

25 Ex-Wales rugby captain Thomas was blackmailed before HIV revelation



26 Bloodied Fury survives severe cut to outpoint Sweden's Wallin



27 Pliskova beats Martić in Zhengzhou to win her fourth title of 2019



BEIJING: Team Spain celebrates after the game against Team Argentina during the 2019 FIBA World Cup Finals at the Cadillac Arena yesterday in Beijing, China. — AFP

Spain beat Argentina to win FIBA WCup

France battle back to deny Australia World Cup bronze

BEIJING: Spain beat Argentina 95-75 to win the FIBA Basketball World Cup for the first time since 2006 yesterday, completing a stunning campaign for a squad considered by many to be among the outsiders when the 32-team tournament began.

The Spaniards scored first and never relinquished the lead, relying on swarming interior defence and superior rebounding to snuff out the offensive threat of 2004 Olympic champions Argentina. Point guard Ricky Rubio racked up 20 points and three assists and Marc Gasol and Willy Hernangomez swatted three shots each as Spain pulled down 47 rebounds, 20 more than Argentina, en route to a comprehensive victory.

For Gasol it was the crowning achievement of an incredible year that saw him win an NBA World Championship with the Toronto Raptors before leading his national team to glory. His 33 points in the semi-final victory over Australia put them in a position to fight for the gold medal, but it was his defence that put them on the top step of the podium.

From the opening tip, the 34-year-old dominated the

driving lanes to the basket that Argentina had used to such great effect against France, forcing them into outside shots that would not fall. He was equally effective banging under the basket at the other end and, though he made only two of his nine field goal attempts, he hit nine of his 12 free throws to maintain the gap between the two teams.

He and Rubio were rewarded for their performances in Spain's unbeaten run to the gold medal with a place in the tournament's five-man All-Star team, which was announced after the final, with Rubio named the tournament's most valuable player.

"Right now, we made history, and we were ready for that. We had a great tournament, (but) you've got to give credit to Argentina, we had to fight for this win," Rubio told a news conference.

"It's just amazing how the whole tournament has been us as a team, and you can tell. We weren't the most talented team, the biggest team, put whatever you want, but we were the team that had the big heart."

There was to be no fairytale ending for the seemingly evergreen Argentinian Luis Scola, whose superb show

against France had helped to carry his side into the final. The 39-year-old power forward, his jet-black hair now flecked with grey at the temples, was kept well-shackled throughout, and it was late in the third quarter before he notched up his first point from the free throw line.

Spain's win marked the second time they have won the tournament on Asian soil, having claimed the 2006 title by beating Greece in Saitama, Japan.

Earlier, France roared back after half-time to defeat Australia 67-59 and claim a successive World Cup bronze yesterday — and extend the Boomers' long wait for a major medal.

Turkish-based guard Nando De Colo led all scorers with 19 points for France and Nicolas Batum had nine points, six assists, three rebounds and three steals. The French, one of the tallest teams at the tournament, defeated reigning two-time holders the United States in the quarter-finals, but then lost heavily to Argentina.

French coach Vincent Collet paid tribute to his team's battling qualities. "For us it's something very, very special and important we did it after a very difficult first half," he

said. "Many teams could have given up, even easy shots we were missing in the first half."

"We started to move the ball better in the second half and that's why we won this game." It was hard on Australia, who similarly led for long periods in their semi-final against Spain before being hauled back in a double-overtime defeat.

It is still a best finish for the Boomers, who had never gone beyond the quarter-finals at 11 previous World Cups, but they are yet to claim a medal at the worlds or Olympics. At the Rio 2016 Olympics they were similarly squeezed out by Spain in the bronze-medal match.

They led 30-21 at half-time in Beijing against France with the Utah Jazz forward Joe Ingles playing a starring role. He was to finish with 17 points. But Orlando Magic's Evan Fournier spearheaded a third-quarter French revival, reducing Australia's lead to just two points with 1:31 left in the quarter. France, bronze medalists at the previous World Cup, were in the ascendancy and grabbed the lead 47-46 with two free throws by De Colo at the start of the fourth quarter. — Agencies

Arsenal blow two-goal lead at lowly Watford

LONDON: Quique Sanchez Flores enjoyed a happy return to Watford as Arsenal blew a 2-0 lead at Vicarage Road to draw 2-2 yesterday. Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang looked to have the Gunners well on course for a comfortable three points when he struck twice in 11 minutes before the break.

However, Sanchez Flores, who was appointed as Hornets' boss for the second time last week after one point from their opening four games of the season saw Javi Gracia sacked, roused the hosts for an impressive second-half fightback.

Arsenal played a huge part in their own downfall too as they gifted possession away inside their

own box for Tom Cleverley to pull a goal back before David Luiz upended Roberto Pereyra, who slotted home the resulting penalty.

A point sees Arsenal only move level with Manchester United, Tottenham, Chelsea and Leicester behind Liverpool and Manchester City in the early season battle for a top-four finish.

However, it is Watford who will feel they should even have gone onto win the game as Arsenal boss Unai Emery's inability to find a balance between his brilliant attack and shoddy defence continued.

Emery recalled Mesut Ozil to his starting line-up for the first time since he and Sead Kolasinac were the victims of a carjacking attack in July. Ozil initially struggled to settle as Watford started the brighter with Cleverley's rising drive forcing Bernd Leno into a fine save before Jose Holebas fired horribly off-target with a great chance from the edge of the area.

However, Watford have now conceded 10 goals in their opening five games to the campaign

and were opened up far too easily to allow Aubameyang to open the scoring on 21 minutes.

The home fans were screaming for a foul as Dani Ceballos won back possession, but Watford were slow to react as Kolasinac burst down the left and fed Aubameyang, who spun and fired low past Ben Foster.

Ozil was involved as a patient build-up from the visitors doubled their lead on 32 minutes. At the end of a 20-pass move, Ozil freed Ainsley Maitland-Niles in behind the Watford defence and the right-back squared for Aubameyang to slot home his fifth goal in as many games this season. Twice the visitors escaped gifting Watford a way back into the game when Matteo Guendouzi was caught in possession on the edge of his own box, trying to play out from the back. But Arsenal did not learn their lesson and were finally punished when Sokratis Papastathopoulos gifted possession to Gerard Deulofeu and the Spaniard teed up Cleverley to shot low past Leno. — AFP

Europe beat USA to regain Solheim Cup

GLENEAGLES: Europe regained the Solheim Cup with a thrilling 14.5-13.5 victory over the United States yesterday at Gleneagles. Norwegian wildcard Suzann Pettersen holed the winning putt in the last match on the course, making a birdie on the 18th to defeat Marina Alex one-up in a dramatic finale in the event's closest ever finish.

It was a first defeat for US Captain

Juli Inkster - and it makes it three wins out of three in Scotland for Europe following on from Dalnahaoy (1992) and Loch Lomond (2000).

"This is fantastic," said Europe's Scottish captain, Catriona Matthew after Europe's first victory since 2013. "I knew the last few matches would be crucial."

Pettersen, a new mum who had hardly played in two years, was a controversial wild card selection. "But I always had faith," added Matthew. "It is all still a blur," said Pettersen.

"I knew it was close. But Catriona came up to me at the last and I said 'is this why you picked me?'. "This is just so fantastic for Europe." It was Europe's sixth Solheim Cup win - with the USA 10-time champions. — AFP