

WIESBERGER GRABS LEAD AFTER NINE BIRDIE BLITZ

KUALA LUMPUR: Bernd Wiesberger reeled off nine birdies in a row in a superb second round of 63 to grab a one-shot lead over Masters champion Danny Willett at the Maybank Championship in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. The 31-year-old lit up the Saujana Golf and Country Club with the birdie blitz from the seventh to 15th holes to go 12-under after 36 to boost his prospects of a fourth European Tour title.

Wiesberger is the first player in European Tour history to card nine straight birdies in a round but

with preferred lies in place, when players are allowed to improve the ball's lie without penalty on certain parts of the course, the Austrian will not make the record books. "I hit really good shots and I just felt calm out there," he said after returning a card that included 11 birdies and two bogeys. "It felt kind of natural, I hit pretty good shots and really only holed two long ones which were the last birdie of the nine on 15 and about a 20-footer on 11. "Apart from that I just hit them pretty close and felt like I had a good idea of what the ball was going to

do on the green today again which was nice," added the Austrian, who began the day six shots off lead.

Englishman Willett hit six birdies and a bogey in his 67 to sit at 11-under, two shots clear of Frenchman Mike Lorenzo-Vera and American David Lipsky. Lorenzo-Vera sank six birdies and an eagle in his 65, while Lipsky was bogey-free in his 67. Marc Warren of Scotland surrendered his overnight lead with a three-over-par round of 75, following three bogeys and a triple bogey on his last six holes. —Reuters



LONDON: In this Aug 11, 2012 file photo Russia's Mariya Savinova, right, reacts as she crosses the finish line ahead of South Africa's Caster Semenya to win the women's 800-meter final during the athletics in the Olympic Stadium at the 2012 Summer Olympics. —AP

RUSSIAN OLYMPIC CHAMPION SAVINOVA STRIPPED OF GOLD

LAUSANNE: Russian runner Maria Savinova was stripped of her 2012 Olympic gold medal for doping yesterday, putting Caster Semenya in line to become a two-time champion. Savinova, who won the 800-meter title at the London Games ahead of Semenya, was also banned for four years by the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

CAS said the 31-year-old Savinova was "found to have been engaged in using doping" from July 2010 until August 2013. In 2014, Savinova was caught in undercover footage filmed by Russian doping whistleblower Yulia Stepanova appearing to admit to injecting testosterone and taking the banned steroid oxandrolone. The footage helped spark a World Anti-Doping Agency investigation into Russia, and led to Savinova's blood samples being re-examined.

Widespread drug use

Savinova has not raced competitively since 2013. She had been preparing for a comeback when she was filmed by Stepanova and then suspended during the investigation. Following further evidence of widespread drug use, the Russian track team was suspended from all international competitions in November 2015 and missed last year's Olympics.

If the International Olympic Committee decides to reallocate the medals from the 2012 final, Semenya will add that gold medal to the one she won last year in Rio de Janeiro. The original bronze medalist in the 2012 Olympic final, Ekaterina Poistogova of Russia, is also under investigation for doping. If she is banned, Pamela Jelimo of Kenya would be in

line for silver, with bronze for Alysia Montano of the United States. Another Russian who originally finished sixth, Elena Arzhakova, was retrospectively disqualified in 2013 over blood doping.

Semenya could also become a two-time world champion by inheriting Savinova's gold medal from 2011. Yvonne Hak of the Netherlands is in line for the 2010 European title. The WADA commission which investigated Russian track and field had originally recommended a lifetime ban for Savinova. She can appeal the CAS ruling. In the footage filmed by Stepanova, Savinova said doping was the only way to succeed in Russian sport.

"What should we do? How should it go differently? That is our system and in Russia that only works only with pharma," she said, according to a transcript produced by WADA. "Oxandrolone is very quickly out of my body out again. It takes less than 20 days." Savinova also said that her husband, former runner Alexei Farnosov, had used "contacts" at a drug-testing laboratory to help cover up her doping. The Moscow drug-testing laboratory was later shut down and its director testified he had covered up hundreds of failed tests by top Russian athletes.

Two top coaches who worked with Savinova, Alexei Melnikov and Vladimir Kazarin, have also faced punishment. Melnikov was banned for life by the IAAF last year, while Kazarin is suspended awaiting the results of an investigation, though he's been accused of breaking that suspension by continuing to coach Russian runners. —AP

HOLDENER LEADS SWISS 1-2 IN COMBINED AT WORLDS

ST MORITZ: Wendy Holdener led a Swiss 1-2 in the combined event at the ski world championships yesterday, winning the race a short time after teammate Lara Gut was taken to hospital following a crash in warmups. Lindsey Vonn was fifth after a gutsy slalom run left her 0.47 seconds from a medal. The American had been only sixth fastest in the opening downhill.

Holdener, a slalom specialist, was 0.05 ahead of teammate Michelle Gisin, who took silver. Michaela Kirshgasser of Austria trailed Holdener by 0.38, and repeated her combined bronze from the 2015 worlds. One hour before the slalom leg, Swiss star Gut crashed in practice and seemed to injure her left knee. She was taken to a hospital in St Moritz. Gut, who won bronze in the super-G on Tuesday, had been third after the morning downhill. She is a doubtful starter for the marquee downhill on Sunday, which is Vonn's main target.

The slalom run in falling snow flipped the standings from the downhill that began in sunshine three hours earlier. First-run leader Sofia Goggia of Italy and second-placed Ilka Stuhec of Slovenia failed to complete the slalom. Stuhec quickly went out just a few gates from the start. Slalom racers seemed to be favored by a decision to shorten the downhill course due to forecasted poor weather on higher sections of the slope.

Holdener, who is third in the season-long World Cup slalom standings behind American Mikaela Shiffrin, was just 0.94 off the lead in downhill. That Vonn was only 0.09 faster in her specialist downhill than Holdener was a surprise, and the American's apparently tentative morning run came back to cost her. Vonn gestured to the finish-area crowd after both runs by holding out her arms as if she could do little more.

Vonn has never won a major championship medal in combined in six starts at the worlds and three Olympics. However, she completed the event on Friday for the first time since the 2005 worlds. Gisin was watched by her older sister Dominique, who took gold in the 2014 Olympic downhill in a tie with Tina Maze of Slovenia. —AP



ST MORITZ: Wendy Holdener of Switzerland reacts in the finish area during the women's combined slalom race at the 2017 Alpine Skiing World Championships. —AP