

BARTHELEMY OUTPOINTS BEY TO RETAIN IBF TITLE

MIAMI: Cuban boxer Rances Barthelemy overcame a controversial knockdown to retain his IBF world lightweight title with a split-decision victory over former champ Mickey Bey on Friday. The 29-year-old Barthelemy improved to 25-0 in his first defense of the title he won in December when he defeated Denis Shafikov. Barthelemy fell to the canvas late in the second round in what the referee ruled was a knockdown for Bey. But television replays showed that Bey headbutted Barthelemy and then tried to sell the move by raising both his arms in the air as if he landed a solid punch. "Once I got dropped, I knew I had to put the pressure on him and that is exactly what I did," Barthelemy said. Barthelemy bounced

back from the knockdown to win handily 117-110 on two of the judges' scorecards and record the first split decision victory of his career. The other judge scored it 116-111 in favor of Bey, who fights as a member of Floyd Mayweather's Money Team. The victory sets the stage for Barthelemy to attract bigger purses and top level opponents going forward. He is considered one of the best lightweight boxers in the world along with Terry Flanagan, Anthony Crolla, and Jorge Linares. Former title holder Bey lost the crown when he refused to defend it against the mandatory challenger and had it taken away. Bey's career has also marred by missteps, including February 2013 when he tested positive for testosterone.—AFP

PHELPS WINS 100M FREE, FALTERS IN FLY IN AUSTIN

LOS ANGELES: Michael Phelps won one and lost one Friday in a tuneup meet in Austin, Texas, where he was competing with an eye on this month's US Olympic trials and a berth at the Rio Games. Joseph Schooling, a 20-year-old from Singapore who swims for the University of Texas in Austin, clocked 51.58sec to edge 18-time Olympic gold medalist Phelps (51.65) in the 100m butterfly—an event in which Phelps holds the world record. Schooling admitted it "felt great" to get his first win over Phelps but he noted that the US great was still in hard training before the US trials and not in peak racing form as he will be in Omaha this month and Rio de Janeiro in August.

"I've got to be even better in two months," Schooling said. Phelps was swimming in his second final of the night, having won the 100m freestyle in 49.49sec, one one-hundredth of a second in front of Jack Conger. The Austin meeting was one of three this week giving US and overseas swimmers a chance to hone their skills before Rio. China's Sun Yang swam the year's fastest 200 freestyle time at 1:44.82

to triumph at the Pro Swim meeting in Santa Clara, California. American Conor Dwyer was second in 1:45.41, third-fastest in the world this year, behind the 1:45.19 of James Guy.

Dwyer, who will be looking to secure his berth for Rio at the US trials in Omaha, Nebraska, said the "good battle" with Sun was perfect preparation. "Obviously, it's not fun to lose and go the third-fastest time in the world," Dwyer said. "But it was a good preview for racing in Rio. I know he'll be a good contender, and I am glad he came, so we can kind of go battle it out and get me ready for trials and hopefully the big show." Australian Emma McKeon won the women's 200m free in Santa Clara in 1:56.36. At the Indianapolis Pro Swim, American Leah Smith posted a pair of career bests en route to victory in the women's 200m freestyle, winning the final in 1:56.64 after clocking 1:56.66 in the heats. Compatriot Jay Litherland opened the Indy meeting with two victories, capturing the 200m free 1:48.41 and the 400m individual medley in 4:13.93.—AFP



TOKYO: Milad Ebadipour (bottom), Mahdi Marandi (#19) and Saeid Marouflakrani (top/#4) of Iran try to receive the ball from Poland during their men's volleyball world final qualification match for the Rio Olympics in Tokyo yesterday.—AFP

VOLLEYBALL: FRANCE, IRAN BOOK RIO OLYMPIC SPOTS

TOKYO: European champions France booked their place in this summer's Rio Olympic volleyball competition after beating Venezuela yesterday at a men's qualifying tournament in Tokyo. Asia's top team Iran joined them, reaching their first-ever Olympics with an impressive defeat of Poland, who had already qualified. Wing spiker Antonin Rouzier led the way with 17 points for the French—who have shot to prominence in recent years after taking the European and World League titles—as they won 25-21, 23-25, 25-11, 20-25, 15-9.

"We're happy to book our ticket to the

Olympics," France coach Laurent Tillie told reporters. "We only needed two sets but it was still stressful. We didn't have a good rhythm but we've qualified and it's been a dream for us to get there." The French needed just two sets to reach Rio. After taking the first, they dropped the second set but achieved their first Olympic qualification since 2004 on the third, powering through 25-11. "I've been waiting for this day for a long time," said captain Benjamin Toniutti.

"Four years ago we didn't make it to the Olympics. It's tough because Europe has so

many good teams but hopefully we can show our strength in Rio." Iran's danger man Shahrar Mahmoudi top-scored with 24 points in a 25-20, 25-18, 20-25, 34-32 win over world champions Poland. "It's time to celebrate," said Iran captain Mir Saied Marouflakrani. "We've made history. We lost out by one set to Australia four years ago, which was a terrible memory for us and this could have been the last chance for some of these players to play at the Olympics." Poland qualified on Thursday after winning five of five matches until their unblemished record was ended by Iran.—AFP

STAMINA 'KEY' AS MURRAY, DJOKOVIC HEAD FOR FRENCH OPEN SHOWDOWN

DJOKOVIC BIDDING FOR HISTORIC CAREER GRAND SLAM

PARIS: The reputations of Novak Djokovic and Andy Murray as the fittest men in tennis will be rigorously tested when they slug it out today for the French Open title, at the end of a tournament in which endurance has been a prime asset. With both men hitting peak form in emphatic semi-final wins, mental strength looks likely to decide a final given added spice by an array of historic landmarks that will fall by the wayside irrespective of who wins.

Over two weeks of often attritional tennis invariably played in damp, cold conditions and with heavy balls, Murray-bidding to become the first British man to win in Paris since 1935—has put his body through close to 18 hours on court over 24 sets. Djokovic, also seeking his first title in Paris to become the first man in almost 50 years to hold all four majors at once, has played five hours and five sets fewer.

But the rain delays that have ravaged the tournament meant the Serbian played four days in succession up to Friday and denied him the usual rest days associated with grand slams. "When I get on the court with (Murray) it's going to be a very physical battle," Djokovic said after Friday's three-set demolition of Austrian tyro Dominic Thiem. "That's why the day off (on Saturday) will definitely serve me well."

Time ticking

If the pressure mounts today, Djokovic may however want to resist reflecting on his three previous defeats in French Open finals, including last year's four-set reverse against Stan Wawrinka—a match the world number one was expected to win. No player in the professional era has ever lost more finals at any one of the four grand slams and gone on to win that event. And at 29, time is ticking for both of them. "Neither of us know how many more chances we'll have to win here. It took obviously Roger (Federer) a long time to win this one (in 2009)," second seed Murray said on Friday after a superb display in beating Wawrinka.

It is in the head that Djokovic believes he may have the advantage over his Scottish opponent, a man just seven days his senior who he has beaten in four out of six major finals, and whose game he has been trying to pick apart since the first time he recalls facing him as an 11-year-old. "It's pretty nice that our rivalry has evolved over the years," he said. "...I think mentally when we step on the court, sure, maybe to some extent, (I have) some small percentage (of advantage), but he's playing in great form."

Murray, who rated Friday's four-set win as one of his best matches on clay, is meanwhile hoping the conditions on the day may provide him with an edge. After 12 defeats in 13 matches against the Serbian, including a loss at altitude in the final of the Madrid Open in early May, Murray turned the tables a week later in their most recent encounter, a rain-affected Italian Open final in Rome. "(Rome) was maybe a bit more similar to here, because it was raining quite a lot of the match when we played," Murray said. "I got off to a good start (in Rome). Novak got off to a good start in Madrid. That helped both of us in respective matches." —Reuters

MUGURUZA STUNS SERENA TO WIN FRENCH OPEN

PARIS: Garbine Muguruza won her first Grand Slam title at the French Open yesterday defeating top seed and defending champion Serena Williams in the final. Twelve years younger than the American at 22, and playing in the first claycourt final of her career, the Venezuelan-born Spaniard upset the odds to win 7-5, 6-4. She is the first Spanish woman to win a Grand Slam title since Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario in Paris in 1998 and she is the third straight first time Grand Slam winner after Flavia Pennetta at last year's US Open and Angelique Kerber at the Australian Open. "I am so excited to play the final of a Grand Slam against one of the best ever players. It's the perfect final and I am so happy," she said.

"I grew up on clay so for Spain and me this is just amazing. "Serena is a very powerful player and I just tried to fight as hard as I can." For Williams it was a second straight loss in a Grand Slam final and it wrecked her hopes once again of winning a 22nd Grand Slam title to draw level with Steffi Graf for most wins in the Open era, since 1968. She will now turn her focus on Wimbledon where she will be the defending champion and a six-time former winner. "Congratulations to Garbine, she played really well today," said Williams, who confirmed that she had been slightly troubled by an adductor problem.

"I could have served better, made a lot of errors on return, but I did try hard out there." The players took contrasting routes to get to the final. Fourth seed Muguruza breezed through, losing just the one set, in her opening match, while Williams struggled past the quarter- and semi-finals amid talk of an injury or illness. But with weather conditions improving after one of the rainiest Roland Garros tournaments on record, it was a different, more focused Williams that got the final underway with a love service game. Muguruza replied in kind as two of the biggest and best servers in the women's game went head to head.

The 22-year-old Spaniard had to battle

hard to level at 2-2, saving two break points along the way, but she then grabbed the first break of the final thanks to a loose game from the American culminating in a double fault. Muguruza, who lost to Williams in the Wimbledon final last year, moved 4-2 ahead, but she lost her range two games later to allow the American to level the score. The tall Spaniard was matching Williams for power and when the title-holder opened the 11th game with a double fault she seized the opportunity to apply some added pressure on her opponent.

Her tactics paid off with Williams failing to cope with a series of explosive baseline groundstrokes. Muguruza's second break of the final allowed her to set for the set and she duly managed that staving off two break-back points along the way. A top quality first set had taken 56 minutes with Muguruza winning 41 points to 40 for Williams underlining the closeness of the contest. Muguruza maintained her level of play and composure to start the second set with a third break of serve, but she then struggled on her own serve, coughing up a seventh double fault to hand back the advantage.

Scream of defiance

Williams though was struggling and this time it was the quality of her opponent's play rather than her own misgivings that were responsible for her struggles. Muguruza made it three straight breaks of serve in the next game and moved out into a 3-1 lead. Williams dug deep to get back to 3-2 sparking a scream of defiance from a player who had been in 26 Grand Slam finals dating back to 1999 and lost just five of them. But Muguruza was solid on her serve despite the occasional double fault and the Spaniard went 4-2 and then 5-3 up. Williams saved four match points in the next game to stay alive, but Muguruza stayed calm to serve out for the biggest win of her fledgling career, clinching it with a lob that landed smack on the baseline.—AFP



PARIS: Spain's Garbine Muguruza poses with her trophy in the locker room after winning the women's final match against the US's Serena Williams yesterday.—AFP



AUSTIN: Michael Phelps warms up in the practice pool before swimming in the Men's 200 meter freestyle heat race during the 2016 Austin Elite Invite in Austin, Texas.—AFP

PAGENAUD 'ON POLE' FOR INDYCAR DETROIT OPENER

LOS ANGELES: France's Simon Pagenaud resumed his assault on the IndyCar Series championship on Friday, capturing pole position for the first race in this weekend's double-header in Detroit. Pagenaud's fast lap in the Fast Six, the last of three rounds of knockout qualifying on the 2.35-mile (3.78 Km) temporary street course, was 1min 14.9166sec. He edged Penske team-mate Helio Castroneves of Brazil by 0.0119 of a second and led a Penske sweep of the first three qualifying positions. "I knew the car would be good here because of the way it was in Long Beach (where he qualified third and won the April 17 race)," said Pagenaud, whose first of seven career IndyCar wins

came at Detroit's Belle Isle in 2013. "Just great that we could extract the lap time out of it. "Obviously there was a bit of strategy on our side with the Firestone tires," he added. "We chose to go on the black Firestone tires (in the Firestone Fast Six). They're working really well for us and it paid off, so I'm really, really delighted." Pagenaud had a three-race winning streak snapped when he finished 19th in the 100th Running of the Indianapolis 500 on May 29. The 32-year-old Frenchman hasn't started worse than third on any road or street course in 2016. He brought a 57-point championship lead into this weekend, which features the only doubleheader on the 2016 schedule.—AFP