

Sport

# Shameful start for Spain

BARCELONA, July 25: Hosts Spain made a shameful start to the Olympic soccer tournament on Friday when they had two players sent off in their 4-0 win over Colombia, reports Reuter.

Colombia's Ivan Valenciano was also shown the red card and nine players were booked — six Colombians and three Spaniards — in the bad-tempered Group B encounter in Valencia.

Valenciano was sent off by German referee Markus Merk after 18 minutes for a wild challenge on Juan Lopez.

As the game boiled over, Lopez was ordered off for a crude tackle. He was followed by Abelardo early in the second half.

Spain shone in the game's few fluent passages and were 3-0 up at halftime with goals from Barcelona star Josep Guardiola, Quico Narvaez and Rafael Berge. Luis Enrique added the fourth in the 70th minute.

## QATAR BEAT EGYPT

A 73rd minute header from Mubarak Mustafa Nooralla gave Qatar a 1-0 win over Egypt in the Group B game in Sabadell.

## ITALIANS WIN WELL

Gold medal favourites Italy kicked off the Olympics on Friday with a 2-1 victory over the United States in the opening match of the soccer tournament in Barcelona.

Alessandro Melli and Demetrio Albertini killed off the Americans with first half goals as the under-23 side of the 1990 World Cup hosts gave a lesson to their 1994 counterparts.

The reigning European under-21 champions played with a level of artistry and sense of timing which the Americans could challenge only with athletic running.

They strutted around the vast but near-empty Nou Camp stage like stars, putting the chorus line in its place, but their composure was shaken in the 65th minute when Joe-Max Moore scored from a free kick in the penalty area.

Italian keeper Francesco Antontoli was judged to have taken too many steps and Moore curled his free kick

around the wall before setting off on a celebration run that suggested he had won a gold medal.

The goal gave the Americans a sudden surge of self-belief and the game a level of excitement.



US player Cameron Rast (2) is chased by Italian Alessandro Melli during the first official competition of the 25th Summer Olympics played on July 24. Italy won 2-1.

citement that had been missing for the 18,000 crowd in the 115,000 capacity home of European Cup holders Barcelona.

But the Italians, whose side contained two full internationals in Albertini and Dino Baggio, and a scattering of Serie A players, triumphed through experience.

Italy never looked like succumbing to the shock 4-0 defeat inflicted on them by Zambia in the 188 tournament against a side which has won only two games in Olympic his-

## POLES BEAT KUWAIT

Two goals from Andrzej Juskowiak gave fancied Poland a 2-0 victory over Kuwait in Zaragoza Friday in a Group A

match.

The 21-year-old who plays for Lech Poznan opened the scoring after six minutes, blasting home a rebound from close range.

Kuwait had no answer to the Poles' fluid attacking football or to Juskowiak's bullet header past Kuwaiti goalkeeper Falah Al-Majidi ten minutes from time.

Miroslaw Waligora should have made it 3-0, but blasted his injury-time penalty over the bar.

# Big blow Aussie hockey hopes

TERRASSA, Spain, July 25: Australia, among the favourites to win the men's hockey gold at the Barcelona Olympics, suffered a big setback on Friday when top goalscorer Mark Hager was ruled out with a fractured foot, reports Reuter.

"Everybody in the world will think that we're less of a threat without him," said coach Frank Murray. "It's up to us to prove they're wrong."

Hager, 29, the team's centre forward and top goalscorer in Australian history with more than 100 goals, hurt his right foot in a training game against Spain last week and the injury developed into a fracture.

Murray said Greg Corbitt was being flown from Australia as a last-minute substitute before Australia face outsiders Argentina in their first match on Sunday.

Hager helped his team to fourth place in the Seoul Olympics and to second place in the 1992 Champions Trophy in Karachi, contested by the top six teams in the world.

Australia have been tipped as among the favourites for gold in Barcelona along with Germany, Pakistan and the Netherlands on the artificial pitches at Terrassa outside Barcelona.

Murray said that winger Lee Bodimeade, who injured a shoulder in the Olympic Village this week, would be fit for the Games.

## German putter refuses drug test

BARCELONA, July 25: Shot-putter Kalman Konya has been dropped from Germany's Olympic team after refusing to undergo a random doping test, reports Reuter.

German team official Heiner Henze said today he had been informed by the German Athletics Federation (DLV) that Konya would not be allowed to compete in Barcelona.

"We have been informed this morning and expect more information. We believe it is a problem in the area of doping," Henze said.

DLV spokesman Lutz Nebenthal confirmed Konya had refused several times to appear for a drug test.

# Records likely to take a beating

BARCELONA, July 25: World records will come under severe threat on the opening day of the Olympic swimming programme on Sunday, reports Reuter.

World champion Norbert Rozsa of Hungary will be the man to beat in the men's 100 metres breaststroke, perhaps the most fiercely competitive event in the Bernat Picornell Olympic pool.

The world mark could go at least once in the heats.

Jenny Thompson cracked the women's 100 metres freestyle world record twice in one day last March and with world champion Nicole Haislett, will be aiming to give the United States a one two start in that event, the first swimming final.

Krisztina Egerszegi, double backstroke world record holder, may well threaten the 10-year-old world mark of East German Petra Schneider in the women's 400 individual medley in which she challenges Chinese world champion Lin Li.

Rozsa, who clocked a world record one minute 01.29 seconds on last year's European Championships, takes on the three Seoul Olympic medalists in a 100 breaststroke field boasting three past or present world record holders for the event.

Defending champion Adrian Moorhouse who lost his world record to Rozsa at the World Championships 18 months ago, contests the seventh and penultimate heat in Lane Five, next to fellow Briton Nick Gillingham.

onships — so the record could easily tumble in the morning's opening session.

Heats and finals are swum on the same day in all swimming events except the 200

Dmitry Volkov of the CIS — the silver and bronze medalists in Seoul — in lanes five and seven respectively.

Moorhouse and Gillingham presented a united front leading up to the race "When we are together we have more strength," Gillingham said. "It takes a bit of pressure off. We can go out and race together as a force."

China's Zhuang Yong and European champion Catherine Plewinski of France, silver and bronze medalists behind East German Olympic queen Kristin Otto in Seoul, take on Thompson and Haislett in the 100 freestyle.

For fourteen-year-old Franziska van Almsick of Germany will also pose an interesting new challenge to the established stars.

The men's 200 freestyle, which closes the first day of the swimming programme, looks wide open following the failure of world record holder Giorgio Lamberti to qualify for that event in the Italian team.

World champion Lamberti and Olympic champion Duncan Armstrong of Australia each qualified only for relays, leaving Poland's European champion Artur Wojdat the front runner.

Kieren Perkins Australia's world record holder at 400, 800 and 1,500 freestyle, could also gain a big morale boost from a good performance in the 200 ahead of his main events — the 400 and 1,500.



NICK GILLINGHAM



NORBERT ROZSA

longest races — the men's 1,500 and women's 800 freestyle. The eight fastest in heats qualify for the finals.

Vasily Ivanov of the CIS, who shared the world record with Rozsa for two months, goes with the two Britons in heat seven, while Rozsa enters the fray in the eighth and final heat.

Rozsa spearheads the heat in Lane Four, with fellow Hungarian Karoly Guttler and

# US girls eye GDR mantle

BARCELONA, July 25: With East Germany and its dominant team now a footnote in history, US women swimmers believe they can become the dominant team at the Barcelona Games, reports AP.

"They are the most dominant female team at this Olympics," said US men's coach Eddie Reese, predicting only the US "Dream Team" in basketball will be more dominant overall.

The description fit the East German juggernaut in 1988, when the women's swim team won 22 medals, including 10 golds, at the Seoul Games.

The only individual medals won by American women in Seoul were three golds by Janet Evans and a bronze by Mary T. Meagher.

Led by Summer Sanders and Jenny Thompson, the American women will try to match the US record of 21 medals in 1988 and 1984. Competition begins Sunday in Montjuic Municipal Pool, high above the city on a panoramic hill behind the National Palace.

"I think that's given the US women a lot more confidence because it was always, 'You guys could never beat the East Germans,'" Evans said. "For them not to be there, it gives us confidence in our own abilities." Americans could be favoured in 12 of the 15 women's events. The men aren't expected to fare as well, although they could be favoured in eight of their 16 races.

"I've been to every Olympic Games since 1976 and this is the first time I've felt that the women will be in every race," US women's coach Mark Schubert said.

"This is the best team I've been with since the World Championships team in '78."

Haislett lead the Expected gold rush Sunday in the 100-meter freestyle. Sanders and Erika Hansen also will swim the 400 individual medley that day.

"What's going to matter is



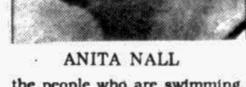
JANET EVANS

Weightlifting is anxious to clean up its act after the shame of the 1988 Olympics in Seoul, where two Bulgarian gold medalists were stripped of their titles after testing positive for drugs.

That episode brought calls to ban weightlifting from the Olympics. A repetition in Barcelona would be devastating for the future of the sport.

Ayan, a Hungarian, proposed giving weightlifting chiefs special travel documents enabling them to visit countries without visas or prior warning in order to carry out spot checks on athletes.

"The best thing would be for controllers to get a UN pass or something similar so they wouldn't need to ask for visas and could carry out truly random tests," he said.



ANITA NALL

Schubert hasn't bothered to tell his swimmers that. "It's almost like we're on a mission. People have been saying this is going to be the best women's team that we've ever had," Sanders said.

"Our coaches never tell us that. They just say, 'You've got to prove yourselves. You've got to be tough.'"

The only events without a favoured American are the 100-and-200-meter backstrokes (Kristina Egerszegi of Hungary) and the 100 breaststroke. In that event, Elena Rudkovskaya of the Unified Team has a qualifying time .24 seconds better than American teenager Anita Nall.

Thompson, who qualified in three events, and Nicole

the people who are swimming the first day and how we get things rolling," Sanders said. "I hope we start it off on a good note."

Sanders is carrying the greatest pressure after qualifying in four events. She's been hyped as the heir apparent to Evans, and four individual medals could create a financial bonanza for the the 19-year-old.

"I'm not gonna make it a do-or-die situation. I made the Olympics," Sanders said. "Nicole Haislett told me we've experienced more than some people experience in a lifetime. So I have to be appreciative for what I've accomplished so far. Then whatever else happens is a bonus."

# Badminton in for a smashing debut

BARCELONA, July 25: The sleeping giant has woken and finally makes its Olympic debut next week, reports Reuter.

Badminton, the game which took root in the 19th century in an English country house that was to lend its name, now claims to be one of the biggest participation sports in the world.

In parts of Asia, it is played and followed with as much fervour and passion as soccer and the International Badminton Federation (IBF) has 115 member countries.

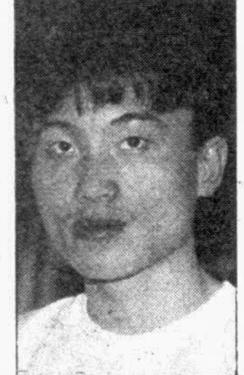
Once largely the preserve of the British, it spread to Malaysia and beyond after the second World War, losing its English middle-upper class tag somewhere along the way.

IBF president Arthur Jones estimates the number of players in Asia at a conservative 30 million with another 20 million in Europe.

While the IBF puts the annual world-wide production of squash rackets at five million and tennis-rackets at 12 million, the figure for badminton rackets is said to be 20 million.

The number of shuttlecocks produced each year is estimated at 300 million.

Jones said: "The game has blossomed to be one of the largest participation sports in the world."



ZHAO JIANHUA

"I think it was a sleeping giant and there are parts of the world that still do not appreciate the game's popularity."

The recent Thomas and Uber Cup team events in Kuala Lumpur were said by many to have provided the finest week in the sport's history with exuberant crowds thrilling to a vastly exciting and skilful tournament.

Barcelona could run it close as players from the powerhouses of China, Indonesia and Malaysia battle for the medals, eager to be the first to Olympic badminton glory.

Officials will want to put behind them recent rows over the "Throwing" of a "dead" game by Indonesia at the Thomas Cup and allegations, holly denied, of Chinese rigging at the All England Men's Championship in March.

Denmark and Britain head the European challenge but it is difficult to deny the outstanding chance of China's world champion Zhao Jianhua in the men's event and counterpart Tang Jihong in the women's.

Crowds at the newly-built Pavello de la Mar Bella, close by the Mediterranean shoreline, will see the highest expression of the sport where strength, reflexes, suppleness and stamina all play vital parts.

Although number one seed Zhao starts favourite, little separates the top 10 in the men. Zhao can be brittle on occasions and compatriots Wu Wenka and Liu Jun are both potential champions.

Ardy Wiranata, the top Indonesian and a joy to watch, has the pedigree but recent form at the very highest level

is not so encouraging.

All Malaysia will be hoping for a repeat by Rashid Sidek of his Thomas Cup exploits where victory over Zhao paved the way for a famous and emotional victory for his country.

Malaysia have never won an Olympic medal of any kind. They look to Rashid and his brothers Razif and Jalani and the doubles to change all that and bring off a splendid double.

If Tang, a brave competitor, slips in the women's event the delightful Susi Susanti of Indonesia, all elegance and deceptive power, is an obvious danger.

Despite Malaysian aspirations, the men's and women's doubles title should be won by South Korean pairings, but to the chagrin of many in the sport there is no mixed doubles ruled out by Olympic officials keen to keep numbers under control.

## Griffin fancied for boxing gold

BARCELONA, July 25: American Eric Griffin, the world light flyweight champion, takes on Fausto Mercedes of the Dominican Republic in an opening round Olympic boxing match Sunday, reports AP.

Griffin was paired against the Dominican in the draw that set the matchups for boxing at the Joventut sports complex in the Barcelona suburb of Badalona.

Also fighting Sunday will be Abram Thwala of South Africa, which is in the Olympics for the first time since 1960. Thwala will meet Rafael Lozano of Spain. Both are light flyweights (48 kg).

Griffin, the gold medal favourite, tops a field of 30 fighters in the light flyweight competition. His main competitor, Rogelio Marcelo of Cuba, is in the same bracket and will meet Griffin in the quarterfinals if both win their first two matches.

In one of the most potentially explosive first-round matchups, lightweights (60 kg) Yun Yong-Chul of North Korea and Hong Sung-Sik of South Korea were paired in their 29-fighter division.

The draw by Olympic officials was random; numbered balls were pulled from a basket. The Koreans meet Thursday.

US light middleweight (71 kg) Raul Marquez, a bronze medalist at the 1989 World Championships, fights Monday against David Deflagbon of Nigeria.

Twelve gold medals are at stake in boxing, which runs through to the final day of the Olympics in the 5,500 seat arena.

# Fu Mingxia - China's child diving prodigy

BARCELONA, July 25: At first glance, this Lilliputian with the ceramic face and glossy swimsuit seems to belong in a wading pool, under maternal vigil. But young and delicate as she is, she plunges into much deeper waters, with a daring exceeding that of any other female on Earth, reports AP.

And that is so, mostly, because her real keeper is not her mother, but her motherland.

When 13-year-old Fu Mingxia of China ascends the 10-meter platform, the highest precipice of the Summer Olympics, at the Piscina de Montjuic diving arena Sunday, she will bear the burden of a child empress upon those willowy shoulders. Age, to her communist taskmasters and aointers, is no excuse for yielding the crown for which they groomed her.

Very likely, Fu, a mere 42 kilograms and just under 150 centimeters tall, will manage to hold her realm. The youngest world champion in diving history is certain, as usual, to attempt spins and twists during those dizzying nearly 10 meter, 56 kilometer an hour freefalls that no other competitor hazards even to contemplate.

And next weekend she may well give her best friend and dormitory roommate, 21-year-old Gao Min, a run in the 3-meter dive, too. Gao was the gold medalist on the lower board at the Seoul Olympics in 1988.

As one of communist

China's Chosen Few in sports, Fu's life is a grueling ritual, exacted by government officials whose predecessors deemed international athletics a capitalistic vice. Now, as part of a calculated campaign to win the 2000 Summer Games for the People's Republic, they demand perfection and glory in

certain events.

Diving is one of those, and Fu has risen — and plummeted — to the task, living full time at a Beijing compound away from her family and home in Wuhan, capital of the Hubei Province in central China. She has said she sees her parents just twice a year, though

Chinese officials insist without elaborating that the visits are more frequent.

By her own account, the regimen includes arising at 6 am for exercises, regular school studies the rest of the morning, then 100 practice dives and more studies before lights out at 9:30 pm. Boyfriends and dates, as for all school-aged young women in China, are out of the question.

At age 11, she won her first gold at the Goodwill Games in Seattle in 1990, and triumphed again in the platform event at the World Aquatic Championships in Perth, Australia, last year.

Still, the glazed expression on her tiny face and her habit of nervously cracking her knuckles may reflect some genuine trepidation as she strives for the Olympic glory sought by her masters.

At a warmup meet in the US state of Florida last May, her form was seriously off, and the entire team was sent into seclusion for day-long workouts on the South China Sea island of Hainan. This China doll has cracked before. A third-place finish at the Asian Games last fall left her humiliated, and in tears.

But if she is spooked by Barcelona, at least she is no stranger to fright. When her first diving coach ordered her to jump off the board back home, she couldn't swim.

"I learned to swim as I learned how to dive," Fu said in a rare appearance before reporters back in Beijing. "The coach would tie a rope around my waist so she could pull me up after each dive."

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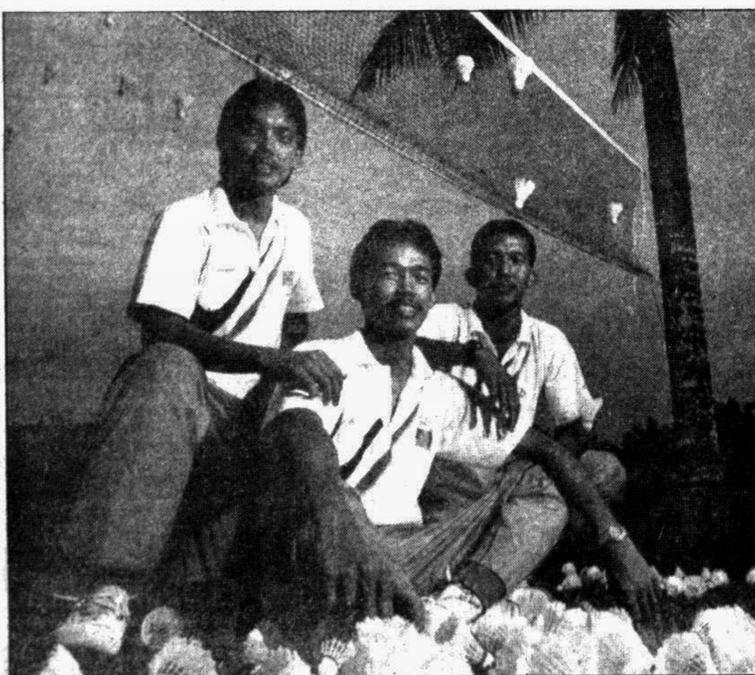
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The Sidek brothers of Malaysia. From left: Rashid, Misbun and Jailani



FU MINGXIA ... a bright gold prospect