

Sports

Youngest Paralympian Husnah swims for change in Tokyo

Kukundakwe was born without her right forearm

TOKYO: The youngest Paralympian in Tokyo took to the pool yesterday looking to change attitudes to disability, as powerlifting and equestrian events kicked off on the second day of competition.

In a reminder of the continuing risks posed by the pandemic, organisers said another two athletes had tested positive for the virus in the Paralympic Village, but insisted the Games would remain safe.

Australia lead the medal table with six golds after an action-packed first day that saw nine world records broken — six in track cycling and three in swimming.

They are closely followed by China, which have won the most golds at every Paralympics since Athens 2004, but with 28 top medals up for grabs, plenty could change. The Games' youngest Paralympian, Ugandan swimmer Husnah Kukundakwe, aged just 14 competed yesterday morning in the 100m breaststroke in the SB8 category.

Kukundakwe, who was born without her right forearm and also has an impairment to her left hand, did not make the final but said she felt she could "touch the clouds" after a personal best time.

She says she wants to change attitudes towards people with disabilities in Uganda, and give "these kids a chance."

She is just months older than fellow teenage swimmer Miyuki Yamada, who became Japan's youngest ever Paralympic medalist Wednesday as she bagged silver in the 100m backstroke S2, the host country's first medal at the Games.

Competitions are taking place mostly without spectators to minimise infection risks, and 15 new positive tests linked to the Paralympics were confirmed Thursday, bringing the total announced by organisers to 184.

McIlroy vows he'll be ready for Ryder Cup

WASHINGTON: A fatigued Rory McIlroy says it takes extra effort to get going in the final days of the US PGA season but he'll be rested and ready for September's Ryder Cup. The 32-year-old from Northern Ireland is grinding through the penultimate event of the 2020-21 campaign at this week's BMW Championship at Caves Valley in suburban Baltimore, Maryland.

But after playing at the British Open and the Tokyo Olympics last month and last week's US PGA playoff opener at Liberty National, 16th-ranked McIlroy is feeling weary. "I've played more than I probably should have and feel like it's just sort of all caught up with me," McIlroy said Wednesday.

"I feel like a lot of guys feel right now, a little jaded, a little tired. End of the season, there's been a lot of golf, so a lot of travel. I'm just sort of getting through it, to be honest. I'm going day by day and just trying to get through it as best I can and try to make it to next week. After that, two weeks off before the Ryder Cup."

Four-time major winner McIlroy is counting on that break to revive him before holders Europe risk the trophy once more against the host Americans at Whistling Straits in Wisconsin. "Having two weeks off after the Tour Championship is going to

Among the few in the stands on Wednesday were around 1,000 schoolchildren taking part in a programme that has attracted controversy in Japan over safety concerns.

Organisers defended the scheme on Thursday, saying social distancing and countermeasures were in place.

"A thousand kids yesterday came, loved what they saw, and hopefully now they will have a very different view when it comes to disability and that will help Japanese society in the long-run," International Paralympic Committee spokesman Craig Spence told reporters.

Paralympic Village cases

Most of the cases at the Games are among staff and contractors living in Japan, which is facing a record Covid-19 wave, but Thursday's cases included two athletes from overseas staying in the Paralympic Village.

Organisers did not give details of which teams the pair belong to, or whether they were linked to any other positive tests.

There have been 13 cases detected in the Paralympic Village so far, including five athletes. Japan is facing a record wave of virus cases and on Wednesday the government said a virus state of emergency, which largely limits alcohol sales and bar and restaurant opening hours, would be expanded to eight more regions.

Two-time wheelchair rugby champions Australia face off against France on Thursday, hoping to wrest back their chances of extending their winning streak after a shock loss to Denmark on Wednesday in the high-impact sport.

And on the wheelchair basketball pitch, the United States men's team beat Germany 58-52 while the women play Spain yesterday afternoon, with both male and female US sides aiming

to defend their golds from Rio 2016.

Later this week, Brazilian sprinter Petrucio Ferreira Dos Santos — sometimes called the "Usain Bolt" of para athletics — is hoping to become the fastest Paralympian in history.

He'll compete on Friday in the men's T47 100m, after winning gold at Rio.

The fastest athlete in Paralympic history is Ireland's Jason Smyth, whose ultra-speedy time of 10.46 seconds secured gold in the T13 100m at London 2012. —AFP

He ranks 28th in the FedEx Cup season points standings with the top 30 after Sunday's final round advancing to next week's showdown for the crown. "The game feels pretty good," McIlroy said. "Energy levels are somewhat sort of trying to dig deep at this point, but try and keep going and put in a good finish this week to make sure I'm in Atlanta next week." McIlroy was having enough trouble being in Baltimore on Wednesday after playing a hurricane-delayed final PGA round Monday at Liberty National in New Jersey, then flying home for a night and back to Baltimore.

"This morning, I was tired," McIlroy said. "We all had a long week last week, as well, but even just summoning up the effort to get out of bed and go get to your 7:20 pro-am tee time, it look a little more effort today than it usually does."

3-wood near the highway

The grind has McIlroy looking forward to the long break coming after next month's Ryder Cup. "Just not traveling for a little bit. I'm going to take a bit of time off after the Ryder Cup and that'll be nice. "Since we came back after the COVID halt, when we came back in (June at) Colonial last year, I think this is my 33rd event since then. Next week will be 34 and then Ryder



TOKYO: Uganda's Husnah Kukundakwe attends a heat in the women's 100m breaststroke at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games in the Tokyo Aquatics Centre in Tokyo yesterday. —AFP



OWINGS MILLS: Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland tees off during the Gardner Heidrick Pro-Am ahead of the BMW Championship at Caves Valley Golf Course yesterday. —AFP

Cup 35. So all that in a space of 15 months, it's a lot of golf. It's probably too much for me."

McIlroy spent some extra time on the driving range working with a new 3-wood after discarding his old one off the ninth tee on Monday near a major highway adjacent to Liberty National. "I threw my 3-wood onto the New Jersey Turnpike off the 9th hole on Monday," he said. "I mightn't have reached the road but I threw it into the trees off the ninth tee at Liberty National, so if someone wants to go get a 3-wood, there's one in there somewhere." —AFP