

Sports

McIlroy hoping to provide spark for Europe in Ryder Cup showdown

Bjorn would love to see a McIlroy breakthrough in France

PARIS: Four-time major champion Rory McIlroy's most important drive leading to the Ryder Cup might have come in a car instead of with a golf club. The 29-year-old Northern Irishman made a prank phone call to European captain Thomas Bjorn while driving with teammates Ian Poulter, Henrik Stenson and Tommy Fleetwood in what became a laugh-filled social media post.

Whether its building camaraderie through trying to get Bjorn to spring for "cryotherapy chambers" at the biennial team showdown against the United States, or shotmaking to lead Europe's top players, McIlroy will be a key figure in the September 28-30 showdown at Le Golf National if Bjorn isn't too upset.

"He's in big trouble. He might not play until today now," Bjorn said of McIlroy to Sky Sports in mock outrage before laughing at himself. "That's OK. They looked like they had fun. It's never fun when you get done on the prank but have to take it in the spirit it is. It was a good moment."

A Europe team with five rookies and five players with four or more prior Cup starts will try to deny the US holders their first victory in Europe since 1993, with McIlroy stressing experience is crucial. "It creates a really good team dynamic," McIlroy said. "It's a continuity that's within the team if you have experience, guys that have been there before, know what goes on."

"You've got all this stuff to do and like gala dinners and opening ceremonies and it's like, 'Really?' All the guys know what they need to do to prepare the best way. I just think continuity in the team room and knowing what to expect as the week goes on is a big thing."

It's a contrast to the uncertainty McIlroy has had about his game for much of the season. After a winless

2017, McIlroy won at Bay Hill in March, then shared fifth at the Masters as he attempted to complete a career Grand Slam.

After missing the cut at the Players and US Open, he shared second at the British Open at Carnoustie and had top-six efforts at the WGC Bridgestone and BMW Championship. Rory ready for breakthrough

McIlroy hasn't won a major since back-to-back wins at the 2014 British Open and PGA Championship, but he likes where his game is as the Ryder Cup nears. "I've given myself some half-chances at majors," he said. "In golf you just have to be an eternal optimist. I feel like I've done as well as I could with what I have. It's still a work in progress."

Bjorn would love to see a McIlroy breakthrough in France. "I just think he's in a place where it's going to go boom and then he's going to start winning a lot of golf tournaments again and that's actually pretty good fun to watch." While McIlroy might get a singles rematch of his thrilling showdown with Patrick Reed at Hazeltine, he might also find himself pitted against Tiger Woods, the resurgent 14-time major winner who has only one team win in seven Ryder Cup appearances.

"Whoever goes up against him in Paris, with us being at home, he's playing against the crowd where it's usually the other way around," McIlroy said. "It's not very often the crowd is against him. This will be a very rare occasion in France. Probably still be some people cheering for him but, for the most part, they'll be cheering for the European team."

McIlroy, who has claimed three points in each of his last three Ryder Cups, hopes to inspire a few roars of his own in what is likely to be a full run of five matches in three days. "My game feels in really good shape,"



ATLANTA: Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland plays his shot from the 16th tee during the second round of the TOUR Championship at East Lake Golf Club on Friday in Atlanta, Georgia. — AFP

McIlroy said. "There are a lot of good signs out there. My approach play, my wedge play has been much better. I'm putting well."

"Ryder Cup is a long week and it's an exhausting week and if you have to play five matches, you feel it at the end. But hopefully it will be worth it." — AFP

Fury, Wilder to fight December 1

LOS ANGELES: Britain's Tyson Fury will challenge Deontay Wilder for the American's World Boxing Council heavyweight crown on December 1, a statement said Friday. Promoters Haymon Boxing said in a statement reported by US media that Wilder and Fury would meet at a venue to be determined.

The Los Angeles Times reported that the Staples Center in Los Angeles was a potential venue for the fight while Brooklyn's Barclays Center was also in the running.

"WBC Heavyweight World Champion Deontay Wilder will defend his title against lineal champion Tyson Fury in a blockbuster matchup of undefeated heavyweights on Saturday, December 1 live on Pay-Per-View," Haymon boxing said.

"The contracts have been signed and the promotional tour will kick-off in London on October 1. It continues with stops in New York City and Los Angeles." Wilder has 39 knockouts in 40 fights and has scored knockouts in each of his previous seven title defenses.

Fury, 30, is the former IBF, WBA, IBO and WBO heavyweight world champion. He remains undefeated in 27 fights. The outspoken British fighter made his comeback earlier this year after a near two-and-a-half year absence, and immediately set his sights on a showdown with Wilder.

"I'll go to Vegas for free and fight Wilder," Fury said last month. "I'd rather have no money and win than 200 billion pounds (\$261.5 billion) and lose," he added. — AFP

Lorenzo takes pole for Aragon MotoGP, Rossi struggles

MADRID: Spain's Jorge Lorenzo secured his fourth pole position of the 2018 MotoGP season yesterday by sneaking ahead of Andrea Dovizioso in qualifying at Aragon. Lorenzo beat his Italian Ducati team-mate by 0.014sec, while Honda's Marc Marquez was 0.079sec back in third.

Marquez, who is chasing a fifth top-class world championship title but is without a victory in his last four races, had set the pace with a time of 1.46.960sec. But the Spaniard paid the price for a mistake at Turn 12 on his final run as Lorenzo and Dovizioso both saved their best times until last.

"My rear tire was a bit worn out so I didn't know if I would have anything left to improve in my last attempt," Lorenzo said. "But I managed to do a few thousandths better than Andrea, who also did a great lap."

Yamaha's Valentino Rossi managed to complete only one timed lap during the session. The Italian veteran qualified in a disappointing 18th, his lowest grid position since 2006. Britain's Cal Crutchlow was pushed back into the second row after finishing fourth. He missed the chance to fight for a top-three spot after crashing out during his last lap. Crutchlow sits in front of Spain's Dani Pedrosa, Italian Danilo Petrucci and another Spaniard, Alvaro Bautista, who came in sixth, seventh and eighth respectively. Marquez owns a 67-point lead over Dovizioso in the standings ahead of Sunday's race, with Rossi sitting third, 70 points adrift. The race in Aragon is the 14th round of the championship and third of four events to be held in Spain this season. — AFP

Zain strategic partner of National Jet Ski team

KUWAIT: Zain, the leading telecommunications company in Kuwait, announced its strategic partnership of the Kuwait National Jet Ski team for the eighth consecutive year. The company's support to the team extends during their participation at the upcoming World Jet Ski Championship 2018 to be held next October in Arizona, United States.

During its participation in the press conference held at the Kuwait Sea Sport Club headquarters, Zain explained that this strategic partnership falls under its solid Corporate Sustainability and Social Responsibility strategy towards supporting the youth and sports sectors as well as supporting outstanding Kuwaiti athletes.

Zain expressed its utmost confidence in the talents of the Kuwaiti youth, expressing its wishes of the best of luck to the team on their upcoming participation in the World Jet Ski Championship 2018. The company further expressed its keenness to encouraging Kuwaiti athletes to represent Kuwait in the various internationally renowned championships.

The National Jet Ski team is authorized by the Kuwait Sea Sport Club to officially represent Kuwait in regional and international Jet Ski championships. The team champions won a number of prominent titles during their past participations, most notably many first place titles in the World Jet Ski Championship, as well as many category titles in the UAE Jet Ski Championship and the Jet Ski King's Cup in Thailand.

Zain expressed its pride in all National teams that



Zain officials with the National Jet Ski team.

raise the Kuwaiti flag high by achieving top international titles, and it further confirms its commitment towards Kuwaiti champions, which resembles the company's endless confidence of the competencies of these young athletes and their capabilities in excelling in different fields. As a leading telecommunications company in

Kuwait, Zain is constantly looking to identify and support excellence across the sports sector. The company will continue to put Kuwaiti National teams and individual athletes at the forefront of its priorities and pledges to continue motivating them to achieve all the recognition they deserve.

Fear of losing drives Joshua to remain 'best heavyweight'

LONDON: World heavyweight champion Anthony Joshua may have proclaimed himself "the best in the division" ahead of putting his titles on the line against Russia's Alexander Povetkin at Wembley Stadium but he also stressed a defeat would not signal the end of his career. The 28-year-old British boxer has won all 21 of his fights since entering the paid ranks, with 20 by way of knockout, although his last title defence, against New Zealand's Joseph Parker in Cardiff in March, saw him go the distance for the first time as a professional before he secured a unanimous points decision. But Joshua, citing the example of many great boxers, insisted a reverse in front of his home crowd yesterday would not see him bow out of boxing.

"That fear of losing is always there," Joshua, the International Boxing Federation, World Boxing Association and World Boxing Organisation champion, told reporters at Wembley. "Sugar Ray Robinson, the best fighter of all time, can lose. Sugar Ray Leonard, Marvin Hagler, Thomas Hearns, Roberto, Duran, Muhammad Ali, Mike Tyson, Evander Holyfield, (all lost). "So who am I to go undefeated?...I have lost before as an amateur and that didn't deter me from getting where I am today," added the London 2012 Olympic champion. When it was put to Joshua that losing would not end his career, he replied: "One hundred percent and I know that it could happen because I know how tough this sport is."

"That's what I say in boxing, there's no league one, league two...You are either the best or you're not." Joshua has a significant height and reach advantage of several inches over Povetkin, the 2004 Olympic champion. Friday's weigh-in also confirmed a significant size difference, with Joshua tipping the scales at 17 stone 8 pounds (111.5 kilograms) compared to the 39-year-old Povetkin's 15st 12lbs. This fight sees Joshua returning to the scene of arguably his greatest triumph, an 11th-round stoppage of former champion Wladimir Klitschko last year.



LONDON: Britain's Anthony Joshua (L) poses by his challenger Russia's Alexander Povetkin during a joint press conference at Wembley stadium in London on Friday ahead of the title defence boxing match. — AFP

Klitschko is the only man to have inflicted a blemish on Povetkin's 35-fight record, with a points win back in 2013. Povetkin, however, served notice of his formidable punching power with a sickening knockout of Britain's David Price on the Joshua-Parker undercard at Cardiff's Principality Stadium.

Nevertheless, Joshua had no doubt his best would be good enough to defeat Povetkin. "Yeah 100 percent," he said. "I am the best in the division. There is no doubt about it. It's been proven. There hasn't been a time in boxing since I've been an amateur that I haven't been on top," added Joshua, whose management have yet to secure a heavyweight unification fight with World Boxing Council champion Deontay Wilder.

Joshua though insisted he was fully focused on the challenge posed by Povetkin. "I'm up against one of the best fighters in the world, he's a top three fighter in the world, so I have got to be on my A game," he explained. But Joshua believes the fact he won a gruelling contest

against Klitschko would stand him in good stead yesterday. "Povetkin says he is not the same fighter he was when he lost to Klitschko, he's stronger," said Joshua. "I can reflect and say I'm the same. When I fought Klitschko, I thought we would have a good boxing match. You know, two tall guys jab, one-two, one-two hook and I'm probably going to knock him out like I did the rest of the fighters. It turned out to be a completely different kind of night."

"Klitschko at the end of his career, he was 39, wanted his hands on the championship belts and he said he was obsessed. "He was probably in good condition, because most fighters are if they train, but he was obsessed. Povetkin, same thing. Back at Wembley at the end of his career, same age, wants his hands on the belts so I have got to be prepared to go through hell and back. "Without that Klitschko fight, I wouldn't be as prepared as I am now," Joshua explained. "I think my well is deep, my heart can definitely go through hell and back." — AFP