

Heptathlon champion Johnson-Thompson joins list of Commonwealth Games absentees

AFP | Glasgow, United Kingdom

Katarina Johnson-Thompson said yesterday she was “gutted” to have to withdraw from the England team for the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow due to an unspecified injury.

The 33-year-old double defending heptathlon champion -- also a silver medallist at the 2024 Olympics in Paris -- was one of nine withdrawals from the England athletics squad on Thursday.

Team-mates who also pulled out just hours before the opening ceremony in the Scottish city included Johnson-Thompson’s fellow Olympic medallists Dina Asher-Smith, Daryll Neita, Matthew Hudson-Smith and Amber Anning.

Johnson, twice a world heptathlon champion and a bronze medallist at last year’s edition in Tokyo, will now join Olympic 800 metres champion Keely Hodgkinson, who did not pursue Commonwealth selection, in concentrating on next month’s European Championships in Birmingham.

“I’m gutted to have to pull out of this year’s Commonwealth Games,” said Johnson on social media. “I was so looking forward to competing on home soil and having the chance to defend my Commonwealth title!”

“Although the injury I picked up earlier this season has improved, I haven’t been able to get back to the level I need to compete at my best.”

The 33-year-old added: “Af-

ter discussing it with my team, we’ve made the difficult decision to focus on giving myself the best chance of being ready for the European Championships, so working very hard to be there later this season.

“Missing a championship is never easy, but I know it’s the right decision. I can’t wait to be back competing again soon.”

Leading international competitors who had previously pulled out of the Games include St Lucia’s reigning Olympic 100m champion Julien Alfred, Hodgkinson’s 800m rival Mary Moraa of Kenya and Olympic swimming medallists Summer McIntosh (Canada) and Kaylee McKeown (Australia).

Katarina Johnson-Thompson



Australia chief floats idea of England Test in India

London, United Kingdom

Cricket Australia chief executive Todd Greenberg is open to the possibility of staging a Test against England in India.

The three nations represent cricket’s ‘Big Three’ -- the sport’s most powerful nations -- but India are the financial powerhouse of the global game, fuelled by the mass enthusiasm for the sport in the world’s most populous country.

Any Australia-England fixture in India would need the backing of both the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) and the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI).

“It’s not something that we are planning, but it’s open for consideration,” Greenberg told the BBC in comments published Thursday. “We’d have to be open to considering all options.

“Our relationship with the ECB and the BCCI is very strong and clearly there are opportunities in India to put more content in certain areas.”

Australia and England played the first Test in cricket history in Melbourne in 1877 and next year they will meet at the Melbourne Cricket Ground for a one-off pink-ball fixture to mark the 150th anniversary of that inaugural clash.

Several former players are understood to have voiced concerns that the showpiece



Cricket Australia chief executive Todd Greenberg

match will be a pink-ball affair but Greenberg said it was not his job “to be popular”.

“We wanted to get as many people for the game as possible,” he said. “Playing that game in the day while people are at work and school would’ve made that difficult.

“Clearly there’s a commercial imperative with broadcast rights back in the UK and the time zone. Pink-ball Tests for us are hugely advantageous in terms of audience.

“It will anger some of the traditionalists but we’re in the business of getting more eyeballs on our game.”

But Greenberg said Cricket Australia were trying to strike a balance between celebrating a significant landmark in Test history and ensuring the longer format attracts new spectators.

“We’re trying to balance celebrating 150 years of Test cricket between our two countries but also have an eye on the future and how we can evolve the sport,” he added.

Anderson declares Man City ‘kings of Manchester’ after £116 mn move

London, United Kingdom

Elliot Anderson declared Manchester City the “kings of Manchester” after completing his reported £116 million (\$154 million) move from Nottingham Forest.

City confirmed Thursday the England midfielder had signed a five-year contract at the Etihad Stadium with the option of a further 12 months.

The deal was agreed earlier this month but finalised this week following the play-

er’s return from the World Cup.

Anderson said he was “over the moon” to be signing “one of the biggest clubs in the world”, with the 23-year-old adding: “I can’t wait to play for this club. It’s a club built to win trophies and compete at the very top of the game. That is exciting for any footballer.

“I think they’re winners, they’re relentless, and that’s the sort of team I want to be a part of. Over the last 10, 12 years, they’ve dominated, so that’s why I wanted to join.”

Anderson said he was already looking forward to appearing in the Manchester derby, with City facing arch-rivals Manchester United at Old Trafford on September 13.

Elliot Anderson



Alonso welcomes Aston Martin upgrade

AFP | Budapest, Hungary

Fernando Alonso on Thursday warned that Aston Martin’s long-awaited upgraded chassis, being introduced at this weekend’s Hungarian Grand Prix, was unlikely to change their position as tail-enders.

But, he said, he believed the team would close the gap and may do better once they understand the potential of the package.

An engine upgrade, more critical to a big uplift in performance, is not due until after F1’s summer break when Alonso has said he will make a decision about his own future.

The 44-year-old two-time

world champion made clear he has complete belief in Aston Martin under the guidance of F1’s most revered designer Adrian Newey, but he would base his decision on how much fun he experienced as a driver.

“It’s not that I need any answers from the upgrade,” he said.

“I have a pretty clear picture of the team that we will fix all the problems -- it takes time, but I have no doubts. I have zero doubts that Adrian (Newey) will provide the best car on the grid, sooner or later.

“I would like to see the first step with this package. And it’s just how soon the car will be competitive. That’s the question.

“Maybe the next two races will give us a feeling for that, but for me, I’m relaxed, as I said many times.

“I’m thinking I need to know what I do next year and the years to come.

“I feel fresh, motivated, fast, but I need to enjoy what I do.



Alonso

As I said in Spa, it was not fun to drive and I think not fun to watch.”

He explained that F1’s chosen direction with the new ‘hybrid era’ did not provide the same experience for drivers.

“It’s not the same adrenaline that I used to have,” he said. “So that’s something I need to put on the table.

“It’s not a problem for me of the competitiveness of the team. It’s a problem that F1 can give me the adrenaline that I need to live!”

Verstappen swerves around future questions

AFP | Budapest, Hungary

Max Verstappen yesterday swerved around questions on his future and declared he was taking things race by race with Red Bull as they work to develop their car.

Twelve months on from declaring he was staying with the team for 2026, the four-time world champion chose not to give any clear response about his plans.

“I feel good and from my side what I’m

saying -- that there’s nothing to say -- is because there’s nothing going on,” the Dutch driver said ahead of this weekend’s Hungarian Grand Prix.

“For me, I am just focused on trying to get the most from the car and that’s already

complicated enough to deal with. “That’s what I’m doing. This team is like a second family to me and of course I want to understand our car a bit better and get back to winning.”

Verstappen, who is seventh in the drivers’ standings, added that he felt they were on an “upward trend”.

“We’re still trying to understand the basics of the car. Some weekends, the performance has been a bit more straightforward. Sometimes we have a few issues. But it’s an upward trend.

“If someone comes with an upgrade and it’s two-tenths or

three-tenths, it looks a bit different and so we have to take it race by race really.”

Verstappen has a performance clause in his contract which is believed to allow him to leave if he is not a title contender, but in this transitional new ‘hybrid era’ there are no clearly more attractive seats available for him to take next year.

Mercedes, Ferrari and McLaren have all made clear they are happy with and retaining their drivers. Verstappen has also said he might consider leaving F1 if he was not enjoying the racing experience anymore.



Verstappen

Sooryavanshi hits maiden 50 as India thump Zimbabwe in T20

AFP | Harare, Zimbabwe

India wonderkid Vaidhavi Sooryavanshi scored a maiden Twenty20 international half-century in a seven-wicket victory over Zimbabwe in Harare on Thursday.

Put in to bat after losing the toss in the first of three matches, Zimbabwe



made a meagre 125-7 in 20 overs with all-rounder Wessly Madhevere (39) top scoring.

Led by 15-year-old prodigy Sooryavanshi, who struck four sixes and four fours in an 18-ball 50, India cruised to 126-3 with 40 balls to spare.

Sooryavanshi became the

youngest cricketer to represent India by debuting in a 4-0 T20I drubbing by England this month. He scored 42 runs in three innings.

After his whirlwind 50 in Harare, Sooryavanshi was out when he got a thick outside edge to a Richard Ngarava delivery and was caught at deep third man by Ben Curran.

He departed with the tourists 68-2. Then, wicketkeeper Ishan Kishan (35) and unbeaten captain Shreyas Iyer (28 not out) ensured India ended a dismal recent T20I run.

Brief scores

Zimbabwe 125-7 in 20 overs (W. Madhevere 39; M. Yadav 2-18, P. Yadav 2-19) v India 126-3 in 13.2 overs (V. Sooryavanshi 50, I. Kishan 35; B. Muzarabani 2-26)

Result: India won by seven wickets

Series: India lead 1-0 ahead of matches on Saturday and Sunda

Before four losses in England, one by an Indian record 125 runs, the reigning T20I world champions lost another series 2-0 in Ireland.

Victory at Harare Sports Club was a welcome relief for Iyer -- it ended a seven-match winless run since he inherited the captaincy.

“I think the boys were tremendous. Could not have been happier with my first win,” the skipper told reporters.

“There was bounce from a good length and it was also variable. I felt it was there in both innings. We are going to play two more matches here, so this performance gives everyone some confidence.”

Madhevere was run out after a 58-run sixth-wicket stand with Tadiwanashe Marumani (27 not out). An unwise attempt to secure a second run led to his downfall.