Grand Prix and trim his angry team-mate Kimi Antonelli's championship lead.

The 28-year-old Briton came home 1.272 seconds clear of world champion Lando Norris of McLaren after resisting a spirited attack by the teenage Italian, who finished third, in the early part of the 23-lap race. Norris's McLaren team-mate Oscar Piastri came home fourth ahead of both Ferraris with Charles Leclerc finishing fifth ahead of seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton.

Four-time champion Max Verstappen finished seventh for Red Bull ahead of Racing Bulls rookie Arvid Lindblad.

It was the first sprint race held at the Circuit Gilles Vil-



First place Mercedes' British driver George Russell (R), second place McLaren's British driver Lando Norris (C) and third place Mercedes' Italian driver Kimi Antonelli receive their plaques after the Sprint race ahead of the 2026 Formula 1 Grand Prix du Canada at Circuit Gilles-Villeneuve in Montreal, Canada

leneuve and was a memorable one, with the scrap between Russell and Antonelli requiring an intervention from Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff, telling the precocious Italian to cool off and stop talking on the team radio.

The incident came on lap six when Antonelli, 19, tried a move

around the outside of Turn One, but Russell defended stoutly forcing the Italian to run off with a muscular defence of his leading position.

"That was very naughty," said Antonelli, who accused Russell of pushing him off. "That should be a penalty. I was alongside the mirror."

## Handball Heroes Return Home with Gold

Manama

Bahrain's national handball team returned home to a hero's welcome after a flawless campaign at the fourth GCC Games in Doha, Qatar, where they secured the gold medal with a perfect record — adding another proud chapter to the kingdom's sporting achievements.

The champions opened their campaign with a strong victory over Kuwait, before following up with another win against Saudi Arabia. They then sealed the gold medal in style with a brilliant performance against Qatar, confirming their place at the top of the standings with a match to spare.

With the title already secured, head coach Robert Hedrin rotated the squad in the final fixture against the United Arab Emirates, giving younger players valuable minutes at international level.

The team were officially crowned champions on the final night at Duhail Handball Hall, where they received their



captain Hussain Al Sayyad is warmly welcomed by officials from the Bahrain Olympic Committee and the Bahrain Handball Association

gold medals alongside silver medallists Qatar and bronze medallists Saudi Arabia.

Back in Bahrain, the victorious squad received a warm welcome upon arrival yesterday. The delegation was received by Lounes Madene, Projects Director and Technical Director at the Bahrain Olympic Committee, and Majdi Mirza, Secretary-General of the Bahrain Handball Association. Both officials congratulated the players, coaching staff, and man-

agement on their achievement. The triumph also contributed to Bahrain's strong overall performance at the Games, with the kingdom securing an impressive 63 medals across multiple sports. Looking ahead, the national team will turn its focus to the Asian Championship in India next June. The players are set to resume training at Isa bin Rashid Hall following the Eid holidays, as preparations begin for their next major challenge.