

CYCLING

VALVERDE EXTENDS FLECHE WALLONNE DOMINANCE

HUY: On-form Spanish veteran Alejandro Valverde notched up a record fifth win in the Fleche Wallonne yesterday, with Ireland's Dan Martin taking second at the summit finish on the Mur de Huy. The Movistar rider, who turns 37 next week, has made the Ardennes classic his own since 2014, winning four straight editions a decade after claiming

his first success in 2006. Luxembourg's Bob Jungels launched an attack before the Cote de Cherave but was caught on the third and final ascent of the Mur de Huy, leaving the seasoned Valverde to again claim the honours. He saw off Martin by one second at the end of the 204.5 kilometre ride with

Belgian rider Dylan Teuns completing the podium in third. "The Ardennes classics are courses that I love. I feel a bit like I'm at home here," said Valverde. "I'm in excellent physical condition, I had to take advantage of it. The team worked right from the first kilometre, we had the belief we were going to win. It's a course that suits me very well, it's

made to measure for me." It was a remarkable 10th win of the season for the Spaniard, who vowed to return to Fleche Wallonne next year before throwing down the challenge to his rivals ahead of Sunday's Liege-Bastogne-Liege. Valverde is a three-time winner (2006, 2008 and 2015) of the event billed as one

of cycling's five "Monument" races. For Martin, it was the second time in four years the Irishman was denied by Valverde and his third podium finish here. "I came second again, it looks like I'll have to wait for Valverde to retire," Martin said after the race. The Quick-Step rider was runner-up to the Spaniard in 2014 and came third a year ago. — AFP



DUESSELDORF: In this Nov. 29, 2015, file photo, Ukraine's Wladimir Klitschko, right, and Britain's Tyson Fury exchange blows during a boxing bout in Duesseldorf, western Germany. Fury won the bout. During Klitschko's rein as champion, every opponent was kept at arm's length. Punches were traded cautiously — probably with good reason, considering what Lamon Brewster did to him back in 2004. Klitschko never won any style points, though he kept winning against a series of opponents who could never seem to crack the code. — AP

BOXING

KLITSCHKO ADMITS WHAT BOXING FANS ALWAYS KNEW: HE WAS BORING

NEW YORK: Wladimir Klitschko was never really embraced by the average boxing fan, despite dominating a lackluster heavyweight division for the better part of a decade. He understands why, even as he looks to change his ways in what could be his last hurrah next week against Anthony Joshua in London. "It's not as boring as it was with me during all those years," Klitschko said. "You can like me or hate me but when one person conquers it all, it is boring. I totally get it."

It wasn't just Klitschko's dominance that soured boxing fans on him. It was the way he fought. Every opponent was kept at arm's length. Punches were traded cautiously — probably with good reason, considering what Lamon Brewster did to him back in 2004.

Klitschko never won any style points, though he kept winning against a series of opponents who could never seem to crack the code. Then Tyson Fury entered the picture, making Klitschko look slow and old in breaking his 11-year winning streak to win his heavyweight titles.

Now Klitschko challenges the unbeaten Joshua for the title once again. He does so as an underdog going into enemy territory, with 90,000 fans expected to be cheering their countryman on a week from Saturday at Wembley Stadium.

NEW FIGHTER

At the age of 41, he says he feels like a new fighter. Even better, he says he feels like really fighting.

"I understand I don't have titles anymore, but in a certain way I feel relieved," Klitschko told The Associated Press in a call from his training camp in Austria. "I feel calmer, more free. Before it was all defending and caution. Now it's different, and I like the feeling that I don't have any pressure."

The fight shapes up as a familiar boxing matchup, with the up-and-coming young slugger from England tested by the aging veteran who has piled up a deep bag of tricks over the years.

Both are Olympic gold medalists (Klitschko in 1996, Joshua in 2012). Both are massive heavyweights with the skills usually found in smaller fighters. Both have the kind of knockout power that may make it a short night in London.

And Klitschko now says it's time to throw caution to the wind. "I have nothing to defend so I need to bounce back and be the hunter," he said. "Joshua has the title and it's something I will need to get. It will be a totally different attitude. I will not hold myself back."

If experience is a key in the fight, Klitschko has a huge advantage against Joshua, who began his amateur career late and has only 18 professional fights.

After regaining a piece of the heavyweight title in 2006, Klitschko made 18 successful title defenses in a row before losing to Fury in a desultory effort. He's won 64 of 68 fights and has fought for the heavyweight title 28 times.

But with the wins came the criticism. Klitschko, who lost the title by knockout to Brewster in 2004, was widely panned in boxing for playing more defense than offense as he won fight after fight against a group of mediocre challengers.

"I think after so many years of defending the title, unifying the title, it built up the pressure," Klitschko said. "At some point, it cramps your style."

Klitschko plans to have his brother, Vitali, in the corner as he usually does for his fights. Vitali Klitschko, now the mayor of Kiev, was a dominant heavyweight champion in his own right, before retiring to take up politics in his native Ukraine.

Meanwhile, he's enjoying the preparations for a fight he never thought he would get after his rematch with Fury was derailed by Fury's emotional problems.

"I think I've been very, very fortunate with having Joshua as my opponent," he said. "For the first time in a long time I'm an underdog. He's either great, or I'm still great. The question marks on both fighters make this a fight for the fans." — AP

ATHLETICS

LONDON MARATHON'S OLDEST RUNNER STILL GOING STRONG AT 83 YEARS

LONDON: His times are getting slower. He says he sometimes gets "very lazy." He aches a lot after his training runs. This particular marathon runner can be excused all of that.

A month before his 84th birthday, Kenneth Jones will be running — or "trotting," as he describes his style — the London Marathon for the 37th straight year on Sunday. He'll be the one wearing tracksuit bottoms, a pair of old running shoes and a wide grin. He'll be the one getting interviewed by the BBC on Tower Bridge during the race. He'll be the one who still expects to be passing many runners in their 20s and 30s in the closing stages.

"At almost 84, to do 26 miles, it's not bad, is it?" Jones says. Jones is the oldest runner in this year's race, at 83 years and 339 days. He is one of 12 so-called "Ever Presents" who have run every single London Marathon since the first in 1981. So what is the secret to Jones' longevity and enthusiasm?

He puts it down to his love of the fresh air and nature, his longstanding passion for Tai Chi, and his wife's vegetable stew. In fact, Nora — who is aged 82 and has been married to Kenneth for 57 years — is his inspiration. "Some days I get very lazy, so she encour-

ages me," Jones said in a phone interview. "She says, 'You'll never finish if you don't get out there and train.' Some days it can be grim, cold, not very nice, but she gets me out."

Jones lives in Strabane, a town in Northern Ireland near the border to Ireland. He moved there 14 years ago, having previously lived all his life in London, where he worked as a civil servant and first got a passion for running.

That passion exists to this day. On a usual week, he goes out on the country lanes near his home for two runs, getting plenty of well-wishes along the way. But the exercise regime has been ramped up ahead of the London Marathon, with Jones doing a long or short walk or run every day.

He also goes swimming twice a week. "I don't touch the sides or the bottom of the pool for an hour," he said. "Just keep going."

Jones, who was a torch-bearer at the London Olympics in 2012, has run more than 100 marathons since his first in 1966 and his personal best is 2 hours, 41 minutes. Last year, he ran 6:53 hours and is hoping to break the seven-hour mark on Sunday, with the plan to walk the first 2 miles, jog the next 20 miles and hang on at the end. — AP

PHELPS ON POSSIBLE COMEBACK: 'WE'LL SEE IF I GET THAT ITCH'

LOS ANGELES: Michael Phelps hasn't gotten the urge to return to swimming. Not yet anyway.

The winningest athlete in Olympic history is clearly enjoying marriage, fatherhood and a newfound willingness to speak out on contentious issues such as doping.

But, in a tantalizing concession that he hasn't totally closed the door on another comeback, Phelps told The Associated Press that it might be tough to stay away from the pool — especially if he attends the world championships in Budapest, Hungary, in July.

"The true test will be, if I do end up going over to the worlds this summer, do I have that itch again?" Phelps said Tuesday during a telephone interview.

He was already strongly considering his first comeback when he attended the 2013 championships in Barcelona, and there was no doubt he'd be back for his fifth Olympics when that meet ended.

"I was just like: 'This is a joke. How can these guys be swimming this slow?'" recalled Phelps, who was especially motivated by a disappointing performance from the men's relay team. "We'll see if I get that itch again."

For now, he's happy with his post-swimming life, which includes a new sponsorship deal with Colgate in which he is pushing water conservation. While Phelps still travels extensively, tending to various sponsors and business interests, he gets a lot more quality time with wife Nicole and their son, Boomer, who will celebrate his first birthday in a few weeks.

"He has started standing by himself a little bit from time to time," Phelps said. "He's on the move all the time now and loving it. He's killing it. It's so fun to watch him. Every day, it's something different, something special. It's a treat for me to see it face to face. It's wild. It's mind-blowing for Nicole and I. We still look at each other sometimes and go: 'Wow, we have a son. This is our son.'"

If Phelps returns to competitive swimming, the demands of training would surely cut heavily into his family time. That's why, if he tries to predict what the future might hold, it doesn't include a sixth Olympics at Tokyo in 2020.

"I'm having so many amazing experience, so many cool experiences, with my family," he said. "I don't see myself making a comeback. I have no desire right now to do it. I'm in the second chapter of my life. I have a lot of things I now want to accomplish. I'm realizing that more and more. This is a really cool opportunity for me to do some things I was not able to do when I was swimming."

That includes lending his still-considerable



LOS ANGELES: In this March 21, 2017, file photo, Michael Phelps and his wife, Nicole Johnson, smile during an NBA basketball game between the Los Angeles Lakers and the Los Angeles Clippers in Los Angeles. If Phelps returns to competitive swimming, the demands of training would surely cut heavily into his family time. That's why, if he tries to predict what the future might hold, it doesn't include a sixth Olympics at Tokyo in 2020. — AP

clout to issues that he considers important to swimming and the world. In the lead-up to the Rio Games, Phelps talked for the first time about the scourge of doping, saying he wasn't sure if he had ever competed in a totally clean race, even while winning a record 23 gold medals and 28 medals in all. In February, he took it a step further by testifying at a congressional hearing on improving anti-doping measures. He said athletes don't believe in the testing programs that are already in place, and he urged lawmakers to help "ensure the system is fair and reliable."

"Throughout my career, I never spoke out about anything," Phelps conceded. "I stayed in my lane and focused on what I was doing. To get out front and speak out on things that are passionate to me, to take different approaches to things I want to talk about in different walks of life, that's pretty cool and pretty special for me. The opportunities I have are absolutely amazing."

"Hopefully," he added, "I can change some things and make a difference." He's doing a

media blitz this week for his new deal with Colgate and the "Save Water" program, coinciding with Earth Day on Saturday.

"It completely blows my mind to think about how much you can waste when you brush your teeth twice a day," Phelps said. "If you leave the water running while you brush your teeth, it's wasting four to five gallons every time you do that. Every time. If we can get people to stop doing that, think how many millions of people in the world could contribute in just that small way." Phelps said this second retirement, coming after an Olympics in which he won five gold medals and a silver with his new family along for the ride, has enabled him to truly appreciate the enormous accomplishments of his career. He still feels like Rio was the perfect ending. "I never had that moment before to sit back and think about what I had done," Phelps said.

"I'm so stoked that I came back for (the 2016) Olympics. I finished exactly how I wanted." Is he really finished? Stay tuned. — AP

BOSTON MARATHON RETIRES BIB 261 FOR WOMEN'S PIONEER SWITZER

BOSTON: A line stretched the length of the block outside the Boston Marathon store on Boylston Street as runners waited to embroider their finishing times onto the jackets they bought to celebrate their achievement.

Inside, another line of runners was there on Tuesday to celebrate Kathrine Switzer.

A day after she returned to the course on the 50th anniversary of her 1967 landmark run, the first official female entrant saw her bib No. 261 retired by the Boston Athletic Association. It's the first number to be retired, though B.A.A. spokesman Jack Fleming said No. 61 has been held out of circulation in honor of Johnny Kelley, who started the race a record 61 times (and finished 58).

Fans crowded the brief ceremony, hugging and posing afterward for pictures with Switzer, a women's running pioneer. "People have such an appreciation for what running has done for them and how it's changed their lives," said Switzer, who named her 261 Fearless foundation after the bib number that was nearly torn from her back on the marathon course.

"It's beyond me; it's the number now," said Switzer, who ran the race on Monday along with 118 women and "seven intrepid men" who raised money for the charity that uses running to improve women's lives around the world. "We can make it happen through running. The number now stands for all of those things."

Switzer was a 20-year-old student at Syracuse when she entered the men-only Boston Marathon in 1967, using her initials on the registration form. Although Bobbi Gibb was also in the race for the second straight year, one of the unofficial runners known as bandits, race director Jock Semple fumed at the sight of Switzer in an official bib and tried to pull her off the course.

Pictures of that splashed across newspaper front pages, and Switzer somewhat inadvertently became a symbol of the women's movement. "It was the worst thing in my life at the time. It became the best thing in my life," she said Tuesday. "He inspired me to completely not only change my life, but to change millions of women's lives."

HISTORY

Switzer began organizing women's road races that helped persuade the Olympics to add a women's marathon in 1984. In 2011, she was inducted into the National Women's Hall of Fame

in Seneca Falls, New York, where they quote Laurel Thatcher Ulrich: "Well-behaved women seldom make history."

"It was a very good thing she wasn't well-behaved on that morning," said Joann Flaminio, the first female president in the 125-year history of the B.A.A. Switzer won the New York Marathon in 1974 and continued to run Boston until 1976 before providing TV commentary for the next 37 years. But this year, at the age of 70, she ran it again, finishing in 4 hours, 44 minutes, 31 seconds — only about 25 minutes slower than when she was 20.

"Fifty years before, it was so freezing," she said. "This time it was wall-to-wall cheering, and people not just congratulating me, but thanking me. It was extremely validating. It was a joyous experience. I was not only pushed by that tailwind, but also buoyed by the crowd."

Geoffrey Kirui won the 121st edition of the men's race on Monday, and Edna Kiplagat won the women's division to complete the first Kenyan sweep in five years. The Americans had their best results since the race went pro in 1986, placing two women in the top four and six men in the top 10, including runner-up Galen Rupp.

In all, 26,411 people finished the race on Monday — 97 percent of those who started — including 11,973 women. There were a total of 2,596 medical "encounters" on the hotter-than-ideal day; 168 of them were transported to hospitals; 15 to 18 stayed overnight and all are doing fine, according to medical director Chris Troyanos. "I'm not sure how it can get any better than how everything went yesterday," race director Dave McGillivray said Tuesday at the annual day-after briefing. "I'm my own worst critic, but my critique document is still blank." — AP



BOSTON: Kathrine Switzer, middle with fist up, the first official woman entrant in the Boston Marathon 50 years ago, cheers at a news conference, Tuesday, in Boston, where her bib No. 261 was retired in her honor by the Boston Athletic Association. Switzer is surrounded by runners with her 261 Fearless foundation, and at far left is, BAA President Joann Flaminio. — AP