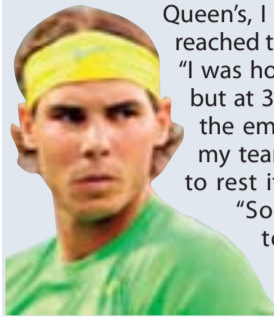


NADAL OUT OF QUEEN'S TO REST FOR WIMBLEDON

LONDON: Rafael Nadal confirmed Tuesday he has pulled out of next week's Aegon Championships at Queen's in order to rest and prepare for Wimbledon. The 31-year-old Spaniard has had a hugely successful clay season, claiming a record 10th French Open crown on Sunday to earn a 15th Grand Slam title. "I am very sorry to say that I am not going to be able to play Queen's next week," the world number two said on his Facebook page. "I am sad to make this decision because I love Queen's, I won the tournament in 2008 and every time I reached the Wimbledon final it was after playing Queen's. "I was hoping to take some days off and then be ready, but at 31, and after a long clay court season with all of the emotions of Roland Garros, and after speaking to my team and doctors, I have decided my body needs to rest if I am going to be ready to play Wimbledon. "Sorry to all the great fans in Britain and to the tournament organisers. "I hope to see you at Queen's next year."—AFP



MCILROY RETURNS FROM ANOTHER INJURY AT WISCONSIN MAJOR

ERIN: The storms moved in overnight and kept pounding Erin Hills through the morning, closing the course for some three hours with just two practice days remaining before the US Open. No one was happier than Rory McIlroy.

"I wasn't crying when I saw that rain last night and this morning," he said Tuesday. "It's a long golf course, and it's only going to play longer. That benefits a few guys, and luckily, I'm one of them." There's more to it than just length.

McIlroy won the first of his four majors in the US Open six years ago at Congressional, a course so softened by rain that he shattered the scoring record (268) and won by eight shots. For someone who grew up in Northern Ireland, he has the reputation of favoring benign conditions instead of firm, wind-whipped conditions.

The course also was soft at the last two majors he won, the British Open at Hoylake and PGA Championship at Valhalla. The bigger concern for McIlroy is his competitive form. This is the second straight time that a major championship has come to Wisconsin and McIlroy, the No. 2 player in the world, is coming off an injury.

Two years ago was far worse. He ruptured a tendon in his ankle playing soccer and missed two months, including his British Open title defense at St. Andrews. He didn't return until the PGA Championship at Whistling Straits, and while he broke par all four days, he finished 11 shots behind Jason Day.

This time, McIlroy has been out for six weeks because of a recurring injury in his rib that caused him to miss nearly two months at the start of the year. McIlroy skipped the BMW PGA Championship and the Memorial as a precaution and to let the rib properly heal.

McIlroy arrived at Erin Hills last Friday. He says he can swing and has full power. The only limitation is how much he can hit balls. The unknown is how sharp he will be this week. "My expectations going into Whistling, I was playing well. I didn't feel like my body was restricting me in any way from doing what I wanted to do," he said. "I felt like coming back into it I was playing well enough to win. And I feel like it's the same thing here. I don't feel like my body is limiting me from doing what I want to do out there. It's just a matter of being able to

do it. And if I play the way that I know I can, I fully expect to have a chance on Sunday."

The sky brightened by the afternoon as Dustin Johnson, the No. 1 player, arrived at Erin Hills. Johnson played two practice rounds last week after missing the cut at the Memorial. And while Erin Hills is new to all but a dozen or so players who were at the 2011 U.S. Amateur, there are not many secrets. Keep it in the fairway. Avoid the thick, knee-high fescue at all costs. Don't miss the green in the wrong spots. And keep a good attitude.

Patience is as valuable as pars, and that holds true at any US Open. "I've heard nothing but great stuff about this golf course and how much everyone's attitude is great at the start of the week," Day said. "Everyone is going to run into some sort of trouble out there - everyone is. It's a matter of how you handle yourself in that moment to prepare yourself to greatness."

McIlroy and Day are the only ones of the top five in the world who have not won this year. McIlroy lost in a playoff in South Africa in January - his last tournament before the rib injury - while Day was coping earlier this year with his mother's treatment for lung cancer.

Jordan Spieth won two years ago at Chambers Bay, relevant only because that was another new US Open course that had opened only a decade earlier. The grass is similar - green at Erin Hills, brown and dying at Chambers Bay - but both are relatively wide by US Open standards.

Spieth didn't see too many similarities except that both are a US Open, and it still feels like one. Adam Scott concurs, though as much focus as there has been on length and driving, he still sees an impeccable short game as going a long way.

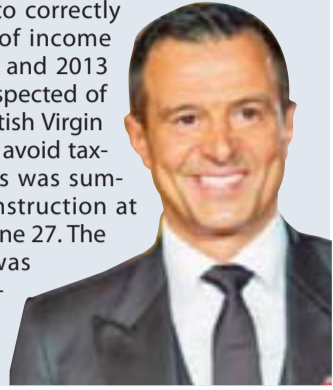
Phil Mickelson, a runner-up six times, is not the model of accuracy off the tee. Neither is three-time champion Tiger Woods. Both are renowned for their short games, as is Spieth. "Even the best drivers of the ball can't hit it in the fairway all the time at most US Opens," Scott said. "And you're going to have to scramble. And great wedge players will do well, and that's also what I've focused on a little bit this year, to lift the standard of that so I'm able to contend. ... It took me a long time to get a good result. I haven't cracked the code, but hopefully I'm on my way." — AP

XI MEETS FIFA BOSS AS CHINA EYES WORLD CUP

BEIJING: Chinese President Xi Jinping met with FIFA chief Gianni Infantino on Wednesday as the football world watches for signs that the Asian giant will make a bid to host a World Cup. Xi greeted Infantino in the capital's palatial Great Hall of the People but the two men did not mention China's World Cup ambitions as they exchanged pleasantries before their closed-door meeting. The talks follow widespread speculation that China will bid to host the event either in 2030 or 2034. "President Infantino, since becoming president of FIFA you have provided great support to the development and reform of football as a sport in China," said China's football-mad president. "I wish to express my appreciation for what you have done." "We are aware of the fact that FIFA is paying more attention to the development of football in China these days, and I do believe China-FIFA cooperation has a good future," he said. Infantino thanked Xi, adding: "We can really start a new era of football, not only in China, President Xi, but in the whole world because we are really passionate about football." —AFP

MENDES SUMMONED OVER FALCAO TAX EVASION

MADRID: Footballing super-agent Jorge Mendes, who manages Cristiano Ronaldo among others, has been summoned before a Spanish court as part of the probe into Colombian striker Radamel Falcao's alleged tax evasion, legal sources said yesterday. Monaco's Falcao is suspected of failing to correctly declare 5.6 million euros (\$6.1 million) of income earned from image rights between 2012 and 2013 while he was at Atletico Madrid. He is suspected of using a web of shell companies in the British Virgin Islands, Ireland, Colombia and Panama to avoid taxes on the image rights income. Mendes was summoned to appear before the court of instruction at Pozuelo de Alarcón, close to Madrid, on June 27. The summons comes a day after Ronaldo was accused by Spanish prosecutors of evading 14.7 million euros in tax through offshore companies. —AFP



HARTFORD: Dustin Johnson of the United States walks along the course during a practice round prior to the 2017 US Open at Erin Hills on Tuesday in Hartford, Wisconsin. — AFP

GOLF

JOHNSON READY FOR LONG GAME IN US OPEN DOUBLE BID

ERIN: Dustin Johnson will aim to exploit his big-hitting prowess on the longest course in major championship history when he tees off at the US Open today, bidding to become the first back-to-back champion in 28 years.

The world number one won his first major in last year's US Open at Oakmont, after several near-misses, and is the bookmakers' favourite at the picturesque Erin Hills course in rural Wisconsin. Hosting a major for the first time, the intimidating 7,741 yard, par-72 layout is not for the faint-hearted, promising a physical and mental challenge for the very best.

Many holes feature blind or semi-blind tee shots, while the course's mid-section runs on an outward-inward path that will ensure players face variable winds. Factor in fairways bordered by deep fescue grass that some have already described as unplayable, and it appears likely that the tournament will live up to its billing as the toughest test in golf. Johnson, however, who missed the Masters in April after a freak accident where he slipped on steps and hurt his back on the eve of the tournament, was adamant the length of Erin Hills would suit his game. "It's just a very, very difficult tournament to win," the 32-year-old said, noting the US Open challenge and the reputation of this year's venue. "I like really tough golf courses. I tend to focus more and play better. I like knowing par is a good score for some reason. I don't know why. I play better when I'm playing for pars."

If he defends his title, Johnson will be the first man to win back-to-back US Opens since Curtis Strange in 1988 and 1989. Strange, now working as a television analyst, backed Johnson to complete the double. "We're at a bomber's paradise, and the best player in the world is the bomber," Strange said. "Wherever DJ plays, he's the longest out there. I have a feeling he'll be amped this week." With Tiger Woods absent, still struggling to resurrect his career after back surgery, and Phil Mickelson likely to skip the tournament to attend his daughter's high school graduation, this year's US Open could mark the end of an era. If Mickelson

fails to show as expected-he retains a tee-time despite vowing not to attend-it will be the first time since 1994 that neither player has featured in the first round of the US Open. World number two Rory McIlroy, who won the event in 2011, has declared himself ready despite a frustrating season dogged by nagging injuries.

DRIVING FORCE

The Northern Irish star has played only one event since the Masters after rib and back problems forced him to withdraw from the BMW PGA Championship at Wentworth.

McIlroy arrived in Wisconsin last week to begin surveying a course he believes he can thrive on.

"I don't think it's a secret that I feel like my driver is one of the biggest weapons in my bag," McIlroy said on Tuesday. "If I can get that in my hands more regularly, and I think if the field has to hit driver more, as well, that plays into my hands, too."

While other players have complained at the tangled acres of fescue grass, McIlroy was dismayed to learn some of the rough had been cut back following the complaints. "These are the widest fairways we've ever played in a US Open," McIlroy said. "You've got 156 of the best players in the world here. If we can't hit it within that avenue, you might as well pack your bags and go home." The last six majors-including Johnson's maiden US Open victory-have been won by players who had never won a major before. One of the likeliest candidates to continue that streak at Erin Hills is 22-year-old Spaniard Jon Rahm, the former amateur world number one. Rahm, who turned pro in mid-2016 and claimed his maiden PGA Tour win at the Farmers Insurance Open at Torrey Pines in January, said he is ready for the challenge of Erin Hills. "It's like a links golf course on steroids, everything is a little bigger," Rahm said. "But I think it's US Open, they expect our best!" — AFP

JUSTIN ROSE EYES MORE FATHER'S DAY SUCCESS

ERIN: Justin Rose believes he is ready for more Father's Day glory at the US Open after slowly recovering his form after his nail-biting Masters defeat to Sergio Garcia.

The 36-year-old Englishman's results have taken a dip since his playoff defeat to Garcia in April, with a missed cut and a share of 65th place at The Players Championship followed by a tie for 12th at the BMW PGA Championship. But the 2016 Olympic champion is adamant that his game is starting to click once more as he looks ahead to this week's US Open at Erin Hills-four years after his victory in the tournament at Merion.

"Since (Augusta) it's obviously been nothing

to really write home about," Rose said Tuesday. "But I do feel like I'm beginning to trend into this tournament. So although the results might not be there to kind of back that up, I feel good about where the week can go for me from here." The US Open usually falls at an emotional time for Rose on Father's Day weekend, bringing back memories of his dad Ken, who died from cancer when the golfer was 21. He dedicated his 2013 victory to his late father and in 2015 played the final round with Ken's name stitched onto his golf bag.

Reflecting on his win four years ago, Rose said he regards the fact that it fell on Father's Day as a "huge gift." — AFP



HARTFORD: Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland looks on during a practice round prior to the 2017 US Open at Erin Hills on Tuesday in Hartford, Wisconsin. — AFP

SECURITY SHIELDS, SECURITY AND CONTROL TO MEET IN FINALS OF LATE SHEIKHA SALWA SOCCER TOURNAMENT

By Abdellatif Sharaa

KUWAIT: The "Security Shields" team will face the "Security and Control" team in the finals of the 12th late Sheikha Salwa Sabah Al-Ahmad indoor soccer tournament, as the first team defeated the special units in the semi final after resorting to penalty kicks 4/3, while the later defeated special operations 4-1.

The tournament is under the patronage of HH the Amir, and backed by Interior Ministry and Undersecretary Lt General Mahmoud Al-Dousary who will attend the final match tonight.

The four teams reached the semi finals after tough competitions in earlier rounds and qualification was not decided until all matches were played.

Former International Referee Saad Kameel, who heads the referees committee lauded the high technical lev-



Referee Saad Kameel

el of competitions and it is getting better year after year with the increase in the participating teams.

He also lauded the efforts of the organizing committee headed by Lt. Colonel Abdallah Al-Bahar through providing all administrative and technical needs for the players during the competition.

