

# WEEKEND SPORTS WEEKEND

## New Enthusiasm for English Football

ENGLAND'S success in reaching the semi-finals of the World Cup in Italy last year has stimulated renewed interest in football at home.

Thousands of fans who had stopped attending live matches, either preferring to watch the limited amount of coverage available on television or losing interest altogether, rediscovered their old enthusiasm, and people who had never been to a football match started to follow their local team.

The result is that the downward slide in attendance figures that had been a feature of the game for 20 years has ended, and there is an air of genuine optimism, helped by the emergence of several exciting new young players.

Chief among these is Lee Sharpe, a winger with Manchester United in the northwest. Still only 19, he made his international debut when he came on in the second half of the European Championship qualifying match against the Republic of Ireland at Wembley in March.

He was one of the few England successes in an otherwise disappointing 1-1 draw, and manager Graham Taylor said afterwards: "The introduction of Sharpe should be a sign to other young players that I am looking to the future."

### New Dimension

Sharpe is Taylor's type of player — fast and direct, a quick, accurate crosser of the ball who will go straight for goal if the chance is there. A hat-trick in United's 6-2 win at Arsenal in London last November brought him nationwide attention after he had missed the latter half of the previous season and the opportunity of a coveted appearance in the Football Association (FA) Cup Final through injury.

He has given Manchester

United an important new dimension. His club captain Bryan Robson said: "We had needed someone with a bit of pace for some time."

Three days before his international debut Sharpe was presented with the Professional Footballers'



Aston Villa's David Platt successfully resists a tackle by Inter Milan's Andreas Brehme during his club's impressive 2-0 UEFA Cup victory at Villa Park, in the English Midlands.

Association's Young Player of the Year award.

Another young winger to make his mark last season was John Salako of south London club Crystal Palace. He has been in the limelight ever

since he scored an astonishing goal from almost the halfway line in the dying seconds of an FA Cup tie at Nottingham Forest in the English Midlands in January.

Salako was born in Nigeria and is eligible to play for that country as well as any of the

England," he says. Football Academy An important part of east London club West Ham's push for promotion from the Second Division in the 1990/91 season was 21-year-old striker Stuart Slater. His speed, nimble feet and mesmerising runs left opponents and onlookers in awe.

He also has the advantage of being brought up in West Ham's famous "football academy". The club has the reputation of getting the very best out of players through sophisticated coaching.

This tradition has continued under new manager Billy Bonds. He spent most of his playing career at West Ham, with the likes of 1966 World Cup heroes Bobby Moore, Geoff Hurst, and Martin Peters, and, later, another England player, Trevor Brooking, and was generally reckoned to be the best uncapped player of his day.

Those who saw Slater's match-winning performance in the FA Cup quarter-final victory over northwesterners Everton were so enthusiastic that a new word was coined — Slatermania. Now, not surprisingly, there is talk of an England call-up for the young player, though he believes he needs more consistency.

Meanwhile, in northeast England, all the talk has been of three goalkeepers. Supporters of the region's three big clubs — Sunderland, Middlesbrough and Newcastle — had to endure their teams' customary eccentricities and waywardness last season, but the form of their respective keepers provided great solace.

### New Legend

The northeast used to be a great coalmining area, and legends had it that football club scouts had only to whistle down any pit shaft and a potential England centre-forward would emerge. That legend has died, along with the pits.

But a new legend could be in the making, for the three best goalkeepers in the country last season all came from that region, living in or around picturesque Durham.

The men in question were Sunderland's Welsh international Tony Norman, consistent Middlesbrough keeper Stephen Pears, and Newcastle's evergreen veteran John Burridge.

Burridge, now 39, is reaping the benefits of a strict, career-long training regimen. "I am fitter and stronger than ever before," he says.

A goalkeeper was also the star of the season in Scotland. Aberdeen's Theo Snelders gave superb performances to consolidate the "Dons'" reputation as one of the top sides in the country with Rangers, following Celtic's slide.

Rangers remain the pace-makers (with a number of Englishmen recruited by manager Graeme Souness) and their "Old Firm" clashes with Glasgow rivals Celtic were as competitive as ever, but Snelders' displays in goal have helped give Aberdeen the promise of a lucrative place in European competition next season.

In particular, his two breathtaking saves either side of half-time in a 2-1 win over Dundee United in March had manager Alex Smith in raptures.

The only bright spot in what has been an otherwise miserable couple of years for Celtic was the form of defender Paul Elliott, who is the second black player after Rangers' Mark Walters to star at the top level in Scotland.

Elliott's majestic performances at least kept troubled Celtic well away from the relegation zone, which in the small Scottish Premier Division means a respectable midway position.

## Brighter future beckons Burrell



NEW YORK: American sprinter Leroy Burrell set a new world 100m record at the last US championships of Friday June 14 and staked his claim to future glory in Tokyo and Barcelona.

Burrell's magnificent 9.90 sec made athletics history and beat the previous world record holder Carl Lewis into second place.

But Lewis, whose 9.92 had survived since the Seoul Olympics in 1988, still had reason to smile here with a superb 9.93. The former 100m king hadn't broken the 10 sec barrier since Seoul.

Burrell's triumph was text book sprinting — an explosive start, a winning lead and superb control over the distance.

Lewis had meanwhile got off to a disastrous start, but clawed his way back from fourth place with a searing burst of acceleration at the 60m mark which sent him through the Pack and onto Burrell's heels.

Putting it mildly, Burrell said "Everything went well. I reacted very well to the gun and never accelerated too fast," although he admitted that "at the end I didn't feel too good."

The 24-year-old from Philadelphia, who made his mark in World Athletics in 1989 with a 9.994 at the US championships in Houston, has been waiting ever since for his chance to enter the record books.

"Ever since I ran 9.94, I knew that it was only a matter of time to break the world record. Right now I don't know what to think. It's like a life-long dream comes true."

"It's funny, I'm not in great shape now but I'm running fast."

He immediately paid tribute to Lewis as a training partner and someone "who has been

teaching me to be a better athlete and a better competitor." Lewis, who had noticed Burrell early in his career and brought him to Houston to be coached by Tom Tellez, was just as quick to pay tribute to his former pupil.

"Leroy ran the race today. He really ran a great race. I have got to give him a lot of credit — he deserves it."

Lewis, whose victory in Seoul followed the disqualification of Canadian Ben Johnson for failing a drugs test, added "I congratulate Leroy — He's a clean champion. He did it with a lot of hard work, the way it should be done."

As for his own race here, Lewis said "I had a terrible start, just a terrible start. I won't say this was my worst start in major competition, but it was just terrible. I'm just not meet sharp yet."

After getting his feet tangled in the starting blocks, "I'm pleased with the time. I can't believe I got such a terrible start and ran this time"

While the two Santa Monica track club team mates were dwelling for the line, running the fastest one-two in history, the rest of the field were also taking full advantage of the ideal conditions.

Third placed Dennis Mitchell improved his personal best by 3/100 this of a second to hit 10 sec and become the 10th fastest man of all time, while the pint-sized Andre Cason finished fourth in 10.05 to secure a place in the relay team at the Tokyo world championships which start in August.

And if Burrell can maintain that standard through to next year, he should also win gold at the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona 3 — provided that Lewis doesn't spring and even bigger surprise that he did here.

## Tabloids offer clues to Seles' withdrawal

WIMBLEDON: Monica Seles hasn't provided a clear explanation for her absence from Wimbledon, but British tabloids are more than happy to offer their own theories.

The Sun ran an "exclusive" Wednesday suggesting that the world's top-ranked woman tennis player is



SELES — growing up pregnant.

"Is Monica a Wimbledon" read the headline. "Tennis ace, 17, pulled out because baby is on way" red the sub-headline.

The story went on to quote Yugoslav newspapers as saying Seles has gained 18 pounds in the past six weeks.

"Her bosom is much bigger and she's added a lot of weight to her hips", a family friend was reported to have said.

Seles, father, Karoly, was quoted as saying recently: "My greatest fear about Monica is that one day she is going to meet a man who is going to make her pregnant."

Seles, who was seeded No. 1 at Wimbledon, withdrew last Friday with what her agents described only as an "injury caused by a minor accident."

The Sun said Seles checked in to a hospital in Vail, Colorado and then disappeared without a trace.

The story ran beside a photo of the Sun's daily "Page 3 Girl" holding a tennis racket and wearing nothing but a headband and wristband.

"Pour Blimey!" the caption read. "London Gayner Goodman finds everyone is for tennis when she plays — even when it's raining."

## Weekly bridge

The following are the results of weekly pair duplicate bridge contest of Dhaka Metropolitan Bridge Association held on last Friday at the Bangladesh Bank Club premises, states a press release:

North-South: First — Farooq Khan and R K Barua (55.00%); second — Md Yakub and Fazlul Haque (54.09%).

East-West: First — M A Mannan Miah and Razauul Haque (61.36%); second — T R Chowdhury and M A Quddus (55.45 per cent).

## Putting tradition out to grass

LONDON: Artificial turf for football and baseball in the United States is one thing. But fake grass for cricket in England?

That genteel game, so steeped in tradition, would surely never abandon its sacred grass pitches.

No, that would be heresy. Like installing hard courts at Wimbledon. Or astroturf at Wembley.

Next thing you know, cricketers will be wearing coloured uniforms and using two-sided bats.

As the Brits say, it just wouldn't be cricket.

Well, hold onto your bowlers, mates. It could all actually happen.

Just ask Alan Smith, chief executive of the Test and County Cricket Board, the governing body for the sport in England.

A former wicket keeper on England's national team, Smith has ignited a storm of controversy by declaring that the future of cricket lies with artificial turf — or "plastic" as it's sometimes called here.

Smith, 54, considers himself a cricket traditionalist and conservative. But he's suddenly

being branded in some circles as a blasphemous anarchist.

"A number of people are very indignant at the thought of it," Smith says. "I should think one or two people think I'm absolutely bonkers. But not everything can stay the same for ever and a day. Things will change. You can't stand still. You have to adjust to time."

Smith proposes a gradual shift to artificial turf outfields. However the wicket, the 22-yard-long rectangular strip between the stumps — the area where the bowler and the batsmen operate — would remain natural grass.

According to Smith, synthetic grass would help combat one of cricket's biggest enemies — rain.

"When it rains you can't play, and even when it stops raining, the pitch still needs time to recover," he says. "In theory with the right artificial surface, the water will go straight through it. It would allow you to play at any time when it is not actually raining."

Smith believes artificial turf would also allow cricket clubs to use the ground for other sports and activities throughout the year.

"You could have lawn bowling on a summer evening, or

tennis in autumn, or soccer or hockey in winter," he says.

"Clubs have invested a lot of capital over the years to improve their facilities. This would help them get a better return on their asset."

Smith, however, acknowledges it may take a little more time to produce the ideal surface. Several English soccer clubs have tried artificial turf and found it unsuitable.

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### ALAN SMITH

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"The substance we need doesn't quite exist yet," Smith

says. But the scientist should be able to devise an artificial surface.

Smith thinks many county cricket clubs will switch to artificial grass outfields by the end of the decade. But he is not so sure about Lords, England's premier test match ground in northern London.

"Lords is the wealthiest of our clubs," he says. "They are not under pressure to diversify or staging other events. They are not hunting for where the next pound is coming from."

Besides, Lord's is not known for being open to change. The Marylebone Cricket Club, which owns Lord's, recently voted to uphold its 200-year-old ban on women members.

"In my view cricketers would always want to play on grass," says Lt. Col. John Stephenson, secretary of the MCC. "I like to see the MCC leading the way in cricket matters but in this instance I think we would probably want to see what happens elsewhere first."

Maybe so. But Smith has yet another radical idea in mind for Lords.

"Lord's has one inherent flaw," he says. "The playing area is not quite wide enough.

The boundaries are a bit too short."

The wicket is moved to a different part of the ground for every match, sometimes giving the field an uneven shape. Some wickets get overused.

"If you could always play in the same place, on the same 22-yard strip in the middle, that would be ideal," Smith says.

But how would you keep the turf from wearing out?

"Grow the 22-yard turf pitches in big metal trays, a dozen lined up side by side. Then for each match, wheel one out and drop it into a slot in the middle of the field. That way, you could always play in the same position."

Such a system was tried out in Australia in the 1970s. But Smith realized it won't be introduced here.

"I think that's a very, very long way away," he says. "Maybe 30 or 40 years away."

Meanwhile, some changes are already occurring.

What will they think of next? A Cricket invasion of the United States?

## Life's no fun at the top

WIMBLEDON: For the seeds who use Wimbledon's first-class locker room, life is tense, serious and dull.

For the outsiders in the second-class lockers, it's loose, friendly and fun.

Pam Shriver discovered the contrasting moods of the women's locker rooms when she came to Wimbledon this year, unseeded for the first time since 1980.

"There's a lot more talking going on in Locker Room Two, a lot more chatting. When you're seeded with the top players you don't get that," Shriver said Wednesday after her 6-0, 7-5 first round triumph over her Baltimore neighbor, Andrea Leand.

"It's so much more friendly in Locker Room Two."

As one of the top-ranked players, Shriver always got a place in the needs locker room, which is the prestigious Lady Members room during the other 50 weeks of the year.

Returning to Wimbledon after a shoulder operating that put her out of action last summer. Her ranking has slipped to 38 and that meant a change of locker room for the 6-foot-0 (1.83-meter) American who

turns 29 on July 4.

"I always had my place in Locker Room One," she said. "I would go in one of the first two cubicles. But when I went in No. 2 I thought, where shall I put my stuff? Where do I go?"

The first day in there I was a bit sulky. It's kind of weird. I felt like I had been demoted," she said. "But I soon got over that."

Shriver said there never was any animosity between players from each locker room. But she discovered a kind of rivalry.

"When a seeded player comes into locker room two the players jeer at them and say 'what are you doing in our locker room?'"

When Elna Reinach was playing Martina (Navratilova) the other players in locker room two were cheering for Elna because she came from their room," Shriver said.

"If someone from your locker room comes up with an upset you are a party."

"It's also so much tidier in locker room one. If you have a drink you have to put it down on a coaster. In locker room two the drinks stay spilled all over the table. And I'm such a messy person," she said.

Then again, women's tennis has come a long way from those Victorian days and it must be admitted that it is rather more difficult for women in their mid-30s to win major championships these days.

However, there can be no doubt at all that Martina, given her current form, should be the top favourite at Wimbledon this summer. It is the great lady's favourite surface and there is a certain comfort that Martina takes in finding herself in the familiar ambience of the All England Lawn Tennis Club. Should she win here first round match a Wimbledon this year, Martina would have achieved yet another remarkable feat — 100 singles victories on the fabled turf. "I am going for double digits, why not?" she said last year after beating Garrison in the final. Well, at another level, she will also be going for triple digits.

And then, there are other records that the champion who is so conscious of history and historic feats will consider. The one that comes to mind immediately is her friend and part time coach Billie Jean King's unsurpassed 20 overall titles at Wimbledon. Martina has 17 (nine singles, seven doubles and one mixed doubles).

To be sure, it is not just the desire to get into the record books that drives Martina. She has done more than enough to find a permanent niche in the

game's hall of fame amidst its immortal champions. What keeps her going is here love for the game and her extraordinary ability to keep herself physically fit to be able to do the utmost justice to her great skills as a competitor.

Perseverance: Eighteen years ago, in the summer of 1973, when Martina played her first Wimbledon and lost in the third round, few would have expected the awe-struck girl from Prague to become a legend in the game.

Although their playing styles and attitude to life are a lot different, it may not be a mere coincidence that both came out of a Czechoslovakia that was far less open than it is today.

At Wimbledon last summer, Martina was talking about whether the Czech kids of today would have the intense desire to excel in sport and use their skills as a passport to get out of the country. She did not think that the levels of desire of the young players of the 70s could be matched now.

Even if they are matched, it is unlikely that another Martina Navratilova will come out of any system, not just Czechoslovakia, in the near future. Players like her don't turn up everyday — or even every decade. May be a few times each century.

And this, just to keep the Dinosaur clan going!

## Keeping that Dino spirit going

It is not just the desire to get into the record books that drives Martina Navratilova. She has done more than enough to find a permanent place in the game's hall of fame. What keeps her going is her love for the game and her determination to do the utmost justice to her extraordinary skills.

DINOSAURS are not extinct. Well, at least in the world of tennis, there seems to be concrete evidence of their presence. And sightings were reported (where else) in a few major cities in the United States recently as creatures the world — a tennis world so much in love with precocious toddlers — almost forgot turned up here and there to steer our attention away from teenaged millionaires and heart-rending stories of their agonising wait for a driving licence. In a rapidly changing world,

if there is a certain comfort that all of us take in the odd hint of reassuring changelessness offered by the seemingly permanent presence of a sports giant or two, then the re-emergence of Martina Navratilova and Jimmy Connors, perhaps the last of the dinosaurs, in the recent weeks should at once have given the game back its missing links — links almost to the very beginnings of Open tennis.

While good old Jimmy came back from the longest layoff of his career to win his first tournament match in almost two years at key Biscayne, it is the stunning, almost incredible comeback staged by Martina that seems far more significant than Connors's I-enjoy-my-tennis, let-me-have-a-good-time endeavour.

Amazing: For, within a few weeks after returning to the circuit after surgery on both her ageing, over-worked knees that had kept her away from the courts since November last year, Martina won two singles titles, No. 153 and No. 154, the second after beating the girl who took over as No. 1 from Steffi Graf a week later: And now the great lady is just three singles titles short of Chris Evert's all-time record of 157.

That the woman who will

turn 35 this October has come back from a major knee surgery to beat the best player in the game—Monica Seles—within a few weeks of her return is not only a tribute to Martina's durable skills but also a warning to the Seleses, Graf and the Sabatins and the critics as well that it might turn out to be a huge mistake to discount her chances in the major events.

During the Australian Open last January, it was almost if Martina did not exist. All the talk relating to Grand Slam events involved Seles or Graf or Sabatini or one of the other top-notchers such as Jana Novotna or Arantxa Sanchez. Well, if that only went to prove that out of sight is out of mind, then Martina has triumphantly forced her way back into our consciousness now.

"I feel 10 years younger now. And I am really looking forward to playing the majors," says Martina who skipped the Australian Open and has decided not to pay the French Open too. Her Grand Slam ambitions centre on Wimbledon first and then the US Open.

"My knees are good I can get down for low volleys now better than anyone else and I am getting balls now I haven't been able to for a long time,"

she says. The pain is gone.

Epoch-making: It was clear for the most part of the last two years, and even at Wimbledon last summer when Martina soared to the uninhabited Cloud Nine at the halcyon home of the game, that the Czech-American left hander's knees were complaining of abuse. Martina, quite often, just stood by and watched passes whiz past her on the famous lawns and had trouble with low volleys.

But the great champion, so completely focused on her ambition of winning a record ninth title, surpassing Helen Wills Moody's eight, knew from experience what she should not do to hurt her knees as much as she was aware of what she needed to do to win her epoch-making ninth singles title. With her nemesis Graf out of the way — courtesy a fired up Zina Garrison — Martina became, at 33 years and 262 days, the fourth oldest Wimbledon women's champion. The oldest was Charlotte Cooper Sterry at 37 years and 282 days when she won in 1908. Blanche Bingley Hillyard, when she won in 1900, was 36 years and 242 days old while Dorothy Douglass Chambers was 35 years and 305 days old when she won in 1914.



NAVRATILOVA — still in good form.