

SHARAPOVA OUT OF QATAR OPEN

DOHA: Maria Sharapova has withdrawn from the Qatar Open tournament to be held later this month due to an injury to her left forearm, organisers announced yesterday. It is the second time the world number six has pulled out of a tournament this season because of the same injury. Earlier this year, Sharapova also had to withdraw from her intended season opener, the Brisbane International. "Unfortunately, I will not be able to play the Qatar Open because of my left forearm injury," the 28-year-old said in statement released by Qatar Tennis. "I would like to wish the tournament and all the great fans in Doha a great week of tennis and I hope to see them next year."

Sharapova has won in Qatar twice—in 2005 and 2008. This year she was meant to be part of a strong line-up in Doha in a tournament featuring number one seed Serena Williams, Simona Halep and Petra Kvitová. Also there will be surprise Australian Open winner Angelique Kerber. If seeding goes to plan Kerber and Williams will meet again in the final in Doha, just 28 days after their clash in Melbourne. This year's Qatar Open will be played between February 21 and 27 and is the 14th time the tournament has been held.



TOULON FORWARD MANOA OUT FOR THREE MONTHS

PARIS: Toulon's US international forward Samu Manoa is to undergo an operation on his injured left knee and will be out for around three months, coach Bernard Laporte said yesterday. The news is a blow for the Top 14 giants, coming just a day after Irish lock Paul O'Connell announced his retirement from all rugby through injury without ever having donned a Toulon shirt. Manoa, who arrived in Toulon from Northampton in the summer, injured his knee in the 29-21 friendly defeat by the Sharks on Friday, having previously sustained an injury in December. The 30-year-old will miss several league games as well as the quarter-finals of the European Champions' Cup and possibly the semi-finals. Toulon, the three-time defending European champions, currently only have Jocelino Suta, Romain Taofifenua, Thibault Lassalle and Konstantin Mikautadze in the lock department, the latter two having also picked up injuries against the Sharks. For that reason, Toulon will look at taking on a medical joker to plug the gap left by Manoa, Laporte said. — AFP

HOEWEDES EXTENDS SCHALKE DEAL

BERLIN: Germany international and Schalke captain Benedikt Hoewedes has shown some faith in the Royal Blues by signing a three-year contract extension until 2020, it was announced yesterday. The 27-year-old, who along with Manuel Neuer and Philipp Lahm was one of only three Germany players involved in each minute of the seven games in winning the 2014 World Cup, has played for Schalke since 2001. Interestingly, there is no early-release clause in his new contract should Hoewedes be lured away from Gelsenkirchen by one of Europe's top clubs in the future. "I signed the contract with a thumping heart," beamed Hoewedes in extending his stay with fourth-placed Schalke, who are nicknamed 'the miners' due to the Ruhr valley's industrial history. "Schalke is a great club with awesome fans and I am very grateful to them that they trained me up in the 'miners' forge' and made it possible for me to make the break through in the Bundesliga. "They also showed some trust by making me captain at such a young age." Hoewedes says the young Schalke team has plenty of potential and is very ambitious, "I want to continue playing an active role in their future". The Royal Blues' director of sport Horst Heldt said he is delighted that Hoewedes had shown the club some faith. — AFP



This handout photo released by the Youth Information Service (YIS)/IOC shows athletes in action during the Speed Skating training session before the Lillehammer 2016 Winter Youth Olympic Games yesterday. — AFP

BIG-WAVE SURFERS GATHER IN HAWAII FOR PRESTIGIOUS EVENT

HALEIWA: "Eddie would go." That's the mantra of the Quiksilver big wave surf competition in memory of Eddie Aikau, a Native Hawaiian surf legend who became famous for riding monster waves and saving hundreds of lives as Waimea Bay's first official lifeguard.

For the first time in six years, the surf conditions on the North Shore of Oahu are expected

to meet the organizers' strict minimum requirements on Wednesday, with waves of around 40-feet tall. Organizers and competitors alike wait and watch each year, inspecting the ocean for the perfect conditions to arrive before announcing the competition will go on. This year, they announced on Monday that Wednesday's conditions are expected to meet

the event standards and provide hours of worthy big waves.

The Quiksilver In Memory of Eddie Aikau event began in 1984, but there have only been eight times the conditions have allowed surfers to actually compete.

According to the National Weather Service in Honolulu, the swell that is approaching the islands this week is being fueled in part by the ongoing El Nino conditions in the region. Though Hawaii gets large swells every winter, El Nino is giving the jet stream extra energy to produce more big swells than normal.

"It has taken us six years to pull the trigger, but this is the first swell we have seen that is truly lining up as an Eddie swell," said the event's director, Glen Moncata, in a statement Monday. According to organizers, however, the event is about much more than just surfing. Event spokeswoman and longtime friend of the Aikau family Jodi Wilmott told The Associated Press in a telephone interview Tuesday that while there is a prize for the winner of the competition, the surfers involved are really there to honor the legacy and generous spirit of Eddie. "The surfers invited to this event absolutely

understand the prestige of being invited," Wilcott said. "It's about coming together to honor the most famous big-wave rider there has ever been and to do that basically at the Mecca of surfing." As a North Shore lifeguard, Aikau is credited with saving hundreds of lives from the dangerous ocean surf of Oahu's North Shore, and he is said to have never had a fatality while on duty. He was a guardian of the bay and any other body of water he visited, Wilcott said, and fittingly so as he was a direct descendant of a Hawaiian high priest named Hewahewa, who was given the task of watching over the Waimea Valley long before Eddie arrived.

"He really did share aloha wherever he went," Wilcott said. "He loved to share his own spirit of what being a Hawaiian was. He played music freely and told stories of Hawaii wherever he travelled."

Wilcott said that Aikau would watch from shore as the waves grew larger in Waimea Bay, making sure everyone was safe. Then, when the surf got to be too big for most and the crowds would leave the ocean, Aikau would grab his surfboard and take on the biggest waves around. "His spirit was very caring, very accom-

modating, very peaceful, and when he would ride it was just a sight to behold," she said. Ultimately, however, Aikau gave his life to the ocean in a final attempt to save others. Part of a team that was attempting to trace the route of their Polynesian ancestors from Hawaii to Tahiti aboard the traditional Hokulea canoe in 1978, the 31-year-old Eddie made a final sacrifice. The vessel encountered very rough seas in the open waters off Hawaii, began to take on water and eventually capsized. Despite the concerns of his crew, Aikau took his surfboard and paddled away for help. The rest of the crew stayed with the boat as Aikau attempted the long trip back to the Hawaiian Islands. He was never seen again, though the rest of the crew was eventually rescued.

Some of the best big-wave surfers in the world are at Waimea Bay to compete in the event, including Eddie's brother Clyde Aikau, who is the oldest competitor at 66 years old and the only surfer to attend all of the competitions. Surfing is expected to last most of the day. Another big-wave competition, Mavericks, is expected to be held on Friday in Half Moon Bay, California. — AP



TRONDHEIM: Winner Eric Frenzel (C) from Germany, flanked by second placed Akito Watabe (L) from Japan and third placed Joergen Graabak (R) from Norway, pose on the podium after the FIS World Cup Nordic Combined competition in Trondheim, yesterday. — AFP

FRENZEL EASES TO NORDIC COMBINED WCUP WIN

TRONDHEIM: Germany's Eric Frenzel extended his lead at the top of the Nordic combined World Cup standings after winning yesterday's event in Trondheim.

The reigning overall world champion started the 10-kilometer cross-country race 27 seconds behind Akito Watabe of Japan after the ski jumping.

Frenzel caught Watabe by the four-kilometer point and stayed close behind before passing him with three kilometers left and easing away to win 15.9 seconds ahead of his rival.

Watabe has finished second to Frenzel four times this season and he conceded after the race that the German was a tough opponent.

"I don't know how to beat Eric at the moment, but I'm pretty satisfied today because I was skiing quite badly yesterday," Watabe said.

"I'm still struggling to improve my cross-country part but I'm really jumping good, I'm still continuing to make the podium." The winner of Tuesday's race, Joergen Graabak of Norway, finished third, 57.8 seconds behind Frenzel.

It was 27-year-old Frenzel's sixth win of the season as he bids to become overall champion for the fourth time in a row. He's now 147 points ahead of Watabe and 262 points in front of third-place Fabian Riessle, also of Germany. There is a nine-day break before the next event in Lahti, Finland. — AP



WAIMEA BAY: File photo provided by World Surf League, Clyde Aikau, left, brother of Eddie Aikau, drops into a wave as Tony Ray, of Australia, finishes during the Quiksilver In Memory of Eddie Aikau big wave surf competition at Waimea Bay, Hawaii. Event organizers say the competition took place yesterday, for the first time in over six years as the surf conditions on the North Shore of Oahu are expected to meet the strict minimum requirements. — AP