Froome keeping eye on key stage

PAU: Chris Froome believes the 12th stage of the Tour de France will be key to claiming a fourth overall title. The 32-year-old Briton leads the race by 18 seconds from Fabio Aru but the overall contenders face a daunting task ahead of them. "It's a tough day, over 200km, we go over some big climbs -the Port de Bales is the most significant climb of the day, the third from final one," said Froome. "We go down just before the final climb... and then 4km up to the finish." It's a 214.5km Pyrenean mountain stage from Pau to Peyragudes that includes six categorised climbs, with riders expected to spend more than six hours in the saddle.

Five years ago Froome finished second to Spain's Alejandro Valverde on the 17th stage finish at Peyragudes, a stage which Froome believes he could have won had he not been ordered to wait for his then-team leader Bradley Wiggins. "It's a bit different to 2012 this time. The finish is on an airstrip, an uphill ascent in a 20-kilometre stage," he added.

"It's savage! If someone blows over those last few hundred metres, there could be some significant time gaps," Froome said.

July 13 also marks an important anniversary in British cycling as it is 50 years since the death of Tom Simpson during the 1967 Tour on Mont Ventoux due to a mix of heat exhaustion and a cocktail of performance-enhancing drugs. Simpson's attention and a cocktail of performance-enhancing drugs. "Certainly Tom Simpson left a legacy on which I'd like to believe a lot of us British guys racing in the Tour de France are going to continue to build upon," added the race leader.

Froome has unfinished business with this stage finish and he admitted to having felt "frustration" in 2012 when ordered to wait for Wiggins rather than chase down Valverde. He missed out on the stage win by just 19 seconds and certainly appeared to be strong enough to catch the Spaniard.

"There are only two uphill finishes now... so it's certainly appeared to be strong enough to catch the Spaniard. But this time he's more concerned with holding onto the yellow jersey. "There are only two uphill finishes now... so it's really going to be one of the key stages to this year's race," added the race leader.

But that might give third-placed Romain Bardet of France the chance to make up his own 51sec deficit. And he believes the stage is ideal for him. "There are many queen stages at the Tour de France, and this is an important stage because this mountain stage with a summit finish," said the 27-year-old AG2R leader. —AFP

Pacquiao to 'continue to fight', Horn seeks rematch

MANILA: Manny Pacquiao says he will "continue to fight" as the new World Boxing Organization welterweight champion Jeff Horn called for a rematch to validate the Australian's stunning victory. Philippines legend Pacquiao, winner of an unprecedented world title in different weight divisions, defiantly suggested he was not ready to hang up his gloves after controversially losing to Horn in Brisbane on July 2. "I love this sport and until the passion is gone, I will continue to fight for God, my family, my fans and my country," the 38-year-old declared on social media.

A bloodied picture of his face accompanied the posts on his Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts and appeared to open the way for a rematch. The posts were made Wednesday as Horn was telling reporters in the United States he was the deserving winner of the bout but that only a rematch will settle the controversy.

Horn stunned the boxing world with a unanimous 12-round decision over Pacquiao, a hotly contested result that triggered an outcry in the Philippines. The WBO moved to-quell the controversy by re-scoring the fight with a different set of judges-who found that Horn won by seven rounds to five. "I kind of feel it has been put to bed and that I definitely won the fight because it has been recorded," Horn told AFP in Los Angeles. "But people are always going to have their opinions and you're not going to be able to change those. So I guess the only way you're going to be able to do is to have a rematch. And I think I would do better a second time."

Pacquiao's camp did not immediately respond to AFP on Thursday when asked about Horn's challenge. — AFP

Arum promoted infamous bout between Muhammad Ali, Inoki

LOS ANGELES: There are many in the boxing world who are appalled by the prospect of Floyd Mayweather and Conor McGregor climbing into a ring next month.

Bob Arum is, emphatically, not one of them. After more than half a century in the ring, he believes that only a fight on his back kicking out at Ali. There were one round where he stood up and Ali threw a punch and he missed him by two feet. Two feet below Ali was frustrat-ed. But Inoki staggered back into the ropes like he'd been hit. It was ridiculous." According to Arum, the plan had ini-tially been to concoct a stage-managed conclusion to the fight that would have kept all sides happy. US wrestling promot-er Vince McMahon came up with a narra-tive that would have seen Inoki declare the winner while Ali could claim a moral victory. "Vince figured out a scenario, which I didn't take that seriously, where Ali would get Inoki on the ropes," Arum said. "And Inoki as a professional wrestler, would have a razor in his mouth, and he would cut his own eyebrow, so he'd be bleeding and everything. And Ali would have him on the ropes and ask the referee to stop the fight, and the referee would refuse. "And eventually Ali would turn his back on Inoki and plead with the referee to stop the fight. At which point Inoki would jump on Ali and get him to the canvas and the referee would count '1-2-3' out and declare Inoki the winner. "And then Ali was supposed to yell 'It's another Pearl Harbor!' But Ali got spooked when he got there and he wouldn't go through with it. "So after that we spent two weeks trying to figure out what the rules would be. And we couldn't come up with anything." —AFP

Boxing

TOKYO: This file photo taken on June 04, 2016 shows Japanese parliamentarian and mixed martial artist Antonio Inoki, an opponent of former US boxing great Muhammad Ali in 1976 (background), speaking at a press conference at a hotel in Tokyo following the news of Ali's death. —AFP

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BAD FOR BOXING? -

Memories of Tokyo perhaps explain why Arum is unwilling to join the legions of critics who have disparaged Mayweather and McGregor August 26 fight as being "bad for boxing." "Mayweather-McGregor will make a lot of money for the people involved," Arum said. "The idea of whether its good for boxing is sort of irrelevant. I don't even know what 'Good or bad for boxing' means. It really has nothing to do with boxing as it carries on. "It's a spectacle. And people will either watch it or they won't. And that's why those kind of questions bother me because nobody is putting a gun to any-body's head. If you want to buy the fight and pay the $100 to watch it on pay-per-view then you do, if you don't, you don't. It's the free market. And the free market should be able to exist without people telling them that it's good for boxing or not good for boxing. Let them do it."

"But at the same time, do I think it's going to be a real fight? No I don't." Arum also had a warning for anyone expecting to see Mayweather risk trading blows with McGregor, predicting that the 40-year-old former welterweight king would opt for the sort of caggy style which marked his fight with Manny Pacquiao in 2015. —AFP

Friday, July 14, 2017