

## Sports

# Johnson and McIlroy lose on first day of Match Play

## Out-of-sorts Johnson beaten by Wiesberger

**TEXAS:** World number one Dustin Johnson and four-time major winner Rory McIlroy suffered surprise defeats on Wednesday as the WGC-Dell Match Play got off to a typically unpredictable start in Texas. Austrian Bernd Wiesberger, seeded 52nd at the tournament, beat defending champion Johnson 3&1, while Peter Uihlein (57th) defeated McIlroy (sixth) 2&1 at Austin Country Club. In another surprise, American Julian Suri, the lowest ranked of the 64 men in the field, beat Australia's world number 15 Marc Leishman, seeded 11th, 3&2.

McIlroy's defeat came three days after he won the Arnold Palmer Invitational with a barnstorming final round. The Northern Irishman said he had been a "little flat" early on, though rallied late with five consecutive birdies to make it close before a relieved Uihlein closed it out with a par at the 17th. "I made him earn it at least. I made the scoreline a little more respectable," McIlroy told reporters. "I got down early and he didn't make a bogey all day. So it was hard to sort of claw my way back."

McIlroy and the other Wednesday losers will get a chance to make amends over the next two days as the tournament no longer

uses a knockout format until the weekend. The 64 players are divided into 16 groups of four, with everyone in each pod playing each other over the first three days. The winner of each group advances to the final 16 and the elimination stage. Wiesberger said he played more freely without any burden of expectation against top seed Johnson.

"I thought it was the easiest game I could have," said the four-times European Tour winner. "I'm the underdog playing the defending champion, so it was just go out there and see what happens. "We both didn't have a great day. He gave away a couple of holes quite unexpectedly." American Suri was another who revelled in the underdog role. "I like to think I play my best with a little chip on my shoulder," said

### Unheralded Suri too good for Leishman

Suri, who plays mainly on the European Tour where he won the Made in Denmark tournament last August.

"A lot of people are saying congrats on being in the field. I don't think any other tournament they'd say congrats. I want to do more than just be here and take pictures." Second and fourth seeds Justin Thomas and Jordan Spieth won their contests while third seed Jon Rahm halved with Keegan Bradley.



**TEXAS:** Rory McIlroy of Northern Ireland lines up a putt on the 16th green during the first round of the World Golf Championships-Dell Match Play at Austin Country Club on March 21, 2018 in Austin, Texas. —AFP

Two-times Masters champion Bubba Watson made a hot start to beat South African Branden Grace 5&3. "It was perfect," Watson said of his front nine, after racing to a 6-up lead

at the turn. "You couldn't ask for better. He (Grace) was under par on the front nine and somehow I just made a few more. I felt like McIlroy on Sunday." —Reuters

## Shooting tournament

By Abdellatif Sharaa

**KUWAIT:** The second day of the Late Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah shooting tournament will see shooters compete in the trap and skeet as well as 10m pistol and rifle for both women and men. It will also include the official pre-event training of archery and 50m pistol and rifle. Kuwait shooting sport club treasurer Essa Ahmad Al-Botti Bataiban said the shooting community is proud with the support it received from HH the Amir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, HH the Crown Prince Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah and HH the Prime Minister Sheikh Jaber Al-Mubarak Al-Hamad Al-Sabah.

He also expressed appreciation to the Public Authority for Sports and its Director General Dr Humoud Fulaiteh Al-



Essa Bataiban

Shimmari. Bataiban added that the board of directors decided to end the season with the tournament of the late Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Humoud Al-Sabah in all disciplines and categories - including having juniors compete with national team members so as to gain experience. The winners of the ladies 10m rifle and 10m pistol will be announced today.

## Serena crashes out in Miami as nervous Osaka advances

**MIAMI:** Serena Williams crashed out of the Miami Open in the first round here Wednesday, slumping to a straight sets defeat against Japan's Naomi Osaka in the latest setback to the former world number one's comeback. Osaka, who won her first major title in Indian Wells last weekend, was superior throughout and fully deserved her 6-3, 6-2 win in just one hour and 17 minutes.

It was Williams' fourth match and second tournament appearance since returning from 13 months of maternity leave-yet the American's movement and inability to stay in the rallies suggested her comeback could be more arduous than expected. The defeat was the first time Williams has lost her first match at an American hard court championship for 21 years. Williams, 36, may have been unfairly unseeded here due to her lack of action over the past year, but could have no complaints with the defeat. In her comeback in Indian Wells, she made it through to round three, where she fell to sister Venus in straight sets.

Taking on Osaka was always going to prove

a tough task-and so it did. Williams refused to speak to the media afterwards. The WTA and tournament will decide if she will be fined, with a potential cost expected to be about \$1,000. She released a brief statement more than 90 minutes after the end of the match that read: "Every tournament is an opportunity for me to better understand the areas I need to improve to be my best. "Naomi played a great match and I look forward to continuing my return by progressing every day. "I am so grateful for my fans who continue to support me every step of this incredible journey."

### Different type of nerves

Osaka, though, was understandably delighted. "I was nervous but once the match started I was OK," said the Japanese rising star, who next faces Ukrainian Elina Svitolina, the world number four, in the second round. "Serena is the main reason why I started playing. I have seen her on TV so many times, so for me to be playing against her, trying to detach myself from the fact I was playing Serena, was hard. It took me three games (to get her head around it).

"It was a different type of nerves. I have never been like that against a specific person. The final in Indian Wells was different because I had never been in that position." Williams looked a shadow of her former self, yet her opponent was too focused on her own game to notice any glaring deficiencies in the American's game. —AFP