

### HEASLIP SIGNS NEW IRISH DEAL FOR 2019 WORLD CUP

**LONDON:** Ireland No 8 Jamie Heaslip has signed a new Irish Rugby Football Union contract that will see him continue to play his club rugby in Ireland until the end of the 2019 World Cup in Japan. The back-row forward will remain with Dublin-based Leinster during that period and yesterday's announcement was something of a coup for the IRFU given Heaslip could have been a target for a lucrative club contract overseas. The 33-year-old has scored 13 tries in 93 Tests since making his Ireland debut in 2006 and has also been on two tours with the British Irish Lions in a career where he has so far made 227 appearances for Leinster during the past 12 years. When regular Ireland captain Rory Best withdrew because of illness from last week's Six Nations international in Rome, it was Heaslip who led the side to a record 63-10 rout of Italy. "My aim when I started my professional rugby career was to leave the jersey either the blue of Leinster or the green of Ireland in a better place than when I first put it on, and this new contract gives me the chance to continue to chase this dream," said Heaslip in an IRFU statement.—AFP



### GALATASARAY BOSS JOB ON LINE AFTER SHOCK LOSS

**ISTANBUL:** The manager of Istanbul football giants Galatasaray Jan Olde Riekerink is facing the sack following a shock weekend league loss, press reports said yesterday. Galatasaray's top executives held an emergency meeting about the Dutchman's future following the 1-2 home defeat to lowly Kayserispor on Sunday, the Anadolu news agency and Hurriyet dailies said. A formal board meeting to be held later yesterday will make the final decision concerning Riekerink, who has only been at the club for a year, according to the reports. The defeat left Galatasaray in third place in the Super Lig behind leaders Besiktas and surprise package Basaksehir. Only victory in the league will satisfy Galatasaray's management, which has assembled a team packed with stars including Germany's Lukas Podolski and Wesley Sneijder of the Netherlands. Riekerink told the Fatataik daily that he had not been informed of the discussions about his future. "It would be normal if the decision taken at that meeting was discussed with me first," he said.—AFP

### AUSTRALIA'S VOGES ENDS TEST CAREER

**SYDNEY:** Australia's Adam Voges has retired from international cricket, signing off with a test batting average second only to the great Don Bradman. Voges became the oldest player to score a century on his test debut when he made an unbeaten 130 against West Indies two years ago, aged 35. The right-handed batsman scored 1,485 runs at an average of 61.87, ranking him second on the all time list behind Bradman's incredible 99.94. Voges lost his place in the test team after the second of two defeats to South Africa in November and was treated for concussion after being hit by a bouncer when batting for Western Australia in a Sheffield Shield match the same month. Voges, 37, will lead the Prime Minister's XI against the touring Sri Lankan team in Canberra today and has said it will be his last match against an international side. "This will be it for me," Voges told reporters. "I'm certainly looking forward to getting out there and playing this game. I've had an amazing couple of years with Australia with the Test team and I've loved every minute of it.—Reuters



#### OLYMPICS

### BACH WANTS ONLY WINNERS IN GAMES HOST BATTLE

**LAUSANNE:** Olympic leader Thomas Bach does not like losers and that is why Paris and Los Angeles could this year both win the right to host the world's biggest and most complicated sporting event. The French and US mega cities are currently locked in battle to stage the 2024 Olympics, along with outsider Budapest.

There is mounting speculation however that an International Olympic Committee meeting in September could give one of the frontrunners the 2024 Games and at the same time award 2028 to the other. The double gold medal event could take some twiddling of the Olympic machinery, but Bach said in December: "We have to take into consideration that the procedure as it is now produces too many losers." The International Olympic Committee is worried that if Paris or Los Angeles miss out on 2024, they may give up on hosting at all. And in times of economic uncertainty, the IOC cannot afford to lose such quality candidates. "You can be happy about a strong field in quantity for one day but you start to regret it the next day because then the procedure starts to produce losers and it is not the purpose of an Olympic candidature procedure to produce losers," Bach said to support his call for change.

The IOC is refusing to say whether reform will be ready for the September 13 vote in Lima. "We are staying with the 2024 process, we are very clear about that," Christophe Dubi, the IOC executive director for the Olympics, told AFP. Paris and Los Angeles have both said they are only interested in 2024. However Casey Wasserman, chairman of the Los Angeles 2024 bid committee, said last month that the idea of awarding two Games at the same time was "an interesting concept".

Sources close to the IOC says a double vote has many advantages.

#### WIN-WIN GOLD

If Paris loses again after being beaten for 1992 (by Barcelona), 2008 (Beijing) and 2012 (London) it would almost certainly withdraw humiliated and not take part again.

Los Angeles, with its heavyweight US media backers, would almost certainly take the same view.

"I know that the idea of a double vote is on the table," one source close to the IOC told AFP.

"There is a clear procedure for 2024, that for 2028 is not yet set," added the source, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the confidentiality of discussions.

"The candidates will have to show that they agree this double campaign. If they say no it will be difficult to impose it on them." If Paris, Los Angeles and Budapest agree to the vote change then the IOC will need the back of the Association of National Olympic Committees (ANOC) and to talk to countries that have expressed an interest in 2028. Madrid has already said it could be a candidate.

An IOC executive meeting in July could formally propose the move. Then the Olympic charter will also need to be changed, another source close to the Olympic movement said.

"It's quite clever of Bach," said Patrick Nally, a sports marketing specialist who was one of the creators of the IOC's The Olympic Partner (TOP) sponsorship programme.

"Bach is aware the IOC is facing difficulties," he added. "One of the biggest concerns is what happens if LA doesn't win." The IOC cannot afford to alienate the United States which was "the saviour of the Olympic movement" when it risked financial troubles in the 1980s. Los Angeles held a landmark Games in 1984, NBC stepped in with a major television deal and Coca Cola was a huge sponsor.

Nally said "Paris is a great city, Paris lost a few times before, but it is not commercially so important for the structure of IOC." Bach "cannot afford to risk upsetting and destroying the one market IOC is totally dependent on."

Nally said the IOC president has support among key Olympic members for a double vote. "It is a very practical suggestion; let's make everybody winners and the Olympic movement a winner."—AFP



Thomas Bach



ST MORITZ: Gold medalists France's team members, center, celebrate on the podium next to second placed Slovakia's team, left, and third placed Sweden's team during the flower ceremony after the final of the team event at the 2017 FIS Alpine Skiing World Championships in St Moritz, Switzerland, yesterday.—AP

#### ALPINE SKIING

### FRANCE EDGE SLOVAKIA FOR WORLD TEAM GOLD

**ST MORITZ:** France edged Slovakia by just eight-hundredths of a second to win the team event at the World Ski Championships yesterday.

The final finished level at 2-2 after Alexis Pinturault and Mathieu Faivre won their races for the French, and Veronika Velez Zuzulova and Petra Vlhova for the Slovaks. The tie breaking time went in favour of France, handing them a first medal of the championships.

"Every team was very strong, every heat a tooth-and-nail battle," said Pinturault, for whom gold will go some way to make up for his disappointment at finishing 10th in Monday's combined.

Tessa Worley, the only member of the France team who also won team gold at the Garmisch worlds in 2011, added: "We didn't expect it but we were ready to fight really hard until the end."

"It was a long shot, for sure. There are so many runs to do. "It was really, really tight! We're really happy we've won gold and we'll celebrate it with the whole team."

Adeline Baud Mugnier, who notched up a key victory over Swedish heavyweight Frida Hansdotter in the semi-final, made up the French quartet and was left basking after its success.

"It's my first podium ever, it's an amazing emotion," she beamed. Sweden took bronze after posting a 3-1 victory over a Switzerland team featuring two individual gold medal winners in Wendy Holdener and Luca Aerni.

#### AUSTRIA HOPES UP IN SMOKE

Double defending champions Austria saw their hopes of a third successive gold go up in smoke with a 4-1 defeat by Sweden in the quarter-finals. Marcel Hirscher, chasing a sixth consecutive overall World Cup title, had a shocker of an afternoon, losing both his races. First he was subject of a massive upset when edged by Dries van den Broecke in Austria's 3-1 opening win over Belgium, before losing to Sweden's Andre Myhrer. "If you train well, everything is possible!" said the Austria-based 21-year-old Belgian. First introduced into the world champs in 2005, the team event will next year be included on the programme of the 2018 Winter Olympic Games in Pyeongchang, South Korea.

The telegenic, mixed-sex event has caught the public's imagination, with skiers racing down a slalom slope side-by-side to offer a different take on the very individualistic sport of alpine skiing.

Slovakia's Velez Zuzulova summed up what the team event meant for racers. "I really enjoyed skiing with my younger teammates, especially with Petra," she said in reference to her compatriot Vlhova.

"We fight all winter: we're from the same country but not the same team!"

Today we were together going for the same goal." Norway's Leif Kristin Haugen added: "I love this event. I think it's good for spectators too and I know people back home like it."

Pinturault had the final word, saying the gold "was a medal which will have more and more importance because it's an event that is growing and will be in the Olympics next year. The level was sensational".—AFP

#### CYCLING

### LANCE ARMSTRONG LOSES BID TO HALT \$100 MILLION LAWSUIT

**AUSTIN:** A federal judge on Monday refused to block the government's \$100 million lawsuit against Lance Armstrong, putting the former cyclist on course for trial in a 2010 case stemming from his performance-enhancing drug use.

The lawsuit was filed by Armstrong's former US Postal Service teammate Floyd Landis. The federal government joined in 2013 after Armstrong publicly admitted he cheated to win the Tour de France seven times from 1999-2005. Armstrong was stripped of those titles and banned from competition.

Armstrong has also taken huge hits financially, losing all his major sponsors and being forced to pay more than \$10 million in damages and settlements in a series of lawsuits. The Landis lawsuit would be the biggest by far, and the ruling from US District Judge Christopher Cooper in Washington was a major setback for Armstrong with a trial most likely in the fall.

Landis, himself a former doping cheat who was stripped of his 2006 Tour de France title, sued Armstrong under the federal False Claims Act, alleging Armstrong and his team committed fraud against the government when they cheated while riding under the Postal Service banner. According to court records, the contract paid the team, which was operated by Tailwind Sports Corp., about \$32 million from 2000 to 2004. Armstrong got nearly \$13.5 million.

The law allows Landis and the government to sue to get that money back and for "treble" damages, or triple the amount, and Armstrong could be forced to pay all of it. Landis stands to receive up to 25 percent of any damages awarded.

Armstrong claims he and the team don't owe the Postal Service anything because the agency made far more off the sponsorship than it paid. Armstrong's lawyers have introduced internal studies for the agency that calculated benefits in

media exposure topping \$100 million. The government has countered that the negative fallout from the doping scandal tainted the agency because of its association with Armstrong.

#### PERSUASIVE CASE

Cooper's ruling said Armstrong makes a "persuasive case," but that any decision on damages should be left to a jury.

"Giving Armstrong 'credit' for the benefits he delivered while using (performance-enhancing drugs) could be viewed as an unjust reward for having successfully concealed his doping for so long," Cooper wrote. "(But) disregarding any benefits USPS received from the sponsorship could bestow the government with an undeserved windfall. The same could be said of Landis, whose role in this entire affair some would view as less than pure."

Landis attorney Paul D. Scott said he was delighted "to see the case move toward trial."

"The finish line for Mr. Armstrong ... is fast approaching," Scott said. Armstrong attorney Elliot Peters said the court's decision laid out Armstrong's case, even as it let the lawsuit proceed.

"There is no actual evidence of any quantifiable financial harm," to the Postal Service, Peters said. "So the government may now proceed to a trial that, as a practical matter, it cannot win."

Armstrong had been one of the most popular sports figures on the planet before his cheating confession. His personal story of recovering from testicular cancer that had spread to his brain, while forcefully denying persistent rumors of doping, had built his Lance Armstrong Foundation cancer charity into a \$500 million global brand and turned him into a celebrity.

The foundation, which removed him from its board and renamed itself Livestrong, has struggled in the aftermath as donations and revenue plummeted.

Armstrong's team was already under the Postal Service sponsorship when he won his first Tour de France in 1999. The media frenzy that followed pushed the agency to sign the team for another five years.

Armstrong's cheating was finally uncovered in 2012 when the US Anti-Doping Agency, armed with sworn testimony from Landis and other former teammates, moved to strip Armstrong of his titles.—AP



Lance Armstrong