



JEAN-Philippe Leclaire holds up the front page of L'Équipe.



David COUGHLAN
EXCLUSIVE

It's a photo of Swedish pole vaulter Armand 'Mondo' Duplantis on his way to a world record at the Olympics. The headline reads: 'Le Record Du Mondo'. "That's bingo!" says the deputy editor-in-chief of the famed French sports newspaper. "When people who can't speak French and they get the headline. That's the bingo." It's Thursday afternoon in the south Paris suburb of Boulogne-Billancourt and Leclaire is preparing for the daily editorial conference. Portraits of sporting greats like Alain Prost, Eddy Merckx and Michel Platini line the walls of the corridor.

Production staff are already piecing together the paper and placing completed pages on the wall. So how does the world's greatest sports-only newspaper cover the biggest sporting event in the world? "It's the biggest event we ever had to cover in the history of L'Équipe," says Leclaire. "We have been waiting for it for 100 years, so we had time to prepare. We had a whole century to prepare for it," he adds, laughing. "The only comparison is the 1998 football World Cup. But I think it's bigger than that. "With these Games, we woke up on the first day — it was raining, there was a sabotage on the national rails, so we thought, 'Oh, what kind of hell are we going to go through?'"



BINGO: The latest L'Équipe front page

"But now the worst rivalry we have is with Argentina, since the World Cup in Qatar and the racist chants at the Copa America. "That's the bitterest rivalry I've seen for a long time." One aspect of L'Équipe is their use of sports photography, with a two-page spread given over to a stunning image each day. The cover shot is most important of all. "You can have beautiful pictures online, but to have a cover like this," he says, pointing at the Duplantis cover, "That's the magic of paper."

Image

"We are lucky to be the last French newspaper to have our own staff of photographers. It helps a lot. For us it's very important. "What we wanted to achieve with the paper is to sell a paper that people would like to buy and keep even if they are internet subscribers. "We wanted to conceive it as a kind of souvenir from the Games, that people will keep

the 15 or 16 editions and say, 'Okay I have them and I will look at them in 10 or 20 years.'" François Gille is the photography editor-in-chief at L'Équipe. He has worked



INSTITUTION: A L'Équipe reader on the streets of Paris

We've been waiting 100 years for this, so we were ready

L'ÉQUIPE STAFF PROUD TO IMMORTALISE GAMES

there since 1991 and it's his job to marshal the staff of snappers and find the most suitable images for the paper. "Deadline is about midnight — maybe to 12.30pm for some very last pages," says Gille. "We have 14 photographers at the Games sending in 5,000 or 6,000 pictures per day. "But it has been a fantastic Olympic Games, for Paris and for L'Équipe." He walks downstairs to the basement where he is overseeing the digitising of their photo archives. "The beginning of L'Équipe is 1946, but we have photos from other newspapers that existed before then," he says. Boxes and boxes of glass

Archive

"We have 13 million pictures which documents 100 years in our archive," says Gille. "So far we have digitised five million of these pictures." Gille holds up a photo of

competitors crossing the line of the 100 metres final during the 1920 Olympic Games. "I have worked for L'Équipe since 1991, so more than 30 years, but every day I'm discovering pictures I've never seen before. "We used the digital archive during Covid when there was no live sport — it was a great thing we had this archive. "They are a piece of history. We have to take care of them." He points to a picture of Sean Kelly, but is hesitant at the mention of Thierry Henry's handball. "We have the picture, but I don't want to start a war!" he says, laughing. Back upstairs Leclaire is

viewing some of the early pages. On the walls beside his desk are old front pages about Michel Platini, Johann Cruyff and a framed photo of Don Revie and Bill Shankley leading out their teams for the 1965 FA Cup final. **Election** He has written books about Platini and is a St-Étienne fan with a fondness for Liverpool and Leyton Orient. For two weeks L'Équipe's pages have been filled with French fans waving tricolours, wearing France jerseys and with blue, white and red painted on their faces. It's a stark contrast from just a few weeks ago when Marine

Le Pen's Far Right National Rally party looked set for power after a snap election. "If you go to the US you have all those American flags in the gardens. It's hard to know if it's a Democrat or if it's a Republican," says Leclaire. "But if you have a French flag in a garden in France, there's a very strong chance — apart from times of a World Cup — that it's someone from the right or extreme right. "Because the flag and even the Marseillaise have been confiscated by the nationalists and by the right and the extreme right. "When it comes to sport, like a World Cup, a Euros, all of a sudden everyone is proud

again and everyone waves the tricolour again. Everybody sings the Marseillaise." The front windows of L'Équipe's office were attacked during the build-up to the recent election — a balot that was hugely divisive. **Mood** "I think one of the reasons that people are so happy during this two weeks is that they were so miserable before, because of the politics," he says. "The mood of the country was so down. All of a sudden you have this big event and people have the opportunity to go on the streets, to celebrate together. "I'm not sure it's going to

last. I don't think so. It never lasts. You can't expect much. If you have two or three weeks of happiness, that's all you can expect from a sports event. "It won't solve the problems of the country. The day after it finishes, on Monday morning we will still have problems. "The problems of this country are so deeply rooted that it will take more than medals to solve them unfortunately. "But at least we had a beautiful summer. A beautiful summer beautifully documented in the pages of L'Équipe and it's not over yet. Impossible n'est pas Français. That's the bingo.

NEW HEROES: Nicolas Batum of France after their basketball team beat Germany to reach the Olympics final

'If you have a French flag in a garden in France, there's a very strong chance — apart from times of a World Cup — that it's someone from the right or extreme right'



RARE INSIGHT: Starsport's David Coughlan with L'Équipe deputy editor-in-chief Jean-Philippe Leclaire and (below) enjoying the photo collection



HISTORIC MOMENT: L'Équipe photography editor-in-chief François Gille with a photo from the 1920 100m final



FRIENDS TO FOES: Evans and Murray

WE'RE RIVALS ON THE GREEN

■ Scott TROTTER

ANDY MURRAY has quickly moved on from partnering Dan Evans for Team GB at the Olympics to declare his teammate is now his opponent. The duo formed an emotional partnership during the Paris Games as Murray attempted to fend off retirement long enough to earn a gold medal. Murray and Evans reached the quarter-finals at Roland Garros before being knocked out by American's Tommy Paul and Taylor Fritz. While tears marked their exit, Team GB's entrants enjoyed a rollercoaster journey during their time in the French capital. Evans is set to see a tumble down the world rankings after sacrificing enough ranking points to drop 100 places, to feature in the Olympics alongside Murray. It was a competition that meant a great deal to both players and with the journey over, they are now facing each other in another sport. **Friendly** Away from the Olympic village, the British tennis stars have taken to the golf course for their next competitive endeavour. It wasn't for a friendly round either with Murray taking to Instagram to declare: "Partners last week... opponents today". Before heading home, Murray also kept busy while in Paris. Former teammate Laura Robson revealed he had been hunting down nation's pins that commemorate their attendance at the Olympics. Robson said: "He's taking [collecting pins] seriously. In the athletes' village, he's trying to find the most niche country, the smallest country."