

## RULE CHANGED TO CURB 'HACK-A-SHAQ' INCIDENTS

**LOS ANGELES:** The NBA approved rule changes on fouls away from the ball on Tuesday, which could help reduce intentional fouling. Previously, if a foul occurred away-from-the-play in the last two minutes of the fourth quarter or overtime, it resulted in one free throw and possession of the ball. That

rule has been extended to apply to the last two minutes of all quarters.

Intentionally fouling poor free throw shooters has become a frequent strategy of the game, an often criticized one, and the rule tweak will limit the opportunities for teams to employ that ploy. Frequently employed

against former Lakers centre Shaquille O'Neal, the strategy went on to be known as 'Hack-a-Shaq.' "In looking at the data and numerous potential solutions to combat the large increase in deliberate away-from-the-play foul situations, we believe these steps offer the most measured approach," Kiki

VanDeWeghe, NBA Executive Vice President, Basketball Operations said in a statement. "The introduction of these new rules is designed to curb the increase in such fouls without eliminating the strategy entirely." Additionally, on inbounds plays, a defensive foul before the ball is thrown in will

also be subject to one free throw and possession. Flagrant foul rules were also adjusted and will now automatically be in effect for any dangerous or excessive deliberate fouls. Previously, these types of fouls were subject to being called flagrant but were not automatic. — Reuters

## SPURS COACH POPOVICH BIDS FAREWELL TO DUNCAN

**LOS ANGELES:** San Antonio Spurs long time coach Gregg Popovich described five-time NBA champion Tim Duncan on Tuesday as the best example of a leader any coach in the NBA could hope for.

"He's the most real, consistent and true person I've met in my life," Popovich said. "When he speaks it's for a purpose. He led by example."

Popovich was speaking at a news conference on Tuesday, 24 hours after Duncan, who is considered one of the greatest players in history, announced his retirement, ending 19 brilliant seasons with the Spurs.

Duncan and Popovich formed one of the most successful duos in National Basketball Association history, accounting for the most wins ever by a player-coach combination at 1,001.

"I figured I better come out and do this and somehow say goodbye to him, which is an impossibility for a lot of reasons," said Popovich, who wore a black shirt with a picture of Duncan that read "Impossible Is Potential". "He's been the best teammate anyone could ever imagine."

Duncan wasn't present for the news conference. The 40-year-old Duncan, who

was selected as the first overall pick in the 1997 NBA draft, spent his entire career with the Spurs—an anomaly in a league where players often change teams.

The Spurs reached the playoffs in every one of his 19 seasons. "I would not be standing here if it wasn't for Tim Duncan," Popovich said. "I'd be in the Budweiser League someplace in America, fat and still trying to play basketball or coach basketball. "But he's why I'm standing. He's made livings for hundreds of us, staff and coaches, over the years and never said a word, just came to work every day."

"Came early, stayed late, was there for every single person, from the top of the roster to the bottom of the roster."

Duncan, also teamed with Tony Parker and Manu Ginobili to form one of the most successful trios in NBA history. They hold the league record for regular season wins (575) and postseason wins (126).

Duncan, a three-time NBA Finals MVP and a two-time regular season MVP, led San Antonio to titles in 1999, 2003, 2006, 2007 and 2014. The Spurs posted a 1,072-438 regular-season record since drafting Duncan—the best 19-year run in league history. — AFP



**CARCASSONNE:** Stage winner Peter Sagan of Slovakia, wearing the best sprinter's green jersey, and Britain's Chris Froome, wearing the overall leader's yellow jersey, sprint towards the finish line of the eleventh stage of the Tour de France cycling race over 162.5 kilometers (100.7 miles) with start in Carcassonne and finish in Montpellier, France, yesterday. — AP

## CAVENDISH HAPPY FOR RARE SPRINT CHANCE

**CARCASSONNE:** Mark Cavendish has happy memories of Montpellier as the Tour de France 11th stage is set to finish there yesterday.

The Manx Missile won a sprint stage in the Mediterranean town in 2011 and he will be looking to notch up yet another Tour stage victory yesterday.

He's crossed the finish line first three times already at this Tour, taking his career total up to 29 stage wins but the 31-year-old Briton is eager for more on the 162.5km mostly flat run from Carcassonne. Following Tuesday's 10th stage that started in Andorra, Cavendish said he was relieved to be rediscovering flatter terrain. "Well, that was the last of the Pyrenees today. Won't miss them! Hopefully a nice little sprint on the cards tomorrow," he wrote on Twitter at the end of Tuesday's stage.

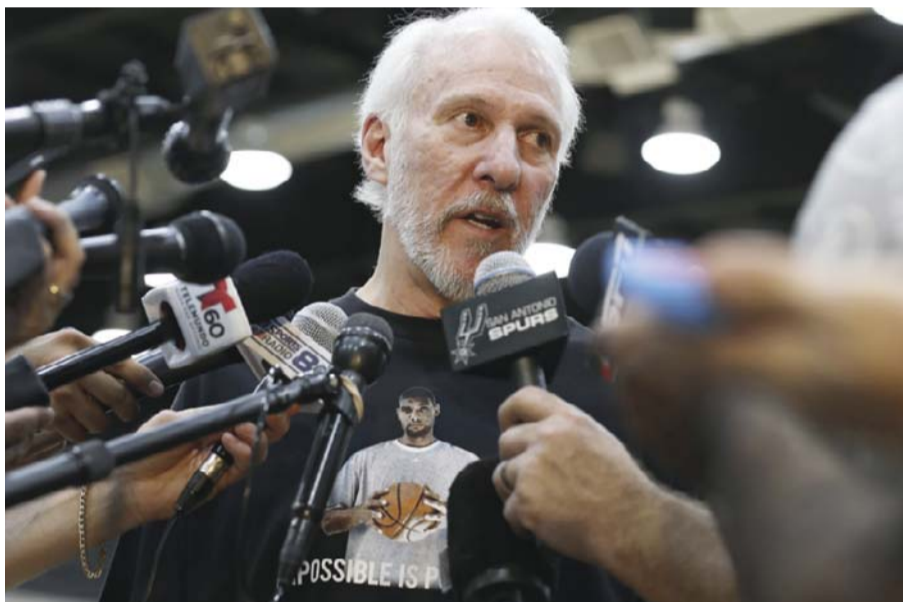
There are few opportunities left for the sprinters before the peloton reaches Paris, with Cavendish saying on Monday's rest day that he thinks there will only be two more chances.

But Wednesday's stage will be anything but straight-forward, with winds of up to 70kph expected on the route.

"When you're here & woken by the wind banging the window shutters, it's not likely to be a calm day on the bike!" added Cavendish on Twitter. In the Pyrenees he spent time simply trying to hold on and get to the finish line inside the time limit. But Wednesday's stage is one where the sprinters' teams, including Cavendish's Dimension Data outfit, will likely take no chances with the day's breakaway, never letting them far off the leash. And it won't just be about Cavendish on the road to Montpellier

where German Andre Greipel won most recently in 2013. Greipel has not had a good Tour so far this year after his best yet in 2015 when he won four stages, including the last on the Champs Elysees in Paris.

He took second place to Cavendish on the third stage Angers, losing out by an inch in a photo-finish. But that's as good as it's been for the Lotto-Soudal sprinter. Like Cavendish, though, he was glad to put the mountains behind him, although he particularly did not enjoy Tuesday's stage beginning with a long climb up to the Tour's highest point this year—the Port d'Envalira in Andorra at 2,400-metres above sea level. "The good thing about a 24km climb at the start from @LeTour stage 10 was that I could eat my breakfast twice...#onthelimit," joked Greipel on Twitter. — AFP



**SAN ANTONIO:** San Antonio Spurs coach Gregg Popovich addresses the media during an NBA basketball news conference, Tuesday, in San Antonio, the day after Tim Duncan announced his retirement. Popovich wore a T-shirt with the likeness of Duncan as he reflected on his relationship with the 19-year Spurs veteran and talked about his contributions to the team and to him personally. — AP

## ADAM SILVER WANTS MORE BALANCE AFTER DURANT MOVE

**LOS ANGELES:** NBA Commissioner Adam Silver said Tuesday that the league might look at ways of maintaining competitive balance following Kevin Durant's blockbuster move to join the Golden State Warriors.

Silver expressed concern at the signing which creates another super team and indicated that the NBA's parity might be better served if changes were made to the collective bargaining agreement.

"Just to be absolutely clear, I do not think that's ideal from the league standpoint," Silver said of lopsided teams during a news conference at the league's annual board of governors meeting.

Durant left the Oklahoma City Thunder to sign a two-year deal worth \$54 million to join the Warriors, creating another NBA powerhouse. Silver added that Durant did not break any rules by exercising his right to change teams.

"I don't think having two super teams is good for the league," he said. "For me, part of it is designing a collective bargaining agreement that encourages the distribution of great players throughout the league. "On the other hand, I absolutely respect a player's right to become a free

agent and in this case for Kevin Durant to make a decision that he feels is best for him. "I have no idea what's in his mind or heart in terms of how he went about making that decision."

"In a way, the good news is that we are in a collective bargaining cycle, so it gives everybody an opportunity-owners and the union—to sit down behind closed doors and take a fresh look at the system and see if there is a better way that we can do it. My belief is we can make it better." The league's current agreement runs through June 30, 2021. Either side can opt out June 30, 2017, if it notifies the other side by December 15. It was negotiated during the lockout five years ago.

Silver also said the league hasn't made a decision on moving the 2017 NBA all-star game from Charlotte in protest of North Carolina's controversial restroom privacy protection law.

"We're not prepared to make a decision today," Silver said. "But we recognize the calendar is not our friend. February is quickly approaching, especially in terms of big events like the all-star games if we're going to make alternative plans." — AFP

## VENTOUX: A MOUNTAIN LIKE NO OTHER

**CARCASSONNE:** Giant of Provence or Bald Mountain? Named after a Gaulish god, or due to the howling winds at its summit? "Mont Ventoux is mythical in cycling. The greats have won there, and I dream of doing so too," said Colombian climber Nairo Quintana. The Movistar leader has tackled the great climb at the Tour once before, during the 2013 edition where he finished second. That was the day, on July 14, the French national holiday, that Quintana announced himself as a future great of the Tour. He didn't win the stage at the top of Ventoux, but his brave solo attack shook up the favourites and while Chris Froome eventually caught him and beat him to the top, the Colombian debutant had proved he was a force to be reckoned with.

Today, the Tour will again finish atop Ventoux, and on Bastille Day, when someone will add his name to the list of stars to have won when the toughest climb in France was tackled. While Alpe d'Huez has its own special place in Tour history, Ventoux is the toughest climb and most arduous challenge. There are three routes up to the barren summit that looks like it would be more at place on the moon than in the lush green summer Alps. The most common, and hardest, which will be tackled on Thursday, is from the south and the village of Bedoin.

From there, the climb is 21.8km long with an average gradient of 7.4% — but that doesn't tell the full story. The first 6km are relatively easy at less than 4% but from there on it's relentless with 15.7km at an average 8.8%.

And it's not just the steep incline that makes this such an epic feat of human endurance—there's the weather. Mont Ventoux could be named after the Gaulish god of storms and mountain summits, Vintur; or maybe the word comes from the old Gallic Ven-Top, meaning snowy peak; or perhaps it's simply derived from the French word ventoux: windy. But the theme is clear: weather is a dominant factor. And that's the case when emerging from the forest path and out into the barren landscape, over the 'col des tempestes'-the storm path—and on to the summit where winds of up to 320kph (200mph) have been recorded. The road over the mountain is often closed as the wind speed is at least 90kph for two-thirds of the year.

### YELLOW IMMORTALITY

Tackling the 'Giant of Provence' is a once-in-a-lifetime challenge all on its own and has become a favourite of amateur cyclists the world over. Those particularly boisterous even try to climb it from all three routes on the same day.

Given one single ascent can take between 90mins to 2.5hrs depending on an amateur's level, that's quite an ambitious project for anyone. The Tour professionals tackle it at the end of a 184km stage this year, and just over halfway through a Grand Boucle edition described by reigning champion Froome as "a climber's Tour".

Winning on Ventoux means making your mark on Tour history and cycling as a whole.

Belgian great and record five-time Tour winner Eddy Merckx won there in 1970 and Raymond Poulidor, the darling of France—who never won the Tour—triumphed in 1965.

In 1987 France thought they'd found the successor to Bernard Hinault—another five-time Tour winner—in Jean-Francois Bernard who won a time-trial finishing on Ventoux to snare the coveted yellow jersey. It would prove a false dawn. Just 25, Bernard lost four minutes to his main

rivals the next day and finished the Tour third, never again to challenge for the yellow immortality. Froome won there in 2013 and went on to claim his first Tour success.

Just as Ventoux can make a rider's career, though, it can also destroy it. Briton Tom Simpson, on a cocktail of drink and drugs and badly dehydrated, collapsed and died of heat exhaustion just metres from the summit in 1967.

A memorial to Simpson remains on the climb to this day, a reminder that Ventoux is a mountain like no other. — AFP

## WILL RIO OLYMPICS BE A SECURITY 'HELL'?

**RIO DE JANEIRO:** Right as a top Brazilian official was confidently guaranteeing safety at next month's Olympics, Rio cops were about to head to their latest nerve-jangling assignment: body parts discovered on Copacabana beach.

Officially, Rio de Janeiro is all ready to provide security for the some half million people expected to flock to the biggest sporting event on the planet from August 5-21.

Addressing journalists with a month to go before the opening ceremony, Andrei Rodrigues, secretary for major events at the justice ministry, declared his "total confidence."

"I am completely calm," he said. That's a claim that has since been repeated by everyone from the Rio mayor to the minister of defense.

But as demonstrated by the discovery that same day of an unidentified, dismembered body next to the Olympic beach volleyball site on Copacabana, not all is well in Brazil's "Marvelous City." And Rio police—who've seen more than 50 of their colleagues killed just this year and have been protesting against late salary payments—appear far from calm.

### STREET MAYHEM

There have been 2,083 murders in Rio state in the first five months of this year, up 14 percent on the same period last year. The number of muggings has exploded and carjackings are also on the rise.

In an embarrassing incident, a truck crammed with more than \$400,000 worth of television equipment imported by German broadcasters covering the Olympics was hijacked. It was later recovered.

The real mayhem is isolated in the north and in huge slums known as favelas, rather than in the coastal areas of Barra, Copacabana and Ipanema where tourists congregate.

But with an ambitious eight-year-old community policing project in those favelas facing growing troubles, drug lords are expanding control. Last month, a gang of about 20 armed men shot their way into a central Rio hospital to res-

cue a detained boss nicknamed Fat Family. Police have reportedly killed as many as nine people in the brutal ensuing manhunt, but the fugitive remains at large.

### IS RIO A TERROR TARGET?

Brazil's lack of involvement in any wars and sheer distance from jihadist strongholds like Syria could be the best defense against any repeat of the kind of mass attacks claimed by or blamed on the Islamic State group in Bangladesh, Belgium, Iraq, Turkey and the United States this year. But hosting the globe's most watched event automatically puts a bulls-eye on Brazil, warns Robert Muggah, a security specialist at the Igarape think tank based in Rio.

"If a terrorist group wants to make a major statement at a global event, Rio would be a good place to start," he said.

Rio will be welcoming hundreds of thousands of foreigners from more than 200 countries, raising the possibility of infiltrators. The border with Paraguay is also notoriously porous, while procuring the powerful weapons wielded in the favelas would be relatively easy.

In June, Brazil's intelligence service said it had detected Portuguese-language messages linked to the Islamic State group on an online forum. An even more explicit warning came after bloody Islamist attacks in Paris last November, when a French jihadist tweeted that Brazil was the "next target." Rio's other big concern will be preventing a major cyber attack at a Games that will be heavily reliant on cloud computing, Muggah said.

Officials say a huge police presence will secure the streets. Between police drafted from other areas and thousands of soldiers, there will be 85,000 security personnel deployed in Rio and the five cities hosting football competitions—double the number used in the 2012 London Games. A police coordination center with officers from 55 countries is to be the biggest such operation of its kind, Rodrigues said. — AFP



**MONTPELLIER:** England's Adam Yates celebrates his white jersey of best young on the podium at the end of the 162.5 km eleventh stage of the 103rd edition of the Tour de France cycling race yesterday between Carcassonne and Montpellier. — AFP