

## SPORTS

## Muguruza among five women to have a spell at world No. 1

## Federer, Nadal shine as rivals hobble into 2018

PARIS, Dec 25, (AFP): Written off as dead men walking, Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal defied time to sweep the Grand Slams in 2017 while the injury curse which dogged their rivals looks set to be the new year's early storyline.

Evergreen Federer, who will turn 37 in 2018, took his majors tally to 19 with a fifth Australian Open title, which was secured by a five-set triumph over Nadal, and a record eighth Wimbledon with a stroll past a tearful Marin Cilic.

Nadal, 32 in June next year, was not to be outdone, claiming a 10th French Open, a third US Open crown and the year-ending world number one spot.

Federer finished the year at number two in the world, having started at 16, and a season-leading seven titles — including three Masters at Indian Wells, Miami and Shanghai — despite having skipped the entire clay court season.

"It's been an amazing year for me," said Federer who had missed the last six months of the 2016 season through injury.

Nadal added two Masters titles at Monte Carlo and Madrid to his triumphs at Roland Garros and Flushing Meadows, finishing the campaign with six trophies. The 16-time Grand Slam champion also secured the year-ending top ranking for a fourth time.

"I never would have imagined I would end up as number one at the end of the season again," said the Spaniard.

"It wasn't one of my goals going into the season — far from it. After returning from a difficult period in my career and battling through injuries, this wasn't on my mind."

Nadal will go into the new season without his uncle Toni who has been his coach since childhood. But one thing will be familiar — his career-long battle with knee injuries.

He was forced to withdraw after just one round at the World Tour Finals and has already

## TENNIS

pulled out of an exhibition tournament in the United Arab Emirates from December 28-30.

Injury permitting, Nadal will now start 2018 as top seed in Brisbane from next weekend with the Australian Open due to get underway on January 15. The Spaniard is not the only A-lister under an injury cloud.

Former world number one Andy Murray and fellow three-time major winner Stan Wawrinka have not played since Wimbledon — Murray suffered a hip injury while Wawrinka required two knee operations.

Murray has delayed his departure to Australia while Swiss star Wawrinka joined Nadal in pulling out of the UAE event.

Novak Djokovic will play in Abu Dhabi as the former world number one and 12-time



This file photo taken on Oct 15, 2017 shows first-placed Roger Federer of Switzerland (left), and second-placed Rafael Nadal of Spain reacting as they hold their trophies after the men's singles final match at the Shanghai Masters tennis tournament in Shanghai. (AFP)

Grand Slam winner makes his return having last played at Wimbledon where he picked up a season-ending wrist injury.

Djokovic is now ranked 12 in the world, Murray is at 16 while Wawrinka starts 2018 at nine.

"I wouldn't be surprised if 2018 worked out

for me as well like it worked out for me and Rafa," predicted Federer.

The new year could also see the highly-regarded Alexander Zverev make a Slam breakthrough after a 2017 which saw him win five titles.

However, the beanpole German had a roller-

coaster year at the Slams — a last-16 spot at Wimbledon punctuated by a first-round loss in Australia, a second-round exit in New York and a third-round defeat to Nadal in Australia.

On the women's circuit, Serena Williams started the year with an Open-era record 23rd Slam triumph in Melbourne.

The achievement was made even more remarkable when the American star revealed she had won the title while pregnant.

Williams, who hasn't played since her Australian Open win, married boyfriend and Reddit founder Alexis Ohanian in November, two months after the couple celebrated the birth of their baby daughter in September.

In Williams's absence, a power vacuum in the women's game opened up as Jelena Ostapenko and Sloane Stephens became two of the most unlikely champions at the Slams. Ostapenko, a 100-1 outsider, became Latvia's first ever Grand Slam champion at Roland Garros, claiming her first career title in the process.

At Flushing Meadows, Stephens won the US Open, just six weeks after seeing her world ranking slip to 957. In between, Garbine Muguruza won a second major at Wimbledon.

Muguruza was one of five women — Williams, Halep, Angelique Kerber and Karolina Pliskova were the others — to have a spell at world number one.

Halep was to end 2017 on top but the popular Romanian, who has yet to win a major, faces a challenge to stay there next year especially with Maria Sharapova and Victoria Azarenka lurking.



This file photo taken on Oct 17, 2017 shows USA's Ryder Cup captain, Jim Furyk (left), and Europe's Ryder Cup captain Thomas Bjorn giving a press conference in Paris. (AFP)

## Thompson heartbreak sparks change

## American youngsters make mark ahead of Ryder Cup

PARIS, Dec 25, (AFP): The rising generation of Americans dominated the 2017 season after Spaniard Sergio Garcia's memorable Masters triumph, laying down a marker ahead of next year's Ryder Cup in Paris.

Brooks Koepka, 27, claimed the US Open title, before Jordan Spieth's third major crown at the British Open and his fellow 24-year-old Justin Thomas' breakthrough victory at the USPGA Championship.

Add in world number one Dustin Johnson, and United States Ryder Cup captain Jim Furyk has a formidable team more than capable of repeating October's Presidents Cup thrashing of the Internationals.

The US are the favourites to retain the trophy come next September at Golf National, but they haven't won on European soil since 1993 at The Belfry.

"We have 25 years of scars to overcome," Furyk said in Paris in October.

"I don't want (them) going in there being overconfident that they are the greatest team. I want them going in with a chip on their shoulder that they have something to prove."

## GOLF

Europe's stars had a mixed season, although 37-year-old Garcia produced the year's stand-out moment by finally ending his wait for a major title by edging out Justin Rose in a thrilling Masters play-off back in April.

Garcia's compatriot Jon Rahm stole a few headlines by rising to world number four in his first full season as a professional, but four-time major winner Rory McIlroy was plagued by injuries and loss of form as he failed to win an event for the first year since 2008.

American players received most of the plaudits for their major-winning exploits, but Europeans like Tyrrell Hatton, Rafael Cabrera Bello and Paul Casey slid slightly under the radar to finish 2017 inside the world's top 20.

"You tell me a time where there's been 11 Europeans in the top 21 in the world," said Europe's Ryder Cup skipper Thomas Bjorn.

"It might have happened but it's not something that you see very often."

"So that's a very strong European team." A year that began with a failed attempted injury comeback from Tiger Woods, ended with the 14-time major champion starting another return.

The 41-year-old pulled out of February's Dubai Desert Classic with a back injury, but after surgery and an appearance as a Presidents Cup vice-captain, he produced a promising performance in the Bahamas earlier this month.

"I knew I was going to be able to play all four rounds, that wasn't going to be an issue," said Woods, who also missed all of the 2015-16 season with back trouble, after finishing tied-ninth at the Hero World Challenge.

"I was still scratchy with my irons. I drove it pretty good all week, made some good putts."

The chances of Woods adding to his major tally — and reviving his bid to chase down Jack Nicklaus' all-time record of 18 titles — will become clearer when he returns to Augusta National for the Masters, where he has 11 top-five finishes including four green jackets.

A first major triumph since the 2008 US Open may seem a long way off but Woods could still be a force to be reckoned with if fully fit — he won five PGA Tour titles and reclaimed the world number one spot in 2013 when he last managed a full season.

Lexi Thompson suffered an agonising loss in the first women's major of the year at the ANA Inspiration in April, as she was handed a four-stroke penalty with only six holes remaining after a TV viewer spotted an infringement from the third round.

Golf's authorities finally changed the rules at the end of the year to stop viewers from calling in from home to alert referees to possible penalties.

American Thompson still only lost to South Korea's Ryu So-yeon in a play-off, so she would have won a second major title under the new rules even if the mistake was noticed, as she would not have been given the additional two-shot penalty for signing the wrong scorecard.

It was an unsavoury moment reminiscent of the 2016 men's US Open, when Dustin Johnson was forced to play the closing holes of his victory not knowing whether or not he would be hit with a penalty at the end of the tournament.

The 22-year-old Thompson finished 2017 in style, though, going four matches unbeaten as the US retained the Solheim Cup.



Thompson

## Sochi champ Hanyu named in Japan team for Pyeongchang

TOKYO, Dec 25, (RTRS): Yuzuru Hanyu will defend his figure skating title at the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics after being named in the Japan team but will not compete until then, the Kyodo news agency reported on Monday.

The 23-year-old has been battling an ankle injury since November when he fell while attempting a quadruple Lutz jump in practice and had to withdraw from the grand

prix final in Nagoya earlier this month.

He has not competed since and will miss the Four Continents championships next month in Taiwan in order to make sure he is ready for the Winter Olympics, Japan Skating Federation director Yoshiko Kobayashi told Kyodo.

"Considering the time we have until the Olympics, (the JFA) believes that he can make a comeback," Kobayashi said. "I hope

he drives the young athletes as Japan's ace."

Hanyu has resumed training but is not practising jumps just yet, Kobayashi added.

Hanyu took gold at the Sochi Games in 2014 and is also the reigning world champion, which earned him selection for Japan's Olympic team despite missing the national championships, which doubled as a qualifier, at the weekend.

The Winter Olympics run from Feb 9-25.

## Henderson's Might Bite has star appeal in King George

Market leader seeks to add name to Boxing Day showpiece

LONDON, Dec 25, (AFP): Nicky Henderson's Might Bite, a dramatic last-fence faller at Kempton 12 months ago, is favourite to make amends in the King George VI Chase on Tuesday.

Blessed with Hollywood star looks, Might Bite was cruising ten lengths clear only to come a cropper in the Grade One novices' chase at this meeting in 2016.

That 'F' on his form figures has been followed by four '1's featuring top grade wins at both Cheltenham and Aintree.

Ridden by Nico de Boinville, the 11-8 market leader faces seven rivals as he seeks to add his name to the Boxing Day showpiece's illustrious roll of honour numbering the likes of Desert Orchid, five-time winner Kauto Star and the mighty Arkle.

Henderson, who has won the King George twice with Long Run, describes Might Bite as "one of the best-looking horses" he's ever set eyes upon.

"But just because you're good-looking doesn't mean you're brilliant," he told The Guardian.

## HORSE RACING

Reflecting on Might Bite's mishap at Kempton last season, Britain's champion trainer told the newspaper it was "a horrible fall. It was probably unnecessary but there you go — these things happen".

"He's incredibly talented, jumps for fun and has such a high cruising speed that no one else can go the gallop and maintain it," de Boinville told Ireland's Sunday Independent.

The opposition is headed by Bristol de Mai, the Nigel Twiston-Davies-trained grey who won Haydock's Beffair Chase in a procession and who will pick up a £1 million (\$1.36m) bonus if he adds this and the Gold Cup at Cheltenham in March.

Also out to deny Might Bite are last year's stylish winner Thistlecrack who disappointed on his warm-up, in-form Fox Norton, and Henderson's second runner, Whisper.

Might Bite's stablemate entered King George calculations on the strength of his eye-catching second, beaten by only a neck, in the Ladbrokes Trophy Chase, formerly the Hennessy, at Newbury at the start of the month.

With his regular jockey Davy Russell unable to take the ride due to commitments in Ireland it is Aidan Coleman who will be in the saddle.

Whisper is a best-priced 9-1 to get the better of Might Bite at the third attempt.

The pair first met at Cheltenham, where in one of the finishes of the season Whisper went down by just a nose in the RSA Novices Chase with Might Bite throwing away a 12-length advantage when veering sharply to the right and slowing to a trot after the last fence.

Their paths crossed again at Aintree, with Might Bite making all to beat his stablemate by two lengths. Whisper's presence is in part due to the 12lb rise in the weights for his fine Newbury run last time out.

"He's (the handicapper) given him the most almighty clobbering. It was brutal enough getting a bruised eye being beaten in the race, but then he got a left hook from the handicapper as well," said his trainer.

With Whisper meeting Might Bite on level terms on Tuesday, Henderson feels his hand was forced. "We know what Might Bite does to him. He's done it comprehensively twice. The poor horse has been second to Might Bite in two Grade 1s and so nearly wins a Ladbrokes Trophy, which were three fantastic runs, but we want to go and win a race."

## League celebrates 100th anniversary

## Orr's 1970 Cup-winning goal &amp; leap remains top NHL moment

NEW YORK, Dec 25, (AP): Growing up in Brantford, Ontario, Wayne Gretzky always heard his father, Walter, wax poetic about Bill Barilko's 1951 Stanley Cup-winning goal for the Toronto Maple Leafs.

"We didn't really even have TV back then and there was kind of clips of it, there was kind of pictures of it — moments of it, so to speak," Gretzky said.

At age 9, Gretzky watched in the same kind of awe as Bobby Orr scored in overtime to win the Cup in 1970 for the Boston Bruins. Orr beat St Louis Blues goaltender Glenn Hall, leaping through the air to celebrate what has become the most iconic goal in NHL history.

"People from the '50s and '60s remember the Barilko goal and then the new generation of kids who got to see the goal like myself could relate to what our parents and grandparents were talking about," Gretzky said. "Time sort of stopped in a moment that you could compare something so unique."

"The Great One" downplays his own accomplishments but considers Orr's goal an un-

## ICE HOCKEY

forgettable moment in hockey history. As the NHL celebrates its 100th anniversary, Orr's goal is so important that it reached the finals of the "Greatest Moments" bracket 47 years after it happened.

While Barilko's goal inspired the Tragically Hip song "Fifty Mission Cap," Orr's has inspired decades of highlights and conversation.

Almost 50 years later, the goal is still revered and remembered, from Ray Lussier's timeless photo to Dan Kelly's play-by-play call of Orr's give-and-go with Derek Sanderson to complete the Boston sweep. Orr's goal was voted one of the two most memorable moments in NHL history finishing behind only Mario Lemieux scoring goals five different ways in one game in 1988.

Many current fans weren't even alive when Orr scored the goal, let alone remember it. Yet among the 17 Cup-winning overtime goals, it sticks out as the most memorable.

"There's some moments in hockey that are just so special that we'll never be able to ever sort of recreate that moment again," Gretzky said. "And that's one of those iconic moments that we'll never be able to recreate."

It has become such a flashpoint that Orr recalled in the NHL's 100 years documentary: "Each time I see Glenn Hall, Glenn says, 'Is that the only goal you ever scored?'" It was actually one of nine goals Orr scored in 24 games during the 1970 playoffs.

So why has Orr's goal become one of the central moments in hockey history? Lussier's snapshot, Orr's legendary career, the advent of television and the importance of the goal for the Bruins' franchise all contribute.

Lussier took the famous photo for the Boston Record American, and recreations of it are everywhere, including on the wall of TD Garden where the Bruins now play. Orr saw it in the newspaper the next morning in its full glory.

"That picture, it's probably one of the top five photographs in sports journalism — not just hockey," said actor Jon Hamm of "Mad Men" fame, a longtime Blues fan from St Louis. "It's amazing. It captures the whole thing. It's Bobby Orr's commitment. He's horizontal to the ice, it's the winning goal, it's the whole thing."

Orr told author Andrew Podnieks for "The Goal: Bobby Orr and the Most Famous Shot in Stanley Cup History" that he jumped as soon as he saw the puck go in to seal the Bruins' first title since 1941. The other five "Original Six" teams had all won the Cup at least once in those 29 years.

"So it wasn't like Montreal, Toronto or Detroit," Hamm said. "It was some new blood on the Cup."

It was one of just two Cup rings for Orr, who was forced to retire young because of knee injuries.

"The only thing is I wish I could've played longer," Orr said in 2013. "I didn't play that long, so (I think about) the years I could have played if I had been healthy. That's the only regret I have."

Even though he played only 10 full NHL seasons and parts of two more, the Parry Sound, Ontario, native won the Norris Trophy as top defenseman eight times and the Hart Trophy as NHL MVP three times.

Deputy commissioner Bill Daly said a Hockey Hall of Famer and one of the best players of all-time scoring the goal fuels the powerful memories to this day. Gretzky said Orr being "one of the greatest players if not the greatest player to ever live" makes the goal even more special.

NHL chief content officer and executive vice president Steve Mayer compared it to Babe Ruth calling his shot on a home run during the 1932 World Series because the picture of Orr has been seen by sports fans for generations.

"It's grown over the years as being just this mythical goal," Mayer said.



Gretzky

Cup rings for Orr, who was forced to retire young because of knee injuries.

"The only thing is I wish I could've played longer," Orr said in 2013. "I didn't play that long, so (I think about) the years I could have played if I had been healthy. That's the only regret I have."

Even though he played only 10 full NHL seasons and parts of two more, the Parry Sound, Ontario, native won the Norris Trophy as top defenseman eight times and the Hart Trophy as NHL MVP three times.

Deputy commissioner Bill Daly said a Hockey Hall of Famer and one of the best players of all-time scoring the goal fuels the powerful memories to this day. Gretzky said Orr being "one of the greatest players if not the greatest player to ever live" makes the goal even more special.

NHL chief content officer and executive vice president Steve Mayer compared it to Babe Ruth calling his shot on a home run during the 1932 World Series because the picture of Orr has been seen by sports fans for generations.

"It's grown over the years as being just this mythical goal," Mayer said.