

SWISS OMEGA EXTENDS AS OLYMPIC SPONSOR TO 2032

BERLINS: Swiss watch manufacturer Omega yesterday extended its Olympic Games sponsorship by 12 years, becoming the first top International Olympic Committee sponsor to commit until 2032. Omega, the Games official timekeeper, is one of 12 major companies on the IOC's sponsorship program. China's Alibaba was the latest addition to the list in January, penning a deal to 2028. Omega's deal sees the Swiss company continue providing timing, scoring, in-venue results systems, equipment and broadcast graphics services, the IOC said. No financial details were disclosed. IOC sources previously told Reuters that major sponsors pay more than \$100 million per four-year cycle, which includes one summer and one winter games. "Omega is the world's leader in sports timekeeping, and the extension of our agreement through to 2032 means Olympic athletes will continue to be able to rely on Omega's expertise," IOC President Thomas Bach said in a statement. "2032 is an important milestone, as it will mark 100 years since the Olympic movement was first able to count on Omega's timekeep-



WOLFF: HAMILTON WIN SET UP BY 'MAGIC CALL'

BARCELONA: Mercedes team chief Toto Wolff says "a magic call" in strategy set up Lewis Hamilton's dramatic Spanish Grand Prix victory over Sebastian Vettel. In Barcelona on Sunday Hamilton slipped from pole to second at the start, recovered and passed Vettel's Ferrari to secure his second win of the season and reduce the German's lead to six points in the title race. The three-time champion obeyed his team's instructions perfectly as they - led by chief strategist James Vowles - plotted his route to triumph by putting pressure on Vettel in the opening stint and then taking perfect advantage of a Virtual Safety Car (VSC) period.

Vettel pitted early for a new set of soft tyres to end his first stint, but instead of matching that call Mercedes chose to switch to their plan and kept both Hamilton and Valtteri Bottas out for longer stints before Hamilton came in for medium tyres - and leaving the Finn in the lead to block the frustrated Vettel. The key moment came on lap 34 when Belgian Stoffel Vandoorne of McLaren crashed into Brazilian Felipe Massa's Williams to trigger the VSC.

"That was beautiful for us," said Wolff. "At that stage we planned to do the opposite to Sebastian - and then the magic call was the one to pit Hamilton, at a time when it looked like the VSC would end, so Sebastian couldn't react... We timed it perfectly - credit to James and the strategists - and that pit-stop

obviously was much faster than Sebastian's afterwards. Then it was down to Lewis to pass him on track which he did on the straight and taking the lead."

That move, which Vettel described as "like a train" passing him, left Hamilton in front for the final stint of 32 laps on soft tyres while Vettel, on mediums, toiled to stay in touch. "In the end, it was all about balancing on a knife's edge," said Wolff. "You want to have a gap, in the lead, to avoid the undercut, but on the other side we had to make the tyres last 32 laps. It was a combination of team work, strategy and Lewis's driving."

NO TENSION

Bottas' selfless contribution on a weekend when he was unable to repeat the form that carried him to his maiden F1 win in Russia was also a significant part of their triumph before he retired with an engine failure. Hamilton says he was left out of breath but relishing the title challenge by the win. "It's definitely one of the favourites, if not the favourite battle, I'm having," said the three-time champion. "I'm in a much better position than last year so 2017 is a much better year so far. It's great to have a battle - and a fight with another team is so much nicer and more enjoyable because there's no tension within our team. At the last race, when Valtteri (Bottas) won, there wasn't an ounce of me that was like 'damn it he won.... But this is how it should be."

Hamilton, who has changed his fitness coaching arrangements and now plans his own schedule between races without a trainer, conceded that he found himself fighting for breath at times. He had to sit down on the victors' podium during the post-race ceremony, clearly lacking the same level of vim and energy of others around him. "Man, these cars are so much more physical this year and this is a tough circuit," he explained after the contest at the Circuit de Catalunya where many seasoned observers commented on his condition. — AFP



Lewis Hamilton

KITTEL COLLECTS FIRST TOUR OF CALIFORNIA STAGE WIN

SACRAMENTO: German Marcel Kittel out-sprinted Peter Sagan to claim his first win at the Tour of California in the opening stage of the seven-day race in Sacramento on Sunday. Kittel got some help from his teammates as he launched off the wheel of Quick-Step Floors partner Fabio Sabatini with about 800 metres remaining to beat reigning two-time world champ Sagan of Bora-Hansgrohe. "I am really happy I could finally win a race here in California," Kittel said. I always try to do my best. "I rely on really strong and intelligent teammates. It is a mix of a lot of things, but in the end when it works it is a great feeling. "My team did an incredible job. We had a good plan and did a good job of bringing me to the finish."

Italy's Elia Viviani finished third while Floris Gerts of the Netherlands placed fourth. By winning the 167 kilometre first stage, Kittel nailed down the 80th win of his pro career. The sprinting specialist,

who turned 29 on Thursday, will enjoy wearing the yellow leader's jersey for at least one day as the race moves into the mountain stage with a 143km ride from Modesto to San Jose on Monday.

The race opened in Sacramento and finishes May 20 at Pasadena. Stage two offers six category climbs, the toughest up Mount Hamilton. Stage five features a steep and long ascent to Mount Baldy among three category climbs. Sprinters will have a penultimate sixth-stage 24km time trial Friday at Big Bear Lake to regain any lost ground ahead of the final 125km stage down to the finish. Meanwhile, Olympic road race gold medalist Anna van der Breggen won the women's Tour of California title Sunday to earn her fourth win of the season. Her victory after four stages of racing follows the gold she won in the Rio Games and wins in three other major one-day races this season. — AFP



SACRAMENTO, California: Marcel Kittel of Germany, riding for Quick-Step Floors, celebrates after winning the first stage of the Men's Amgen Tour of California on Sunday. — AP

BASTIA FAN FACING PRISON TERM FOR 'MONKEY NOISES'

BASTIA, France: A French prosecutor is seeking a three-month suspended prison sentence for a Bastia fan accused of racist abuse directed at Nice striker Mario Balotelli. Prosecutor Nicolas Bessone also requested that Herve Guittou receive a four-year stadium ban and be fined 800 euros for inciting racial hatred. Italian striker Balotelli had accused a section of the Corsican supporters of making "monkey sounds during the match" on Jan 20. "So is racism legal in France? Or only in Bastia? Football is an amazing sport... those people like Bastia supporters make it horrible! A real shame," an upset Balotelli wrote on Instagram after the game. Bastia initially said it was "amazed" at the Italian's allegations, before acknowledging "several" fans had abused the player during the 1-1 draw. The French league's disciplinary commission docked Bastia one point - suspended - and ordered the club to close its East Stand for the next three home games. Bastia were also punished for crowd violence during April's league game against Lyon which had to be abandoned at halftime.

RAONIC NAMED IN TEAM WORLD FOR LAVER CUP

PRAGUE: Canadian Milos Raonic, ranked number six in the world, is the first player to be named in the rest of the world team that will take on Europe in the inaugural Laver Cup from Sept 22-24 in Prague this year. The Laver Cup, a three-day competition modelled on golf's Ryder Cup, will pit a team of six top players from Europe against six of their counterparts from the rest of the world. Players will officially qualify based on their post-Wimbledon rankings, and the teams will be finalized following the US Open in September. Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal are already confirmed to play for Team Europe, with Tomas Berdych committing to play if qualified or selected. Team World is being captained by John McEnroe, while Bjorn Borg will captain Europe during the tournament, which will comprise two singles and a doubles match each day.



PONTE VEDRA BEACH, Florida: Si Woo Kim of South Korea plays his shot from the 18th tee during the final round of The Players Championship at the Stadium course at TPC Sawgrass on Sunday. — AFP

S KOREAN RISING STAR KIM WINS PLAYERS TITLE

MIAMI: South Korean Kim Si-Woo became the youngest winner in Players Championship history, firing a three-under par 69 on Sunday for a three-stroke US PGA Tour victory. The 75th-ranked prodigy, who has played 120 professional tournaments worldwide, became only the second Asian winner of the event after South Korea's K.J. Choi in 2011. The 21-year-old Kim eclipsed the Players age mark set by Adam Scott when the Australian won at age 23 in 2004 at the famed TPC Sawgrass layout in Ponte Vedra Beach, Florida. "I still can't believe I'm the champion and I'm the youngest champion for this major tournament," Kim said through a translator. "I'm looking forward to working hard from now on." Resolute and cool under pressure, Kim used a bogey-free final round to collect his biggest victory by finishing 72 holes on 10-under 278. Kim, ranked 75th in the world, became only the second non-US player to win twice on the US PGA Tour before age 22, joining last month's Masters winner, Spaniard Sergio Garcia.

Britain's Ian Poulter and South African Louis Oosthuizen shared second on 281, Poulter after a closing 71 with "Oosty" firing a 73. American Kyle Stanley and Rafa Cabrera Bello of Spain shared fourth on 282.

PRIOR WIN KEEPS KIM CALM

Kim, the US PGA's youngest player, won his first tour title last August at Greensboro, but hadn't managed a top-20 US PGA finish since last October and was in only his second Players, having shared 23rd in 2016. "Usually I'm very nervous but last year I won one and I got a two-year extension," Kim said. "So I can hit aggressively and I wasn't as nervous." Now Kim has a five-year spot on the tour and assured spots into many of golf's top events.

Stanley and countryman J.B. Holmes, who closed with an 84, were 54-hole co-leaders, but Holmes had bogeys on five of the first five holes and Stanley on two of the first four to stumble back. Oosthuizen sank a four-foot birdie putt at the par-5 second to reach nine-under but found water at the fourth and made double bogey to fall back. That left Poulter and Kim atop



Si Woo Kim holds The Players Championship Trophy on Sunday. — AP

the leaderboard at eight-under, Poulter after a tap-in birdie at the second and five-foot birdie putt at the sixth and Kim after a 17-foot birdie on the opening hole. Kim sank a 24-foot birdie putt at the par-4 seventh to seize the lead and sank an 18-foot birdie putt at the par-5 ninth to reach 10-under for a two-stroke advantage. Then Kim parred his way through the back nine, his last putts no longer than four feet on any hole as he calmly ignored winds and tension to prevail.

LATE BOGEYS FOIL POULTER

Poulter could never catch him, reaching nine-under with a five-foot birdie putt at the par-5 11th but making bogey at 12, missing a five-foot par putt, and taking another bogey at 18 after shanking his approach 40 yards right into a bush but then smacking his fourth inches from the cup. "It was one of the worst shots you will ever

see to a pretty good one," Poulter said. "I was nervous out there all day, being in a situation I hadn't been in for a while. "I felt good coming down the last few holes. I'm pleased I played well. It has been a good week."

It was the second Players runner-up finish for Poulter after 2009. It came after he had thought his playing rights were lost before a recalculation of points showed he had done enough with a medical exemption to keep his tour spot. Stanley made his fourth birdie of the week at the par-3 17th island green, matching American Paul Azinger from 1987 as the only players to birdie the hole four times in one week. Northern Ireland star Rory McIlroy, who fired a 75 to finish on 290, travels to Belfast for an MRI exam yesterday to see about nagging back pain that could be related to a rib injury that sidelined him earlier this year. —AFP

BUTTON HINTS F1 RETURN STILL POSSIBLE

BARCELONA: Jensen Button, preparing for his one-off comeback with McLaren-Honda at the Monaco Grand Prix, yesterday hinted he could make a U-turn on retirement and make a full-time return to Formula One in 2018. The 37-year-old 2009 world champion told reporters that he could not rule out a comeback with the team. "I have a contract with the team to race next year so definitely I would not rule anything out," he said, when questioned about the future.

A move to retain Button's services again may be an option for the troubled McLaren outfit if they fail to convince two-time champion Spaniard Fernando Alonso. Alonso yesterday flew into Indianapolis to start his preparations for the Indianapolis 500 on May 28, when Button replaces him on a one-off basis at the Monaco Grand Prix. It had seemed Button's F1

career was over when he held his retirement party at last year's end of season Abu Dhabi Grand Prix. Button said he was contacted by two other teams, offering him a race seat for 2017. "I had so many options to race this year it is hilarious," he said. "I am thinking of Monaco as my only race this year. But, obviously, if I am asked again at another point in the year I am here to fill that seat." Button has been spending time in the United States this year and on Saturday won his age group competition in an 'Ironman in California' contest.

"It is pretty mad really that I am getting back in a Formula One car," he said. "But there are no negative thoughts going through my head. I don't have anything to gain, but I don't have anything to lose either. I am there to help the team out and have some fun - and it will proba-

bly be one of the most fun Grand Prix for me because there is no pressure. It is a one-off so I am really excited about the challenge." — AFP



Jensen Button