

## Sports

# Thomas wins WGC-Bridgestone Invitational in a dominant style

## Mellroy, Poulter, Day unable to mount challenge

**OHIO:** Winning the WGC-Bridgestone Invitational on Sunday had put Justin Thomas in a "great place mentally", with the timing perfect as he gears up to defend the PGA Championship title. Thomas showed his game and mind are both firing as he stayed clear of the field for a four-stroke victory in Akron, Ohio, on Sunday. Thomas started the final round with a three-shot cushion and was never seriously challenged, a one-under-par 69 more than enough to clinch his first World Golf Championships event and ninth PGA Tour title.

He finished at 15-under 265 at Firestone, while fellow American Kyle Stanley carded 68 for second place on 11 under. World number one Dustin Johnson and Dane Thorbjorn Olesen shot 64 and tied for third on 10 under. "I take a lot of pride in how I played today," Thomas told reporters. "I was very nervous going in. "With a three-shot lead I knew I needed to play well but I had a little bit of wiggle room. "I was able to dwell on past ... experience. "My goal today I was trying to get to 18 under, because I knew if I got to that I didn't think anyone would catch me. I played well enough to do that but didn't make many putts."

The victory was especially special for Thomas, in

front of his grandparents. Grandfather Paul played in the 1960 PGA Championship at Firestone. "They don't get to come out very often any more. This is my first PGA Tour win with them here, so it's pretty cool," the 25-year-old said after joining Dustin Johnson and Bubba Watson as three-times winners on the tour this year. He held steady on a day when the three players who started closest to the lead all fell apart. Rory McIlroy made three straight bogeys around the turn, carded 73 and finished seven shots behind, while Ian Poulter putted uncharacteristically poorly and was never a factor after four bogeys in the first seven holes.

A 74 left Poulter tied for 10th with Australian Jason Day, eight strokes off the pace. Day crept within two shots after three successive birdies from the 10th hole, only to drop five shots in the next five holes and shoot 73. The championship moves to Memphis next year, ending a long run at Firestone. "I'm glad I finally played well around here, just in time for it to leave," said Thomas, who will head to St. Louis brimming with confidence for the PGA Championship, which starts on Thursday at Bellerive. "I'm in a great place mentally right now. I was so patient and calm all week." — Reuters



OHIO: Justin Thomas plays his shot from the eighth tee during the World Golf Championships-Bridgestone Invitational - Final Round at Firestone Country Club South Course in Akron, Ohio. —AFP

## 'Good times' returning to Euro athletics

**BERLIN:** The European Athletics Championships, which were set to kick off in Berlin on Monday, will be the "strongest ever seen" and will help bring the "good times" back to an ailing sport, according to European Athletics president Svein-Arne Hansen. The 24th edition of the 84-year-old event, which for the first time will come under the umbrella of the new multi-sport European Championships being co-hosted by Glasgow and Berlin, comes with the sport trying to emerge from a grim period. Yet Hansen, the 72-year-old Norwegian who was the meet director at Oslo's Bislett Games, said the Championships could help restore credibility to a sport disfigured by doping problems.

The event features seven reigning Olympic champions, 15 world champions and 34 victors from the last championships in Amsterdam two years ago. "I think it's the strongest championships we have ever seen," Hansen said. There will again be no Russian team in Berlin with their national federation still suspended from international competition over state-sponsored doping, even though the IAAF have said they have made "significant" improvement in key areas. A group of 29 Russians will compete as 'Authorised Neutral Athletes' in Berlin after satisfying IAAF requirements.

"Athletics in the world is very much coming out of that dark period with Russia," Hansen said. "We don't want the cheating. The Russian athletes who will be in competition in Berlin are clean." He believes that Berlin's historic Olympic stadium that hosted a successful world championships in 2009 featuring Usain Bolt in his world record-breaking pomp now has the chance to showcase "new stars" and attractive plotlines. Among them are the outlandish prospect of Norway's three Ingebrigtsen brothers - 27-year-old Henrik, Filip (25) and Jakob (17) - sweeping the medals in the 1,500 meters.

There should be a sprint battle to relish in the women's 100 meters between Dutchwoman Dafne Schippers, bidding for a third successive title, against Britain's brilliant Dina Asher-Smith, the reigning 200m champion. Norway's world champion Karsten Warholm launches his 400m hurdles bid on Monday but will then also attempt the most unlikely double over the flat 400. The men's 100m could top the bill in the stadium where Jesse Owens and Bolt thrived, featuring a quartet who have dipped under 10 seconds this season-Britain's Zharnel Hughes, France's Jimmy Vicaut, Italy's Filippo Tortu and Turkey's Jak Ali Harvey. — Reuters

## Germany target Euro domination

**BERLIN:** Johannes Vetter headlines a strong German team that will bid to dominate the European Athletics Championships at Berlin's Olympic stadium this week, while Norway's Karsten Warholm has lined up a shot at a rare 400m/400m hurdles double. Germany, boasting a squad of 128 athletes, will eye a potential sweep in the men's javelin given they can start with world champion Vetter, newly-crowned German champion Andreas Hofmann and Rio Olympic gold medalist Thomas Roehele. Estonia's Magnus Kirt (89.75m) and Czech Republic's Jakub Vadlejch (89.02m) will be looking to challenge the German triumvirate.

"They (the Germans) can all throw over 92 meters, so I'm looking forward to seeing that," said Germany's David Storl, the multi-medalled shot putter seeking a fourth successive European title. Storl is one of five reigning European champions representing the host nation, alongside Christina Schwanitz (shot put), Max Hess (triple jump), Cindy Roleder (100m hurdles) and Gesa Felicitas Krause (3000m steeplechase). More medal hopes for Germany also lie in the men's discus. Olympic champion Christoph Harting is joined by Olympic bronze medalist Daniel Jasinski and older brother Robert, who famously won the world title in the same stadium in 2009, in his farewell to major championships competition. —AFP

## Kuwait figure skating team wins five medals in Asian tournament

**BANGKOK:** Kuwait's female figure skating team won four gold and one silver medals in the second day of the weeklong Asian tournament held in Thailand. Tala Al-Kharjy won a gold medal in the drama section, whereas Taiba Al-Atwan won a gold medal in the beta category. Aljoud Al-Kharjy and Fatima Al-Yousif won the gold medals in the gamma category, while Futoun Al-Atwan won a silver medal in the solo category. "What has been achieved today was the result of joint efforts by the management of the club and the athletes," said Director of the Kuwait Winter Games Club Salem Al-Ajmi in a statement to KUNA. "The strong training camp, which was held in the Czech Republic with the support of the Public Authority for Sport (PAS), reflected positively on the results of players in the tournament so far," he stressed. — KUNA



## Russian women eclipsed in apparatus events at Euros

**GLASGOW:** Russia's gymnasts dominated the women's team event at the European Championships but none of them were able to strike gold in the individual apparatus events on Sunday. Hungary's Boglarka Devai won the vault, Belgium's Nina Derwael successfully defended her asymmetric bars title, Dutch Olympic champion Sanne Wevers prevailed on the balance beam and

French starlet Melanie de Jesus was victorious on the floor. Angelina Melnikova, the outstanding performer in Russia's win on Friday, was the only member of the victorious team to win an apparatus medal, taking silver in the vault and bronze on the asymmetric bars at the SSE Hydro arena.

The 18-year-old Devai burst into tears after Melnikova, the last to compete, failed to overhaul her outstanding mark of 14.349 and it dawned on her that she had become the first Hungarian woman to win the European vault title for 20 years. World bronze medalist Derwael, also 18, took the gold on the bars with a routine that earned her an outstanding 14.733 mark ahead of Sweden's silver medalist Jonna Adlerteg (14.533). The 26-year-old Wevers, the first Dutch female gymnast ever to win Olympic gold, won on the

beam (13.900) a decade after taking a World Cup title in Glasgow. After reaching her peak in Rio, Wevers admitted it had been a difficult challenge to get back to her best in Glasgow.

"It has been hard. I really had to get obsessed with gymnastics again, to just completely focus on my goals. I managed to do so and I think today it all came out," she said. "It's fantastic to win this title and of course the bronze medal in the team final." De Jesus, one of the rising forces in the sport and all-around bronze medalist at the 2017 Europeans, produced a brilliant routine on the floor to record a mark of 13.766 and grab a gold to go with her silver with the French team. She finished ahead of Romania's Denisa Golgota (13.600), who also won bronze in the vault, and Belgium's Axelle Klinckhaert (13.400). — Reuters

## Pom-pom girls and kiss cams: Badminton gets edgy to win fans

**NANJING:** Pom-pom girls strut their stuff, pop music reverberates around the arena and a "kiss cam" trains its sights on the next unsuspecting couple. Sounds like a basketball or baseball match? Think again: this is badminton, and probably not as many imagined it. It is all part of an attempt by the sport's governing body to attract and keep new fans, the younger the better.

"Increasingly we see ourselves as part of the entertainment business and not only the sports-entertainment business," Thomas Lund, secretary general of the Badminton World Federation (BWF), said. "That's a conscious choice... We are competing for people's time and attention - on television, on social media, online," the Dane said on the sidelines of the World Championships in Nanjing, China. "We want to engage them in badminton and make them think badminton." For spectators, that means more than just loud music and the fancy spotlights that rake over the audience between matches.

It is also the thudding "heartbeat" sound that plays to the crowd during a video decision review, ratcheting up the tension, and players walking onto court like rock stars. "The big thing for us at the moment is to ensure that it is not really about the court or the surroundings, it is really about the players," said Lund, a former Olympian in the sport. "It is about... how you present the players, these players that people think of as stars, present them as stars. "It's a theatre thing." The notorious "kiss cam", when couples in the crowd are flashed up on the big screen and encouraged to smooch, was in full effect in Nanjing, where Japan's Kento Momota was crowned men's champion and Spain's Carolina Marin won the women's title.



NANJING: Dancers perform during the badminton World Championships in Nanjing, Jiangsu province. — AFP

### More money

Badminton - popular in Asia and bits of Europe but a niche sport in many countries - is "growing as a sport on many different levels", according to Lund. The BWF has attracted new sponsors, notably global banking heavyweight HSBC, and there is more prize money for players, he said. For the first time, there is a handful of semi-professional referees and later umpires too. Getting children interested, whether as spectators or players, is a key plank of the Kuala Lumpur-based BWF's drive to make badminton more popular and find the stars of the future. "It's about getting a racquet into their hand and keeping it in there," said Lund. To that end, the BWF has a schools program in 132 countries. Nobody is pretending that badminton will rival football for global popularity, but the BWF believes there is plenty of room to grow.

### More competition

At the London 2012 Olympics, China cleaned up, winning all five titles. But those days of Chinese domination have gone, even if the hosts did win the mixed and men's doubles titles when the World Championships wrapped up on Sunday. Japan took gold in the women's doubles to go with Momota's singles title. China's somewhat waning powers can only be good for badminton's popularity — who wants to see the same country win everything? "But the good thing is that it is not because China have become worse, it's that the others have got better, we have seen a rise in standard," said Lund. "Japan are fantastic, India are fantastic, Thailand, Chinese Taipei (Taiwan), the Spain story with Carolina (Marin), Denmark still hanging on, which is good for the sport. "It has become more diverse." — AFP