

Sports

Boxer Joshua brushes off 'nonsense' retirement talk

Boxing star avoids comment as tweeter jailed

JEDDAH: Heavyweight boxer Anthony Joshua called retirement speculation "nonsense" on Wednesday after suggestions he could hang up his gloves if he loses to Oleksandr Usyk again this week. Joshua, 32, is bidding to reclaim the world titles he lost to Ukraine's Usyk, who beat the Briton by unanimous decision in London last September. Some experts have said a third professional defeat could end the career of the former Olympic heavyweight gold medalist - a claim dismissed by Joshua.

"I'm competing with a pound-for-pound (one of the most skilled across all weight classes) fighter," he told AFP ahead of Saturday's fight in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. "I'm not losing against some has-been. It's crazy to suggest I should retire. "If I would lose to one of the top fighters of the world today (people would say) 'Oh he should retire, he lost to one of the best'. What type of nonsense is that?" Joshua remains one of the sport's biggest draws but his lustre faded with his surprise defeat by Andy Ruiz Jr in 2019, and dimmed further when he lost to Usyk last year.

However, he avenged the Ruiz loss in Saudi Arabia, and he is hoping for the same result again in Saturday's "Rage on the Red Sea" in the coastal city of Jeddah. "If people really want me to walk away,

then cool. I ain't begging no one," Joshua said. "People always ask questions and they're entitled to their questions. "For me personally, I still want to compete. I love it. It's challenging, but I love the challenge. Sometimes I question whether I want to do it, it's that hard. "It's not an easy job but I've got the will, I've got the strength to keep on pushing."

Joshua declined to comment on human rights in Saudi Arabia as news broke Wednesday that a woman had been jailed for 34 years over her Twitter activity, days before his world heavyweight fight in Jeddah. Joshua, who has been based in Saudi Arabia ahead of Saturday's unification bout with Oleksandr Usyk of Ukraine, said people seemed "cool" in the kingdom and that he preferred to avoid "negative" talk.

"I'm here enjoying Saudi Arabia now we're all here loving the positive side of things. Don't focus on anything that's negative. I've had a great time," he told AFP. "What I experienced is only what I can talk about. I'm not on the internet researching, digging and digging and digging. I'm sure if you want to find that stuff out you have to dig." As Joshua was preparing for his fight, it emerged that a Saudi woman studying in Britain was jailed for 34 years - with a further 34-year travel ban - for posting messages on Twitter. —AFP



JEDDAH: Ukrainian boxer Oleksandr Usyk (center left) and British boxer Anthony Joshua (center right) attend a press conference ahead of the heavyweight boxing rematch for the WBA, WBO, IBF and IBF titles in Jeddah on August 17, 2022. —AFP



BRIDGETOWN: Nicholas Pooran of West Indies survives a quick rising delivery from Lockie Ferguson of New Zealand during the 1st ODI match between West Indies and New Zealand at Kensington Oval, Bridgetown, Barbados, on August 17, 2022. —AFP

Brooks powers Windies to 5-wicket win over NZ

BRIDGETOWN: Shamarh Brooks played the sheet anchor role to perfection in guiding the West Indies to a five-wicket victory over top-ranked New Zealand in a low-scoring opening day-night One-Day International of a three-match series at Kensington Oval in Barbados on Wednesday. After the home side's bowling combination pace and spin dismissed the visitors for 190 off 45.2 overs batting first, Brooks' 91-ball 79 with nine fours and one six provided the much-needed solidity to take his team to 193 for five off 39 overs in reply.

His 72-run fourth-wicket partnership with captain Nicholas Pooran (28) steadied the chase and ensured there would be no repeat of the collapses which have become an all-too-common feature of their game in recent years. "It was important just to get a start because this was not the easiest pitch to bat on," said Brooks after receiving the "Man of the Match" award. "It was especially gratifying to be in a good partnership with the captain and to see the way he really buckled down, which is not his nature."

Not only did the result mark New Zealand's first ODI loss of the year but it also ended the Caribbean team's abysmal run of nine consecutive losses in the 50 overs-per-side format. More importantly, it earned them 10 vital points in the bid to qualify for next year's World Cup in India. Left-arm spinner Akeal Hossain and fast bowler Alzarri Joseph claimed three wickets each as the Black Caps, winners of the preceding T20 International series in Jamaica 2-1, laboured in the conditions earlier in the day with captain Kane Williamson top-scoring with 34.

"We need to roll up our sleeves and learn to adapt to different conditions, because it definitely wasn't easy batting out there," was the New Zealand captain's assessment of his team's innings. "It's all part of the learning process and we just have to move on from here." Put in on a bright afternoon, New Zealand looked to be establishing the platform for a formidable total via an opening stand of 41 between Finn Allen (25) and Martin Gupthill (24).

Hossain changed the complexion of the innings with the first three wickets but it was Joseph's double-strike in the 30th over which proved the most incisive as he first trapped Daryl Mitchell leg-before and then induced an outside edge from Williamson's bat to wicketkeeper Shai Hope. A 40-run seventh-wicket stand between Michael Bracewell (31) and Mitchell Santner (25) gave New Zealand hope of pushing past 200 but Jason Holder claimed two wickets in two balls and Joseph wrapped up the innings in the 46th over when Trent Boult played on. —AFP

Quintana denies use of drug after disqualification

PARIS: Colombian Nairo Quintana on Wednesday denied taking a banned pain medication after he was retrospectively disqualified from this year's Tour de France over a positive tramadol test result. Former two-time runner-up Quintana, 32, finished sixth overall in the race that ended on July 24. The pain medication has been on a list of International Cycling Union (UCI) prohibited substances since 2019.

"I know nothing about the use of this substance and deny ever having used it in my career," Quintana, who is due to take part in the Vuelta a Espana beginning on Friday in the Netherlands, said in a statement published on Twitter. "With my team of lawyers we are exhausting all avenues to mount my defense." Tramadol is only banned in competition and while Quintana has been disqualified from the Tour after testing positive for the substance on both July 8 and 13, he will not be banned from future races.

The UCI said Quintana "has been sanctioned for an infringement of the in-competition ban on using tramadol... with the aim of protecting the safety and health of riders in light of the side-effects of this substance". The governing body added that "the analyses of two dried blood samples... revealed the

presence of tramadol and its two main metabolites". Quintana has 10 days to appeal the decision to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), the UCI said.

"As this is a first offence, Nairo Alexander Quintana Rojas is not declared ineligible and can therefore participate in competitions," it added. Quintana's Arkea-Samsic team said they were aware of the decision but would "make no further comment". The team did not say whether Quintana would still take part in the Vuelta but



Colombian rider Nairo Quintana

Wallabies Hooper out of SA Tests, Foley recalled

SYDNEY: Captain Michael Hooper was missing from the Australia squad named Thursday for two home Rugby Championship Tests against South Africa as veteran playmaker Bernard Foley earned a shock recall. Hooper pulled out of the team's two-match swing of Argentina this month a day before their opening clash and jetted home, saying he was not in the "right mindset" to lead his country.

In his absence, the Wallabies won the first Test 41-26 but were humiliated 48-17 in the second. Rugby Australia boss Andy Marinos previously said "you cannot put time limits on these things" when asked about Hooper's return. Coach Dave Rennie said he had spoken to the 121-Test veteran since their return from Argentina. "We're not in a position to discuss that in detail and we've got no firm timeline as to when he will return," he added.

Fellow Test centurion James Slipper, who took over as skipper in Argentina, is again expected to captain the side for their showdowns against the Springboks in Adelaide on August 27 and Sydney a week later. Japan-based Foley, 32, returns for the first time since the 2019 World Cup. The 71-Test fly-half, who plays for Kubota Spears, gets another chance with Quade Cooper out with a season-end-

ing injury and James O'Connor dropped after starting Australia's last Test.

"Obviously with Quade's injury and his (Foley's) availability, we started having a conversation after the first Argentinean Test," Rennie said. "James (O'Connor) got a crack in the last Test and we wanted him to drive the ship and allow us to implement our plan, but we were clunky and lacked cohesion, so he's missed out on selection. "Bernard hasn't played an enormous amount of rugby recently... we'll make a call on him once we get him in camp on Sunday."

While Hooper's absence is a blow, the Wallabies welcome back a host of players from injury, including winger Andrew Kellaway and props Angus Bell and Scott Sio. Fellow prop Allan Alaalatoa, centre Hunter Paisami and hooker David Porecki also return after leaving the Argentina tour early for personal and injury reasons. Young NSW Waratahs backrower Langi Gleeson was named in his first national squad, with Queensland Reds fullback Jock Campbell the only other uncapped player.

"To have their experience on deck will be invaluable in what's going to be a massive challenge coming up against South Africa two weeks in a row," said Rennie. "We know that respect is earned daily and we'll be doing everything we can to ensure we put in performances that are worthy of that respect in Adelaide and Sydney." South Africa head into the Tests on the back of a 35-23 home loss to New Zealand, having stunned the All Blacks 26-10 in their Rugby Championship opener. All four teams in the southern hemisphere competition have won one and lost one so far. —AFP



Australia's captain Michael Hooper

the Grand Tour's race director, Javier Guillen told Spanish news agency EFE that he "can start the race, according to the rules". "The rider and the team will decide what they are going to do," added Guillen.

On Tuesday, the Breton outfit announced Quintana had signed a contract extension until 2025. Quintana was the first Colombian to win a Grand Tour when he claimed Giro d'Italia glory in 2014 before adding a Vuelta triumph two years later. Although he never won the Tour, he was an inspiration to many more Colombian cyclists that came after him, such as Egan Bernal who in 2019 became his country's first winner of the world's most prestigious race. —AFP

Five riders to watch at Vuelta a Espana

UTRECHT: The Vuelta a Espana starts on Friday with three-time defending champion Primoz Roglic in the spotlight. Here AFP Sport looks at the main contenders for the overall title:

Primoz Roglic - Jumbo-Visma/Slovenia (age 32)

The former ski-jumper, who suffered an agonizing penultimate-stage defeat on the 2020 Tour de France, can make Vuelta history by winning a fourth straight title. He could take a lead from the day 1 team time-trial, but faces being ganged up on in the Sierra Madre in the final week. Coming back off an injury lay-off but is physically the strongest rider on the roster. Joked during the Tour de France saying: "I'm getting ready for the Vuelta".

Remco Evenepoel - Quick-Step/Belgium (22)

Quick-Step are finally unleashing the 22-year-old while also talking down his chances. Touted in Belgium as the 'new Eddy Merckx' before he plunged into a ravine in Italy in 2020 breaking a hip. Evenepoel has won 11 races this season, is a brilliant one-day racer and one of the best time-trial riders. In Spain, he will have world champion Julian Alaphilippe to guide his every move. "He's done everything to be ready for this," Quick Step boss Patrick Lefevere said of his prodigy this week.

Richard Carapaz - Ineos/Ecuador (29)

One bad day cost Carapaz the Giro d'Italia in May but the cool Ecuadorian climber can count on deep mental reserves and high-level tactical nous. Could be his last ride for Ineos as sole leader and he will enjoy back up from Dutch powerhouse Dylan van Baarle, and climbers Pavel Sivakov and Tao Geoghegan Hart. Carapaz got ahead of Roglic to win his only grand tour on the Giro in 2019, but has been on the podium at the Tour and the Vuelta too. The team time-trial and long second week individual time-trial should also help his overall quest.

Simon Yates - Bike Exchange/England (30)

The 2018 Vuelta champion is one of a clutch of riders who have the credentials to pull off a triumph and will almost certainly be in the mix on the major mountain stages. Could be disadvantaged by the opening day team time-trial but Yates has the ability to punish rivals on the steepest of climbs. May concentrate on stage wins should he fare poorly in the time-trials.

Jai Hindley - Bora/Australia (26)

This mountainous Vuelta should suit his patient style of waiting for the big moment to strike. "We'll let the road decide," he said this week. Took his foot off the gas since his Giro triumph in May so may need to nurse his losses in the first week in the Basque Country hills and Asturias mountains and bank on coming into form in the Sierra Madre. The ambitious 26-year-old has stepped up a level with the support of the German team since his close-season move to Bora, who plan to unleash him on the Tour de France next season. —AFP