

RIGONDEAUX BEATS FLORES IN CONTROVERSIAL FIRST ROUND KO

LAS VEGAS: Two-time Olympic gold medalist Guillermo Rigondeaux defeated Moises Flores with a controversial fight-ending punch at the close of the first round Saturday to retain his WBA junior featherweight title in Las Vegas. The victory was controversial as tele-

vision replays showed Rigondeaux landing a left hand after the round-ending bell had rang. He also landed three punches while holding Flores' head from behind just before the knockout.

The fight was on the undercard of the Sergey Kovalev-Andre Ward world title

light heavyweight bout at the Mandalay Bay hotel and casino. Rigondeaux improved to 18-0 with 12 knockouts, while Flores, of Mexico, dropped to 25-1, with 17 KOs.

The Cuban-born Rigondeaux was announced the winner, but after the

fight Nevada Athletic Commission executive director Bob Bennett told broadcaster HBO that they might have to review the decision.

"We will take a look at it. If the punch landed after the bell it is a disqualification," Bennett said. "We want the right

fighter to win. Anything is possible. We could take a look at it and do the right thing." Flores stayed down for several minutes and had to be helped back to his corner where he sat during a lengthy review that eventually resulted in Rigondeaux being crowned the winner. —AFP

FOWLER READY TO BREAK MAJOR DUCK

ERIN: Rickie Fowler is confident of "getting the job done" after resurrecting his hopes of a maiden major at the US Open on Saturday.

The 28-year-old number nine got off to a flying start on Thursday with a seven-under-par 65 but saw his momentum falter on Friday with one-over-par 73. On Saturday, Fowler exploited the benign conditions at Erin Hills to haul himself back into the frame.

A four-under-par 68 left him at 10 under heading into the final Sunday, two behind the lead. While Fowler still has ground to make up, he was pleased with a strong finish that saw him pick up strokes with three birdies on the 14th, 15th and 16th.

"It's going to be a really cool day for someone tomorrow," said Fowler, who has posted six top-10 finishes in majors during his career, including a second place finish at the 2014 US Open.

"I'm looking forward to my shot at it, I know it's not going to be an easy day, for

sure," Fowler said.

"I've been there a handful of times and had some good finishes. But I'm looking forward to getting the job done."

Fowler agreed that the wide open leaderboard—none of the top 16 players have won a major—made it anyone's title to win. "A lot of young guys, lot of great players," he said. "Someone has a very good chance of ending up with their first major tomorrow."

Fowler is also buoyed by the knowledge that his biggest tournament wins have usually come when he has emerged from the field—even though that can increase the pressure to pick up shots. "My wins have been from behind," he said. "It's sometimes nice being out front because you can afford to make a mistake. "But I'll take exactly where I'm at. This was the goal going into the week to put ourselves in position to be in contention on Sunday. Whether that was two back, two up front or tied for the lead—let's go." —AFP

GOLF

HARMAN EDGES CLEAR, THOMAS DAZZLES IN US OPEN BLITZ

ERIN: Brian Harman opened up a one-shot lead at the 117th US Open on Saturday in a dramatic third round lit up by a record-equalling 63 from Justin Thomas.

Torrential rain that doused the 7,818-yard layout at Erin Hills overnight presented the field with a feast of birdie chances, transforming the leaderboard into a sea of red as dusk fell.

Harman, who had begun the day in a four-way tie for the lead, carded a five-under-par 67 which included six birdies and one bogey. The 30-year-old from Georgia had never gone past the second round in a US Open before this year, missing the cut on his two previous visits in 2012 and 2015.

"We're breaking down all kinds of barriers," Harman quipped. "I'm proud of the way I hung in there today. I got off to a pretty good start, which I really haven't done yet, so that was nice. "Struck it well, hit a bunch of greens, and that's what you've got to do to play well around here."

The world number 50 headed to the clubhouse on 12 under, one ahead of Thomas, Brooks Koepka and England's Tommy Fleetwood.

FORGIVING CONDITIONS

The soft, forgiving conditions created opportunity for major movement up the leaderboard for those players willing to take it. And the prime beneficiary was Thomas, who catapulted up the leaderboard with his record-breaking nine-under-par 63. The 24-year-old world number 13 produced a magnificent eagle three on the 600-yard 18th hole to crown a spellbinding display that was the lowest to par score in US Open history.

The previous lowest score in relation to par was the eight-under 63 shot by Johnny Miller in the final round of the 1973 Open. Thomas was already on course for a share of the lead as he stepped up to the 18th having carded nine birdies against two bogeys in a spectacular round. He then drilled a 300-yard second shot to around eight feet before rolling in his eagle putt to roars from the galleries.

"I feel comfortable. Being in con-

tention in a major is new and I'm excited," said Thomas. "I hope the moment will come as soon as possible. I know I'm going to be nervous, I just need to harness that as best I can."

FOWLER CONFIDENT

Rickie Fowler was two behind Harman on 10 under after a four-under-par 68 which kept him firmly in contention. Fowler likes his chances of breaking his major duck on Sunday. "It's going to be a really cool day for someone tomorrow," the world number nine said. "I'm looking forward to my shot at it. It's not going to be an easy day, for sure. I've been there a handful of times and had some good finishes. But I'm looking forward to getting the job done."

South Korea's Kim Si-Woo was one behind Fowler on nine under after also shooting 68, while three players—Patrick Reed, Russell Henley and Charley Hoffman were on eight under.

Reed was one of the biggest movers, powering up the board with a dazzling seven-under-par 65 that included four birdies on the front nine against one bogey.

The American Ryder Cup star then bagged a trio of birdies on the 14th, 15th and 16th holes to finish at eight under.

The low-scoring sets up a wide open final Sunday, with the world's top three ranked players—No.1 Dustin Johnson, No.2 Rory McIlroy and No.3 Jason Day—all missing the cut on Friday.

None of the leading 16 players have won a major before, making it likely that a run of six consecutive victories by first-timers will extend to seven this weekend.

South Korea's Kim will lead the Asian quest for a major yesterday after Hideki Matsuyama was unable to build on his second round 65. Matsuyama, the world number four, had to settle for a one-under-par 71 which left him on six under, six off the pace. Elsewhere, Masters champion Sergio Garcia finished with a 71 to stay on six under, six behind Harman. China's Li Haotong, who on Friday became the first player from mainland China to make the cut at a major, bombed out of contention with a 10-over-par 82. — AFP



LAS VEGAS: Andre Ward (L) and Sergey Kovalev battle it out during their light heavyweight championship bout at the Mandalay Bay Events Center on Saturday in Las Vegas, Nevada. Ward retained his WBA/IBF/WBO titles with a TKO in the eighth round. —AFP

BOXING

WARD STOPS SERGEY KOVALEV TO WIN LIGHT HEAVY REMATCH

LAS VEGAS: Andre Ward vowed he would leave no doubt this time around. He didn't, turning the tables on a big puncher and stopping Sergey Kovalev in the eighth round Saturday night to win their light heavyweight title rematch.

The undefeated Ward turned the fight around with a big right hand that wobbled Kovalev, then swarmed all over him. Kovalev was in the neutral corner and Ward was landing shots to the body when the Russian sat on the ring rope and referee Tony Weeks signaled an end to the bout at 2:29 of the eighth.

"I knew this time it was going to be different," Ward said. In a lot of ways it was the same, until Ward - who was knocked down in the first fight - showed he was a big puncher, too, with a right hand that made Kovalev's right leg wobble and signaled the beginning of the end to the bout.

The fight had been close, with Kovalev (30-2-1) winning the early rounds before Ward (32-0) began making adjustments and Kovalev began tiring. Both fighters complained of dirty tactics and Weeks spent a lot of his time breaking up clinches.

Ward won the first fight in November, coming back from a second round knockdown to get a controversial decision. The rematch seemed just as close until Ward landed the right hand that caused Kovalev's legs to wobble.

"He's a great fighter," Ward said. "You've got to raise your game to the next level and thankfully that's what we did tonight." Kovalev complained that Ward hit him with two low blows in the final exchange, forcing him to sit on the first rope.

"Why stop the fight?" he said. "I could have continued to fight." The fight was rough and tumble from the beginning, much like when the two met the first time when both were unbeaten. But while Kovalev was supposed to be the puncher it was a big right hand by Ward that landed midway through the eighth.

"I could tell he was reacting to my body shots and I knew I had him then," Ward said. "I knew he was hurt." Ward was up by a point on two scorecards and down three points on the third going into the final round.

"I don't know, I can't explain it," Kovalev said. "I thought I was doing very good. I was better and he was better this fight. I didn't feel like I was getting knocked down by the power of his punches."

Ward, who won an Olympic gold in 2004 and hasn't lost a fight since he was 12, took a few rounds to find his mark but once he did the two engaged in close rounds that were difficult to score. The crowd at Mandalay Bay thought otherwise, roaring at every punch landed by Ward and chanting his nickname.

There was genuine dislike between the two fighters, born largely out of their first fight. Neither made any effort to touch gloves when given their final instructions, and once the bell rang, they both went after each other.

The fight itself played out early somewhat like the first one, with Kovalev starting out aggressively and Ward trying to find his rhythm. Weeks, meanwhile, was working hard to keep control as the two fighters clinched and hit each other behind the head, with Ward landing a low blow in the second round that doubled Kovalev over and caused Weeks to pause the bout.

Ward vowed before the fight to leave no doubt this time, after escaping with a win that many at ringside questioned in the first fight. He appeared confident he would do just that, coming into the ring doing a little dance before turn-

ing to salute the crowd.

Kovalev, a Russian who lives in Los Angeles, had complained bitterly about the scoring in the first fight, though he appeared to run out of gas as the fight went on. Ward was paid \$6.5 million for the rematch, while Kovalev got a percentage of the gate and the pay-per-view.

In another fight, two-time Olympic gold medalist Guillermo Rigondeaux retained his super batamweight title on a first-round knockout over Moises Flores when he landed a punch after the bell.

Rigondeaux and Flores were trading punches when the bell rang to end the first round and both threw after the bell. Rigondeaux's punch landed, and Flores dropped to the canvas where he was counted out.

Nevada boxing officials huddled for several minutes and watched the replay before ruling the punch was legal.

Rigondeaux, who won his gold medals for his native Cuba, improved to 18-0 with 12 knockouts as a pro, while Flores, from Mexico, fell to 25-1. — AP

LEXI THOMPSON TAKES ONE-SHOT LEAD IN MEIJER LPGA CLASSIC

GRAND RAPIDS: Lexi Thompson shot a 64 on Saturday on the Blytheheld layout reduced to a par of 69 because of flooding, giving her a one-stroke lead in the Meijer LPGA Classic.

The fifth hole was played as a 111-yard par 3 instead of a par 5 because of the flooding from overnight rain. Coming off a playoff loss to Ariya Jutanugarn last week in Canada, Thompson had six birdies four on the back nine - and a bogey to reach 15-under 196.

"It was just a matter of staying patient," Thompson said. "I knew I was hitting it well on the front nine, I just wasn't making the birdies. But I hit it well all day, so it was all a matter of hitting the shots closer and I guess just taking advantage of like No. 11, reaching that one in two, and making a few putts for birdie."

Her only bogey was on the par-4 seventh.

"It was just a stupid club coming in," she said. "I should have just played short of the green, that's where you have to miss it, and I hit it long. Just a bad miss, stupid mistake." Brooke Henderson, the leader after each of the first two rounds, had a 67 to drop into a tie for second with Lee-Anne Pace (61), Sung Hyun Park (62) and Jenny Shin (63). Thompson won the Kingsmill Championship last month in Virginia for her eighth LPGA Tour title after losing the ANA Inspiration in a playoff after being penalized four strokes for a rules violation reported by a television viewer.

At Rancho Mirage in early April, Thompson was given the four-shot penalty with six holes to play in the final round. She had a 15-inch putt on 17 in the third round when she stooped to mark

the ball, and quickly replaced it about an inch away. The television viewer contacted the LPGA Tour the next day, and officials determined it was a clear violation.

Thompson was assessed a two-shot penalty for where she replaced the ball, and because it happened the day before, she received a two-shot penalty for signing an incorrect scorecard. She went from a three-shot lead to one shot behind, and eventually lost to So Yeon Ryu in the playoff.

Henderson birdied Nos. 12 and 13 and closed with five pars. "I made that long one from off the green on 12 that wasn't really expected and that kind of gave me some energy," the 19-year-old Canadian said.

Pace had two eagles and five birdies. "My irons were really good," the South African player said. "Obviously, all the par 3s, that helps. I was looking at birdie almost every hole, which is quite nice. I was never really in trouble except on 10, I missed the drive left, but that was really the only thing. There were a couple of long putts I made, unexpected putts actually."

Shin made a long putt on No. 14 for her fifth straight birdie. But on 17, she pushed her approach shot and wound up on the bottom of the green, and took her only bogey of the round.

Hyo Joo Kim (65) was 12 under, and Lydia Ko (64), Michelle Wie (64), Moriya Jutanugarn (67) and Carlota Ciganda (68) followed at 11 under. Ko dropped to No. 2 in the world Monday after an 85-week run at the top. The top-ranked Ariya Jutanugarn, Moriya Jutanugarn's younger sister, was 9 under after a 64. — AP



ERIN: Brian Harman hits on the 18th hole during the third round of the US Open golf tournament Saturday, at Erin Hills in Erin, Wis. — AP



Lexi Thompson