

SPORTS
sports**Wiggins abandons Olympic rowing bid**

London, United Kingdom

Five-time Olympic champion cyclist Bradley Wiggins has abandoned plans to bid to row for Britain at the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo.

The 2012 Tour de France winner retired from cycling in December 2016 and flirted with the idea of rowing competitively, taking part in last December's British Rowing Indoor Championships. The 38-year-old told his eponymous Eurosport show: "I'm still training most days with it, but I've decided I'm not going to the Olympics because I've got too much other stuff to do."

"I need to give myself a break. I haven't got time to train three times a day. To the level I want to do it to, it's a full-time job in itself. There's too much going on."

Wiggins previously floated the possibility of going to a sixth Olympics in Tokyo, when he will be 40, as a rower, although his lack of experience and the timeframe meant that was always a challenging prospect. He won a fifth Olympic gold in the men's team pursuit at Rio 2016 after returning to the track from the road.

Osaka advances to semis

Tokyo, Japan

Japan's Naomi Osaka exuded a major champion's aura yesterday as she dispatched Barbora Strycova 6-3, 6-4 to reach the Pan Pacific Open semi-finals, despite being nowhere near her best.

The third seed, who stunned Serena Williams to capture the US Open title earlier this month, failed to hit the same heights she did on that historic night in New York.

But she still had too much firepower for Strycova in Tokyo, advancing to face Italy's Camila Giorgi in the last four.

Eighth seed Strycova had little answer to her opponent's venomous hitting and the world number seven bagged the first set with a sledgehammer forehand that almost tore the racquet from the Czech's hand.

The 20-year-old Osaka, contesting her first tournament since becoming Japan's first Grand Slam singles winner, never looked back against a player 12 years her senior, with another forehand rocket bringing up a first match point.

Strycova saved that one but moments later, Osaka fired a bruising serve into the body to extend her current winning



Naomi Osaka of Japan

streak to nine matches.

"It would mean a lot to win this tournament," said Osaka, who reached the Tokyo final in 2016.

"It definitely is on my mind," added Japan's latest sporting celebrity, who has a Japanese mother, a Haitian father and was raised in the United States.



My serve will be there when I'm in danger. That's how I saved a lot of break points at the US Open and I'm not trying to do anything different

NAOMI OSAKA

"But tomorrow is going to be a hard match. I've never played (Giorgi) before but I know she's a very difficult player to play against."

Giorgi, who knocked out top seed and defending champion Caroline Wozniacki on Thursday, was leading former world number one Victoria Azarenka 5-3 when the Belarusian retired with stomach pains.

Service gremlins

"I'm looking forward to it," shrugged Osaka, backing herself

to fix the gremlins that plagued her serve against Strycova.

"My serve will be there when I'm in danger. That's how I saved a lot of break points at the US Open and I'm not trying to do anything different."

Earlier, fourth seed Karolina Pliskova saved two match points before the former women's top-ranked player ended American qualifier Alison Riske's run with a 6-1, 6-7 (5/7), 7-6 (7/4) victory.

The Czech, who smashed a racquet in disgust after squandering multiple chances at 5-5 in the deciding set, completed a "lucky win" with a sliced backhand that Riske wafted into the net after two hours, 40 minutes.

"It was an important win for me," said Pliskova after reaching her first Tokyo semi-final.

"I'm just happy to be able to fight back -- she was a little bit better than me, but you need a bit of luck in tennis."

Pliskova faces Croatia's Donna Vekic in the last four after she upset second seed Caroline Garcia 6-3, 6-4.

Garcia blew an early break to allow Vekic to take the opening set and the Frenchwoman suffered a carbon-copy letdown in the second, the Croatian ending her misery with a backhand winner.

Sergio Aguero extends contract

London, United Kingdom

Manchester City's record goalscorer Sergio Aguero extended his stay with the Premier League champions yesterday, signing a one-year contract extension.

The 30-year-old Argentina international -- who broke the record last season and whose tally stands at 204 -- put pen to paper on a deal that will see him through to the end of the 2021 season and postpones his stated desire to finish his career with Independiente back in his homeland.

"I am happy for this additional year," said Aguero in a club statement.

"My idea was being here for 10 years. I've been here for seven years, it's going to be 10 when the contract expires."

"This was the main reason I signed. I'm very happy because they have treated me very well since the first day I got here."

City manager Pep Guardiola -- who has left Aguero out at times in the past two years with young Brazilian Gabriel Jesus getting the nod -- said he had not needed to change the striker's mind about delaying his return to Argentina.

"I didn't convince him, he decided himself," said Guardiola at his Friday press conference.

"So I say thanks for the trust he has shown in us, like Vincent Kompany and David Silva."

Guardiola, though, believes that Aguero -- who earns a reported £220,000 (\$288,000) a week -- staying 10 years at the same club will be a thing of the past.

"Before it was easier to find players to stay their whole career in the same club," said Guardiola.

"They want to live new experiences, and it's not bad if they want to discover new languages and learn other cultures."

"It happened with Sergio: Argenti-



Manchester City's Argentinian striker Sergio Aguero

na, then Madrid and then here. He's an important player for the club, not just for the team."

Txiki Begiristain, Manchester City's director of football, said Aguero retained his status as one of the club's most pivotal players.

Lukaku hunts golden boot as United gather momentum

Manchester, United Kingdom

Romelu Lukaku will look at Manchester United's next three Premier League games as a good opportunity to strengthen his prospects of being this season's top scorer in the competition.

Wolves visit Old Trafford on Saturday, before a trip to West Ham and a home fixture against Newcastle, by which time Lukaku could be the clear leader in the race for the Golden Boot.

Lukaku goes into this weekend with four Premier League goals, one behind Chelsea's Eden Hazard at the top of the standings, but has not had an entirely smooth start.

The Belgium striker has scored in each of United's past two league matches, with both goals in a 2-0 win at Burnley on September 2 and another in last weekend's 2-1 victory at Watford.

Yet he continues to face accusations that he is a 'flat-track bully' because of his disappointing record against the rest of England's big six teams.

Of the 20 Premier League goals Lukaku has scored for United since arriving from Everton in July 2017, only one has come against the teams who made up last season's final top six -- when Chelsea were defeated at Old Trafford in February.

Perhaps, then, a run of fixtures against opponents lower down the table will offer a chance to bolster his goal total.

He may also be helped by the fact Liverpool's Mohamed Salah and Tottenham's Harry Kane have not, so far, reached the high standards they set last season, while Sergio Aguero, who has three league goals to date, is likely to be rotated with Gabriel Jesus at



Manchester United's Belgian striker Romelu Lukaku

Manchester City. "You always compete every year against Aguero and Kane, and Salah this year. You always think about (the Golden Boot), being a striker," Lukaku said.

"But then, while I want to score as much as I can, I want to win championships. That's why I signed for Manchester United."

Last season, Lukaku was the sixth-highest scorer in the Premier League with 16 goals, half the total that Salah achieved to win the Golden Boot.

The victory at Watford was followed on Wednesday by a 3-0 defeat of Swiss side Young Boys in the Champions League, and Mourinho's recent grumbles about a lack of adequate close-season transfer market activity have quietened.

A consistent goalscoring run from Lukaku over the next fortnight will further improve both the mood and the league position; costly defeats by Brighton and Tottenham during August meant that United got into the weekend lying eighth, six points behind leaders Chelsea. If Lukaku can keep on scoring regularly beyond that -- with a league trip to pace-setters Chelsea to come later in October -- then he may have a genuine chance of winning the league titles he craves.

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Fisher cards first 59 in European Tour history

Vilamoura, Portuga

Unheralded Englishman Oliver Fisher fired the first round of 59 in the European Tour's 46-year history on a remarkable second day of the Portugal Masters on Friday.

The 30-year-old tapped in for par on the final hole to complete an astonishing 12-under-par round featuring 10 birdies and an eagle, after his long birdie putt for a 58 grazed the edge of the hole.