

City, Gladbach matches called off due to storm

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MANCHESTER CITY'S Premier League game against West Ham on Sunday was called off due to a storm battering northern Europe. The announcement was made five hours before the scheduled kickoff in Manchester, with City citing safety concerns due to "extreme and escalating weather conditions."

It was one of four scheduled Premier League games this weekend in the competition's first split winter break. Sheffield United was still due to host Bournemouth on Sunday, despite what Sheffield called "wet & windy" conditions at the Bramall Lane stadium on Twitter. Widespread disruption is expected to train services, which could cause problems for fans making the long journey from Bournemouth on the south coast.

The storm impacted the Women's Super League with postponements including Sunday's high-profile clash at Goodison Park for the Merseyside derby between Everton and Liverpool, and a North London derby between Arsenal and Tottenham. Non-league club Wisbech Town posted pictures on Twitter of storm damage to its stadium. A stand had collapsed and goalposts were bent backwards. Storm Ciara, named by the Met Office national weather agency, was expected to bring winds up to 129 kph as well as heavy rains. The British agency has issued 22 emergency flood warnings and 149 flood watch alerts. The storm has led to soccer games in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands also being postponed.

German title challenger Borussia Monchengladbach's game against Cologne has been called off. Gladbach said that the game itself would likely not have been affected but that fans could face a dangerous journey home.

There was no word of the storm affecting Sunday's other Bundesliga game between league leader Bayern Munich and Leipzig.

All four of Sunday's scheduled league games in the Netherlands were called off, including Ajax's visit to Utrecht, along with amateur games at all levels. The Dutch soccer federation said "the safety of supporters and players cannot be guaranteed" amid the storm. Three games in the Belgian league and all second-tier fixtures were also postponed. In other sports, two Super League rugby games were called off in the north of England, along with women's Six Nations rugby union game between Scotland and England, and various horse-racing events.

Pole star

Duplantis of Sweden sets world pole vault record of 6.17 metres in Poland

NYT/AP
FEBRUARY 9

ARMAND DUPLANTIS, a 20-year-old Louisiana native who has been as shrewd in choosing the nation he represents as he has been in choosing his fiberglass poles, broke the world record in the pole vault on Saturday with a jump of 20 feet 2 3/4 inches, or 6.17 meters.

At an indoor meet in Torun, Poland, Duplantis edged by a centimeter the previous record set in 2014 by Renaud Lavillenie of France, the 2012 Olympic champion.

Duplantis, known widely as Mondo, has already been selected to compete at the Tokyo Games, where he will be a favorite to win gold. But he will wear the blue and gold uniform of Sweden, his mother's home country, instead of the red, white and blue of the United States.

Among other things, Duplantis's decision is a cunning bit of strategy.

If he had sought to represent the United States at the Olympics, Duplantis would have had to finish among the top three vaulters at the Olympic track and field trials in June. One bad day, trouble with his technique or adverse weather conditions would present the risk of having to wait another four years to compete in the Summer Games. Sweden, along with many countries, has a more forgiving Olympic selection process that is not determined by a single trials performance.

A number of top American vaulters have been left heartbroken by a disappointing performance at the trials. Famously, the decathlete Dan O'Brien, who was an Olympic gold-medal favorite in 1992, failed to qualify for the 10-event discipline at the Barcelona Games when he could not clear a height in the pole vault at the Olympic trials in New Orleans. O'Brien recovered to win the gold medal in 1996. Duplantis, who is from a family of elite athletes, all of whom attended Louisiana State University, spent his boyhood summers in his mother's native Sweden, competing for a track and field club there. His mother, Helena, was a heptathlete and volleyball player at LSU.

A vaulting phenom from the age of 7 with dual citizenship, Duplantis had to choose which country to represent in international competitions. In part, he was swayed by wanting to follow in his mother's footsteps. But he also understood the risks of trying to qualify for the Olympics for the United States with its trials format.

"I can't say that wasn't in the back of my



Duplantis, the US-born 20-year-old, will wear the blue and gold uniform of his mother's home country Sweden at the Olympics. AP

mind," Greg Duplantis, Mondo's father and coach, said on Saturday in a telephone interview from Lafayette, La. "Every time, there's a disaster or someone comes up that no one knows about." Greg Duplantis, who was an All-American pole-vaulter at LSU, said most people he had encountered had been fine with Mondo's decision, though "you get a few disgruntled people."

"I'm expecting some backlash for the Olympics," he said. "I don't quite get it. He's following in his mom's footsteps. There shouldn't be anything wrong with that."

Sam Kendrick of Oxford, Miss., the 2016 Olympic bronze medalist and a two-time world champion, told The New York Times in 2017 that Mondo Duplantis's decision was a "very professional way of looking at it."

"I know a lot of people are going to say, 'Why don't you compete for the United States?'" Kendrick said. "But that's not the point of it for him. The point is to jump high and elevate the sport."

On Saturday, Duplantis told the website of track's world governing body that the record was "something that I wanted since I was 3 years old. It's a big year, but it's a good way to start it."

Duplantis can soar higher, says former pole vault record holder

Duplantis can reach even higher heights, said Frenchman Renaud Lavillenie, whose mark the Swede shattered by a centimeter.

"It is completely conceivable, there is no reason why it cannot be in the long term,"

Lavillenie told newspaper L'Equipe when asked if Duplantis might one day clear 6.20 metres. The Frenchman, who was vaulting in Rouen, France, when he heard about Duplantis' record, said he had been expecting it. "I was prepared," he said.

"He did it and it's cool for him."

DUPLANTIS' COMPETITION RECORDS: 2015 World U18 Championships (1st, 5.30 m, Championship Record), 2016 World U20 Championships (3rd, 5.45 m), 2017 European U20 Championships (1st, 5.65m CR), 2018 World U20 Championships (1st, 5.82 m CR), Euro Championships (1st, 6.05 m World U20 Record), 2019 Worlds (2nd, 5.97 m), 2020 World Athletics Indoor Tour (1st, 6.17 m World Record)

THE MONDO FILES

IN THE BLOOD First, the nickname. Mondo means 'world', and Armand was first called that by his father Greg's Italian friend. American Greg is a former pole vaulter with a personal best of 5.80 m and was among the few Americans to jump over 19 ft in his time. Swedish mother Helena was a heptathlete and volleyball player. With a vault pit and runway in their backyard, Armand and elder brothers Andreas and Antoine too took up the pole. While Andreas represented Sweden at youth and junior Worlds, Antoine dropped pole vault for baseball and last year became career hits leader at the Louisiana State University. Armand too flirted with baseball and football before settling for pole vault.

IDOL, RIVAL He broke 2012 Olympic champion Renaud Lavillenie's world record on Saturday, but the relationship goes back seven years, when a 13-year-old Armand queued up to meet Lavillenie for an autograph. His bedroom still has a signed poster, singlet and biography of Lavillenie. The two exchanged Twitter DMs and started training together and competing against each other. "I like sharing things with him, but I'm also learning," the Frenchman said of their association.

BUILT FOR IT According to father Greg, Armand was "really small, skinny and weak". Till age 7, Armand would look enviously at his brothers jumping away in the backyard, ruing his slender frame as he couldn't get a pole to bend for him. His family soon arranged custom poles, and Armand responded by breaking age-group records. He's still filling out his upper frame, but at 5'9 and 79kg, Armand has the speed and technique to bend and control the recoil of poles designed for heavier vaulters.

RETROSTYLE Unlike other vaulters who drive the front knee high and let the trail leg swing upward, Duplantis opts for the retro swing-both-legs ploy to generate momentum, a style used by yesteryear vaulters and their rigid poles made of bamboo and aluminum. Armand's success is down to his fiberglass poles, longer, stiffer and held with a higher grip, than other contemporaries.




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