

Sports

Georges Groves defends WBA super-middleweight title

'Groves suffered a shoulder injury in the last round'

MANCHESTER: George Groves' place in the World Boxing Super Series (WBSS) final is in doubt after his unanimous points win over Chris Eubank Jr on Saturday. Groves earned scores of 117-112, 116-112 and 115-113 over his English rival at the Manchester Arena, but went straight from the ring to hospital after suffering a suspected dislocated left shoulder in the last round.

Victory over Eubank in a second defence of his World Boxing Association (WBA) super-middleweight title also secured Groves a place in the final of the eight-man tournament. The WBSS final had been set to take place at the O2 Arena in London on June 2, but Groves' trainer Shane McGuigan said there are now concerns over whether the champion will be fit by then.

"He suffered a shoulder injury in the last round, we don't know what that is at the moment but hopefully he can box again soon," McGuigan told a press conference. "After a performance like that he's the best super-middleweight on the planet. We fulfilled the game plan to the T and executed it perfectly. We beat them on many different levels.

"It's a massive concern for the tournament. George Groves' health is paramount." Kalle Sauerland, promoter and co-founder of the WBSS, said the tournament's duration is finite. "We have scope of when the tournament must be completed," he said.

"We will wait until today. With those sort of injuries

you can train very quickly again-if it's a case of it just popping out. No one knows until it has been scanned." Sauerland said that despite losing to Groves, Eubank could find himself in the WBSS final if Groves is ruled out through injury.

"He will definitely be on the list," said Sauerland. "It's a decision that's taken by the (WBSS) board. I will make my recommendations."

LOADING UP

Eubank Jr, 28, said he was hampered by a cut above his right eye suffered in the third round. "This is the first time I've been cut in my career," he told reporters. "I couldn't see out of my right eye for pretty much most of the fight and that affected my style. I had to resort to loading up. Every time he moved to my right, I couldn't see him.

"In the later rounds I was hurting him with a lot of shots. I thought I did enough in the later rounds to nick it, but George had a good game plan." Groves smothered Eubank when he tried to get close to him and was more accurate with his jab.

Eubank, who could not land enough clean shots or put the champion under sustained pressure, said he felt Groves should have been penalised for what was judged an accidental clash of heads in the third round.

"George headbutted me a lot in that fight and I didn't know how he didn't have a point taken away from him," said Eubank. Eubank's father Chris Sr, who



George Groves' (right) punches Chris Eubank Jr in WBSS final match.

was world middleweight and super-middleweight champion in the 1990s, admitted Groves deserved the decision.

"He [Junior] didn't perform," said Eubank Sr. "He's a lot better than what you saw because he was loading up. He didn't close him down. No combinations, just

power, but that's okay, he will live and learn.

"George fought the right fight, staying off, feinting, and when he came in, he held. It was perfect tactics." England's Callum Smith and Germany's Juergen Braehmer meet on February 24 in the other WBSS semi-final. — AFP



Eubank could find himself in the WBSS final

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Benavidez crushes Gavril to retain WBC crown

LOS ANGELES: David Benavidez outclassed Ronald Gavril to easily retain his WBC super-middleweight crown with a unanimous points victory on Saturday. The 21-year-old champion from Phoenix dominated Romania's Gavril to claim a deserved win at the Mandalay Bay Events Center in Las Vegas.

Benavidez had beaten Gavril, 31, last September by a split decision to claim the vacant crown in one of the best fights of 2017. An ill-tempered build-up to the rematch had seen Gavril vowing to right a wrong, claiming he had robbed of victory in the first fight.

But on Saturday there was only one winner, with Benavidez using his stinging jab and superior movement to toy with Gavril on his way to a resounding victory. One judge scored it 119-109 while the two other cards had it 120-108 in favour of Benavidez, who improved to 20-0 with 17 knockouts after the win.

Benavidez, the youngest active

champion in world boxing, said he had sought to exploit Gavril's aggressive tactics. "I knew he was going to come in aggressive-like I said before he's a one-trick pony, he don't know anything else but pressure," Benavidez said.

"So I used that to my advantage-jabbed, boxed him all day and when I saw an opening I took it. I didn't knock him out but he's a tough son of a gun," Benavidez said he was unfazed by the bad blood that had simmered between the two fighters before the bout.

"I don't really care," he said. "I had the better of him. Look at his face and look at mine," he added. Benavidez's best moment came in the fourth round, when he rocked Gavril with an uppercut followed by a left hook that sent the Romanian reeling into the ropes.

Gavril managed to dig himself out of that hole however, clinching successfully until the bell to survive. It was only a fleeting respite though as Benavidez continued to pick him off at will with a superb exhibition of precision punching.

Benavidez would not be drawn on possible future opponents, declining to say whether he fancied a possible bout against Britain's George Groves, who won a bruising fight with Chris Eubank Jr in Manchester earlier Saturday.

"I want to be the best, so whoever they put in front of me, that's what I'm going to do," Benavidez said. — AFP

Rio de Janeiro Games legacy incomplete: IOC

PYEONGCHANG: Some venues for the Rio de Janeiro 2016 Olympic are decaying as Brazil has so far fallen short of its own legacy plans for sports facilities, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said yesterday.

In a surprisingly frank comment, the Olympic Games Executive Director Christophe Dubi admitted plans for the post-Games use for several venues, including the aquatics centre in the Olympic park, had largely remained on paper.

"A very well planned legacy that did not materialise in full," Dubi told reporters. He said while the city had benefitted from the post-Games use of what he said was an improved transportation and telecommunication systems, some sports venues were standing idle.

"Dismantle the venues," Dubi said of temporary structures that were supposed to be moved away from the park in Barra de Tijuca after the 16-day competition in 2016. "It has not happened because of the political landscape, because of the social and economic situation."

Brazil was experiencing near double-digit annual growth when it was awarded the first Olympics in South America back in 2009. But when the Games came round in 2016 the country was in its worst recession in decades and locked in a maelstrom of politi-



One of the venue of the Rio de Janeiro 2016 Olympic. — File photo

cal uncertainty. Crime has also spiked with deadly violence in Rio up in recent years, with an eight percent increase in killings last year over 2016 and a 26 percent jump since 2015, according to statistics from the Rio state government.

"The legacy is still not perfect," Dubi said. "They (venues) need to be dismantled. These are not venues designed and built to last. I hope the city and government will do the right thing and dismantle those venues that were not built to last."

To add to Rio's woes, Games chief Carlos Nuzman, a long-time former IOC member, is to stand trial for his role in a corruption case involving alleged bribery in Rio's successful

bid to host the Games. Nuzman, who faces racketeering and money laundering charges among other, has denied wrongdoing.

Police raided his home and seized gold bars, computers as well as a Russian passport among other items. The iconic Maracana football stadium has been looted after the Games, with seats ripped out, while the entire Olympic park remains shut for much of the 18 months since the Games. The velodrome has been damaged by two fires, the most recent one in November last year.

In August 2017 IOC President Thomas Bach had urged to give Brazil more time to implement legacy plans due to the country's political and economic woes. — Reuters

US rout Chile to maintain unbeaten start to ARC

LOS ANGELES: Former Chicago Bears NFL player Paul Lasike scored a try on his debut as the United States maintained their 100 percent start to the Americas Rugby Championship with a 45-13 win over Chile.

Lasike, who was released by the Bears last year after failing to establish himself as a starter, crashed over for a late try at the University of California at Fullerton ground as the Eagles made it three wins out of three.

The reigning ARC champions followed up impressive opening wins against Argentina and Canada by outscoring the Chileans by seven tries to two. Scrum-half Nate Augspurger launched the rout in the fourth minute, dotting down near the posts after a superb break from full-back Mike Teo released flying wing Ryan Matyas down the left flank.

An opportunistic try by centre Dylan

Audsley after relentless USA pressure but the Eagles 10-0 up in the 21st minute. Chile reduced the deficit to seven points when fullback Tomas Ianiszewski stroked over a penalty on 28 minutes and it remained 10-3 at half-time.

The Eagles however cut loose with a blistering start to the second half, Matyas again proving instrumental in helping set up a converted try by Audsley to make it 17-3. Audsley turned provider moments later with a break down the left before feeding inside to Bryce Campbell who crossed to make it 24-3.

Chile scored their opening try in the 46th minute when hooker Tomas Dussailant went charging over after a cleverly worked lineout move, but the US hit back with a converted score from Teo which made it 31-8.

Replacement Malon Al-Jiboori extended the US lead with a try under the posts which sent the home team into a 38-8 lead. Chile grabbed a consolation through left wing Italo Zunino but the New Zealand-born Lasike rumbled over late on to seal a deserved win.

The US now travel to South America for away games at Brazil and Uruguay knowing that two wins will see them retain their crown. In other games on Saturday, Canada defeated Brazil 45-5 in Langford while Argentina's XV defeated Uruguay 34-17 in Punta del Este. — AFP

Houston stuns Kendricks for US pole vault title

ALBUQUERQUE: Scott Houston upset world pole vault champion Sam Kendricks while Christian Coleman stayed on course in the 60 metres at the US indoor championships in Albuquerque, New Mexico on Saturday.

Houston, who ranked only fifth among U.S. pole vaulters last year, cleared a lifetime best 5.83 metres to beat Kendricks, who failed three times at the height after not missing an attempt through 5.78 metres.

A big loss in Europe last month played a role, Houston said. "Three weeks ago I had a great opportunity to go compete in Germany and compete against the best in the world - the last six world champions, indoors and out, the last two Olympic medalists, gold medalists, and I got beat really bad," he said.

"You can't take a loss and just tuck your tail down and run home so I came back and got off the plane and drove up to a meet the next day and competed. "(I) set a new indoor personal best, and kind of started this path on to the indoor

national meet." World outdoor championships silver medallist Coleman cruised through qualifying in the 60 metres in 6.46 seconds despite slowing as he advanced to today's semi-finals and finals. The top two finishers in each event qualify for the March 1-4 world indoor championships in Birmingham, England, provided they have the qualifying standard.

Coleman's time was just 0.01 seconds faster than Ronnie Baker, who won the heat prior to Coleman's. "I put out a good race. Now I've got two rounds to fill it out," said the confident Coleman, who hopes to use the rarefied air at high-altitude in Albuquerque to eclipse Maurice Greene's 20-year world record of 6.39 seconds.

Coleman ran 6.37 seconds last month in South Carolina, but the performance will not be ratified because electronic starting blocks were not in use. America's hurdlers also are expected to be major factors at the world championships with Christina Manning clocking 7.84 seconds in 60 metres hurdles qualifying. World outdoor record holder Kendra Harrison won her heat in 7.87 seconds with Sharika Nelvis (7.91) also a heat winner. Jarret Eaton led the men's preliminaries, running 7.53 seconds with Devon Allen 0.05 seconds slower in another heat. Aries Merritt, the outdoor record holder, was fifth fastest at 7.66. Olympic silver medallist Paul Chelimo outkicked Shadrack Kipchirchir for the 3,000 metres win in 7:57.88. — Reuters

S Korea's Ko leads to win Australian Open

ADELAIDE: South Korea's Ko Jin-young led all the way to win the Australian Women's Open by three shots at Adelaide's Kooyonga golf course yesterday.

Ko, 22, rolled in a short par putt at the last hole to clinch a wire-to-wire victory at 14-under to beat compatriot Choi Hye-jin on 11-under with Australia's Hannah Green on 10-under in third place. Ko's victory allows her to take up full LPGA Tour membership for 2018. The Korean was ranked 20th in the world before the tournament and will likely be close to the top 10 in this week's new rankings. "My goal is to be rookie of the year," Ko said. Ko began the tournament with a blistering seven-under 65 and was never headed nor seriously threatened.

Choi was the closest, jumping out of the pack to move within two shots at the turn in the final round, and still two shots back when they came down the stretch. Ko hit a beautiful seven-iron shot to the 17th green, where the pond on the right represented potentially her only way of losing the Open. Then she rolled the putt down the hill and into the cup from five metres. She fired a closing three-under par 69, starting out with two birdies that stretched her initial lead of four shots to six. — AFP