

BADMINTON

AGEING LEGENDS HOPE TO DEFY YOUNGSTERS AT WORLDS

GLASGOW: China's Lin Dan and Malaysian Lee Chong Wei are both in the twilight of their careers, but they remain among the leading lights at this week's World Championships in Glasgow. Dan, 34 in October, is a five-time champion, and recognised as perhaps the greatest player of all time.

So can he make it number six? "There are very many young players coming through, so it is a massive challenge," admitted Dan, the seventh seed. "I would be delighted to win again, but there is a lot of hard work to be done. There are a

lot of hard players in the draw." Lee, who will turn 35 in October, is on a golden mission after being the best man and never the bridegroom too often—he has won three World Championship silver medals and three Olympic silvers. "I am very focussed, but it is going to be very hard," said Lee, who showed he is still a force to be reckoned with by winning his fourth All-England title this season. "At the Olympics, there are only two Chinese players, but here there are many more. The draw is very tough but I am going to do my best." So will this be the last

World Championship for Lin and Lee? With a knowing smile, they replied in unison—"I don't know." On the woman's side Carolina Marin is seeking to add a third world crown to her burgeoning medals cabinet.

The 24-year-old added to her lustre by winning Olympic gold in Rio last year although she sets little store in the past. "But this week I am forgetting about the past," said Marin, who has slipped to fourth in the world rankings.

"This is a new championship. "But my goal this week is to fight for the gold

medal. "My expectations are very high. I have had two great months of preparation and feel even better than at the Olympics."

India's fourth seed Pusarla Sindhu (known as PV) is bent on revenge having been beaten by Marin in the Olympic final and with two bronze medals in the worlds, in 2013 and 2014, she feels it is time to move up to the top step of the podium. "I hope I do well this week and I want a change of colour," she said with a smile. "I want better than bronze." Kirsty Gilmour, the No.16 seed,

is the local Scottish hope and a valid outsider for a medal having taken on a new coach. "I am in great shape," said the 23-year-old who underwent a knee operation after last year's Olympics.

Gilmour believes new coach Malaysian Wong Tat Men has transformed her as a player and turned her into a viable contender for a medal. "He has been great," she said. "Everything has improved since last year and I am so excited to be playing in front of my home crowd. It is a privilege to be under pressure." — AFP

PREVIEW

ONCE-BITTEN GUARDIOLA WARY OF EVERTON THREAT

LONDON: The Premier League title credentials of Pep Guardiola's new-look Manchester City face an early-season examination today when Ronald Koeman's ambitious Everton visit the Etihad Stadium. With around £150 million (\$193.1 million, 164.1 million euros) of new players on show, City made an assured start to the campaign by winning 2-0 at promoted Brighton and Hove Albion last weekend. But Everton are also stronger, taking their spending past £130 million this week with a club-record £45 million move for Gyfi Sigurdsson, and they trounced City 4-0 when the teams last met in January. "They are a top squad and they have important players," said Guardiola, the City manager.

"They lost an important player, (Romelu) Lukaku, but they have a good group of players-midfield players and strikers. They are one of the best teams in the Premier League, I am pretty sure of that.

"I expect they will play the same way and attack our defence. "Sandro Ramirez and Wayne Rooney are used to playing in that way. They have a strong defence. They have great players and are dangerous on the counter-attack." City's 4-0 defeat at Goodison Park in January was the low point of Guardiola's maiden campaign in England, which ended with his side 15 points adrift of champions Chelsea in third place.

The visitors had 71 percent of possession and registered 13 attempts on goal to Everton's six, but they were wasteful in attack and alarmingly porous in defence. Of the goalkeeper and four defenders who started at Goodison, only centre-backs Nicolas Otamendi and John Stones are expected to be involved today.

Guardiola has used a three-man defence in pre-season and at Brighton, with captain Vincent Kompany bringing much-needed authority at the back and new boys Kyle Walker and Danilo supplying thrust on the flanks. City's third new full-back, Benjamin Mendy, is not yet ready to make his debut

due to a thigh injury.

But he is back in training, along with long-term injury victim Ilkay Gundogan, and both players are expected to return to action soon. While Guardiola prioritised signing full-backs over the close season, his former Barcelona team-mate Koeman has apparently been on a mission to cram as many number 10s into his squad as possible. Sigurdsson and his fellow new signings Davy Klaassen and Wayne Rooney all tend to play in central attacking roles and Ross Barkley also remains on Everton's books for the time being.

Rooney and Klaassen played in support of Sandro Ramirez, another new signing, as Everton won 1-0 at home to Stoke City last weekend through Rooney's first-half header. Room must now also be found for Sigurdsson following his switch from Swansea City, but Koeman says it is a pleasant headache for a manager to have. "You need competition in your team," said the Dutchman. "It is not about 11 players."

For his part, Sigurdsson says he will wear his hefty price-tag lightly. "It's not up to me how much clubs pay for me," said the 27-year-old Iceland international, who supplied nine goals and 13 assists for Swansea in the league last season.—AFP

Live Matches on TV
(Local Timings)

ENGLISH PREMIER LEAGUE	
Manchester City v Everton	22:00
beIN SPORTS HD 2	
SPANISH LEAGUE	
Levante v Villarreal	21:15
beIN SPORTS HD 2	
Malaga v Eibar	23:00
beIN SPORTS HD 3	



GIRONA: Atletico de Madrid's Argentinian forward Angel Correa (R) vies with Girona's defender Pedro Alcala during the Spanish league football match Girona FC vs Club Atletico de Madrid at the Municipal de Montilivi stadium in Girona on Saturday. — AFP

SOCCER

ATLETICO DEFY GRIEZMANN RED CARD TO SALVAGE GIRONA DRAW

MADRID: Atletico Madrid battled back from 2-0 down after a red card for Antoine Griezmann to salvage a 2-2 draw at newly-promoted Girona to start their La Liga campaign on Saturday.

Tight security measures oversaw the first top-flight match in Catalonia since two terror attacks in the region left 14 dead and hundreds injured in Barcelona and the nearby seaside town of Cambrils on Thursday and the early hours of Friday morning.

Concrete road blocks were mounted outside the Estadi Montilivi as in both attacks vans had been used to mow down pedestrians. However, a near capacity 13,500 crowd weren't dissuaded from attending and thought the hosts were headed for a dream start to their first ever La Liga campaign.

Christian Stuani took advantage of some slack marking at the heart of an Atletico defence shorn of the suspended Diego Godin to head home twice in three first-half minutes.

Atletico's hopes seemed to have gone when Griezmann was controversially dismissed 23 minutes from time. The French international appeared to have been clipped by Gorka Iraizoz as he rounded the goalkeeper, but was instead booked for diving and then shown a straight red card for his protests towards referee Juan Martinez Manuera.

Despite their numerical disadvantage, Atletico responded heroically to salvage an unlikely point as Angel Correa blasted into the top corner from outside the box 12 minutes from time.

Jose Maria Gimenez completed the comeback when his header from Koke's free-kick caught Iraizoz in no man's land. "Many at 2-0 down in the first-half would have thought the game was over," said Atletico boss Diego Simeone.

"When we went down to 10 men that thought would have been doubled, but the team kept going in the same way they have the past few years with effort, a never say die attitude and kept going until the end."

The visitors still had their own goalkeeper Jan Oblak to thank as the Slovenian produced an outstanding reflex save to prevent Manchester City loanee OIarenwaju Kayode from netting a last-minute winner. Atletico didn't lose any ground on their likely challengers to once again be Spanish football's third force behind Real Madrid and Barcelona as Sevilla were held 1-1 at home by Espanyol.

Clement Lenglet bundled the hosts in front from a corner midway through the half, but Leo Baptistao levelled 10 minutes before half-time. Sevilla also ended with 10 men as Ever Banega was sent-off following an angry exchange with the referee.

Earlier, Real Sociedad also came twice from behind to beat Celta Vigo 3-2 at Balaidos. Maxi Gomez had put Celta in front early in both halves, but goals from Mikel Oyarzabal, Juanmi and William Jose's penalty two minutes from time handed the Basques all three points. — AFP

BOXING

UNBEATEN CRAWFORD KOS INDONGO TO UNIFY TITLES

LINCOLN: Terence Crawford took all the drama out of his fight against Julius Indongo, and he did it fast. Now Crawford is the only undisputed world champion in professional boxing. Energized by his huge home-state following 45 minutes from his Omaha base, Crawford stopped Julius Indongo in the third round Saturday night to claim all four major belts at 140 pounds.

The fight was the first four-belt unification bout since 2004, when Bernard Hopkins stopped Oscar De La Hoya to claim all the belts in the 160-pound division. Crawford came in with the WBC and WBO belts; Indongo, from Namibia, was the WBA and IBF champion. "It means everything," Crawford said. "When you start boxing when you're 7 years old, that's your dream to become world champion - and after that you want to become something bigger than world champion. You just don't stop there. You go to the highest level possible."

Crawford's work at 140 pounds probably is finished. A move to 147 looks imminent. Promoter Bob Arum of Top Rank said the plan is for Crawford to go with him to Australia for the expected November rematch between Jeff Horn and Manny Pacquiao. Arum wants Crawford to fight the winner.

"I'm all for it," Crawford said. The 29-year-old Crawford was as dominant as ever against Indongo, a 34-year-old from Namibia who was fighting in the United States for the first time after making a rapid ascent to champi-

on. Though Crawford was a heavy favorite, Indongo had height and reach advantages that caused his camp some concern.

But Crawford sent Indongo to the canvas with a right to the body in the last minute of the second round and just missed with a massive left hook before the bell. At that point he was in firm control.

Midway through the third round, Crawford caught Indongo with a left hook to the body that put him down writhing in pain. "We knew the body was going to be open, being that he swings so wild," Crawford said. "We felt we could catch him in the middle of his punches. That's what we worked on in the gym." Crawford (32-0, 23 knockouts) was in his home state for the fifth time in nine fights but for the first time in Lincoln, 45 minutes from his Omaha base.

Indongo (22-1, 11 knockouts) made his rise in his weight division in less than a year after winning bouts in Russia and Scotland. Crawford entered the ring to roars from the Pinnacle Bank Arena sellout crowd of 12,121 after coming down the steps from the arena concourse. He wore a red No. 140 Nebraska Cornhuskers football jersey, a nod to this city being home to the University of Nebraska.

With fans on their feet and chanting his name, Crawford seized control early. When his final blow took down Indongo, the decibel level increased even more, and Crawford jumped in the air in the middle of the ring in celebration. Indongo couldn't get up. — AP



LINCOLN: Terence Crawford stands over Julius Indongo, after a punch brought him down in the second round of a junior welterweight world title unification bout in Lincoln, Neb., Saturday. Crawford won by knockout during the third round. — AP

KYLE BUSCH COMPLETES BRISTOL SWEEP WITH 20TH WIN AT TRACK

BRISTOL: Erik Jones really needed to win, and Kyle Busch would have loved to celebrate the first Cup win for the kid he discovered. But this is Bristol Motor Speedway, and Busch practically owns the place. Busch swept the weekend for the second time in his career by winning the Monster Energy Cup Series race Saturday night. He also won in the Truck Series on Wednesday night and the Xfinity Series on Friday night. He's the only driver to pull off the sweep, and he also did it in 2010.

Busch toyed with the crowd, which had equal cheers and boos, by cupping his ear to the fans who disapproved of the win. "So proud of Rowdy Nation. This one's for you!" he shouted. And the haters? "I don't care. All noise is good noise," he said. He then collected a broom from an onlooker to commemorate the sweep. Busch admitted this win was the most difficult of the week because of the race he had with rookie Erik Jones, his protege, future teammate and fellow Toyota driver. Jones led the most laps and the rookie believes he needs a victory to lock up his spot in the playoffs. "Erik Jones put up a whale of a fight," said Busch. "I was running with my tongue hanging out, my arms were Jell-O and my throat hurts."

Busch won for the 40th time in the Cup Series, sixth time at Bristol in Cup, and second time this season. All told, he's won 20 times across NASCAR's national series at the Tennessee bullring. Jones settled for second, one spot short of his first career victory. He led a race-high 260 laps and felt it had been his best chance to date to win a Cup race.

He was admittedly disappointed to fall a spot short. "You don't want to sound like you're whining or being a sore loser by saying

it sucks to run second, but it's a bummer. It hurts," Jones said. "This was the first shot that I really had to come really close to it in the Cup Series. It's Kyle Busch. He won all three races here this weekend."

Jones conceded how difficult it is to beat Busch anywhere, particularly at Bristol. Busch is also Jones' former boss, and Jones was amazed at Busch's ability to win three national NASCAR races in four nights. Jones said he's done a triple-duty weekend before, and "it was something I honestly never want to do again, so I respect him for that."

"He's a hardcore racer, he really commits himself to that and he does a really good job that he doesn't let it affect his Cup racing, at all," Jones said. Denny Hamlin and Matt Kenseth were third and fourth as Joe Gibbs Racing took the win and two other spots inside the top four, while all four drivers were in Toyotas. Busch passed Jones for the lead with 55 laps remaining as the track changed and the top lane became the preferable spot. Jones' car didn't handle as well in that area, and he had Busch and Kenseth all over his bumper. It was Busch who moved from third to first, but Jones didn't relent.

He chased Kenseth after Kenseth moved into second, but Jones ultimately gouged Kenseth out of his way. It put Jones in the middle of a weird JGR sandwich. In front of him, Busch, the driver who launched Jones' career and future teammate, and Kenseth, the guy Jones is replacing next season who is looking for 2018 employment. Hamlin eventually took position from Kenseth, but it was so obviously a night for Toyota. Martin Truex Jr. finished 21st and did not clinch the regular-season title. — AP



BRISTOL: Kyle Busch, driver of the #18 M&M's Caramel Toyota, poses with the trophy after winning the Monster Energy NASCAR Cup Series Bass Pro Shops NRA Night Race at Bristol Motor Speedway on Saturday in Bristol, Tennessee. — AFP