



FRANCE: Team Sky with Britain's Luke Rowe, Wout Poels of the Netherlands, Ireland's Nicolas Roche, Britain's Ian Stannard, Australia's Richie Porte, Leopold Konig of the Czech Republic, Britain's Geraint Thomas, and Britain's Chris Froome, wearing the overall leader's yellow jersey (from front to rear) leads the pack during the Tour de France cycling race. —AP

THOMAS SURVIVES CRASH AS PLAZA WINS 16TH STAGE

GAP: Britain's Geraint Thomas survived a terrifying crash on a hair-raising descent as Ruben Plaza won yesterday's 16th stage of the Tour de France. Chris Froome finished in an elite group of favourites to maintain his 3min 10sec lead over Nairo Quintana but his teammate Thomas came close to disaster on the 201km ride from Bourde-Peage to Gap. Young Frenchman Warren Barguil lost control on a dangerous corner and bumped into Thomas who was knocked over a sheer drop, hitting his head on a lamppost as he went over the edge.

Incredibly, the tough Welshman climbed back onto the road and after a swift change of bikes, he carried on, losing only 38sec by the finish and holding onto his sixth place overall.

"I'm OK, I just hit my head on a lamppost but I'm alright," said the chirpy 29-year-old, who reacted

with typical dry humor. "It was a hard right and I was just following the wheel and then all of a sudden Barguil went into me. I feel alright for now. I guess the doctor will ask me my number and date of birth soon," he added, jokingly claiming to think his name was Chris Froome.

"A nice Frenchman pulled me out but I lost my glasses as well. They don't even make them any more." Barguil blamed the crash on American Tejay Van Garderen, claiming the BMC man had bumped into him before he lost control.

"I'm sorry. Just before the bend, Tejay Van Garderen touched me with his shoulder and my finger slipped off the brake," said the 22-year-old.

But Van Garderen saw things differently. "Warren was trying to come over the top of me. I was trying to keep my position and stay safe," said the 26-year-old, third overall at 3min 32sec.

"It was a matter of who breaks the latest, he (Barguil) was willing to take great risks, he took out Geraint Thomas and almost took out himself."

A French TV commentator following on a motorbike said Thomas looked "groggy" but fine as he remounted. That drama happened almost 20 minutes back from Spaniard Plaza's stage victory as the Sky-led peloton had shown no interest in chasing a 23-man breakaway.

Lampre's Plaza attacked with 18km left on the final climb—an 8.9km-long second-category ascension with an average gradient of 5.6 percent. He crested the summit, 12km from the finish, with around a minute's gap to nine chasers as the breakaway group had splintered.

Peter Sagan led the chase and came home second at 30sec-taking his fifth runners-up spot on a stage this year as his two-year wait for a Tour

victory drags on.

Colombian Jarlinson Pantano was third at 36sec while Eritrean Daniel Teklehaimanot earned his best finish at the Tour, finishing seventh. "It's the most important win of my 15 years as a professional," said the 35-year-old Plaza.

Sagan took the defeat well: "Maybe my time is coming." Behind the breakaway, Van Garderen's BMC team had picked up the pace of the peloton coming into the final climb before Alberto Contador's Tinkoff-Saxo outfit pushed hard on the ascent.

Contador himself attacked near the top of the climb, but Froome managed to reel him back in, only for reigning champion Vincenzo Nibali to take the opportunity to accelerate away himself.

The Italian had eeked out a 15sec gap to the rest of the favourites at the top and by the finish

he had snatched back a morale-boosting 28sec on what has otherwise been a disappointing defence of his title as he sits eighth overall.

Nibali, known for his daredevil descending, was clear of the drama behind him but Thomas showed great bravery in carrying on and only losing 38sec by the finish—an incredible effort given he had to change bikes after clambering back up onto the road.

The big loser, though, was Frenchman Tony Gallopin, who started the day ninth but seemed to lose his bottle on the descent and lost 3min 39sec to drop out of the top 10, with Barguil benefiting.

In the breakaway group, Australian Adam Hansen was the first to strike out for home inside the final 50km before Austrian champion Marco Haller caught him.—AP

YANG OUT TO STOP CUENCA'S QUEST

MACAU: Undefeated "Ik" Yang Lian Hui will on Saturday seek to become only the second Chinese fighter to win a professional world title but to do it will need to prevent Cesar Cuenca's march into the record books. The unheralded Argentine light welterweight has built up a record of 47 wins and no defeats in his home country over a career spanning 13 years.

That puts the number one rated International Boxing Federation contender just one win behind Floyd Mayweather and two off Rocky Marciano's all-time 49-0 record in the pantheon of the world's undefeated fighters.

But against him being mentioned in the same breath as those two ring greats is the fact he has only four times gone the championship distance of 12 rounds and has just two knockouts on his resume.

Saturday will be the first time the man from Chaco, north-eastern Argentina, has fought outside of his home country and he will be up against a knockout specialist in Yang when they face off for the vacant IBF junior welterweight world title at Macau's Cotai Arena.

The explosive puncher from the north-eastern Chinese city of Dalian has stopped his opponents 13 times in an 18-fight undefeated career and battered the seasoned Thai Patomsuk Pathomphong (30-3) in a six-round knockout on his last appearance at the same Macau venue in March. Cuenca (47-0, 2 KOs) is undaunted by Yang and says he deserves to be ranked with the greats, despite detractors saying he lacks the power to knock out his opponents.

"No one ever did me any favours. I earned my number one rating by beating everyone who has been put in front of me," the 34-year-old Cuenca said.

"Lots of fighters claim they train to go the distance but I really do. Yang is going to be in very deep and very uncharted waters." He confidently added that people should be comparing him with Mayweather, who beat another Freddie

Roach-trained fighter Manny Pacquiao on points in May in the richest fight in boxing history.

"I am more Mayweather than Marciano," said Cuenca. "Mayweather has had only two knockout victories over the past 10 years. He fights his fight and he fights to win. That is my philosophy too."

Roach will be absent from Yang's corner Saturday, a long-standing back problem that needs surgery preventing the Hall of Fame trainer making the long trip from Los Angeles to the southern Chinese city. Filling in for Roach will be Australian Justin Fortune—a former heavyweight who once lasted five rounds against the great Lennox Lewis—and he was quick to dismiss Cuenca's chances.

"Only two KOs in 47 fights? Let's face it this guy couldn't break an egg," Fortune told AFP. Yang said he wanted to win the belt for Roach.

"I am sad he cannot be with me now," Yang said. "I want to honor him with this fight. I can't wait to see the look on Freddie's face when I walk into his gym with the belt."

Victory for Yang will make him just the second Chinese fighter to win a professional world title and the first in a major weight category. China's Xiong Zhaozhong currently holds the little-recognised WBC minimum weight (105lb, 48kg) belt.

Former five-division world champion Nonito Donaire (34-3, 22 KOs) from the Philippines and 2012 US Olympian and undefeated super lightweight prospect Jose Ramirez (14-0, 11 KOs) feature in the standout bouts on Saturday's undercard.

"Filipino Flash" Donaire, looking to get back on the world title trail after losing belts in the last two years to the great Guillermo Rigondeaux of Cuba and Jamaica's Nicholas Walters, takes on France's Anthony Settout (20-3, 8 KOs) in a 10-round super bantamweight bout. Ramirez will fight an eight-round super lightweight contest against Japan's Ryusei Yoshida (26-7, 13 KOs).—AFP



TORONTO: Brazil's Natalia Azevedo performs during the rhythmic gymnastics ribbon competition in the Pan Am Games. —AP

US, TEMPERATURES AND TICKET SALES ON PAN AM RISE

TORONTO: The heat and the United States charge up the Pan American Games medal table both continued on Sunday, as officials celebrated a victory by surpassing the one million tickets sold mark.

The United States, who passed Canada on the medal table on Saturday, padded their lead by adding eight gold medals to push their total to 59 and 160 overall as the hosts settled into second on 54 gold and 142 overall medals.

Brazil are third followed by Colombia, who surged past Cuba and Mexico into fourth courtesy of three gold medals on the golf course.

Having spent the first week of the July 10-26 multi-sport fest leading the medal standings, Canada gave locals plenty of reason to open their wallets and come out and cheer.

The Americans, however, cashed in on Sunday striking triple gold at the canoeing venue and double gold in rhythmic gymnastics and equestrian eventing. With temperatures again nudging into the mid-30s Celsius (95 Fahrenheit), Canada got the day off to a sizzling start with Evan Dunfee winning the men's 20km race walk ahead of compatriot Inaki Gomez while Mexico's Maria Gonzalez took the women's title. No athlete was hotter, however, than American Laura Zeng who added hoop and ball apparatus gold to her all-around rhythmic gymnastics

crown. The 15-year-old could add two more titles to her haul on Monday with the club and ribbon finals. "I want to become the best world-class gymnast that I can become," said Zeng, who won a bronze in the individual all-around at last year's Youth Olympic Games. "As much as I love getting the medals, I haven't really been focusing on medals. It's more about myself and showing what I can do." The high point of the day for Canada came on the trampoline where 2012 Olympic champion Rosie MacLennan successfully defended her Pan Am gold and Keegan Soehn won the men's.

Canada ended the day with a dramatic 10th inning 7-6 decision over the United States to defend their Pan Am baseball title.

Canada and the United States will also play for women's basketball gold after contrasting semi-final wins. Linnæe Harper drained two clutch free throws with 7.7 seconds left to give the United States a 65-64 comeback win over Cuba while Canada demolished Brazil 91-63.

Colombia ruled at the golf course sweeping all three gold medals, Marcelo Roza winning the men's title, Marijo Uribe the women's and the team gold. Argentina cruised to two golds on the final day of the sailing competition, while Guatemala, Ecuador and Puerto Rico also clinched titles.—Reuters



TORONTO: Miles Evans, of the United States, spikes the ball past Ruben Mora Romero, of Nicaragua, during a beach volleyball game at the Pan Am Games yesterday. —AP



'Ik' Yang Lian Hui