

WOMAN TRAILBLAZER HOPES TO BE FIRST OF MANY

WASHINGTON: Jen Welter caused a stir when she accepted an invitation by Floyd Mayweather's camp to attend what he insists was the last fight of his career at the weekend.

Some said she should not associate with a man who, while being the best boxer of his generation, is equally notorious for a string of cases of domestic violence. But then Welter is used to confounding the critics. This summer she became what is believed to be the first woman to hold a coaching position of any kind in the National Football League.

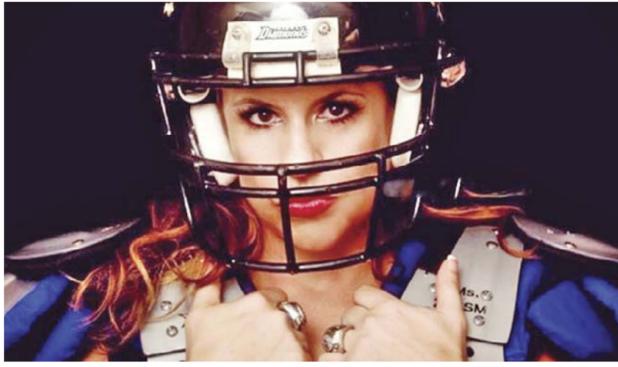
Like boxing, NFL is a notoriously male-dominated sport and one which in recent times has hit the headlines for a series of unsavory incidents of domestic violence against women. Welter, 37, who was hired by the Arizona Cardinals as an assistant coaching intern for training camp and preseason to work with inside linebackers, believes in creating change from within—hence why she accepted the Mayweather invitation.

"Hopefully what I did was to create an opportunity to open the door where other women will come through and do not only what I've done, but even more so," Welter told AFP, reflecting on her trailblazing experience within the NFL.

Welter, who says she was given a "great" reception from the first time that she entered the Cardinals locker room, is keen to stress that domestic violence is a wider problem and not something only the NFL has to grapple with.

And she makes clear—as he did—that Cardinals coach Bruce Arians brought her in on merit, not to fight some greater cause. "And yet when we see those problems (of sportsmen committing violence against women), what we can do is create change and that's what you hope," she said. "When those people do it we have the opportunity to say that's not ok and we have the opportunity to change it."

GIVING A VISION
Welter may have been the first woman



Jen Welter

coach in the NFL, but she is not the lone female making headway in US sports, though their numbers remain minuscule. San Antonio Spurs assistant coach Becky Hammon made worldwide head-

lines when she guided the NBA team to a summer league championship in Las Vegas. Speaking on the eve of Mayweather's supposed swan song in the same city, Welter rejected the notion that

she was a one-off in the NFL. "No way, no way," said Welter, who holds a PhD in psychology. "What I did gives girls and women who love football a place for the very first time."

"It gives them a vision: they see that they can grow up and be in the NFL. It's a dream that's never been there before. There are lots of girls growing up with football and they now have opportunities to see it in a different way."

Welter, a Florida native who has been involved in women's football for 15 years, is ambitious that her Cardinals experience is just a first foray into the NFL—not only for her, but for other women too.

"I have a lot of things left to do. I hope to get my next job with an NFL team, but it is step by step," she said. "Any time you change the expectation of what is possible, of course there are going to be a lot of questions and I'm honored to be the one to answer those questions and be able to say: yes it was a first and now there can be a next." — AFP

DAY FINDS THE MISSING PIECE

LAKE FOREST: Two wins in seven years on the PGA Tour doesn't compute for a player with the talent and work ethic of Jason Day. It was simple enough to attribute his slow start to injuries, and that would be accurate with one stipulation. It wasn't all physical.

The most fragile part of his body might have been between the ears. "I always thought I had the skills to play and win at the highest level and be competitive," Day said. "But mentally, I think the last piece of the puzzle was to really believe. I mean, it's easy to say, 'Just go ahead and believe in yourself.' But how do you believe in yourself when you don't know what to believe in? That was the hardest part for me." The 27-year-old Australian seems to have figured it out.

A weakness has become a strength, and Day is becoming a force in the new era of golf. His victory at The Barclays to start the PGA Tour's postseason was his second in a row and fourth of the year. It not only moved Day to No. 1 in the FedEx Cup, but it also put him in position to reach No. 1 in the world. Day still has to navigate past Rory McIlroy and Jordan Spieth, which won't be easy, though he is getting closer. Instead of having to win this week at Conway Farms, a runner-up finish might be enough to reach the top. And to think it all started with what looked like another failure.

Day had a 30-foot birdie putt on the 18th hole at St. Andrews to join the playoff and he left it short. It was his second straight major with a share of the 54-hole lead. It was another close call. Only this time, frustration gave way to a sense of peace.

"All those major championships I lost, it was built-up scar tissue," Day said. "Scar tissue can be bad. But it can also heal and be good for you. No matter what happened that whole week, I felt calm. I didn't play flawless golf, but I didn't make mistakes. There was no stress. I was patient with myself. No matter what happened, I was letting it unfold and not forcing the issue."

That was different from how he felt when was runner-up at the Masters in 2011, and at Augusta National two years later when he had a two-shot lead standing on the 16th tee and finished two shots out of a playoff, or

when he bogeyed the last hole at Merion and finished two shots behind.

"I had confidence, but I didn't have the 'I'm going to go out there and beat everyone here' confidence," Day said.

Spieth was surprised to hear Day didn't truly believe he could be the best until this summer. Spieth saw the full potential of Day at Whistling Straits, when they played together in the final round and Spieth could never catch up. "I would argue Jason believed in himself every time he stepped on the first tee," Spieth said. "I think maybe he just had a bit of doubts as it got into the heat on the last round ... where at certain times he'd just have a little bit of self-doubt for tiny stretches. And if you do that, you're not going to win the tournament. So for him to say he just started truly believing in himself around July, I would argue a player of his caliber has that self-belief all the time. He just may have lost it here and there."

"Now, he doesn't lose it." Players go through hot streaks all the time. What separates great players is being able to sustain it. That's what Spieth has done this year, and pretty much all three of his years on tour. Spieth has four wins, including two majors. He has 10 other top-10 finishes, which make his consecutive missed cuts startling, but little more than that. Adam Scott began his climb to No. 1 in the world a year ago by making sure he was a regular on the leaderboard at just about every event. McIlroy still has a few valleys, though his peaks are bordering on Mt. Everest.

And that's where Day is headed. All because he finally figured out how to combine a little self-belief with his powerful swing and relentless work habits. "I feel like everything is a lot clearer to me," Day said. "As a junior and an amateur, I'd walk onto the putting greens and feel like I was the guy to beat. And it took me a long time to really try and feel that way. Obviously, I'm not saying that I feel that way all the time here, but especially when I was playing some really good golf at the PGA, The Barclays, I felt like I was the guy to beat." "That's the mentality I have to get to all the time," he said. "And I think once I get to that, then I'll be a lot more consistent." — AP



LILLE: Czech Republic's Tomas Satoransky (left) dunks a basket, while his teammate Jan Vesely (second right) and Serbia's Nemanja Nedovic (second left) and Nemanja Bjelica (right) look on, during the EuroBasket European Basketball Championship quarterfinal match. — AP

FRANCE DEFEAT LATVIA, TO PLAY SPAIN IN SEMIFINALS

LILLE: Tony Parker scored 18 points to pace defending champion France to an 84-70 victory over Latvia and set up a showdown with Spain in the semifinals of the European basketball championship. Pau Gasol scored 27 points and Nikola Mirotic added 18 to book Spain's place in the semifinals with a 73-71 victory over Greece. France took the title away from Spain two years ago in Slovenia when it beat the Spaniards in the semis before defeating Lithuania in the final.

Parker scored nine points in a row at the end of the second quarter and inspired France in the third as it pulled away. A steal by Parker, then an alley-oop pass for Rudy Gobert's dunk gave France a 10-point lead and Parker then made four straight free throws to put France up by 13, its biggest lead until then.

Parker finished with six assists and France cruised in the fourth after building up its lead to 17. Boris Diaw added 14 points for France and Gobert had 13 points and six rebounds.

Kristaps Janicenoks led Latvia with 16 points.

Spain guard Sergio Rodriguez contributed three points from free throws down the stretch as the two teams stayed close together throughout the match. Previously undefeated in six games, Greece had 12 points and 17 rebounds from Giannis Antetokounmpo, who also had a pair of late turnovers.

"The most important thing was our defense," Mirotic said. "We've been playing great offense the entire tournament but we knew everybody had to step it up on defense."

Spain has never finished lower than fourth in the past eight EuroBasket tournaments and won the title in 2009 and 2011, before finishing third in 2013. "We managed the tempo for most of the game," Spain coach Sergio Scariolo said. "I am very pleased with how we came back ..." Neither team led by more than nine points, and Spain trailed by two at the end of the third quarter. Mirotic made two

free throws to give Spain a six-point lead as Greece center Yanis Bourousis fouled out with 3:30 remaining.

Rodriguez made one of two free throws to make it a six-point game again with 1:05 left. Greece star guard Vassilis Spanoulis, who went 4-for-14 from the field and finished with 10 points and five assists, missed a jumper but Nick Calathes stole the ball and made a layup. Gasol made one free throw on the next possession, Calathes hit a 3 but then fouled out and Rodriguez made two free throws to make it 72-68 with 13 seconds left. Calathes finished with 14 points.

Spanoulis threw an air ball on a 3-point attempt, Antetokounmpo grabbed the rebound and fed Kostas Sloukas, who made a 3. But Gasol got fouled and made one of two free throws with two seconds left for the final score, and had only two points in the final quarter. Gasol, the tournament's leading scorer, also had nine rebounds. — AP



Jason Day

IOC UNVEILS FIVE CANDIDATES FOR 2024 SUMMER GAMES

Los Angeles is in the running to host a third Olympics while Hamburg, Paris, Rome and Budapest will battle to bring the multi-sport extravaganza back to Europe after the five cities were officially unveiled as candidates to host the 2024 Summer Games yesterday.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC), which will select the winning bid in 2017, announced the final list after the deadline for submissions ended at midnight (central European time) on Tuesday.

"The IOC welcomes five outstanding cities to this strong competition," IOC President Thomas Bach said in a conference call. Bach added that Azerbaijan's Baku, which hosted the inaugural European Games in June, had also considered running and held talks with the IOC before deciding to wait for a possible 2028 bid. After a disappointing campaign for the 2022 Winter Games, where just two candidates—Kazakhstan's Almaty and eventual winner Beijing—stayed in the race after four others pulled out due to financial concerns or a lack of public support,

the IOC is keen to restore the image of the Olympics as a lucrative prospect. It adopted a series of reforms under the banner 'Agenda 2020' which were aimed at making it easier to bid for, and cheaper to host, the Olympics.

In a bidding race predicted to be the most hotly contested for at least a decade, Los Angeles, the United States' second choice after Boston pulled out amid fears over cost overruns, is hoping to stage the Games for a third time after 1932 and 1984.

Paris, which had a failed bid for the 2012 Olympics, is eager to host a centennial Summer Games after the city staged the event for a second and last time in 1924. It is being seen as an early frontrunner along with Los Angeles.

Rome, the 1960 hosts, had briefly campaigned for the 2020 Olympics before the government pulled the plug over budget concerns, while Budapest is seeking to join Russia as the only Eastern European countries to land the Summer Games.

Hamburg, which will hold a referendum in

November on whether the city actually wants the Games, is proposing an inner-city Olympics with venues within walking distance for athletes after it beat out Berlin in Germany's bid race.

The German port has never hosted the Games before. "What is important for the IOC is that we want to send athletes to cities where they are welcome, where the population is clearly supporting the Olympic Games and is welcoming the athletes," Bach said when asked if all cities should hold a referendum. "How the candidate cities are showing this culture of welcome ... is up to them." Bach also ruled out suggestions that an informal rotation of continents may influence the vote in two years' time, with the United States not having staged a Summer Games since 1996 while Europe held the 2012 Olympics in London. "I do not think this plays a major role," Bach said. "We have now three Olympic Games in a row in Asia (Pyeongchang 2018, Tokyo 2020, Beijing 2022). So this shows that this informal rotation which we always saw in the past is losing importance." — AP



KUALA LUMPUR: In this Monday, Aug. 3, 2015 file photo, International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach speaks at a press conference. — AP