

Navratilova's earliest exit from US Open

NEW YORK, Sept 4: Magdalena Maleeva's line-kissing groundstrokes, an untimely cloudburst and a touch of age combined Thursday to hand Martina Navratilova her earliest US Open loss since 1976 — the year after Maleeva was born, reports AP.

"It is pretty bad, yeah," Navratilova said, ranking the 6-4, 0-6, 6-3 loss among the worst of her career. A finalist here last year and in 1989, she came in seeded No. 3 after a recent victory over Monica Seles, and considered herself a realistic contender for a fifth Open championship.

Now Navratilova, a month shy 36, has to reassess her future.

"Time is running out," she said. "I don't know how much more I have of this heart, these legs."

Navratilova joked that she'll go down in history as one of the few players to lose at least once to all three Bulgarian-born Maleeva sisters — Maggie, 17, Katerina, 23, and Manuela, 25.

"I'm glad she's the last one," Navratilova said. "But I beat their mother (Yulia). I never lost to their mother."

Navratilova appeared to have Thursday's match totally in-control as the third set began. But rain suspended play for the third time of the day and the first time in the match at 30-30 with Maleeva serving in the opening game of the final set.

"If ever I lost a match by a few inches, today was the day," Navratilova said.

"Figure out what she had to lose and what I had to lose," Navratilova said. "For her it's the match of her life. For me it's a second-round loss in what could be my last Grand Slam match."

Maleeva broke Navratilova to 4-2 in the third set, setting up break point with a blistering forehand return that caught Navratilova going the wrong way. Navratilova then

lost the game with a long forehand after getting trapped in a baseline battle, exactly the opposite of her served-and-volley style.

That was all Maleeva needed as she proceeded to serve out the match. Navratilova plunking the final return into the net.

Maleeva came away with no loss of respect for Navratilova, who went out in the first round in 1976 and made it to the semifinals or finals 11 times in the next 15 years.

"She's still a great player," Maleeva said. "I don't believe she's so old and still so good. She is my favorite player. She can do everything, return the

ball, drop shots. She does what I want to do with my game."

While little Magdalena was busy turning the Open upside down on stadium court, both her sisters quietly moved into the third round with straight sets wins on the outside courts.

Fifteenth-seed Katerina eased past Dominique Monami of Belgium 6-3, 6-4 and eldest sibling, Manuela Maleeva-Fragniere, the ninth seed, beat American Louise Allen 6-4, 6-2.

There was also one minor upset on the women's side when 12th seed Nathalie Tauziat of France left the court in tears after a crushing 6-0, 6-0 loss to South African Amanda Coetzer.

Twice US Open champion and reigning Wimbledon title holder Steffi Graf overcame a lackluster performance to oust Pam Shriver 7-5, 6-3 and 14th-seeded American Zina Garrison beat German Silke Meier 6-2, 2-6, 6-4.

The rain played tricks with matches all day, interrupting play several times, suspending seven day matches, postponing Andre Agassi's and Goran Ivanisevic's night matches, and testing the patience of all the players.

Brad Gilbert saved three match points and needed more than eight hours, including a four-hour rain delay in mid-match, to upset No. 11 Michael Stich 5-7, 6-3, 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (7-0).

Jim Courier idly and impassively strummed his racket strings in the sprinkling rain early in the day as Andrei Chesnokov begged the umpire to stop their second-round match.

Courier's patience — with the rain, with Chesnokov, with his own mistakes in the match and his mild slump this summer — is a big reason he's No. 1 and in the third round of the Open after a 4-6, 6-3, 6-3, 6-1 victory.

Courier needed that attitude Thursday during the frustrating delays against the always-dangerous Chesnokov, the 40th-ranked Russian who had beaten him in their five previous matches.

After falling a set behind this time, Courier didn't worry or change his tactics. Instead, he pummeled the ball as hard as ever from the baseline, took his chances on occasion at the net, and he said, "I won the last point, something I hadn't been able to do five times against Andrei."

As the drizzle began in the third game of the second set, one game apiece, Chesnokov slipped to lose a point on serve, complained to the umpire, slipped again to lose another point, and complained once more.

The umpire, Sultan Gangli of Great Britain, didn't budge.

Courier, meanwhile, stayed back by the baseline and fiddled with his racket, waiting to pounce on the annoyed Chesnokov and break him. Which he did. From there, it was all one way — Courier's.

Still, Courier couldn't explain why it is he is virtually unbeatable at times, and terribly vulnerable other times.

"I wish I knew," he said.

In another rain-delayed match played on Thursday night, John McEnroe cruised to a runaway 4-6 6-3, 6-0, 6-2 second-round victory over Diego Nargiso of Italy after lurching through the first set.



M NAVRATILOVA

Spanish league kicks-off today

MADRID, Sept 4: Only Diego Maradona's transfer from Napoli to Seville could steal the spotlight from the Spanish First-Division season opener Saturday between title-starved Real Madrid and defending champion Barcelona, reports AP.

Seville, coached by Carlos Bilardo, would still like to get Argentina's 1986 World Cup hero, and Napoli, insisting he is not for sale, still want him to return for the Italian League season.

Maradona, just off his 15-month suspension for a positive cocaine test, maintains he will never go back to Italy and leaves it for FIFA to sort out.

The transfer would undoubtedly add sparkle not just to Seville but to the entire First Division, suffering from a drought of big-name imports this year. Most clubs found their spending heavily restricted following the ordered conversion into limited companies and responsible to shareholders.

Citing official figures, the leading daily El Pais said Spanish clubs' expenditure on new players decreased from \$50 million in 1991 to \$30 million this season.

But that apparently won't detract from the season opener, which will feature this season's most expensive transfer, Chilean centre forward Ivan "The Terrible" Zamorano, and last year's highly touted but often-injured Robert Prosinecki — both for Real.

Zamorano, who came from Seville, cost Madrid 600 million pesetas (\$15 million), while Prosinecki, who had a price tag of \$15 million, finally appears to have healed from a series of leg injuries that kept him out of all but five games last season.

Trying to end their two-year slump without a major honour, Real is hoping new coach Benito Floro can bring changes that will mirror his success at Albacete, which he took the Third Division to fifth place in the First Division last season.

"Real Madrid have been accustomed in recent years to playing counterattack, what I aim to do is that the team attacks from the word 'go'," Floro said, adding the squad is under orders to chase the ball "like mad dogs."

But several heavily disappointing pre-season performances, including last Saturday's 4-0 thrashing by Brazil's Sao Paulo and Tuesday's 3-1 defeat by Ajax of Amsterdam, already have critics busy.

"I respect the criticisms, but I don't share them and neither do they worry me," he said.

He said the team has been playing at 25 per cent of their potential but insists improvement is near.

"The results will be seen this year," he said, adding that he was more than confident Real Madrid would regain the league title.

Meanwhile, Johan Cruyff's Barcelona remain virtually unchanged since winning both the European Champions Cup and then second Spanish league title.

With Bulgarian striker Hristo Stotchkov, Dutch sweeper Ronald Koeman and Danish forward Michael Laudrup, Cruyff believes Barca is the undisputed favourite to retain their crown.

"To start the season with a defeat in Camp Nou (Stadium) is inconceivable," he said. "If

we lose, we might as well give it up."

Despite Real Madrid's and Barcelona's absolute dominance of the title since the 1983-84 season, a growing number of writers are predicting Atletico de Madrid's rise to the top.

Atletico, the King's Cup winner last year who finished third in the league, will field newly acquired 23-year-old Mexican Luis Garcia along with German sweeper Bernd Schuster and Portugal's Paulo Futre in its opener against Tenerife on Sunday.

Luis Aragones, one of 11 Spanish-born coaches in the 20-team division, will again rely on Manolo Sanchez, the league's top scorer last season with 28 goals.

Valencia has added Romanian defender Miodrag Belodedic in hopes of improving on last season's fourth-place finish.

Entering a second season under Guus Hiddink — one of four Dutch coaches, Valencia begins their season Saturday against division newcomer Rayo Vallecano, which recently signed Austrian Anton Polster.

Other fresh foreign signings include Brazilians Maura da Silva and Jose "Bebeto" Gama for Deportivo de La Coruna, which hosts newcomer Celta.

Real Zaragoza, meanwhile, hope to extract some glory from 31-year-old ex-Inter Milan defender Andreas Brehme of Germany in the team's opener against RCD Espanol.

Other games Sunday include Cadiz at Athletic de Bilbao, Oviedo at Logrones, Seville at Albacete, Osasuna at Sporting de Gijon, and Real Sociedad at Burgos.



A mid-field tussle during yesterday's Third Division football league match between Maghbazar Kishalaya Sangha and Dilkusha Sporting Club at the Outer Stadium. Maghbazar won by a solitary goal. — Star photo

Div III soccer

Sports Reporter

Mutauli Juba Sangha registered a convincing 3-0 victory over Little Friends' Club in one of the three matches of the Pragati Insurance Third Division Football league at the Mahakhalai T&T ground yesterday.

Abdul Karim Mintu put Mutauli ahead in the 15th minute (1-0).

Mizanur Rahman Khokon doubled the margin in the 33rd minute (2-0) while Selim completed the tally for the winners in 62nd minute (3-0).

Selim of Mutauli received the yellow card for rough play.

At the Outer Stadium, Maghbazar Kisha Sangha edged past Dilkusha Sporting Club 1-0.

Ratan Kumar was the scorer.

Bashabo Tarun Sangha shared points with East Bengal Boys Club in a goalless draw in the other match of the day at the same venue.

TODAY'S MATCHES

Dhaka SC vs Purbachal (3 pm: Outer Stadium)
Jagaran 5 vs Gandaria Famous (4:30 pm: Outer Stadium)
Lalmatia Club vs Maghbazar KC (4 pm: T&T ground).

Where labour is blossoming

RIGA, Latvia, Sept 4: Latvian soccer coach Janis Gilis seemed relieved just to have fielded a full team in the World Cup qualifier against Denmark, let alone held the European champions to a historic goalless draw, reports Reuter.

Since taking charge in January Gilis has been battling poverty, inexperience and public indifference as he builds a team only recently readmitted to international soccer after a gap of more than 50 years.

Between the wars Latvia had just about the best soccer side of the three Baltic states, but decades of Soviet rule sent the game into virtual hibernation. It is now only the fourth most popular sport behind ice hockey, basketball and volleyball.

"I've had to start from scratch and it's been very difficult," Gilis said.

"There is a whole range of problems to be solved, both technically and financially. This is still a poor country".

The team receives no government funding and raises every rouble itself. It even had to take out a 2.5 million Latvian rouble (15,600 US dollar) bank loan to improve Riga's national Daugava Stadium when the owners pleaded poverty.

The side is relying heavily on the hard currency it earned from selling advertisement space to Swedish television as well as 17,000 dollars gained for providing the Danish fans with tickets.

Most of the players have little experience of top-grade soccer, with only a handful playing abroad. The 12-team First Division has barely six decent sides in it, Gilis says.

The Latvians' pedigree could hardly have been less impressive—five defeats in six matches against sides like Malta and the Norwegian Olympic team.

They kicked off their World Cup campaign with a 2-1 defeat at home to Baltic neighbours Lithuania.

But last Wednesday Latvia's defence put on a remarkably mature display to shut out the Danes.

Gilis, pacing up and down the touchline in his distinctive yellow jacket and purple trousers, was understandably ecstatic.

"The result was not the main thing, although I am glad we got a point. The main thing was that the whole world knows Latvia can play football," he said afterwards, beaming broadly.



Eight wheelchair athletes carry the Paralympic flag at the Montjuic Stadium during the opening ceremony of the IXth Paralympic Games in Barcelona on Thursday. — AFP photo



Jim Courier, the top-seeded American, shakes hands with Andre Chesnokov of Russia after winning his third round match of the US Open on Thursday at the National Tennis Centre, New York. — Star TV photo

Fischer-Spassky 2nd game drawn

SVETI STEFAN, Yugoslavia, Sept 4: Veteran US chess star Bobby Fischer left no doubts about the strength of his comeback after 20 years on Thursday by fighting his way to a drawn in the second game against his Russian Garry Kasparov.

Fischer said, "I had a winning chance ... the end is a clear draw."

Spasky, a 55-year-old Russian now a French citizen, conceded he simply "played badly" in the middle of the game.

Spasky played white and opened the game at 3:30 pm with the Samisch variation. Fischer adopted the King's Indian defence to appreciative "oohs" from the audience.

Given Spasky's early positional advantage, chess experts were impressed by the strength of Fischer's middle game. Some said he came close to beating Spasky outright.

"Fischer's not much worse than he used to be — that means he's one of the best in the world," Icelandic Grandmaster Meigar Petursson said. "This is beautiful play," said Aleksander Nikitin, a Russian Grandmaster. "The Fischer we saw today is the Fischer of 20 years ago."

Spasky, robbed of the world crown by Fischer in 1972, appeared to have won a positional advantage after an opening with a King's Indian defence and sacrificing a pawn in the 18th move.

But Grandmasters watching the game said the former Soviet chess genius made a major error 16 moves later by failing to play his bishop.

Fischer, easily realising his advantage, won an exchange, gaining a rook for a bishop and swinging the game in his favour as Spasky tired.

But Spasky fought back after the 52nd move, ensuring a draw offered by Fischer.

Fischer fans noted that the 49-year-old American stuck to his own variations of the King's Indian defence opening from 20 years ago and ignored subsequent improvements by

contest Wednesday. The contest is being held in this elegant Adriatic sea resort in defiance of UN sanctions against Yugoslavia.

The next game in the series is due to take place on Saturday.

There are to be no adjournments in the series, in which the victor will be the first to win 10 games.

After one player win five games, the match moves to Belgrade, the capital of Serbia and the new truncated Yugoslavia.

Paralympic Games begin in Barcelona

BARCELONA, Sept 4: Two hundred wheelchairs adorned with multicoloured lights rolled into Barcelona's Montjuic Olympic Stadium as the Paralympic Games opened to the theme of the light of inspiration on Thursday, reports Reuter.

More than 3,000 disabled athletes from 85 countries, who will compete for medals in 15 sports over 10 days of competition, paraded in a glittering opening ceremony presided over by Spain's Queen Sofia.

The stadium, reduced in capacity from 65,000 during last month's main Olympics to 40,000 to cater for disabled spectators, was packed for the three-hour ceremony, which lacked none of the spectacle or emotion of the opening of the full Games.

In an effort to sustain the Olympic spirit in Barcelona, Games organisers have made all Paralympic sports free to the public. Spectators pay for the opening and closing ceremonies but top prices were only one fifth of those for the main Games.

Antonio Rebollo, the Spanish archer who held millions in thrall when he fired a blazing arrow to light the Olympic flame last month, staged a perfect repeat performance on Thursday.

The 36-year-old Polio victim from Madrid ignited his arrow from the Olympic torch carried on a lap to the stadium by four differently disabled athletes before sending it arcing 60 metres up to the bowl of the Olympic flame.

Rebollo, a Paralympic medal winner in Seoul and Los Angeles, is competing again and is hopeful of another medal, despite the "unconventional training" involved in lighting the flame.

The athletes, gathered inside the track around an olive tree, symbol of Olympic victory, listened to a message of encouragement from crippled British scientist Stephen Hawking.

"Each of us, has within us a spark of fire, a creative force," Hawking's computerised voice rang around the hushed stadium.

"The important thing is that one should be stretched to be outstanding in some

field. These Games provide an opportunity for that."

The Barcelona Paralympics, for the blind, sufferers from polio and related diseases, para and tetraplegics, amputees and victims of cerebral palsy, are the ninth since the movement began as part of the 1960 Olympics in Rome.

Barcelona is the fourth Olympic city to stage the Paralympics as an extension of the world's biggest single sporting event, using many of the same venues.

Many Paralympic sports are the same as their full Olympic counterparts — athletics, cycling, shooting, archery, weightlifting — but others are designed specially for the disabled.

Boccia, a version of the French game of Boules, is played by people with cerebral palsy. Goalball is a game for the blind, with players aiming to score goals aided by bells inside the ball.

An indication of how seriously the Paralympics are taken is that for the first time competitors will be subject to full International Olympic Committee (IOC) drugs testing procedures.

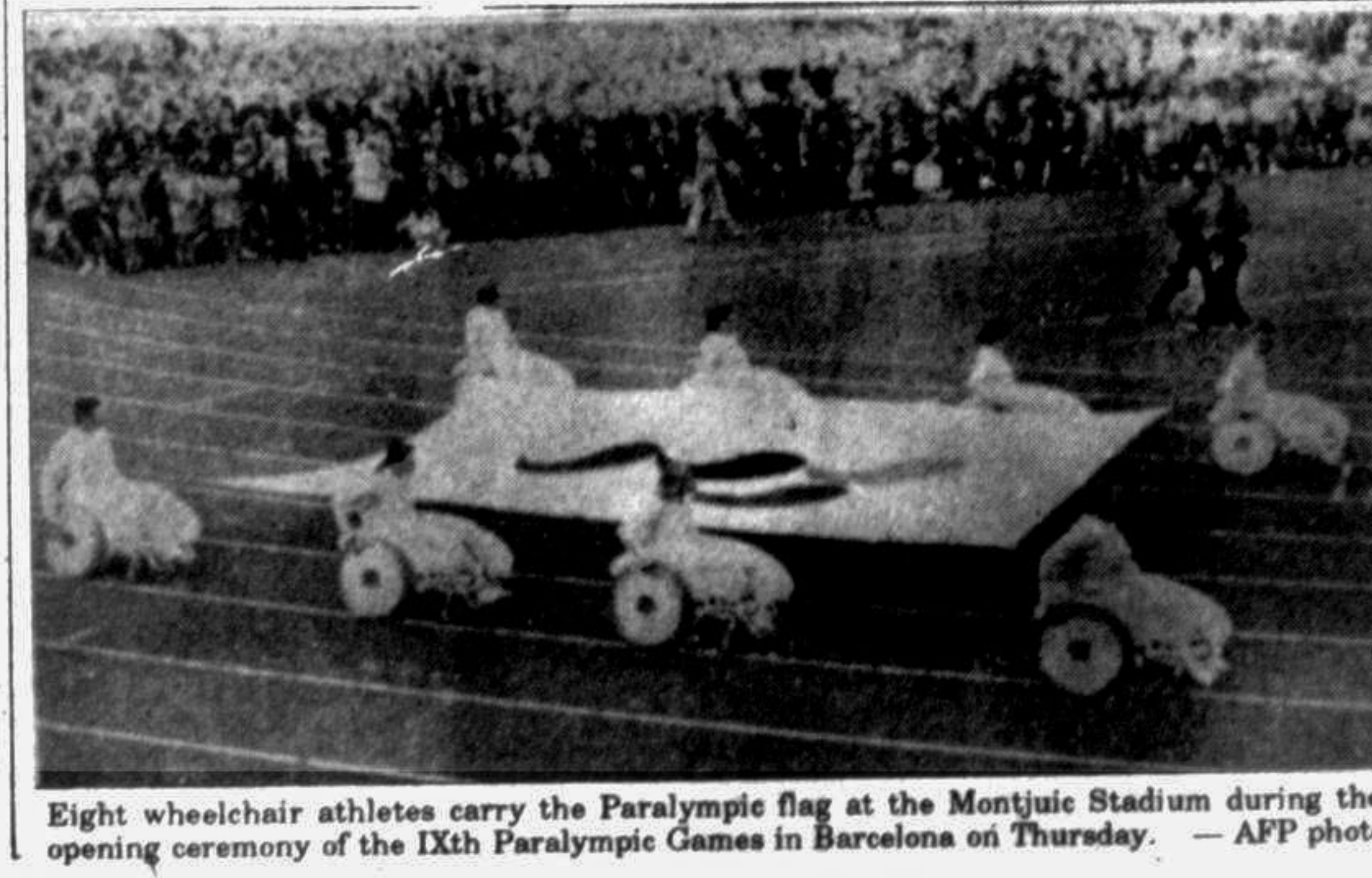
Pre-qualifying tests, during which competitors are sorted into categories according to their disabilities, included strict controls to ensure athletes did not overstate their limitations in order to compete against less able rivals.

In a welcoming speech, Barcelona mayor Pasqual Maragall said: "For an Olympic city organising the Paralympic Games is more than a moral obligation, it is a satisfaction and a necessity. Without the Paralympic Games we could not speak of removing barriers or of opening up the city."

Maragall and Miguel Duran, president of ONCE, Spain's charity for the blind which put up 40 per cent of the 100 million dollar Games budget, have both made pleas that the Paralympic become an integral part of the Olympic movement instead of depending on the goodwill of the host city to stage an event for the disabled.

Catalan IOC chairman Juan Antonio Samaranch, talking to the Barcelona newspaper La Vanguardia, ruled this out on grounds that the Olympics were already too unwieldy.

But Duran persisted. "It does not matter to us if we coincide in time with the able-bodied athletes. What matters to us is that we be considered Olympians and for that we are willing to give up some things."



Eight wheelchair athletes carry the Paralympic flag at the Montjuic Stadium during the opening ceremony of the IXth Paralympic Games in Barcelona on Thursday. — AFP photo

The girl who won Fischer's heart

SVETI STEFAN, Yugoslavia, Sept 4: A Fresh-faced 19, Zita Rajcsanyi is not just Hungary's junior chess champion.

She has also won the heart of reclusive American chess genius Bobby Fischer, reports Reuter.

Fischer, 49, emerged from 20 years self-imposed seclusion to beat old rival Boris Spassky in six hours and 49 moves on Wednesday in the first game of a 5 million dollar re-match of their 1972 world championship duel.

Rajcsanyi is rumoured to have played a major role in stimulating Fischer's desire to return to public competition.

She was, she says, simply a fan.

"I wrote him a letter about two years ago and then one year later, he called me on the phone," she told Reuters on the second day of the re-match.

"I'm really fond of him, so I guess I put my heart and soul into that letter. Then in April I went to Los Angeles to see him."

Rajcsanyi was not even born when Fischer beat Spassky in 1972, becoming the only American to win the world title.

By the time she won her first tournament at the age of eight, her future boyfriend had turned his back on the chess world and spent nine years in seclusion.

Her arrival in Sveti Stefan for the tournament caused a storm amongst photographers. Pretty and round faced with a natural smile and long, straight hair, she charmed them all.

At a champagne gala on the eve of the match — her 19th birthday — she and Fischer were feted as a king and queen by dancers dressed as pawns in a costumed extravaganza.

As a rising female chess star, Rajcsanyi says, she often has to battle for credibility from male colleagues.

"They don't take women seriously. They say women are not good chess players," she said.

"And they are sort of right, because women are generally weaker."

Fischer himself was once known as scornful of women players. "They're weak compared to men. They shouldn't play chess, you know," he was quoted as saying in a 1961 interview with writer Ralph Ginsburg.

Asked whether Fischer really said that, Rajcsanyi laughs.

"It could well have been Bobby," she says, adding that he is sceptical of the abilities of her fellow Hungarian, Judit Polgar, who plays at world championship level.

Rajcsanyi often plays against Fischer, to the benefit of her game.

Carr retains title

SEHLLHARBOUR, Australia, Sept 4: Rod Carr retained his Australian super-middleweight boxing title Friday night when his 12-round bout with challenger John Bogolin was declared a technical draw after three rounds, reports AP.

Referee John Wright halted the contest at the end of the third round after both fighters suffered cuts above their left eyes following head clashes.

Carr's record is now 11-8-3, while Bogolin, who survived a standing eight count in the first round, is 12-9-3.