

'Different, but better' - Jacobs confident of defending 100m title

Italian sprinter confident of retaining gold despite challenges since Tokyo triumph

- **Jacobs aims to defend 100m and 4x100m relay golds**
- **Overcame criticism and injuries post-Tokyo**
- **Changed coach and moved to US for training**
- **Considers semi-final the most challenging hurdle**

AFP | Paris

Olympic 100m champion Marcell Jacobs said yesterday he is a "changed, but better" athlete and is confident of defending his title at the Paris Games.

The Italian stunned the field to snatch gold in the Covid-delayed Tokyo Olympics, in a European record of 9.80sec.

He made it double gold just days later by helping Italy to victory in the 4x100m relay.

The 29-year-old told reporters he was back at the Summer Olympic Games.

Games for one reason only: to defend his title in one of its standout events.

"I'm the Olympic champion. I want to win again," Jacobs told reporters.

"I know what I can do. I know I am the Olympic champion. I won the 100m at t

I worked really hard to get here to win again... so

I can do the double."

After his stunning success in Tokyo, Jacobs went off the radar, citing fatigue and a knee

problem.

We're 'not robots'

His conspicuous absence raised eyebrows and brought criticism that still stings.

"What hurt me was that people didn't understand that we are not robots, we are not machines. We are human," he said. "We work every day at 100% with our body, so it's normal to have some difficulties, some injury."

"The problem with doping (accusations) after the Olympics didn't touch me because I know what I have to do to get a win, so I know what is not true.

"It's hard to survive at the Olympics and win, but it's harder to continue to win.

"So for that, you have a lot of injury and people didn't understand that.

"In Italy, we never had an Italian guy make the Olympic final, but I won and they continued to criticise me. So it hurt me."

Jacobs showed his determination to bag back-to-back golds by upending his life, both professionally

YOU KNOW WHAT

Marcell Jacobs is the first Italian sprinter to ever win an Olympic gold in the 100m. His win in Tokyo marked a historic moment for Italy in Olympic sprinting history



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MARCELL JACOBS

semi-final because we are this year 15 or 16 guys who can go to the final. The semi-final will be hard," he said.

"Every year is a different, every year there are some people who can run really fast. This year we have the Jamaicans, the Americans, but every year is like that.

"In Tokyo it was like everybody can wait for the silver medal because the gold was being prepared for Trayvon Bromell.

"He ran 9.76sec at the beginning of the season, but he didn't even make the final so you never know. The Olympics are different."

Jacobs concluded: "But it will be fun because there are a lot of guys who can run really fast, but only one can win, and on Sunday we'll know!"

and personally, changing coach in Olympic year and moving, with his family, to the United States to work under Rana Reider.

It seems to have paid off as Jacobs claimed a second European title in Rome in June.

"Of course I've changed since Tokyo," he said. "It was three years ago."

Since then, Jacobs added, "I win, I lose, I have a lot of injury. I change everything. I change country and change coach, so I'm different, but I'm better".

Jacobs maintained that reaching Sunday's 100m final was the hardest part of the jigsaw.

"The most difficult thing is the

WRC add Saudi race to calendar



Kalle Rovanpera of Finland and his co-driver Jonne Halttunen of Finland steer their Toyota GR Yaris Rally1 HYBRID during the last stage SS20 of the WRC TET Rally Latvia WRC event

AFP | London

World Rally Championship announced yesterday that it will add races in Saudi Arabia, the Canary Islands and Paraguay to its calendar next year.

Rally Saudi Arabia will end the season on November 27-30 with the event in the Spanish archipelago on April 24-27 and the race in South America on August 28-31.

Rallies in Croatia, Poland and Latvia are no longer on the circuit.

Flick opens his Barcelona tenure with win over Man City

AFP | Orlando

New Barcelona manager Hansi Flick made a triumphant start to his tenure on Tuesday as the Spanish giants beat Manchester City on penalties after their pre-season friendly at Orlando finished 2-2 at full-time.

Toni Fernandez, who signed with Barca earlier this month after turning 16, flicked in a left-footed shot past reserve City goalkeeper Stefan Ortega to give the German manager's

side a 4-1 win on penalties.

Barcelona kicked off their US tour in the pre-season contest against the four-time reigning Premier League champions, guided by former Barcelona player and coach Pep Guardiola.

A sellout crowd of 63,237 spectators were unhappy early as a storm delayed the start by 80 minutes, but were delighted with a strong early pace, before both teams gave reserve players abundant time on the pitch.

National Center for Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation welcomes handball stars with advanced technology

Hussain Almaskati
TDT | Manama

The National Center for Sports Medicine and Rehabilitation, part of the Bahrain Olympic Committee, recently hosted a delegation from the Bahrain Handball Federation.

The delegation, led by Ismail Baqer, Director of National Teams at the federation, and Dr. Karim Eid, a specialist in the federation, was warmly received by Dr. Moyad Al-Alawi, Director of the centre.

The visit included a comprehensive tour of the center's facilities, with advanced ser-

vices and programs designed to enhance Bahraini athletes' performance.

Key highlights included the state-of-the-art Physical Performance Laboratory, which offers precise assessments of players' physical capabilities and personalized training programs.

The delegation also explored the center's modern rehabilitation programs, aimed at rapid recovery from injuries and swift return to play.

This collaboration is telling of Bahrain's leadership to advancing sports and providing top services for its athletes.

Fifteen stadiums, five cities in Saudi 2034 World Cup bid

AFP | Riyadh

Saudi Arabia, the only bidder for the 2034 World Cup, will host the 48-team tournament in fifteen stadiums across five cities, including eight in the capital, state media said yesterday.

The announcement came days after the kingdom submitted its official bid to the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA).

Saudi Arabia plans to host "the largest-ever edition" of the tournament in a single country, according to the bid book, details of which were carried by the Saudi Press Agency (SPA).

The bid book outlines five proposed host cities for the tournament, including the capital Riyadh, the Red Sea city of Jeddah, Al Khobar, Abha, and NEOM, a \$500 billion, futuristic new city, SPA said.



An artist's impression of the new 92,000-capacity stadium in Riyadh

They will feature 15 advanced stadiums, eleven of which are new, according to the agency.

Riyadh will be home to eight stadiums, including the new King Salman Stadium, which will accommodate over 92,000 spectators and is set to host the opening and final matches of the tournament, SPA said.

As the only bidder, Saudi

Arabia was anointed host of the 2034 World Cup last October by FIFA after gas-wealthy neighbour Qatar hosted the Middle East's first World Cup at an eye-watering cost of \$220 billion, including related infrastructure.

To host the 48-team World Cup, the kingdom needs 14 all-seater stadiums capable of

holding at least 40,000 people, according to the bid document.

It currently has two: Jeddah's King Abdullah Sports City Stadium and Riyadh's venerable King Fahd International Stadium, which is undergoing a major refit.

Infrastructure is the initial concern for the oil-rich kingdom, which is snapping up high-profile sports events in an attempt to sweep away its conservative image and entice foreign investment.

By the time the World Cup kicks off, the desert country of 32 million will have hosted the 2027 Asian Cup and even the 2029 Asian Winter Games.

In 2034, the same year as the World Cup, Riyadh will host the Asian Games -- a two-week tournament with more events than the Summer Olympics and a similar number of athletes.