

## BRAZIL MIDFIELDER GANSO CLOSE TO SEVILLA MOVE

**SAO PAULO:** Midfielder Paulo Henrique Ganso is close to joining Spanish club Sevilla from Sao Paulo in his native Brazil, according to his current club president Carlos Silva. The 26-year-old, once billed as one of Brazil's brightest emerging talents until his progress was curtailed by injury, was included in his country's squad for the Centenary Copa America last month after a series of impressive displays for his club. "It's his wish and there's nothing we can do about it," Sao Paulo president Carlos Silva told ESPN. "To keep a player against his wishes is counterproductive. I will miss having a guy in our team with such rare talent. We are obliged to accept some things and this is one of them." Brazilian media reported that the clubs had agreed a fee of 9.5 million euros (\$10.5 million) for the playmaker. — Reuters

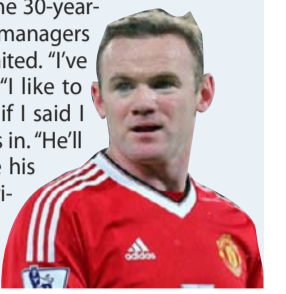


## ITALIAN NICCOLO MORNATI GETS FOUR-YEAR DOPING BAN

**MILAN:** Italian rower Niccolo Mornati will miss the Rio Olympics after being suspended for four years by the country's Anti-Doping Tribunal, the Italian National Olympic Committee said in a statement on Tuesday. The 35-year-old rower, who is the brother of Olympic silver medalist Carlo Mornati, tested positive for anastrozole, a breast cancer drug which can be used as a masking agent, on April 6 on his way back from a training camp in South Africa. Niccolo Mornati, who had qualified for the Rio Olympics, was provisionally suspended in May pending an inquiry by the tribunal but has now been banned until Feb. 5, 2020. He has three silver medals and two bronze medals from world championships in different categories. His last medal was bronze in the men's coxless pairs at the 2011 worlds in Bled, Slovenia. At the London 2012 Olympics, Mornati finished fourth with Lorenzo Carboncini in the men's coxless pairs. — Reuters

## WAYNE ROONEY LOOKING FORWARD TO MOURINHO ERA

**LONDON:** Manchester United striker Wayne Rooney admits the arrival of Jose Mourinho has given him added motivation for the season ahead. Former Chelsea boss Mourinho has suggested he preferred to play Rooney in a more attacking role, rather than see him pull strings from midfield as he did under predecessor Louis van Gaal. Rooney will be looking to forge a formidable strike partnership with new signing Zlatan Ibrahimovic, after a dearth of goals under the Dutchman last season. "I'm really excited to be working with Jose this season," the 30-year-old told the club's official magazine. "He's one of the best managers in the world and it's an exciting time for Manchester United. I've always respected him both as a man and a manager. I like to think I'm always motivated as a player but I'd be lying if I said I wasn't a bit more motivated when a new manager comes in. He'll bring all these qualities with him and I'm sure he'll have his own ideas, but one of the biggest assets will be his experience." United begin their Premier League campaign with a trip to Bournemouth on Aug. 14. — Reuters



## MCILROY AND CO BRACED FOR TROON TEST IN BRITISH OPEN

**TROON:** Treacherous and unfamiliar challenges lie in wait as the British Open returns to Royal Troon this week and Rory McIlroy returns to the hunt for the Claret Jug. McIlroy, who leads a host of the sport's biggest names to have withdrawn in controversial circumstances from next month's Rio Olympics, is bidding to win his fifth major and second Open after his victory at Hoylake in 2014. Twelve months ago McIlroy was missing from the field in St Andrews after suffering an ankle injury while playing football but he will tee off on Thursday morning in the same group as Bubba Watson and Japan's Hideki Matsuyama.

"I'm excited to be back and to a golf course that I've never played before," the Northern Irishman, number four in the world, told reporters on Tuesday.

"I don't really have any experience here at Troon, so it was good to get a couple of good looks at it last week, and then I just played another 18 holes this morning."

Troon is where Tiger Woods first played in the Open as a professional in 1997. The ailing 14-time major winner is not in this year's field and instead the focus is on the current 'Big Four' of McIlroy, Jordan Spieth, Jason Day and recent US Open winner Dustin Johnson.

They have all withdrawn from the Rio Games amid much-publicised fears about the Zika virus, with Spieth pulling out at the last minute on Monday. The 22-year-old Texan will be relieved to be able to focus on the Open now after being hit with a barrage of questions about the Olympics on Tuesday. He is targeting the Claret Jug and a third major title having won the Masters and US Open last year.

"This is a very, very special tournament; everybody knows that. I crave to have that trophy in my possession at some point, and to reach a third leg of the Grand Slam this week would be a fantastic achievement and a life-long goal of mine," said Spieth, who is not in the best of form but has history on his, or at least his country's, side.

The Open has been played at Troon eight times, with the last six winners all American, most recently Todd Hamilton in 2004. In 1997 the winner was Justin Leonard, a Texan just like Spieth.

"I don't think it impacts you, but I think

it's very cool to walk through the clubhouse halls to see that," said Spieth of Troon's history.

### PITFALLS

Dustin Johnson may be the favourite and Day the world number one, but all of the sport's leading players must beware the potential pitfalls in store. Troon is home to one of golf's most iconic and deeply unpredictable holes, the 123-yard par-three eighth known as the Postage Stamp. Here is where German amateur Herman Tisseries took 15 in 1950 but also where a 71-year-old Gene Sarazen had a hole-in-one in 1973.

"I think I took an eight or a nine, so that didn't go too well," McIlroy said of his efforts in practice. "If you make four threes there this week, you're probably going to gain a bit of ground on the field."

Then there is the 11th, a 482-yard par-four with the Glasgow to Ayr railway line immediately over a four-foot high stone wall to the right side. Jack Nicklaus took 10 here in 1962. "They're both incredibly difficult, yeah," acknowledged England's Justin Rose of the two holes.

With this being the first Open at Troon since 2004, the younger stars of modern golf are unfamiliar with the course but one man who knows it all too well is Colin Montgomerie.

This is the veteran Scot's home-town Open, and his 86-year-old father will become club president next week. Montgomerie came through qualifying and will hit the championship's first tee shot at 6:35 am local time (0535 GMT) on Thursday as he goes out with Luke Donald and Australia's Marc Leishman.

The latter was involved in a three-way play-off in St Andrews last year that was won by the American Zach Johnson. It was played out in gloomy conditions on the Monday after wind and rain delayed the finish. The hope is for calmer weather this year, although Friday is expected to be particularly wet and the wind coming in from the Firth of Clyde is bound to make life difficult. "If you get it breezy, like in any Open venue, this place really shows its teeth. I think it's a fantastic Open venue and a fantastic test of golf," acknowledged the current Masters champion Danny Willett. — AFP



**TROON:** Dustin Johnson of the United States picks up his ball after playing the 5th green during a practice round ahead of the British Open Golf Championship at the Royal Troon Golf Club in Troon, Scotland, yesterday. The British Open starts today. — AP

## DUSTIN WILL BE TOUGH TO BEAT, SAYS WORLD NO 1 DAY

**TROON:** The last six British Opens held at Royal Troon have been won by Americans and Dustin Johnson, the hottest player in golf, looks like he has all the credentials to send the US into seventh heaven this week. Not only did the big-hitting 32-year-old follow up his victory at last month's US Open by capturing the prestigious WGC-Bridgestone Invitational title in Ohio, he also has a good record to boast about in the world's oldest major. Johnson has finished in the top 14 in four of his seven trips to the British Open and came within a whisker of landing the coveted Claret Jug in 2011 when he wound up in a tie for second place behind Northern Ireland's Darren Clarke. "He has a lot of spotlight on him this week because he has won the last two events he's played and they've been pretty big events," world number one Jason Day told reporters on the windswept Ayrshire coastline.

"He's typically played pretty well in the Open championship so he's obviously going to be a very tough guy to beat." Johnson's surge to second in the world rankings has come as a surprise to some. His namesake Zach Johnson, however, believes it was always destined to happen.

"He's a supreme athlete and it just so happens that his sport for all of us, unfortunately, is golf," said British Open title holder Zach. "Not many guys can do what he does." Day's form has also been pretty spectacular, having triumphed seven times in the past 12 months to rise to the summit of the rankings. The Australian suffered a near-miss last year when he ended up in a share of fourth place at St Andrews.

### TOP SPOT

Winning a first British Open is clearly number one on Day's list of immediate priorities but hanging on to top spot in the rankings comes a close second.

"I think the stress of being number one in the world is a motivating factor for me just because I don't want to lose it," he said. "It's really important for me to make sure I stick to my processes and do all the hard work I can to try to stay there for as long as I can." Jordan Spieth won the US Masters and US Open in 2015 and is almost certain to figure prominently on the Troon leaderboard. The 22-year-old American, however, has

been the subject of intense scrutiny this week following his decision on Monday to opt out of next month's Rio Olympics due to health concerns. With the benefit of hindsight, Spieth clearly would have made his announcement before Monday's Games deadline. "I wish I could have made it as early as possible, not only for myself but also for Olympic golf, USA Golf," said the world number three.

"I certainly was not trying to wait until the last minute. I just couldn't make a decision and ... I was very indecisive with it." The other member of the so-called 'Big Four' of world golf, Northern Ireland's Rory McIlroy, is pleased to be back at his home Open after being sidelined last year because of an injury he sustained while playing a friendly game of soccer. "I guess it's the start of a new chapter for me in the Open championship," said the 2014 winner.

"It was very disappointing to miss last year but I'm determined not to miss any more for the foreseeable future and it's great to be back and have another chance to win another Claret Jug," added world number four McIlroy. The year's third major begins on Thursday. — Reuters



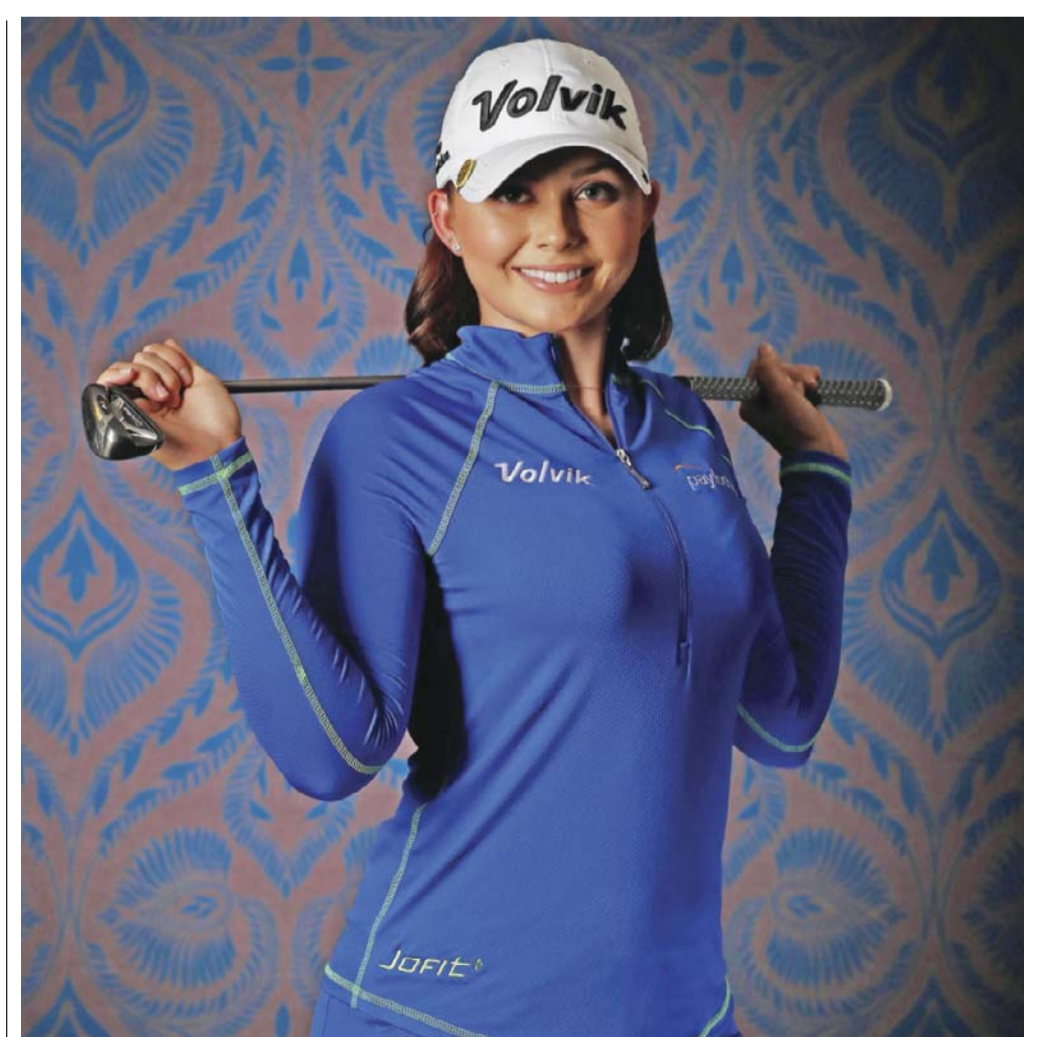
**TROON:** Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland putts on the 16th green during a practice round ahead of the British Open Golf Championship at the Royal Troon Golf Club in Troon, Scotland, yesterday. — AP

## THAI STARLET EXCITED ABOUT BRITISH OPEN

**TROON:** Thailand's teenage sensation Phachara Khongwatmai just wants to "have fun" as he competes at this week's British Open at Royal Troon. Phachara, who only turned 17 in May, is the youngest player in the field at the championship after qualifying in sensational fashion back in December. "I'm proud and feel lucky that I have a chance to play in an event like this. It's like an accident that I'm here," said Phachara as he took in the surroundings on Scotland's west coast.

Phachara owes his spot at Troon to his impressive sixth-place finish at the Thailand Golf Championship on the Asian Tour, when he came in ahead of the likes of Martin Kaymer and Bubba Watson. "I didn't expect to get a chance to play in a Major so soon in my career. If I make the cut here, I'll be happy. If I don't make the cut, I'm also happy," said Phachara, whose first name means 'diamond'. He was just 14 when he became the youngest golfer to win a professional tournament in his native Thailand in July 2013.

But he knows the fresh and potentially windy conditions at Troon will be a new experience. "It's a tough golf course. But I think my bunker play, chipping and putting are my strong parts. I don't want to get too worried about the obstacles here. I will try to relax and hopefully play well. I'm looking to have fun when I'm on the golf course. If I put pressure on myself, I won't play well." Phachara will tee off in his first round at 1104 local time today. — AFP



**SYLVANIA:** Victoria Elizabeth poses for a portrait prior to the Marathon Classic Presented by Owens Corning and O-I at Highland Meadows Golf Club in Sylvania Ohio. — AFP