

N Korean Kim charms Americans

INDIANAPOLIS, Indiana, Sept 15: Kim Gwang Suk of North Korea was overwhelmed by the standing ovation she received here Saturday after her extraordinary routine on the uneven bars earned her a perfect 10,000 and a gold medal at the World Gymnastics Championships, reports AFP.

Kim, a diminutive 16-year-old competing in her second world Championships, was up against American Shannon Miller in the apparatus final, but everyone in the Hoosier Dome knew the Korean's performance was superior and responded with an applause topped only by the one they gave to Kim Zmeskal when she won the all-around gold medal on Friday.

"I felt like flying, said Kim, who scored a 9.987 with a similar routine in the team competition. During the performance I could not hear anything, because I was concentrating very hard.

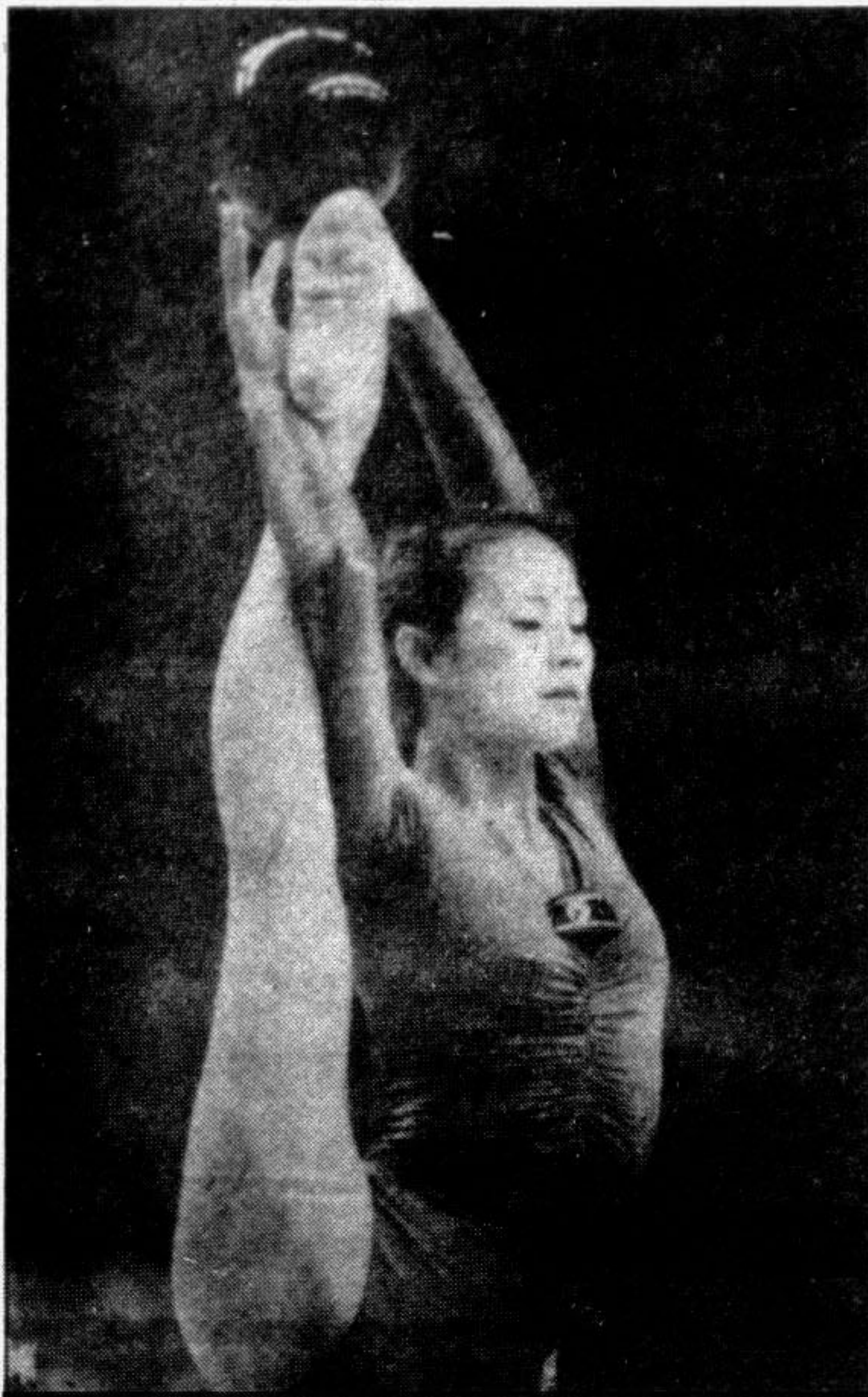
But after, I heard it all. It was loud.

Miller, who was joint second with a 9.950, was watching as Kim performed and admitted her routine deserved a 10,000, even though she was hoping her own routine would stand up.

"It was one of the best bar routines I've ever done, she said. I didn't make any mistakes until my dismount.

Tatiana Gutsu of the Soviet Union also scored a 9.950 on the uneven bars and shined the silver medal side of the podium with Miller.

Kim's 10,000 was only the second of the meet so far. Zmeskal earned a perfect



KIM GWANG SUK

score with her second vault during the team optional on Wednesday, helping the United States to the silver medal.

In the women's vault final, Zmeskal finished a disappointing seventh while Miller was

sixth.

Lavinia Milovovici have Romanian coach Belu Octavian something to smile about by winning the gold medal, here two vaults averaging to 9.949.

Octavian, a former colleague of U. S. coach Bela Karolyi, refused to meet with the media after his team finished behind the Americans in the team competition and again when Cristina Bontas took the bronze in the all-around.

Hungary's Henrietta Onodi got some consolation for a poor showing in the all-around when she tied for the silver medal in the vault with Oksana Tetushovitian of the Soviet Union.

Likewise, 1989 champion Igor Korobchinsky rebounded from missing the all-around finals by taking the gold medal in the men's floor exercise, edging out teammate Vitaly Scherbo, the all-around silver medalist.

Japan's Daisuke Nishikawa won the bronze.

The Soviet men, who have dominated the meet so far, also won gold medals on the still rings and the pommel horse.

Grigori Misutin, the all-around gold medalist, nipped Andreas Wecker of Germany on the rings by just .013 points, while Valeri Belenky turned in the best performance on the pommel horse.

"All of our gymnasts are very strong and they showed what they are capable of tonight," said Belenky, last year's World Cup all-around champion.

China's Guo Linyao won the silver medal on the horse, followed by compatriot Li Jing. Italy's Yui Chechi took the bronze on the rings.

Seles may be quite safe at top

TOKYO, Sept 15: Monica Seles of Yugoslavia is expected to fortify her number one ranking this week, spearheading the 350,000 dollar Nichirei International ladies tennis tournament starting tomorrow, reports AFP.

The Yugoslav, who has been leapingfrogging with Steffi Graf of Germany in the rankings for the past several months, recaptured the number one spot a week ago by winning the U S Open.

To the disappointment of fans, Wimbledon champion Graf withdrew from the seven-day competition with an injury to her right shoulder she has suffered since the Federation Cup tie at Nottingham, England, in late July.

Zina Garrison of the United States, who knocked out Seles in the 1990 Wimbledon quarter-finals, also withdrew with an injury to make the road easier for the 17-year-old Yugoslav.

Twenty-eight world leading players will take part in the singles event, vying for the top prize money of 70,000 dollars and 200 points counting towards the WTA computer rankings.

The runner-up will collect 31,500 dollars and 140 points.

The top four seeds — Seles, Mary Joe Fernandez and Amy



MONICA SELES

Frazier of the United States and Katerina Maleeva of Bulgaria — had first-round byes.

Top-seeded Seles, the Australian and French Open title-holder, will take on either Rika Hiraki of Japan or a qualifier in the second round on the hard courts at the Ariake Colosseum.

She will then possibly meet another Japanese, eighth-seeded Kimiko Date, a surprise winner over world number three Gabriela Sabatini of Argentina in the semifinals at the Virginia Slims of Los Angeles last month.

Fourth-seeded Frazier, who powered past Seles here last year, should come up to threaten the Yugoslav if the American can survive the second quarter, which includes Japan's Naoko Sawamatsu and sixth-seeded American Pam Shriver.

Defending champion and second-seeded Fernandez, who scored her first career victory last year, will face the winner of the match between Elizabeth Smylie of Australia and Patricia Hy of Canada.

She is drawn in the same half with third-seeded Maleeva, seventh-seeded Marianne Werdel of the United States and fifth-seeded Laura Gildemeister of Peru, who will play rising Indonesian top player Yayuk Basuki in the first round.

Kenyan success hurts Europe

LONDON, Sept 15: The overwhelming success of Kenyan athletes is beginning to grate in Europe, reports AFP.

"The public doesn't want to see gangs of Kenyans running round a track", said British Amateur Athletics Board promotions officer Andy Norman.

"One or two names yes, those they've never heard of, no".

At the Tokyo World Championships last month Kenyans won golds in the 800 metres, 5,000, 10,000 and steeplechase, as well as silvers in the 15,000, 10,000 and steeplechase.

But very few invitations were handed out to the champions from the East African mountains for Sunday's challenger meeting in Sheffield, England, the last big event in Britain this season.

Norman's bluntness explained why. Big money is at stake and quite simply too many have become too good for the Europeans.

Olympic tickets over subscribed

BARCELONA, Spain, Sept 15: Organisers of next year's Olympics have returned 470 million pesetas (4.3 million dollars) to sports fans who lost out in a draw for tickets, reports AFP.

A draw was held after bookings for 85 sessions were massively over subscribed.

Organisers would not say which sports or events were concerned but the opening and closing ceremonies, basketball and gymnastic finals were favourites with fans.

Middle and long distance events in Europe have been totally dominated by Kenyans since the World



BILLY KONCHELLAH



MOSES KIPTANUI

places in the 800 metres, the first four in the steeplechase and first five in the 10,000.

Konchella, like many of his colleagues, has bought a farm. Ex-Britain athlete John

Within 24 hours the Koblenz meeting on the other side of Germany saw a similar pattern. Other Kenyans won the 1500 metres and steeplechase and claimed one, two, three in the 10,000.

Again in the Ivo Van Damme memorial in Brussels on Friday, Kenyans took over.

Thirty-two turned out, and all but two were in the same six events.

Norman recalled a couple of decades ago when Americans easily won every sprint in Europe. "You can have too much of a good thing," he said.

No Kenyans were invited to run in the prestige mile at Sheffield, ensuring the Europeans got a look in.

World 800 metre champion Billy Konchella, who was invited to Sheffield, understands the issue well. "Every time I pick up my federation's bulletin there's a new name from home I don't know," he said.

"They are lining up to come to Europe," he told the London Independent newspaper.

He first claimed the world title in 1987 but disappeared from the international scene after illness and this season no promoter would touch him — until he won the national title.

Now he's back with a bang, a gold from Tokyo, and the benefit of his big name draw.

Konchella also knows the benefits running can bring to poor African athletes. "For most in Kenya, running's the only opportunity," he said.

A big summer can set a man up for life.

Richard Chelimo, who represents Olympic gold medalist John Ngugi among others, has no qualms about the numbers of Kenyans coming over.

"The market is flooded but you can't keep talent out," he declared. "There's so much more untapped, waiting in Kenya for their chance".



RICHARD CHELIMO

Despite domestic turmoil Soviets confident of Olympic success

MOSCOW, Sept 15: The Soviet Union's top sports official predicted on Saturday that his country would sweep to victory in the Barcelona Olympics despite losing talented athletes from the newly-independent Baltic states, reports Reuter.

"In the Summer Games we think in terms of golds we can beat Germany, the United States and China," said Nikolai Rusak, head of the Soviet sports committee and effective minister for sport.

He told Reuters in an interview the forecast was based on detailed studies which the Soviet Union prepares before every Olympics. "We are rarely wrong. There may be a difference of two to five medals, but the calculations are very exact."

Rusak was less optimistic about Soviet chances in the Albertville Winter Olympics in February, citing poor training results so far in skating, ski jumping and bobsleigh.

"We think that we'll be competing on equal terms with Germany and Norway, but in quantity of gold and other

medals we'll lose to Germany in the Winter Games," he said.

In 1988 the Soviet Union led the medals tables at both the Winter and Summer Games. Their grand total of 66 golds was 20 more than second-placed East Germany.

But prospects for 1992 have been clouded by political turmoil in the country and the loss of the three Baltic republics, whose athletes excel in basketball, bobsleigh and several field events.

Rusak acknowledged that the three looked set to field their own Olympic teams, independent from the Soviet Union, subject to the apparent formalisation of an agreement

next week by the International Olympic Committee (IOC).

But he said Baltic athletes picked to represent the Soviet Union in Barcelona in sports such as volleyball and handball, where the selection process is virtually completed, should be allowed to remain in Soviet teams if they wanted.

"We think athletes who have won the right to take part in the Soviet team should be able to compete in Barcelona. Political decisions shouldn't affect a person's right to take part in the team."

Rusak said that despite the fragmentation of the country, Soviet sports facilities would remain the joint property of all republics including the Baltics, which host the country's only bobsleigh training run and one of its key ski bases.

He said Soviet sport, which receives no state subsidies and pays its way through ticket sales and lotteries, was suffering a severe financial crisis.

Republican sports chiefs sent an urgent appeal to President Mikhail Gorbachev this week to cancel laws forcing them to sell 40 per cent of their hard currency earnings to the foreign trade bank and pay a further 30 per cent in tax.

"It's completely absurd. We are the only sports organisation in the world that pays such taxes," said Rusak, a 57-year-old Byelorussian and former handball player.

But Rusak was upbeat when asked if Soviet sport, despite its problems, could maintain its levels of excellence.

"You can't say that the years of stagnation had their effect on sport. In sport, the free market really works because there is competition. That's why, of all branches of our economy, only sport can compete in the world arena," he said.

Luck smiles on Saint-Genies' girls

INDIANAPOLIS, Indiana, Sept 15: Merry Saint-Genies' luck suddenly changed for the better here last Wednesday as his French women's team qualified for the Olympics for the first time in 20 years, reports AFP.

France, competing without top gymnast Karine Mermet, surmounted a mediocre rotation in the floor exercise to finish third after six of the eight subdivisions, meaning no worse than 11th place, with the top 12 teams earning a trip to Barcelona next year.

"I've been dreaming of this for 15 years," said Saint-Genies, who has coached the French national team since 1975. "This represents 15 years of work. I'm very happy."

Saint-Genies, who trains his team at the National Institute in Paris, had come so close to the Olympics so many times, only to be rewarded with disappointment when something went wrong.

The last time, at Rotterdam in 1987, was perhaps the most difficult failure to accept. His team was firmly in 12th place after the compulsories.

But finished 13th when disaster struck in the optionals with all six gymnasts falling during their floor exercise routines.

An eternal optimist, Saint-Genies was confident that things would be different this year, that finally he would get to take a full team to the Olympics.

Once again, however, it appeared his bad luck had followed him top gymnast Karine Mermet seriously injured her arm during warm-ups and had to be replaced by talented, but unproven, Ingrid Stutz, and the team was once again in 12th place after the compulsories.

"I was very worried it would happen again," he said. "So this morning I went running, and it found my lucky penny, then I was sure it would not."

The French, led by veteran Karine Boucher, started with

the floor exercise and, while they avoided the mistakes of 1987, were less than stellar, with Stutz receiving an 8.750 and Barbara Solans getting only a 9.000.

They rose to the occasion, however, turning in excellent routines on the uneven bars. Boucher had a 9.612 and Virginie Machado scored a 9.812.

Boucher then went first on the balance beam in the final rotation and her shaky 9.112 left the team vulnerable.

As had occurred throughout the competition, however, someone else picked up the slack, this time it was Machado and Cloe Maigre with a pair of 9.650's.

The final effort easily was enough to keep France ahead of Canada, but the team score was slow in being posted and Saint-Genies his wife and the girls huddled and waited anxiously.

"I thought I was going to explode," said Boucher, who was a member of the team in 1987 and again in 1989 when France also finished 13th. "We couldn't wait any longer."

Finally, the standings appeared and the tears flowed, years of frustration wiped away in too brief a moment of joy.

"It's been 20 years," said Stutz, still embracing Boucher, who was weeping uncontrollably. "This is greatest day in our lives."

Boucher was born the same year that France last competed in the Olympics. And it was no coincidence that Saint-Genies reserved the greatest praise for the girl affectionately known as "Kiquit".

"She's an historical gymnast," she said. "She created what happened here after Mermet was hurt."

Mermet was not on hand to celebrate with her teammates. She flew back to France on Tuesday to have her injured arm examined by doctors.

"She called me just before the competition today and said she was with us in spirit," Boucher said, the tears flowing once again. "She wished us good luck."

Chavez too good for Smith

LAS VEGAS, Nevada, Sept 15: Undefeated World Boxing Council (WBC) super-lightweight champion Julio Cesar Chavez of Mexico had no trouble retaining his title, taking a 12-round unanimous points decision over speedy but overmatched Lonnie Smith of the United States on Saturday, reports Reuter.

The win was as easy as oddsmakers had expected. Chavez, a 13-1 favourite, won by scores of 118-106, 119-107 and 118-109 from the judges.

There were no knockdowns in the one-sided bout, but Chavez jarred Smith several times with right leads to the head the final three rounds.

This could be Chavez's last fight at the 140-pound (63 kg) division.

"I'm going to move up in weight," said Chavez after the bout. "It was difficult to make this weight."

Promoter Don King indicated Chavez's next fight will be in the 147-pound (66 kg) welterweight division.

Smith ran, or attempted to, the entire bout, only occasionally throwing left jabs but sel-

dom following with combinations.

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deducted, that in the fifth round, for knocking Chavez in the groin during a clinch.

The 29-year-old Chavez is now 76-0. The victory was his sixth as super-lightweight champion and 20th in world title bouts. Chavez has been the WBC super featherweight and WBC and World Boxing Association lightweight champion.

The 28-year-old Smith is now 29-3-1. It was his first loss since 1986, the year he lost the WBC super lightweight title.

Chavez received 750,000 dollars and Smith 100,000.

In an earlier bout, Julian Jackson of the Virgin Islands retained his WBC middle weight crown by knocking out number one contender Denise Milton of the United States in the first round.

Jackson, 31, stopped Milton, 30, with a right to the head.

Jackson in now 42-1 and Milton, who had not lost since 1987 slips to 16-3-1.

Jackson received 150,000 dollars for this, his first defence since winning the 116-pound crown in November. Milton was paid 65,000 dollars.

Montreal Stadium closed for a week

MONTREAL, Sept 15: The litany of troubles for Olympic stadium continues, reports AP.

The stadium built for the 1976 Olympics, will be closed for at least the next seven days after a 55-ton chunk of concrete fell from the structure Friday. The closing will force the Montreal Expos Major League Baseball club to play four home games next week on the road.

The last -place Expos were



Soweto-born Dingaan Thobela jubilates after successfully defending his World Boxing Organisation (WBO) title against Puerto Rican Antonio Rivera in Johannesburg, South Africa on Sept 14. —AFP photo

Thobela keeps title

JOHANNESBURG, Sept 15: Dingaan Thobela outlasted top-rated challenger Antonio Rivera to win a unanimous decision Saturday and retain the World Boxing Organisation lightweight world championship in the first title bout in this country in five years, reports AP.

Thobela, who turns 25 this month, was staggered by a left hook in the fourth round but otherwise controlled the fight with stiff jabs and fluid combinations to improve his record to 26 wins and one draw.

It was his second successful defence of the title he won almost a year ago over Mauricio Acceves, also in a 12-round decision.

The judges scored the fight 115-114, 118-112 and 117-112, known as the "Rose of Soweto" because he comes from the sprawling black township outside Johannesburg.

Rivera, a former International Boxing Federation featherweight champion from Puerto Rico, had his record fall to 23 victories, eight losses and a draw.

There were no knockdowns, but both fighters bled from the nose from the early rounds and Rivera, 27, sustained a small cut over his left eye in the third round.

It was the first title fight in South Africa since November 1986, when World Boxing Association bantamweight champion Bernardo Pinango of Venezuela stopped South African challenger Simon Skosana in the 15th round.

Boxing organisations banned title fights in South Africa because of its apartheid policies of racial segregation. Some organisations lifted the ban earlier this year due to President FW de Klerk's reforms aimed at dismantling apartheid.

The crowd of about 5,000 at the Standard Bank Arena chanted and sang as Thobela entered the ring, and roared its approval when the champion stung Rivera with combinations in the third round after a slow start by both fighters.

Rivera, fighting from a defensive stance, with gloves over a Thobela right in the fourth and wobbled him. He attacked with both fists, but Thobela ducked and grabbed to gain time, then punched his way out of trouble as the bell rang.

It was the only time he was in trouble. He picked up momentum as the fight went on, moving and jabbing effectively and successfully clinching when Rivera moved him against the ropes.