

GAME NOTES
Osaka pulls out of Hong Kong Open with back injury

HONG KONG, OCT 7 /--/ US Open champion Naomi Osaka has pulled out of this week's Hong Kong Open to prevent aggravating a slight back injury, organisers said on Sunday.

The Japanese star required treatment to her lower back during her semi-final defeat to unseeded Anastasiya Sevastova at the China Open in Beijing on Saturday. Afterwards, Osaka, who turns 21 on October 16, said it was more a case of fatigue than anything more serious, but suggested that she may not make the WTA Hong Kong Open, which starts on Monday. "Unfortunately, I have been playing through pain to get back this whole week," the world number six said in a subsequent statement released by organisers. "The doctors have advised me that I need to rest to ensure the injury is not further aggravated and become more serious." One player who does appear set to play in Hong Kong is China's Wang Qiang, who is in the form of her life. (AFP)

Deborah, Savanur win gold in Saksham Pedal Delhi

NEW DELHI, OCT 7 /--/ Deborah Heredia and Shreedhar Savanur Sunday won the gold medals on offer in the elite women's 40km and men's 50km competitions respectively, at Saksham Pedal Delhi, India's Premier Cyclothon. Both were criterium races at the Jawahar Nehru Stadium. Rounding off the elite men's podium were Manjeet Singh and Krishna Nakaodi while Sonali Channu and Swasti Singh finished with silver and bronze respectively in the women's elite race. To mark the occasion, Cycling Federation of India's secretary general Onkar Singh said, "The 2018 edition had a strong field of the best 160 elite cyclists in the country and continues to showcase the quality of competitive cycling in India." "Both Deborah and Savanur are deserving champions in the criterium race. I would also like to thank PCRA & DOT Sports for driving the sport of cycling via a fantastic platform like Saksham Pedal Delhi.

Ronaldo scores to keep Juventus perfect amid rape allegation turmoil
Roma move third in Serie A


Cristiano Ronaldo celebrates scoring their second goal — Reuters

UDINE, MILAN, OCT 7 /--/ Cristiano Ronaldo shrugged off damaging rape allegations to score for Juventus as the Serie A champions beat Udinese 2-0 under the rain in northeastern Italy on Saturday 37 minutes from the left following a cross from Croatia's Mario Mandzukic, four minutes after Rodrigo Bentancur's opener.

It was Ronaldo's fourth goal this season for Juventus, with the 33-year-old celebrating wildly with his teammates, as the Italian champions claimed their tenth consecutive win in all competitions. Ronaldo remained tight-lipped after the game, giving a thumbs up as he left the dressing room where he was greeted by fans shouting "Cristiano Cristiano!" The superstar showed no sign of the immense pressure he is under amid damaging accusations which threaten his multi-million euro sporting empire. US police on Monday re-opened an investigation into claims by former American model Kathryn Mayorga that she was raped by Ronaldo in June 2009. "I don't know how things are for him at home, I don't live with him," said Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri. "What I know is what is on the pitch. He trains hard, he is serene and today he scored an extraordinary goal." Juventus — with a maximum 24 points from eight Serie A games — open up a nine-point lead on second-placed Napoli who host Sassuolo on Sunday. With the eyes on the world on Ronaldo the match against lowly Udinese, in a small

town not far from the border with Slovenia, attracted journalists from as far afield as China. But the "Ronaldo affair" appeared to have no way dented the player's popularity among the fans who packed the 25,000-seater Stadio Friuli. He was greeted by the enthusiastic cries of dozens of children waiting for the team buses before the game, with one child running onto the pitch during warm-up to ask for his autograph. "Stronger than the mud," headlined Turin daily Tuttosport, a traditional backer of Juventus, above a photograph of Ronaldo dining with the team this week, and a bigger picture of the star smiling. "CRSexe" was the front-page headline on Rome-based Corriere dello Sport on Saturday, referring to the allegations. Another headline said "World of Juve shaken" after the club's share price plunged almost 10 percent on Friday. The back page was dominated by an advert for Ronaldo's line of underwear, featuring a full-page photograph of the player bare-chested. Ronaldo has hired David Chesoff, known as the lawyer of the stars, to defend him. The Las Vegas-based criminal lawyer has already worked with well-known athletes like Shaquille O'Neal, Mike Tyson and Andre Agassi. After initially dismissing the rape claims as "fake news" on Instagram, Ronaldo took to social media during the week to "firmly deny" the accusations. "Rape is an abominable crime that goes against everything that I am and believe in," he said on his Twitter feed, which has 75 million followers. However, there have been off-field consequences to the controversy. Just two weeks ago, shares in Juventus rose 180 percent to a

record level of over 1.80 euros. On Friday, they closed down 9.92 percent at 1.19 euros on the Milan stock exchange. Nike has said it is "deeply concerned" by the allegations against one of their marquee athletes whose relationship with the US sportswear giant is rumoured to be worth \$1 billion (869 million euros). Sports channel, for whom Ronaldo is a leading figure in their phenomenally successful FIFA video game market, also described the allegations as "concerning". Juventus have so far stood behind the player who moved to Turin in the summer in a 100 million euro (\$115 million) deal from Real Madrid. However, the Italian club's reaction to the issue has angered some fans as "dismissive" and "aggressive". Juventus sporting director Fabio Paratici, nevertheless, underlined the club's support on Saturday. "We have already made clear our support for the player, who has always been very active on social issues and been a great professional beyond the pitch, as confirmed by his teammates," Paratici told Sky Sport Italia. "We are behind him all the way. He has been an exemplary professional and an exemplary person throughout his career." Before Saturday's game Ronaldo had received encouragement from his mother. "Best wishes son for you and your team, because together we are stronger. Go Juventus," wrote Maria Dolores Alveiro on Instagram, alongside a photo of Ronaldo embracing her. Steven Nzonzi and Edin Dzeko scored in either half as resurgent Roma won their fourth consecutive game to move third in Serie A with a 2-0 win over promoted Empoli in Tu-

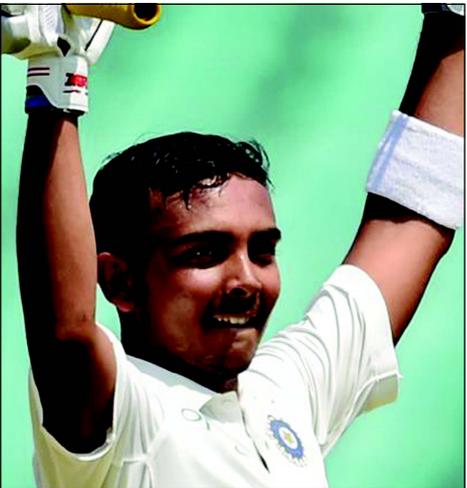
cany. Eusebio Di Francesco's side had slumped to ninth after a four-game winless streak, but jumped into the top three with a win over second-from-bottom Empoli. French World Cup winner Nzonzi headed in his first goal for Roma since his move from Sevilla in the 36th minute, with Bosnian ace Dzeko following his midweek Champions League hat-trick against Viktoria Plzen by wrapping up the points five minutes from time. Roma are now ten points behind leaders Juventus — who have a maximum 24 points after eight games — and one point adrift of Carlo Ancelotti's Napoli who host Sassuolo on Sunday. "The main thing is we're back winning." It wasn't an easy period but we worked our way through it, we have now won four games in a row heading into the international break and we have fixed things a bit. Teenage defender Luca Pellegrini got his first Roma start, with midfielder Javier Pastore and centre-back Aleksandar Kolarov injured. Lorenzo Pellegrini sent a free-kick over for Nzonzi to get the opener with Empoli proving wasteful. Ismael Bennacer rattled the woodwork for the hosts after the break with Francesco Caputo blazing a penalty over the crossbar on 58 minutes after a Congli Under hand ball. But Dzeko grabbed the second, collecting a Stephan El Shaarawy through ball to fire into the roof of the net. Roma have now won their last four games over Frosinone, Lazio, Viktoria Plzen and Empoli, for a total of 14 goals with just one conceded. But Di Francesco insisted there was room for improvement. (AFP)

Indian girl Keerthana wins IBSF world U-16 snooker title


MUMBAI, OCT 7 /--/ India's Keerthana Pandian has won the girls' title in the IBSF World Under-16 Snooker Championships, her maiden international crown. In the corresponding boys category, Ben Mertens of Belgium clinched the title in St Petersburg, Russia, according to information received from the media cell of International Billiards & Snooker Federation (IBSF). Keerthana won the girls' title by outclassing Belarussian rival Albina Leschuk 3-1 in the final. After qualifying for knockout stage as seed 4, Keerthana knocked out her compatriot Manasvini Sekar and Russian girl Alina Khairulina in straight frames 3-0 before meeting the defending champion and countrymate Anupama Ramachandran in the semi-finals. Keerthana had lost the first frame, but after that she played flawlessly to win next three frames and defeated Anupama 3-1. Similarly, in the final, Keerthana went down after losing the first frame, but with scores level at 1-1, she geared up and played with full control to win next two frames and the championship. (PTI)

Rayhan narrowly misses title, ends tied second

SINGAPORE, OCT 7 /--/ Indian teenager Rayhan Thomas came within a striking distance of creating history before finishing tied second at the elite Asia-Pacific Amateur Championships here. Thomas tied second is the best finish ever by an Indian in the 10-year history of the Championship. The Dubai-based golfer (4 under) ended two shots behind the winner, Takumi Kanaya (65), who made a great charge between the 14th and 16th with three successive birdies to surge ahead to victory over Thomas and the Asian Games individual gold medalist fellow Japanese Keita Nakajima (67). The 20-year-old Kanaya, who was second individually at the World Amateur Championships last month days after being part of Japan's Asian Games gold medal winning team, totalled 19 under 287. Thomas and Nakajima were 11-under 268 as the threat of lightning stopped play for an hour and 11 minutes at the new Tanjong Golf Course. While Kanaya earned a coveted spot into the 2019 Masters and the 2019 Open Championships, both Thomas and Nakajima saved a place at the final stage of the Open Qualifying Series. Overall, it was India's best ever Asia-Pacific Amateur Championships with five of the six Indian players making the cut this week. Thomas was followed by debutant Kartik Sharma (70) Tied-13, despite a bogey-bogey finish. "I am very proud and thrilled with the finish and know I can compete with the best," said Kartik, who plays at the DLF, Yuvraj Sandhu (71) also dropped two shots in last four holes and Tied-25, while Kshitij Naveed Kaul (67) was Tied-38th and Varun Parikh (72) was Tied-40th. Thomas fired back from a disappointing 10-over on the first day and was the only player in the Top-6 to have an over par during the week. With 64-66, he was 15-under for last 54 holes. "This medal (second place) means a lot to me. That over on first day was pretty disheartening but I am very proud to have fought back from there and come so close, Thomas said.

Prithvi must tighten up his technique, say former players


RAJKOT, OCT 7 /--/ Prithvi Shaw was up to bat with a classy Test century on his India debut but the teenage sensation must tighten up his technique for tougher challenges away from home, former Indian batsman Prithvi Singh said. Shaw batted like a seasoned pro to hit a sublime hundred in the series opener against the West Indies, becoming the youngest Indian to reach a three-figure score on Test debut. He did not face the best of attacks but it was still a special knock that promises a great career. His punches off the back foot reminded former West Indies all-rounder Carl Hooper of the good old Caribbean flair but he feels Shaw's aggressive style with the bat and batting technique make the 18-year-old vulnerable for sterner tests overseas, starting with the tour of Australia next month. "He seems to be a great talent but tends to play away from the body. Clearly, he likes to be on the back foot and play square off the wicket. It worked here in Rajkot but with so much gap between the bat and body, he could face issues in England and Australia," Hooper, a veteran of 102 Tests, told PTI. Former India opener Aakash Chopra, who successfully negotiated the new ball in Australia during the 2003-04 tour, has a different take on Shaw's technique. He too feels that Shaw needs to tighten up his game but said if an unconventional approach worked for "Virender Sehwag, it could also work for the highly-rated teenager. "What we have just seen is perhaps a trailer of the things to come. It looks very promis-

ing. You cannot grudge about the opposition's attack. But he will be tested (overseas) and I am sure he is aware of it. We will get to know whether he can weather the storm and stay firm in the face of those conditions, who played 10 Tests for India. "Currently, there are couple of things. I am pretty sure he is working on that. One was his trigger movement which is already looking different to what we saw in the IPL. I am not too worried. He has got a great start," Chopra said. "People will have faith and he will get a slightly extended run. God forbid even if Australia does not end up being the best of tours for him, you have to bear in mind that lot of players went there the first time and did not really set the world on fire." He said Shaw might have to curb his aggression a bit while facing the likes of Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood. The ball will swing in Australia but not as much as in England. "There will be some swing as Kookaburra tends to move a lot early on. Hazlewood and Starc will be exploiting those conditions. See, you have to back yourself. Whatever took you to this level should make you successful at the highest level as well. "You may want to tighten up a bit but radical changes in your technique are not advisable. He has got to be a little careful off the

back foot. The punches that he likes to hit could be slightly risky if the ball is moving laterally. We will have to assume that he will learn with time. What he has done in the past counts for nothing. He will be eventually be judged by what he does at the highest level," added Chopra. Someone who has tracked Shaw closely is Amol Muzumdar, a stalwart of Mumbai and owner of more than 11,000 first-class runs. The 43-year-old said one should not jump the gun but wait till Muzumdar actually gets an opportunity overseas before making a comment on his own style of play. He does not need to change too much. Every player has got his own style of play. His style is aggressive, playing on the rise and he should continue doing that. We will have to wait and see how he does in England and Australia. Australia then only we can talk about it," said Muzumdar. "You cannot be technically correct all the time, too much reliance on technique is also not good. There has to be a balance between technique and flamboyance. All he needs to do is to be selective with his shot making. On which ball to go for your strokes and on which ball to defend. That is the only thing he needs to watch out," reckoned Muzumdar, one of Mumbai's finest batsmen. (PTI)

No decision yet on Kohli's request to allow wives on overseas tours

NEW DELHI, OCT 7 /--/ No decision will be taken in the near future regarding the request to allow wives of overseas cricketers to stay for the entire duration of overseas tours, Committee of Administrators (CoA) sources said on Sunday. This comes after Indian cricket captain Virat Kohli put forth a request before the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) to allow wives of players to extend their stay during overseas tours. Reacting to the same, CoA sources told ANI, "Yes, he (Virat) had requested, but we are not going to take any decision soon. We have said that we will leave it to the new office bearers. The policy will not change now." Earlier this year, the BCCI had announced that wives and girlfriends of cricketers will be allowed to stay with their partners for a duration of two weeks while the team is touring overseas.