

# Lucky Abahani in semis

Sports Reporter

Defending champions Abahani Krira Chakra moved into the semifinals with a face-saving 3-2 victory over spirited Fakirpool Youngmen's Sports Club in the Independence Day soccer quarter-final yesterday at the Mirpur Stadium. Abahani, taking the field for the first time this year, and without Aslam and Wasim, led 1-0 at the breather.

Abahani dominated the first half proceedings with the full mostly confined to midfield. Mohsin, in the goal, Munna (sr) in the defence, Yousuf in midfield and skipper Rupu upfront were the pick of the Abahani players.

Fakirpool, on the other hand, took most of the first half to recover from the short goal which they conceded in the very second minute of play.

They came back smoking in the second half and without any doubt they looked a much better side compared to their rivals. In fact, the defending champions were really lucky to scrape home. Some brilliant goalkeeping by ex-national goalkeeper Mohsin deprived Fakirpool of three definite chances in the second half.

In the end, one can say, Abahani utilised the opportunities that came their way

while Fakirpool can only blame their forwards for not converting the chances and also one or two fatal lapses by their inexperienced defenders allowed their rival forward to romp home.

Abahani surged the lead, within two minutes of the kick-off, when striker Rumi was brought down by Fakirpool defenders Swapan and Ibrahim just outside the box. Munna (sr) took full advantage of a faulty defensive wall to send a curling shot past the diving Fakirpool goalkeeper Dhanu (1-0). This stunned and took the sting out of Fakirpool and Abahani slowly established full control over the game in the first half.

Despite dominating the first half, Abahani's forwards failed to penetrate the Fakirpool defence except for an odd occasion or two. Rumi failed to push off Rupu's fine minus while young Alamgir hit the side netting from close.

The second half started with Fakirpool coming back with new energy while their rivals seemed lazily content with their lone goal lead.

In the very second minute, of the second half, Fakirpool's Balri's angular shot was well stopped by the stretching Mohsin at the cost of a corner.

In the 55th minute, Fakirpool equalised in dramatic fashion.

Masih all on a sudden unleashed a tremendous left-footer from well outside the box, giving no chance to the bemused Abahani goalkeeper (1-1).

Ten minutes later Uttam's cracking 35-yarder was superbly tipped over the bar by Mohsin.

Fakirpool's Masood was slow to react off Bahu's pass when Mohsin came out smartly to collect the ball off Masood's feet.

In the 58th minute Mohsin once again punched the ball from a point blank header by Shamsuddin to deprive Fakirpool of another chance.

In the 75th minute, Krishna's curling corner was partially cleared by Pijush but the ball landed before an unmarked Rumi, who made no mistake in placing inside the net (2-0).

Munna (jr) made it 3-1 for Abahani when he brilliantly dribble past a defender and rounded the goalkeeper to score with an angular shot.

Firoze of Fakirpool took advantage of a relaxed Abahani defence to make it 3-2.

Fakirpool missed a golden chance at the flag end of the match.

Shamsuddin headed wide from a close range off Firoze's cross.

Abahani will play against the winners of BRTC and Eskaton Sabuj in the Semifinal in April 5.

# Navana cricket title-decider tomorrow

Sports Reporter

Bangladesh Biman and Brothers Union will meet in a one-day play-off match to decide the 1990-91 Navana Premier Division cricket league championship starting at 9:15 am tomorrow at the Dhaka Stadium.

Both Biman and Brothers finished jointly on top of the league table with 16 points after their quota of nine matches each.

Biman have a slight psychological advantage over the Gopibagh Boys having beaten them in the league match.

The play-off match will be of 45-overs a-side instead of the usual 75 overs provided for the league proper.

# Seraj cricket

Dhaka and Rajshahi qualified for the final round of the Seraj memorial national junior cricket championship after becoming champions of Zones 'A' and 'C' respectively yesterday at the zonal venues.

Dhaka clinched the Zone 'A' title beating Barisal by 33 runs in the final at Satkhira.

Rajshahi won the Zone 'C' title defeating Chittagong by 54 runs at Mymensingh.

In Zone 'B' at Barisal, Jhalakathi moved into the final when they scored a 68-run win over Magura in the semi-final.

In Zone 'D' at Pabna, BKSP reached the final beating Chappal Nawabganj by 33 runs. BKSP will play Kushtia in the final on April 3.

# Nirman cricket

Sports Reporter

The Dhaka Zone Nirman Schools cricket championship will begin today at different venues around the city.

Thirty-six schools are taking part in the Dhaka zone matches. In the 20 other zones around the country a total of 224 schools are taking part in the preliminary round competitions.

# Reid burst helps Aussies hit back

KINGSTOWN, St Vincent, April 1: Left-arm pace bowler Bruce Reid confirmed his improved form with a timely four-wicket haul as Australia's cricketers hit back against West Indies under-23 team on Sunday, reports Reuter.

Reid, who had taken one wicket overnight, finished with four for 76 as the local side crumbled from 232 for two to 307 all out in their first innings.

Australia were 92 for one at the close of the second-day of the four-day match. Mark Taylor (48 not out) and David Boon (35 not out) sharing an unbroken stand of 66.

They repaired the early damage caused by the dismissal of Mike Veletta, well caught at short leg by Philo Wallace off Linden Joseph for four.

Reid's continued revival was the most heartening feature of the day for Australia, who face West Indies in the third Test starting in Port-of-Spain on Friday.

Reid, who has struggled to make an impact on the tour, had bowled a good second spell on Saturday. He sustained that form to help Australia's fightback, all his wickets coming in his last 19.1 overs for 38 runs.

Fellow paceman Terry Alderman bowled solidly but may have some way to go before he regains his Test place, while off-spinner Peter Taylor did his chances no harm by snapping up three wickets to polish off the tail.

The holiday crowd endured disappointment at the early departures of Brian Lara (22), a member of the Test squad, and the promising James (12).

Opener Stuart Williams' apparent nervousness contributed to his exit: A victim of

# Junior soccer

The eight Suhrawardy Cup national junior under-19 soccer competition will begin from the first week of May according to a press release issued by the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday.

All interested DSA's Education Boards have been asked to send their entries by April 15.

# Ruelas KOs Cruz

LAS VEGAS, Apr 1: Undeclared Rafael Ruelas knocked out Steve Cruz in the third round Sunday night to win the North American Boxing Federation featherweight title, reports AP.

Ruelas, 25-0, used combinations to knock down Cruz four times, including three times in the second round of the scheduled 12-round bout at the Sands Hotel.

Ruelas, of Van Nuys, California, scored the knockout 57 seconds into the third round. Cruz, from Fort Worth, Texas, fell to 35-6.

# Hick to end 7-year wait

LONDON, April 1: Graeme Hick, the gifted Zimbabwe-born batsman with the Bradman-esque

appetite for runs, on Monday reaches an eagerly-awaited landmark in his cricket career of mounting personal achievement, reports Reuter.

It is the day 24-year-old Hick qualifies to play for England, ending a seven-year wait to put his undoubted skills to the test against the world's best opponents at the highest level of the game.

Hick's qualification period with Worcestershire has been illuminated by a sequence of record-breaking feats in county cricket, guaranteed both to enhance his test claims and ensure media hype projects him as England's batting saviour.

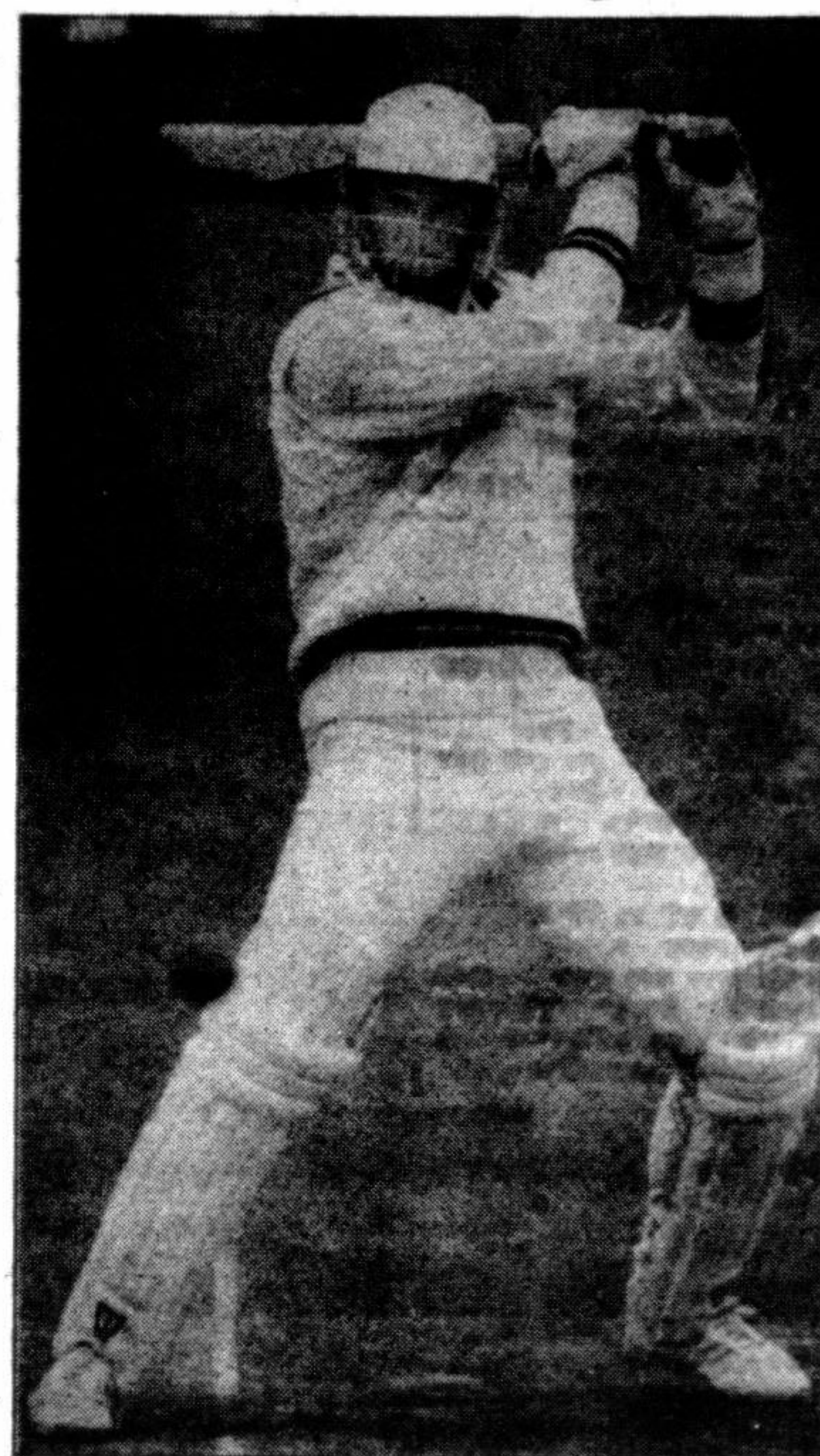
So he arrives already with a heavy burden of expectation and still to prove himself on the international stage, in addition to which his selection would put him among a growing number of England players whose roots are overseas.

Test batsmen Allan Lamb and Robin Smith are reminded more often than they feel necessary that they were born in South Africa, while England's pace bowling has featured West Indian born Devon Malcolm, Gladstone Small, Phillip DeFreitas and Chris Lewis in the past 12 months.

Hick's expected inclusion will provide further ammunition for the critics, both inside and outside the English game, of the overseas influence, but chairman of selectors Ted Dexter views it in a different perspective.

"The more good players available for England the better," he said. "We have strict and very carefully interpreted regulations about qualification for the Test side."

"In Graeme Hick's case, we have a young player who has



GRAEME HICK... England's future batting saviour?

had to wait seven years to become eligible.

"He must be the outstanding player of his age in England, given his record to date, and I'm delighted to have

someone of his ability available to us. He's strong, he hits the ball hard and he concentrates very well.

"That doesn't mean, of course, that he's an automatic

selection this summer. Graeme has got to force his way into the side like everyone else."

Yet after England's batting agonies during the recent Ashes Series in Australia, Hick's name is almost certain to be one of the first written down by the selectors when they choose their teams to face West Indies in the forthcoming season.

Hick's essentially sound technique, timing and placement are key elements of his batting but equally significant are his application and concentration.

Completing a century can be the moment for some batsmen to relax: For Hick it is merely the signal to mark a fresh guard and settle down in pursuit of a double century.

Such dedication to run-making has helped him rewrite the record books, notably in 1988.

During that English season he became only the eighth player to score 1,000 runs before the end of May, including his career-best 405 not out against Somerset — a Worcestershire record and the second highest score ever in first-class matches in England.

Last season Hick became the youngest player in cricket history to complete 50 first-class centuries, reaching the landmark 62 days before his 24th birthday to break the record Don Bradman had held for 55 years.

Hick's expected entry to the Test scene offers one of the intriguing prospects for 1991, not least because his ability to rise to the big occasion will be under scrutiny.

After failing in two one-day domestic finals at Lord's during the last three seasons, Hick will want to confirm he has the temperament as well as the skill to seek his place among the great batsmen of Test history.

# BFF calls 30 booters to camp

Sports Reporter

The Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) yesterday called up 30 players for the residential camp to select the national under-23 side for the pre-Olympics qualifying round championship, scheduled to start later next month.

The two-leg competition will be held from late May to mid-June in the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur and south Korean capital Seoul.

The thirty booters for the intensive training camp have been screened from the 60 called earlier last month for the preliminary trials.

Bangladesh will be playing

South Korea, Thailand, Malaysia and the Philippines in Group D of the Asian zone.

The selected players are to report to national coach Abdul Hakeem at the federation office by 2:00 pm this afternoon.

Following are the selected players:

Goalkeepers: Bijon (Dhaka Division), Lahul (Rahmatganj), Sheikh Mohsin (Mohammedan) and Suhag (Muktijoddha). Defenders: Shamim (PWD), Nira, Moon (Brothers), Aman (Abahani), Barun, Jewel Rana (Muktijoddha), Sani (Khulna Division), Sohel (Rajshahi Division) and Hamid (Army).

Mid-fielders: Alamgir (Abahani), Sabbir, Titu, Zakir (Mohammedan) Rokshi (Arambagh), Uttam (Fakirpool), Swapan, Kamal (PWD) and Rubel (Adamjee).

Forwards: Nakib (Mohammedan), Mamun (Victoria), Munna Jr (Abahani), Ekram Rana (Muktijoddha), Raha (BKSP), Gaus (PWD) and Samrat, Badal Das (Brothers).

Besides a few players may be included for the residential camp after reviewing their performances in the current Independence Day Football Tournament.

# Italian press sad but thankful

ROME, April 1: Italian newspapers on Sunday reacted to the apparent end of Diego Maradona's soccer career with a mixture of sadness and gratitude for his past performances, reports Reuter.

Napoli's 30-year-old Argentine star tested positive for cocaine after a league match two weeks ago and faces a ban of up to two years, which would effectively end his career.

"The end of Maradona. Goodbye to football for love of cocaine," was how La Repubblica, the daily that broke the doping story last Thursday, headlined its front page story.

Veteran football writer Gianni Briar headed an editorial "but thanks all the same" in which he recalled the stocky Argentine's genius on

the pitch. The Italian soccer federation said on Friday a routine test taken after a match against Bari on March 17 showed traces of cocaine. The Italian league's disciplinary commission is expected to meet in the next few days to decide Maradona's fate.

Italian newspaper failed to appear on Saturday because of a journalists' strike and the first reaction to the Argentine's latest woes came on Sunday.

"Maradona, this time it's well and truly over," the Milan Daily Il Giornale said.

The Italian media see the doping scandal as the final and most damaging chapter in a disastrous season in which Maradona has been at loggerheads with Napoli and the Italian Football Federation.

He has run up of more than 50,000 dollars for missing a number of training sessions and matches.

He is also involved in a paternity suit, an investigation into possible links with a drugs and prostitution ring while Napoli are suing him for damaging the club's image.

"Maradona is finished. Don't lynch him," was the headline of an editorial in L'Unita.

L'Unita's Michele Serra wrote that it was right to punish Maradona the sportsman for his use of drugs, but that the Argentine as a private individual was free to do as he wished.

"Addio Diego, beaten who," said the Corriere Della sera of Milan.

Its sister paper, the Sports Daily Gazzetta Dello Sport wrote: "And Maradona ended in the [cocaine] dust."

# Noah slots into new role

RENNERS, France, April 1: Yannick Noah, slotting smoothly into his new role as non-playing captain, has lost none of his ambition since laying down his racket as he resolutely plots France's first Davis Cup victory for almost 60 years, reports Reuter.

While admitting to a degree of frustration in his unaccustomed place on the sidelines, the ebullient Noah was given a big boost by France's 5-0 victory over Israel in their World Group first round tie at the weekend.

With a favourable draw, which gives his team every chance of reaching the final, and with players Guy Forget and Henri Leconte highly enthusiastic about their new leader's ability as a motivator, Noah can permit himself a few hopes.

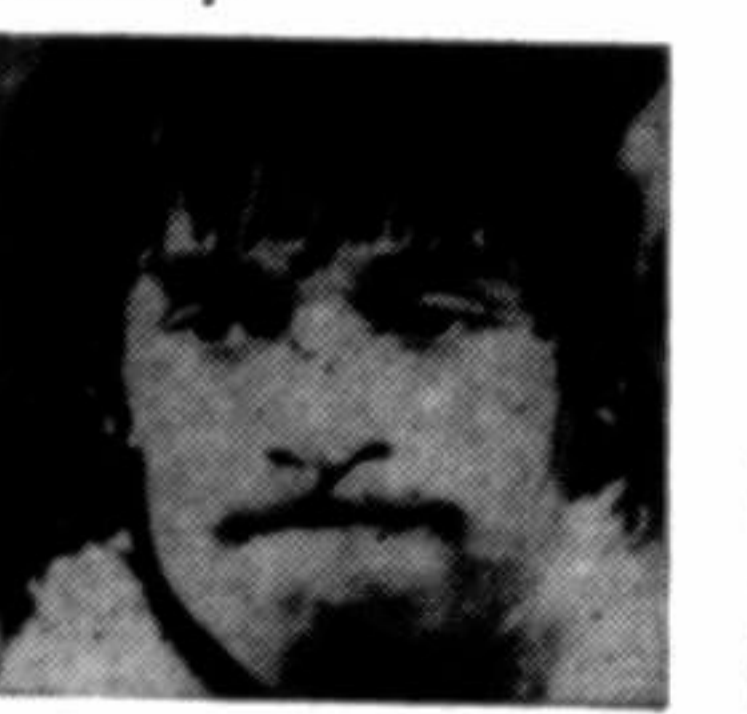
"This team can beat anyone," he announced proudly at the end of the first round match. "It's going to have its say in this competition because it's very strong."

France have not won the Davis Cup since 1932, back in the days of the four musketeers, Jean Borotra, Henri Cochet, Rene Lacoste and Jacques Brugnon.

But Noah can see a clear path into the final with home ties against Australia and Yugoslavia the only obstacles.

His team are strong with Forget in outstanding form after rising to number four in the world rankings and the effervescent Leconte coming

back to his best after a long spell of injury problems. The two are also brilliant doubles partnership.



YANNICK NOAH

Leconte, who has not always seen eye to eye with Noah in the past, had nothing but praise for the non-playing captain.

"He knows just how to pass on the drive he always showed on court," he said. "He's always there with us to help us. He says the things we need to hear just when we need them."

# Barrios' double

PARIS, April 1: Arturo Barrios of Mexico broke the world on-hour and 20-km records in a race at La Fleche, France on Saturday night, reports Reuter.

The Mexican ran 21.101 kms in an hour, breaking a 15-year record held by Jos Hermens of the Netherlands who covered 20.944 kms in 1976.

En route, Barrios also beat the 20-km record with a time of 56 minutes 54.03 second. The previous best was set last year by Dionisio Castro of Portugal with 57 minutes 18.4 second.

# Graf's warning to Seles

SAN ANTONIO, April 1: Steffi Graf took a step toward regaining the top women's tennis ranking on Sunday with a 6-4, 6-3 victory over top-ranked Monica Seles to claim the US Women's Hardcourt championship title for the third time, reports AP.

It was Graf's first tournament victory since November's Virginia Slims of New England and her first over Seles since 1989.

Graf, ranked No. 2 in the world, had last met Seles in the 1990 French Open finals, which Seles won 7-6, 6-4. Graf improved her career lead over Seles to 4-2.

Seles, 17, ascended to the No. 1 world ranking on March 11 after Graf's record reign of 186 weeks. Because the US Women's Hardcourt Championships is only a 32-player draw, Graf will not overtake Seles in the computer rankings.

But Graf, 21, acknowledged that she hoped her victory Sunday would be a turning point.

"I think I'm on the right way now," a smiling Graf said. "I think I made her play. That's a good feeling to have."

Graf started slowly, failing to step into her shots and netting many of them on the way to losing two service games and falling behind 4-1 in the first set. But she stormed back in the sixth game to break Seles' service to love.

Two games later, Graf broke Seles again to even the match at 4-4 and won the first set with a third service break. The set ended with a lob by Graf that landed on the baseline.

Both players started the second set by holding their serve, but Graf got a crucial service break to take a 4-2 lead. Seles had missed a break-point opportunity at 2-2 when Graf hit a volley putaway at the net. Seles had another break opportunity in the seventh

game, but a Graf service ace at deuce followed by a down-the-line winner gave her a 5-2 lead.

Seles had one last break point to put the second set back on serve in the ninth

averages out performances over the past year.

But Graf said the ranking matters less than the return of her confidence that had waned in the last few months.

"The way I played the last



STEFFI GRAF... a gratifying victory

game, but a Graf volley, a Seles shot into the net and a Graf cross-court winner ended the match.

"She was hitting the ball well, and I had to keep hitting great shots back, but that's hard to do constantly," Seles said. "She pulled out a lot of points on her serve."

Graf narrowed Seles' lead in the computer ranking from 23 points to 16 in a system that

few matches makes me feel better, and I look forward to the next few matches," Graf said.

Graf won the US Women's Hardcourt title twice after the tournament was revived in 1988, but did not enter last year because of a thumb injury. Seles was the defending champion.

The victory earned Graf 45,000 dollars.

# Jahangir confirms return to form

GLASGOW, April 1: Jahangir Khan, world champion on six occasions, confirmed his return to form by beating Australian Chris Dittmar 5-15, 17-16, 15-10, 15-13 in the final of the Scottish Open squash championship on Sunday, reports Reuter.

The 28-year-old Pakistani missed five months of this season suffering from mental and physical exhaustion but bounced back to winning form when he defeated current world champion Jansher Khan in the German Open final last week.

Although Dittmar was top seeded in Glasgow, Jahangir's victory in Cologne made him a firm favourite to take the Scottish title.

However Dittmar stormed through the opening game and the Australian looked set to move still further ahead when he overturned an 8-12 deficit to serve for the second game at 14-13.

But Jahangir eventually took that second game after 30 minutes and always had the edge through the third.

Dittmar led 13-12 in the fourth game but failed to win another points as Jahangir claimed a victory after one and a half hours that keeps him on course for his attempt next month to win the British Open for a 10th year in succession.

# Fernandez, Sukova win title

TARPOUR SPRINGS, Florida, Apr 1: Gigi Fernandez and Helena Sukova overcame a 5-1 third-set deficit Sunday to win the 200,000-dollar Light N' Lively Doubles title, reports AP.

The pair won 6-4, 4-6, 7-6 (7-3) over Natalia Zvereva and Larisa Savchenko of the Soviet Union.

Sukova of Czechoslovakia and Fernandez of Puerto Rico split the 75,000 dollars winner's check. Zvereva and Savchenko shared 35,000 dollars.

# Navratilova fit and ready

COLUMBIA, April 1: Martina Navratilova has been on Hilton Head Island for a week, building a foundation for what she hopes will be a fifth victory in the Family Circle Magazine Cup tournament.

"I'm working on everything, but everything's pretty good," Navratilova said. "Just some minor adjustments. No major overhaul on any stroke or anything. I feel fit and ready to go emotionally."

Now, if she just can remember to stay aggressive on the green clay courts at the Sea Pines Racquet Club this week.

"This surface tends to make

me more passive than I should be," she said. "You have to be more passive than you can be on a normal court. But I tend to take that a step too far."

Toward that end, Navratilova left the cold of Colorado for the warmth of Hilton Head Island.

"It's difficult to practice in Aspen in the altitude because you can't keep the ball in play very well in the altitude, even though there are indoor clay courts," she said. "And I need to get outdoors. I've only played one tournament outdoors since the U.S. Open."

Navratilova is the favourite for the tournament, which begins Monday. She is the highest ranked player in the field at No. 3 in the world.

In the Family Circle tournament, she won in 1982 and 1983, then didn't return until 1988, when she defeated Gabriela Sabatini in three sets.

Navratilova lost in the semifinals in 1989, but came back to beat Jennifer Capriati 6-2, 6-4 in 1990 for her 150th singles crown.

Can Navratilova win again? "I'm the top seed, but you've got (six) out of the top 10 players in the world playing in this, so anything can happen," she said. "Sabatini's been very hot. She's playing good tennis. I think she's a better player on clay than I am."

"The other girls are not exactly pushovers. So it's going to be a dogfight."

Monica Seles and Steffi

Graf, who are ranked Nos. 1 and 2, are skipping the tournament. But Sabatini, one of the better clay-court players on the women's tour, is back.

Two other top 10 players withdrew — Mary Joe Fernandez and Zina Garrison.

Sabatini will be making her first appearance since 1988 at the Family Circle, which she's never won. Sabatini is ranked fourth in the world and is the U.S. Open champion.

Other top players in the weeklong tournament include former French Open winner Arantxa Sanchez Vicario, who is ranked fifth, and Australian Open runner-up Jana Novotna, who is seventh. Capriati, who was the crowd favourite a year ago, also will play. Capriati is ranked 10th.