

Sports

Retired sumo wrestlers fight for new careers

KYOTO: When Japanese sumo wrestler Takuya Saito retired from the sport at 32 and began job-hunting, he had no professional experience and didn't even know how to use a computer. Athletes in many sports can struggle to reinvent themselves after retirement, but the challenge is particularly acute for those in the ancient world of sumo. Wrestlers are often recruited early, sometimes as young as 15, and their formal education ends when they move into the communal stables where they live and train.

That can leave them in for a rude awakening when their topknots are shorn in the ritual that marks their retirement. When Saito left sumo, he considered becoming a baker, inspired by one of his favourite cartoons. "But when I tried it out, they told me I was too big" for the kitchen space, said the 40-year-old, who weighed in at 165 kg during his career. "I had several job interviews, but I didn't have any experience... They rejected me everywhere," he told AFP.

Professional sumo wrestlers or "rikishi" who rise to the top of the sport can open their own stables, but that's not an option for most. Last year, of 89 professional wrestlers who retired, just seven remained in the sumo world. For the others, the restaurant industry sometimes appeals, offering a chance to use the experience gained cooking large meals for their stablemates. Others become masseurs after years of dealing with aching muscles, or leverage their heft to become security guards.

'Inferiority complex'

But trying to start over when non-sumo peers can be a decade or more into a career track is often demoralizing. Saito said he developed an "inferiority complex" and found the experience of jobhunting

far harsher than the tough discipline of his life as a rikishi. "In sumo, the stable master was always there to protect us," he said, adding that his former stable master offered him a place to stay, meals and clothes until he found his feet.

Many wrestlers leave the sport with little or no savings, because salaries are only paid to the 10 percent of rikishi in the sport's two top divisions. Lower-ranking wrestlers get nothing but room, board and tournament expenses. Saito wanted to be his own boss and decided to become an administrative scrivener, a legal professional who can prepare official documents and provide legal advice.

The qualifying exam is notoriously tough, and when Saito passed he opted to specialize in procedures related to restaurants, hoping to help other former wrestlers. His first client was Tomohiko Yamaguchi, a friend in the restaurant industry with an amateur sumo background. "The sumo world is very unique and I think that outsiders can't understand it," Yamaguchi told AFP, suggesting society can sometimes prejudge rikishi.

Wrestlers who go from being stopped for photos and showered with gifts can also struggle with fading into obscurity. A rare few may end up with television gigs that keep them in the public eye, but for most, the limelight moves on.

'Very strong, very reassuring'

Keisuke Kamikawa joined the sumo world at 15, "before even graduating high school, without any experience of adult life in the outside world," he told AFP. Today, the 44-year-old heads SumoPro, a talent agency for former wrestlers that helps with casting and other appearances, but also runs two day centers for the elderly, staffed in part by retired rikishi. "It's a completely different world from sumo,



TOKYO: This picture taken on April 6, 2022 shows retired Japanese sumo wrestler and owner of the Hanasaki day-care center, Keisuke Kamikawa, who competed under the name Wakatenro, eating lunch with his family and elderly women at the center. — AFP

but rikishi are used to being considerate and caring" because lower-ranked wrestlers serve those in the upper echelons, explained Kamikawa.

Shuji Nakaita, a former wrestler now working at one of Kamikawa's care centers, spent years helping famed sumo champion Terunofuji. "I prepared his meals, I scrubbed his back in the bath... there are similarities with care of the elderly," he said after a game of cards with two visitors to the center. And while the sight of hulking former rikishi around diminutive elderly men and women might appear incongruous, the retired wrestlers are popular.

"They are very strong, very reassuring and gentle," smiled Mitsutoshi Ito, a 70-year-old who says he enjoys the chance to chat about sumo with former wrestlers. Kamikawa has also set up a group that provides advice on post-sumo careers to wrestlers and families worried their sons are not planning for their future. "Sumo is a world where you have to be ready to put your life in danger to win a fight," said Hideo Ito, an acupuncturist who has worked with rikishi for over two decades. "For these wrestlers who are giving it their all, thinking about the future can seem like a weakness in their armor." — AFP



GREENSBORO, North Carolina: Lilly King reacts after winning the Women's 100m Breaststroke Final on Day Four of the Phillips 66 International Team Trials at the Greensboro Aquatic Center on April 29, 2022. — AFP

King completes breaststroke sweep at trials

WASHINGTON: World record-holder Lilly King clocked 1min 05.67sec to win the 100m breaststroke on Friday and complete a sweep at USA Swimming's World Championship trials in North Carolina. King claimed a third individual berth for the World Championships in Budapest on June 18-July 3. Annie Lazor was second in 1:06.12 while Lydia Jacoby, who stunned King to claim Olympic gold in Tokyo last year, finished fourth to miss out on a Worlds berth.

Freestyle superstar Katie Ledecky nabbed her third individual victory of the week, winning the 400m freestyle in 3:59.52. Ledecky, who won the 800m and 200m freestyles earlier in the meet, will be aiming to reclaim the 400m free world title she surrendered to Ariarne Titmus in 2019, a task that looks easier since the Australian star - who also beat Ledecky to Olympic 400m gold in Tokyo last year - indicated she will not compete in Budapest.

In other events on Friday, Hunter Armstrong followed up his world record-setting win in the 50m backstroke with a 100m backstroke win in a world-leading 52.20sec. World record-holder Ryan Murphy was second in 52.46 - second-fastest in the world this season. Regan Smith won the women's 100m back in 57.75 with teenager Claire Curzan second in 58.39. Veteran Nic Fink won the men's 100m breaststroke in 58.37 with Michael Andrew second in 58.51 - the top two times in the world this year. — AFP

Nagelsmann wants clarity over future of Lewandowski

BERLIN: With a tenth straight Bundesliga title secured, Bayern Munich coach Julian Nagelsmann wants to settle the future of star striker Robert Lewandowski so he can plan for next season. As the title celebrations raged last Saturday after a home win over Dortmund that meant Bayern cannot be caught, Lewandowski was reluctant to discuss his plans.

The Pole's contract expires in 2023, but while Bayern bosses insist he will stay next season, persistent rumors link the 33-year-old to Barcelona. Lewandowski's agent Pini Zahavi met Bayern's senior bosses in a Munich restaurant on Thursday, but no progress was made towards signing a contract extension. "Basically, it's always good to have planning security - in all areas of life, including the strikers," Nagelsmann said Friday. "That's why I would also like us to reach an agreement."

Nagelsmann is irritated by the constant speculation, adding: "I must have said 50 times that I would

MLB suspends Dodgers' Bauer for two seasons

LOS ANGELES: Major League Baseball suspended Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Trevor Bauer for two seasons on Friday over sexual assault allegations for which he was never criminally charged. Commissioner Rob Manfred announced the ban in a statement, saying an "extensive investigation" by MLB found Bauer violated MLB's Joint Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Policy.

Bauer's career had been in limbo since last July 2, when he was placed on leave in the wake of a California woman's claim that two sexual encounters with Bauer in April and May of 2021 turned violent without her consent. Bauer immediately said in a Twitter post that he would appeal the suspension. "In the strongest possible terms, I deny committing any violation of the league's domestic violence & sexual assault policy," Bauer wrote. "I am appealing this action and expect to prevail. As we have throughout this process, my representatives & I respect the confidentiality of the proceedings."

Manfred's statement said Bauer was suspended, without pay, effective Friday, for 324 championship season games or two full seasons. "In accordance with the terms of the Policy, the Commissioner's Office will not issue any further statements at this point in time," the statement said. All 15 of the those previously suspended under MLB's domestic violence policy have accepted or negotiated suspensions ranging from 15 to 162 games.

Lucknow beat Punjab by 20 runs in IPL

PUNE: Lucknow Super Giants won by 20 runs against Punjab Kings after a powerful bowling performance by Dushmantha Chameera, Moshin Khan and Krunal Pandya in the Indian Premier League on Friday. Lucknow were defending a tricky 153-run target against a power-packed Punjab batting attack but Sri Lankan speedsters Chameera, Khan and Pandya ripped through the batting order, claiming seven wickets between them as Punjab slumped to 133 for eight in 20

like him to stay." Lewandowski, twice voted FIFA's best male player, has won every title possible with Bayern, who he joined on a free transfer from Dortmund in 2014. He is set to be crowned Bundesliga top scorer for the fifth straight season and can add to his tally of 33 goals in Saturday's away match at Mainz.

If he starts, Lewandowski will be without his forward partner Thomas Mueller, who misses the trip to Mainz with illness, Nagelsmann said. RB Leipzig have extra time to recover, four days after their 1-0 home win over Rangers in the first leg of the semi-final leaves them on the brink of the Europa League final. The second leg is at Ibrox next Thursday.

Meanwhile at the foot of the table, legendary Bundesliga coach Felix Magath has compared keeping Hertha Berlin up to winning a "gold" medal. With three matches left, Magath has managed to haul Hertha out of the relegation places up to 15th with a four-point buffer over 16th. Consecutive victories over Augsburg and Stuttgart have left Hertha on the brink of securing a tenth straight season in Germany's top flight, but Magath insists the fight is not over.

"By no means do we already have 'gold'," said Magath, but the 68-year-old who coached both Bayern Munich and Wolfsburg to Bundesliga titles said Hertha could "now go for silver" with a third consecutive victory. — AFP

Under the policy, players may be suspended despite the absence of criminal charges and only one suspended player, former Atlanta Braves outfielder Hector Olivera, served jail time. Olivera served 10 days of a 90-day sentence on misdemeanor charges. Bauer was originally placed on paid administrative leave on July 2, 2021, days after his California accuser filed for a temporary restraining order against him.

She alleged he choked her to unconsciousness and then punched her repeatedly in the head. Bauer denied any wrongdoing, with his attorney and representatives saying all the encounters were entirely consensual. The temporary restraining order has since been lifted and Los Angeles County prosecutors finally announced in February they would not press charges against Bauer, citing insufficient evidence. Earlier this month, Bauer filed a defamation lawsuit against the woman and against two media outlets over their coverage of the accusations.

'Categorically false'

Bauer has also denied as "categorically false" another woman's claim, reported last August by the Washington Post, of a similar incident in 2017, when he played for Cleveland. The Dodgers signed Bauer in 2021 on a three-year deal worth \$102 million following his departure from the Cincinnati Reds, where he became the club's first Cy Young Award winner. The Dodgers paid Bauer \$38 million last year, and he was due to make \$32 million this season and next season.

The Dodgers said in a statement they cooperated with the probe and were informed of its conclusion. "Today, we were informed that MLB has concluded its investigation into allegations that have been made against Trevor Bauer and the commis-

ioner has issued his decision regarding discipline," the team statement said. "The Dodgers organization takes all allegations of this nature very seriously and does not condone or excuse any acts of domestic violence or sexual assault. We've cooperated fully with MLB's investigation since it began and we fully support MLB's Joint Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, and Child Abuse Policy, and the commissioner's enforcement of the policy."

The team said it would have no other comment pending Bauer's appeal to an independent arbitrator. The arbitrator can uphold, overturn or reduce the suspension. In 2014, Alex Rodriguez's 211-game suspension for use and possession of performance-enhancing substances was reduced to 162 games. And in 2012 Ryan Braun's 50-game suspension after a positive dope test was thrown out because the arbitrator found testing protocols were not followed. — AFP

Lucknow opens Quinton de Kock and Deepak Hooda stitched an 85-run knock after they lost skipper K L Rahul (6) in the third over. De Kock scored 46 off 37, hitting four 4s and two sixes while Hooda made (34) before South African Kagiso Rabada tore into the batting line up and returned with figures of 4 for 38. Rahul Chahar picked up two wickets as Punjab restricted Lucknow to 153 for eight. Chameera, Khan and Jason Holder played cameos to help the team cross the 150 mark.

"The crucial runs at the back end and then the execution with the ball helped us win. The way we responded with the ball was phenomenal. Krunal has been brilliant throughout the tournament," Lucknow skipper K L Rahul said. Pandya was declared player of the match for his brilliant bowling spell. — AFP

John Coates ends 32 years as Aussie Olympic boss

SYDNEY: Australian sport ushered in a new era Saturday when powerbroker John Coates stood down as president of the country's Olympic Committee after 32 years at the helm. Coates, 71, rose to prominence when he helped Sydney win its 2000 Games bid and is credited with shaping the Olympic movement globally in the decades since. He told the Australian Olympic Committee's annual meeting in Sydney those Games were among his career highlights, along with creating financial security for the AOC.

"In my 32 years as president, we've followed what has become known as the Bach mantra: 'Change or be changed'," he said. An emotional Coates said the Olympic committee's role was to help Australians chase their dreams. "Today, with a full heart, I thank you for giving me the chance to live mine."

Ian Chesterman, Chef de Mission for Australia's 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games team, was elected as Coates' successor. A congenital hip dislocation meant



Trevor Bauer

Coates was unlikely to become an elite sportsman - although he was a capable schoolboy rowing cox - but his love of sport saw him excel as an administrator. He twice masterminded successful Olympic bids - Sydney 2000 and Brisbane 2032 - and was known to be as competitive as the athletes he represented. He courted scandal by revealing the Ugandan and Kenyan Olympic committees were offered A\$48,000 (\$33,900) before the 2000 Olympics host-city vote - but only if Sydney won. When the ballot was counted, Sydney beat Beijing by two votes, 45 to 43.

Coates has not always had harmonious relationships with sports bodies and politicians. A tense 2021 press conference with Queensland Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk - during which he ordered her to attend the opening ceremony of the Tokyo Olympics - saw him labelled a "mansplaining dinosaur" on social media. On the whole, though, the Olympics boss was widely respected for what he achieved for Australia.

"He has made an enormous contribution to Australian sport over decades," said John Wylie, who as chairman of the Australian Sports Commission clashed publicly with Coates in 2017. IOC President Thomas Bach, who travelled to Sydney for Coates' farewell celebration, praised his long-time colleague for his contribution to sport. "You are a champion, mate," Bach told Coates. — AFP