

Maradona starts to live again

SEVILLE, Spain, Sept 23: Diego Maradona ended his eight-year career with Napoli on Tuesday when the Italian club transferred him to Seville of the Spanish League for \$7.5 million, reports AP.

"This is the happiest day of my life, the day I returned to soccer and they gave me my freedom," Maradona said, weeping upon hearing of the deal's completion. "Today I start to live again as I always have and as I know how."

The 31-year-old forward completed a 15-month suspension for cocaine use on June 30. But he refused to report for the final season of his contract with Napoli, the club he led to their first two Italian League titles in 1987 and 1990 and the 1989 UEFA Cup.

He tested positive for cocaine following Napoli's match against Bari on March 17, 1991, and was suspended that April 6. He was arrested in Buenos Aires 20 days later for possession of illegal narcotics, and is free on probation and under treatment by court order. On Sept 18, 1991, a Naples court gave him a 14-month suspended sentence for cocaine possession.

Maradona was captain of Argentina's national team when it won the 1986 World Cup and finished second to West Germany in 1990. He scored 81 goals in 188 Italian League games for Napoli — a record for a foreigner that was matched last weekend by Marco Van Basten — and added 28 goals in 45 Italian Cup games and five goals in 25 European cups matches.

His play clearly declined in 1989 and 1990, when he gained weight and began fighting with Italian officials and fans, claiming mistreatment. He now admits he isn't the top player in the world.

"Now I am No 10,000, but let me fight on the field to get back to what I was," he said. "Then you can judge if I'm No 10,000 or No 1."

He returns to the Spanish League, where he played for Barcelona from 1982-84. Maradona scored 22 goals in 36 Spanish League games, and added eight in seven European cups matches. He had played for Boca Juniors in Argentina in 1981, scoring 28 goals.

"With the eagerness that I have, I can play a good game for 45 minutes and, if the people in Seville arc with me, that's what will put wind in my sails," Maradona said.

He wanted to play for Seville because the club is coached by Carlos Bilardo, Argentina's coach in the 1986 and 1990 World Cups. Maradona is to make his debut for Seville on Monday at home in an exhibition match against German's Bayern Munich. His first official game probably won't be until Oct 4 at Athletic de Bilbao.

The final agreement was reached in Zurich, Switzerland, during a five-hour meeting at the offices of FIFA, soccer's governing body. FIFA general secretary Sepp Blatter said he had pushed for a settlement, calling it an "absolutely unique case in the annals of soccer."

"If a player was banned from the playing fields, when he finds this way back to soccer society, one has to give him

the possibility to play again," Blatter said.

The deal calls for Seville to pay Napoli \$7.5 million within a week and the remainder in four instalments at intervals of six months, Blatter said.

Napoli, which acquired Maradona from Barcelona for \$11 million, had insisted throughout the summer it wouldn't deal Maradona, but changed its mind under pressure.

"It is in the interest of soccer in general," Napoli president Corrado Ferlaini said, adding he made the deal even though he feels contracts "must be respected — period."

Maradona's contract with Seville gives the club an option for the 1993-94 season. Ferlaini said the deal prohibits Maradona from playing in the Italian League for two years, and Blatter said Maradona agreed to refrain from verbal attacks on soccer officials. Seville president Luis Cuervas Vilches said Maradona is forbidden to make "offensive remarks against Italian culture."

"He has to make his talent explode on the field and stop making insulting comments against soccer leaders — club, federation and international," Blatter said.

Maradona has scored 31 goals for Argentina's national team. He said he hopes to become captain again as his country prepares for the 1994 World Cup, which will be played in the United States.

Maradona had been dining at Seville's Andalusi Park Hotel when he received a call at 2.45

pm (1245 GMT) from Zurich saying that Napoli had agreed to the \$7.5 million transfer.

"Today I start to live again as I always have and as I know how," a tearful Maradona said. Maradona is in "very good



DIEGO MARADONA

shape despite 1 1/2 years of absence from competition, Cuervas said.

FIFA will guarantee the transfer pact.

The protocol, or transfer pact, also commits Maradona, known for his moods, temperamental outbursts and stormy personal life, to refrain from attacks on soccer officials including FIFA's leaders, Blatter said.

Cuervas said Maradona also is forbidden to make "offensive remarks against Italian culture."

Blatter denied FIFA pressured Napoli. He dismissed press reports that a major aim was to boost chances that Maradona would become a

magnet for the sport at the 1994 World Cup in the United States.

"FIFA did not want to meddle by taking the case before its own tribunal," he said. "We wanted first to use all possible means to find a correct, amicable solution."

"If a player was banned from the playing fields, when he finds back to soccer society, one has to give him the possibility to play again," he said.

"FIFA played the role of mediator and arbiter from the beginning because we were convinced that two so prestigious clubs could, if they wanted, find an area of agreement."

"It would have been a simple affair if the person involved were not Diego Armando Maradona," Blatter said.

The Seville team reportedly started bidding at \$4.5 million but by Monday upped that to \$6.5 million. News reports said Napoli was asking between \$9 million and \$15 million.

Argentine coach overjoyed

BUENOS AIRES, Sept 23: Argentina's coach Alfio Basile, overjoyed at news of Diego Maradona's return to soccer, said on Tuesday he would call the former captain to the national team for every important match, reports Reuter.

"I am shocked with emotion. The world's best player is back, at long last," said Basile, whose side are unbeaten in 20 games since he took charge in December 1990.

Maradona, who led Argentina to victory in the 1986 World Cup and second place in 1990, returns to professional soccer with Sevilla this month after nearly 18 months out of the game.

The Spanish Club, now coached by former Argentina boss Carlos Bilardo, and his former Italian team Napoli announced earlier on Tuesday the transfer of the 31-year-old midfielder.

"My happiness is complete," Maradona said after the transfer was confirmed. "I am coming back with new colleagues in a new country and in a city where I have been treated marvellously."

Maradona, who in June concluded a 15-month suspension for cocaine abuse, has always been in Basile's plans although he has never played under his guidance.

"We've already talked things over with Bilardo and Diego won't have any problems in joining us whenever we ask for him," Basile told a radio interviewer.

Asked how often he planned to summon Maradona, Basile fired back: "Always. He might not make it when (Sevilla) is playing a UEFA Cup match or some tournament. They'll have to make the decisions, but Diego can't miss the most important matches."

Argentina, who won the South American Championship under Basile last year, meet arch-rivals Uruguay in a friendly in Montevideo today.

They are scheduled to play in a four-team tournament in Saudi Arabia next month against the host country, the United States and Ivory Coast and meet Poland in a friendly at home on November 25.

Sabatini, Maleeva move on to qtrts

TOKYO, Sept 23: Second-Seeded Gabriela Sabatini and fourth seed Katerina Maleeva scored straight-sets wins on Wednesday to reach the quarter-finals of the 350,000 dollar Nishrei International Ladies Tennis Championship, reports Reuter.

World number three Sabatini needed 96 minutes to dispatch hard-hitting Japanese Rika Hiraki 6-3, 6-3 in the second round and said afterwards it had been a difficult match.

"I played well but it was a tough match as Hiraki just hit everything. I tried not to play the same tennis all the time. I used drop shots and came to the net actively," said Sabatini, seeded second here and ranked third among the world's women tennis players.

The Argentine player broke Hiraki in the third game after four deuces, but the 5-foot, 2-inch (157-centimetre) rookie Japanese pro immediately broke back with passing shots.



Czech-born American Martina Navratilova, with her pet dog K D (killer dog), arrived at Caesar's Palace Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada on Monday to begin her preparations for the 'battle of sexes' match against Jimmy Connors on Sept 25. — AFP photo

US-Sweden Davis Cup semifinal

Sampras' chance to redeem himself

MINNEAPOLIS, Sept 23: Another shot at Stefan Edberg. Another chance to redeem himself in the eyes of his countrymen. Another opportunity to free himself from his personal prison of disappointment.

For Pete Sampras, this weekend's Davis Cup semifinal is more than just another tennis tournament, reports AP.

He calls his Sept 13 loss to Edberg in the US Open final

1991 Davis Cup final at Lyon, France, where he felt he personally cost the United States the title.

Saturday, Sampras and John McEnroe will play doubles together for the first time when they meet Sweden's Edberg and Anders Jarryd in what could be the event's key match.

Jim Courier and Andre Agassi will represent the United States in singles matches Friday and Sunday. Edberg and Magnus Larsson

Tuesday, Wednesday of last week I was still very disappointed. It was just bad luck.

He was just the better man that day. For some reason, that loss really affected me more than any other loss I had in my career.

Sampras didn't touch a racket again until this week. "The US Open loss... was a good chance that I let slip away," he said. "I just wanted to put the racket up, play some golf and have a little fun. After

than I would be at another event. I kind of got the whole Davis Cup ball of wax all in one shot.

"France hadn't won in a long time and we were very eager. I came out a little bit cold and, as a result, I basically lost the tournament, losing my two matches. It was a very tough experience for me and hopefully I won't go through it again."

Said Gorman: "I don't think he will ever experience the internal feeling he had in Lyon."



STEFAN EDBERG

is most disappointing defeat ever. A close second was his double dose of failure in the

Top seeds to play Paris Indoor Open

PARIS, Sept 23: Seventeen of the world's top 20 players will take part in the Paris Indoor Open tennis tournament in November, organisers said on Wednesday, reports Reuter.

Only Wimbledon champion Andre Agassi and fellow Americans Ivan Lendl and Aaron Krickstein will miss the 2,165,000 tournament in Bercy, which offers the biggest prize money on the ATP tour.

World number one Stefan Edberg of Sweden, who won in Bercy two years ago, will top the bill for the November 2-8 event, followed by Americans Jim Courier and Pete Sampras,

Sevilla fans crowd hotel

SEVILLE, Spain, Sept 23: Hundreds of Spanish football fans besieged the Seville hotel where Diego Maradona was staying hours after his transfer to FC Sevilla was finalised on Tuesday, reports AP.

Police said they had to seal off the hotel in the suburb of Benacazon.

Maradona trained at the nearby Las Minas golf course as he has done since arriving in the city. But a training session with his new clubmates on Tuesday afternoon was ruled out because of the risk of injury after his months of soccer inactivity.



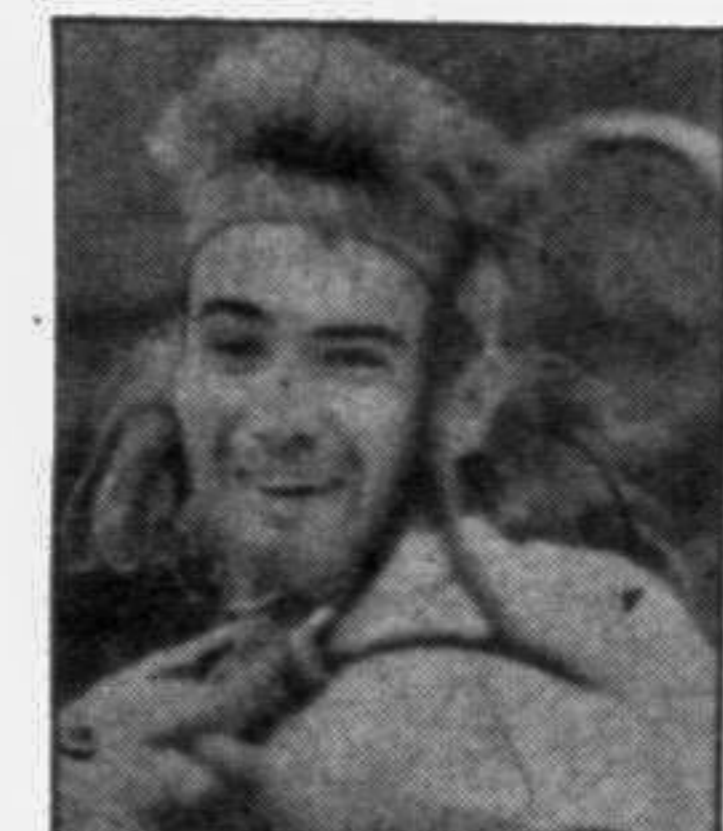
JIM COURIER

are expected to be Sweden's singles players. Brazil faces Switzerland this weekend in the final. Winners advance to the final, Dec 4-6, at Fort Worth, Texas.

"I'm happy to be on this team. I'm happy to be playing this weekend against Edberg again," Sampras said Tuesday. "But that second US Open trophy would definitely sit pretty in my living room. I'm still very disappointed. This loss has affected me much more than I thought it would."

Sampras, who won the US Open as a 19-year-old in 1990, got back to the final earlier this month, fighting off severe stomach pain to beat Courier in the semifinals. The next day, however, he lost in four sets to Edberg.

"You don't realise how much it really means to you until it's over," said Sampras, ranked third in the world behind Edberg and Courier. "Monday,



ANDRE AGASSI

about a week, I missed it and was looking forward to hitting yesterday and today. As far as my state of mind, I'm pretty happy."

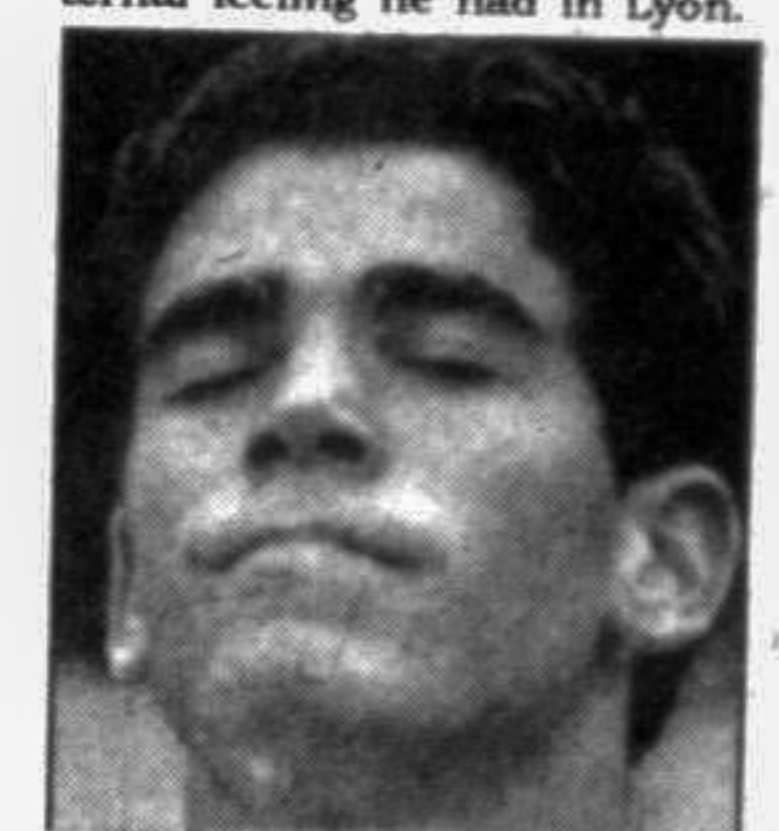
He wasn't very happy about 10 months ago when he faltered at Lyon.

Sampras had never competed in the Davis Cup until captain Tom Gorman chose him to play against France in the '91 final, where he lost to Henri Leconte in straight sets and to Guy Forget in four.

"That was one of the tougher decisions, to have a player play his first Davis Cup match in the final," Gorman said. "At that time, I felt — as all the other players felt — that Pete was playing the best of anybody in the world."

Once he got to Lyon, however, "I was completely overwhelmed," Sampras said.

"When I was out there playing Leconte, I was so distracted by so many different things. I was more nervous



PETE SAMPRAS

We're at home now and I think he'll be thriving off the enthusiasm here."

He also said Sampras would benefit from playing with McEnroe, even if the two are strangers on the court.

"I think Mac's presence will snap anything out of Pete that's been bugging him," Gorman said.

In addition to being the spokesman, leader and elder statesman of the US team, McEnroe is 57-10 in Davis Cup play — 16-2 in doubles.

That's comforting to Sampras, who knows he's not being asked to carry the load this time.

"I'm fortunate that I'm playing with probably the best doubles player that's ever played this game. Unfortunately, we haven't played together," Sampras said. "We're basically going out there hoping for the best. I'm just going to go out there and play my tennis."

Quiet Neapolitans accept departure

NAPLES, Italy, Sept 23: When Diego Maradona flew into Naples for the first time eight years ago,

tens of thousands took to the streets to greet him, reports AP. "Diego, make us big," shouted the crowd of 70,000 San Paolo Stadium on a July night, seeing him as a savior of the fortunes not only of the Napoli soccer team but the troubled city itself.

But there were no demonstrations or shouting Tuesday, just an apparent sense of relief that Maradona's battle to be released from his Napoli contract was finally over.

"Everything's quiet, nothing public is planned," said Francesco Marolda, a sports reporter with the city's leading newspaper, 11 Mattino.

Marolda said recent polls of Maradona's fellow Napoli players and fans showed that most just wanted and end to the struggle and to see the great Argentine forward back on the field, even in the jersey of another team.

Maradona got his wish, release from Napoli to play for Sevilla, a deal that is costing the Spanish team 7.5 million dollars to take over the 31-year-old player's contract.

"You certainly need courage, that's millions thrown to the wind," commented the president of Torino, Gian Mauro

Borsano. "He's a player who's given a lot, still has a lot left but can create a lot of problems for any team."

During his stay, the temperamental Maradona proved his worth, leading Napoli to its first ever Italian titles, in 1987 and 1990, and the UEFA Cup in 1989.

But his triumphs on the field were marked by continuing off the field problems. In addition to the 15-month suspension from soccer for cocaine use, a Naples court also gave him a 14-month suspended sentence on cocaine possession charges.

The Italian charges stemmed from a police investigation which included wire-tapping of suspects in an alleged drug and prostitution ring.

Also helping to make soccer fans forget is the emergence of a new hero, Daniel Fonseca of Uruguay. Fonseca scored the team's five goals in a 5-1 battering of Valencia in a UEFA Cup match last Wednesday — equalling Maradona's total for all his UEFA Cup appearances.

"I'm happy how this story ended," said Napoli team captain, Ciro Ferrara, as quoted by the Italian news agency ANSA. "Diego wanted to return to playing, that's always been his greatest desire. I'm close to him in this moment. I'm happy that he's resuming his activity."

Danes face Latvia for first time

LONDON, Sept 23: After struggling to a goalless tie in Latvia last month, European soccer champion Denmark return to the Baltic region Wednesday to tackle Lithuania in another World Cup qualification game, reports AP.

The two teams have never met before but the Danes know the Lithuanians won 2-1 at Latvia and came from 2-0 down to tie 2-2 with Northern Ireland in Belfast.

And it's a game the Danes dare not lose.

The game in Vintus is one of five World Cup qualification matches being staged Wednesday. In another Group Three game, Latvia host Spain.

In Group Two, the Netherlands go to Norway and Poland welcome Turkey and in Group Four, Czechoslovakia receive the Faroe Islands.

Since their surprise triumph in the European Championships in Sweden, Denmark have been the focus of attention and their title-winning stars have been in demand.

Arsenal hired midfielder Johan Jensen and another English Club, Liverpool, recruited defender Torben Piechnik. Of the lineup likely to start the game against Lithuania, only two will be home-based players.

The team needs to improve on the performance against Latvia in Riga and won't be helped by the absence of experienced striker Flemming Povison who pulled out because his wife gave birth to their first child on Sunday.

Late rally saves Liverpool blush

LONDON, Sept 23: Troubled giants Liverpool battled from 3-0 down to snatch a 4-4 draw in an astonishing English League Cup tie against little Chesterfield at home on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

Chesterfield, who are in the football league Third Division, embarrassed the Premier League side who have been ravaged by injury this season but who still managed to field five full internationals in the second round first leg match.

England centre-back Mark Wright's 86th-minute equaliser from a powerful header made up for his involvement in a blunder that allowed Chesterfield to go two goals up after half an hour.

Chesterfield were 3-0 ahead after 48 minutes and led 4-2 with 20 minutes to go.

Champions Leeds won 4-1 at home against Scunthorpe, but Arsenal needed an equaliser from Kevin Campbell 12 minutes from time to scrape a 1-1 draw at home to First Division Millwall.

Premier league leaders Norwich were held 2-2 at Third Division Carlisle, while Sheffield United lost 2-1 First Division Bristol City.

Liverpool, who have not won away yet this season, travel to Chesterfield in the second leg on October 6.

Steve Norris opened for Chesterfield in the seventh minute. On the half hour, Wright passed back to goalkeeper David James who, not allowed to use his hands failed to control the ball and striker Dave

Lancaster punched to force the ball over the line.

Lancaster made it 3-0 three minutes into the second half, but within a minute Hungarian substitute Istvan Kozma crossed from the right for Israeli forward Ronny Rosenthal to open Liverpool's account with a diving header.

Liverpool struck again in the 58th minute when Chesterfield goalkeeper Mick Leonard saved brilliantly from Mark Walters and Don

Hutchison followed up to notch his first senior goal for the Merseyside club.

With Liverpool going all out for an equaliser Norris raced clear on to a long ball from defence to beat James again in the 69th minute.

But Walters pulled one back three minutes later and five minutes from time Kozma laid on Wright's equaliser with a cross from the right wing.



French Lancia drivers Bernard Ocelli (L) and Didier Aurioi raise their hands after winning the Rally Australia in Perth on Tuesday. The French duo completed 35 special stages of the 536 km race to victory. — AFP photo