

World Cup sans the stars



HAVANA, Sept 25: The future of the athletics World Cup seems secure despite mounting criticism from administrators concerned about an already overcrowded schedule, reports Reuters.

Only 11 gold medalists from this year's Barcelona Olympics have opted to make the trip to Havana for the three-day eight-team competitions starting today.

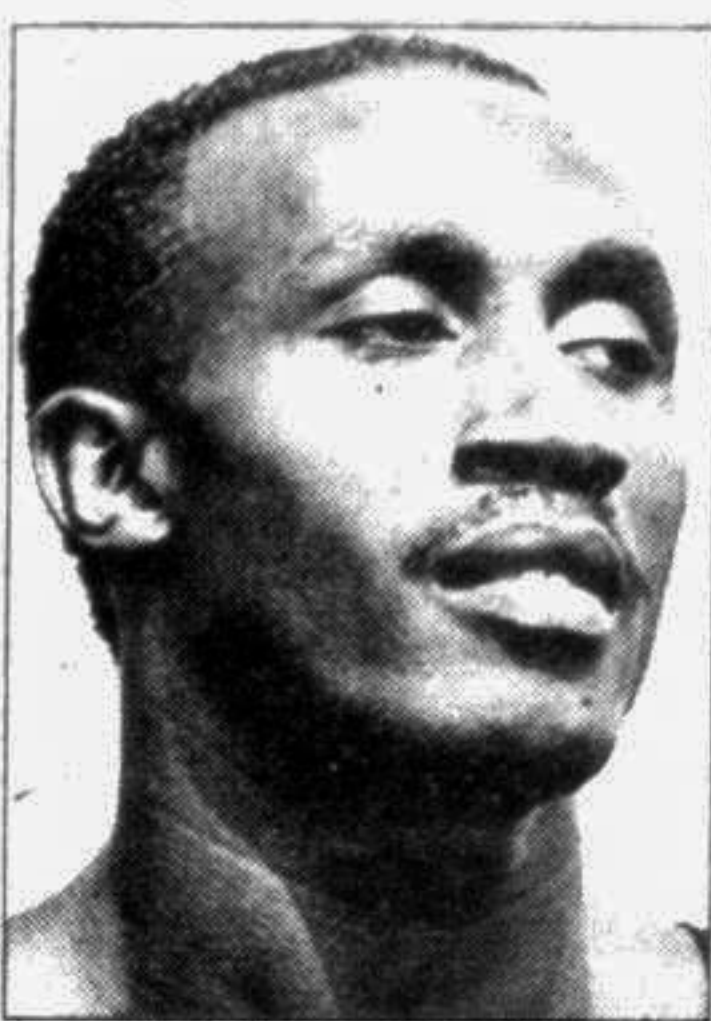
But although the absence of so many of the world's elite athletes has clearly embarrassed the International Amateur Athletics Federation (IAAF) officials said on Thursday the Cup was likely to continue.

The general opinion is that we have it in the years in which there's no World Championships or Olympics," one senior official said.

The World Championships are now staged every two years with the next scheduled for Stuttgart, Germany in 1993. The Cup would continue its present four-year cycle with the next due in 1994.

The officials said bids for the next World Cup had been received from Birmingham in England, Singapore and South

Africa. Earlier IAAF president Primo Nebiolo told a news conference the further of the Cup was in the hands of the



LINFORD CHRISTIE

federation's governing council. "We have time to decide," Nebiolo said.

Although Nebiolo, predictably, said he believed this year's Cup would be a great success, the number of defections by top athletes and the mounting criticism from administrators must be concerning the IAAF.

The timing of the event is

nonsensical and the World Cup should be scrapped," German Federation officials Horst Blatterger said.

Offen Cassel, executive director of the Athletics Congress, the US governing body, said the Cup could have a future but not in its present form. "Maybe under a different philosophy," Cassel said.

Chief British coach Frank Dick expressed concern at the increasing number of IAAF competitions.

"Quite clearly there's a move to saturate the calendar," Dick said. "It is time for us to rationalise the international competitive calendar."

"The world is quite different from the world in which the World Cup was born, for goodness sake."

At least one person made it perfectly clear on Thursday that he was more than happy with this year's edition of the Cup.

Olympic 100 metres champion Linford Christie said he would still have travelled to the Caribbean even if he had been named as a team reserve.

"I wouldn't have missed this trip for anything," the British team captain told reporters. "I think the people who have missed this trip have missed

out on a lot." "I'm not in that kind of same shape as I was at the Olympics. I'm not going to say I'm going to run 10.0."

"I'm not in that kind of shape. Nobody goes out to finish second but if I don't win, who cares?" Christie, who admitted he was exhausted after a long hard year, could run in three events here.

European champion John Regis has dropped out of the 200 metres after bruising his ribs while jet skiing, giving Christie a chance for the sprint double.

And depending on his performance in the 200, Christie could then take part in the 4x400 metres relay, the final event of the competition on Sunday night.

One concern for the organisers has been a tropical depression off the Cuban coast plus the start of the rainy season here.

A fierce rain storm lashed Havana on Wednesday afternoon, flooding the streets and slowing traffic to a crawl.

A similar storm on any of the three days of competition would almost certainly force organisers to cancel the programme for the evening, causing yet another headache for the IAAF.

Zmelik's feat

OSTRAVA, Czechoslovakia, Sept 25: Olympic gold medalist Robert Zmelik set an unofficial world record here on Thursday when he scored 7,897 points in a one-hour decathlon, reports AFP.

The 23-year-old smashed the previous best for the competition set by New Zealander Simon Poelman on March 1, 1991, in Auckland.

Zmelik completed nine events of the 10 events in the one hour period, with the 1,500m race run afterwards.

The official decathlon event is held over two days and a new world record of 8,891 points was set by Dan O'Brien on September 5 in Talence, France.

The American had failed to qualify for the US team at the Barcelona Games.

Athletes seek cash from IAAF

HAVANA, Sept 25: International athletics chief Primo Nebiolo will be asked next month to consider payments for athletes at the 1993 World Championships, reports Reuters.

A senior International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) official said on Thursday a group representing athletes' managers would meet Nebiolo in London in the middle of October.

The group requested a meeting to discuss the situation of payments to the athletes, the official said.



Finland's Sami Elopuro throws his racket on the ground in despair in the quarter-finals of the World Open squash championships at Johannesburg's Standard Bank Arena on Thursday. Elopuro lost to Pakistan's Jansher Khan by 15-7, 15-5, 15-9.

— AFP photo

Rodney wins battle of brothers

JOHANNESBURG, Sept 25: Defending champion Rodney Martin of Australia won a titanic 78-minute battle against his brother Brett

to earn a place in the semifinals of the World Open squash championship on Thursday, reports Reuters.

Rodney, 26, and the younger brother by a little over two years, triumphed 17-16, 15-5, 15-17, 15-17, 15-10. He always seemed to have the upper hand and yet could not relax for a moment as Brett fought all the way.

In the semifinals, Rodney Martin plays fellow-Australian Chris Dittmar, while Pakistani Jansher Khan faces Austin Adarraga of Spain, who had to qualify.

The Martin brothers last

met in the US Open final in New York in October when Rodney was also the winner. But in their only previous World Open clash, Brett was the victor in Kuala Lumpur in 1989.

They matched point for point in the opening game of their quarter-final here. Rodney missed a game point at 14-13 but then clinched the game as both players had game point at 16-16.

Third seed Rodney looked to be heading for a quick victory as he won the second game in 10 minutes but Brett fought back to win the third and then levelled the tie, having saved three match points in the fourth game.

It was level pegging in the deciding game, but from 11-10 Rodney stormed to victory with the help of two penalty

strokes.

"We have played together since we were kids so we know all about each other's games," said Rodney. "I had to try to slow the game down because when Brett gets on a roll he can beat anyone."

Dittmar, the second seed and four times beaten finalist, looked in good form and had no trouble disposing of another Australian, Rodney Eyles, 15-10, 15-7, 15-4 in 35 minutes. Top seed Jansher, the world number one who has won the title three times, crushed Finland's Sami Elopuro 15-7, 15-5, 15-9 to reach the last four.

Adarraga, the Australian-born son of Spanish parents, defeated England number one Peter Marshall, the ninth seed, 15-13, 15-12, 9-15, 6-15, 15-10 in 89 minutes.

Wattana in semis at White's cost

MOTHERWELL, Scotland, Sept 25: Thai snooker ace James Wattana reached the semi-finals of the Scottish Masters here on Thursday night and was then backed to win the tournament by the man he had just beaten, reports AFP.

World number three Jimmy White was mightily impressed by Wattana's 6-2 triumph in the quarter-finals, which improved the Thai's record against the Englishman to nine wins in 14 meetings.

"Although it's difficult to predict something like this, James showed that he's scoring heavily when given the chance and playing a dangerous brand of snooker," said White, who was suffering from

a heavy cold.

Wattana, who triumphed inside 103 minutes, was not so sure, having been an unconvincing 5-3 first-round winner over Scotland's Alan McManus.

"I'm not saying I'm playing well enough to win the title, but I played twice as well as I did in my previous match," he commented.

This is a great start to the season for me. Jimmy had his chances in the first few frames, but he missed a lot and I didn't make many mistakes."

White should have pocketed frame one, miscuing badly when 57-2 ahead. He levelled at 1-1 with a 48 break, but soon fell 5-1 down as Masters debutant Wattana notched runs of 91, 51, 56, 67 and 48.

Although White managed to clinch frame seven with a 62

clearance after trailing 53-0, the world number seven was not to be denied his semifinal place and finished off a surprisingly error-strewn match in another 13 minutes.

White, a notoriously slow starter to the season, typically refused to use his cold as an excuse for defeat.

"I didn't feel too bad, but at this stage of the season it's just about practising potting balls," said the English left-hander.

Wattana, guaranteed 11,000 pounds, now takes on England's Neal Foulds in Saturday's second semifinal.

Quarter-final result: James Wattana (Thailand) 6-2 Jimmy White (England) 6-2 (frame scores: 70-59, 37-73, 91-8, 66-33, 123-0, 89-16, 53-62, 62-46).

Seles, Sabatini sail into semis

TOKYO, Sept 25: World number one Monica Seles and number three Gabriela Sabatini crushed local hopes by beating Japan's top two women players in the

Seeded shuttlers move to quarters in S'pore Open

SINGAPORE, Sept 25: All four top seeds scored straight set wins to move into the men's singles quarter-finals in the Singapore Open badminton championships here Thursday, reports AFP.

First to reach the last eight was top seed Ardy Wiranata of Indonesia who edged China's Zhang Qingwu 15-7, 15-17 in just over 40 minutes.

Wiranata, 22, the silver medal winner in the recent Barcelona Olympics, is the early favourite.

Number two seed, Zhao Jianhua, 27, of China, easily overcame Singapore's Hamid Khan 15-8, 15-11, while Indonesia's other top player, Bambang Suprianto, the number three seed, defeated China's Lin Li-Wen 15-8, 15-7.

The only non-Asian seed, Denmark's Thomas Stuer-Lauridsen, seeded fourth, brushed aside Taipei's Limwei-Chen 15-8, 15-7.

quarter-finals of the 350,000 dollar Nihirei Tennis Tournament here Friday, reports AFP.

The American-based Yugoslav, the winner of all Grand Slam titles except Wimbledon for the second year running, trounced Naoko Sawamatsu 6-1, 6-0, while Sabatini brushed aside Kimiko Date 6-4, 6-2 on the Centre Court of the Ariake Coliseum.

Earlier in the day, Mary Joe Fernandez of the United States had to overcome swirling winds to beat another Japanese, Kyoko Nagatsuka, 6-0, 6-2, and set up a semi-final encounter against depending champion Seles on Saturday.

Fernandez, the runner-up here last year, seeks to avenge her semi-final loss to Seles at the US Open two weeks ago. She defeated Seles in their first meeting in 1989 but has lost in their 13 meeting since.

Sabatini will take on fourth-seeded Katerina Maleeva of Bulgaria, who downed American Marianne Werdel 6-4, 6-4 in a hard hit baseline duel.

"I played her (Maleeva) many times," said Sabatini, who has 5-1 win-loss record against the Bulgarian. She likes to be aggressive, to hit the ball hard, and she's coming more to the net than she has to do. I'm going to have to play similar to today's match."

Sabatini and Date, who both

clinched their first career titles winning the Japan Open here — Sabatini in 1985 and Date in 1992 — could not hold serve until the Japanese kept the fifth game to lead 3-2 and 4-3 in the first set.

But Date lost the next three games and was never able to take the lead afterward as the South American retaliated with her heavy topspins against the Japanese number one.

"I knew she was going to be very dangerous. She has a very good backhand and she was putting pressure on me, coming to the net," said Sabatini, who lost to Date in their first meeting in the Los Angeles tournament last year.

"I learned a lot from the Los Angeles match, so probably, I know a little bit better how to play against her. I have a good strategy," added the 22-year-old Argentine, stretching her head-to-head record to 2-1.

The strong winds forced the organisers to close the removable roof of the Centre Court before the Seles-Sawamatsu match, and all the other matches were held indoors.

Singles quarter-finals (X denotes seed):

Gabriela Sabatini (Argentina X2) bt Kimiko Date (Japan X7) 6-4, 6-2.

Katerina Maleeva (Bulgaria X4) bt Marianne Werdel (USA) 6-4, 6-4.

Battle of the Sexes III vs Navratilova

Connors confident despite handicaps

LAS VEGAS, Sept 25: Jimmy Connors, winner of a record 109 men's singles titles, has new worlds to conquer. Friday night, against Martina Navratilova, he gets his chance, reports AP.

"I've beaten all the men," Connors deadpanned. "Now I want to become the unofficial women's champion."

Connors and Navratilova re-enact 1973's much ballyhooed mixed-gender match between Billie Jean King and Bobby Riggs when they meet in a best two sets out of three match at Caesars Palace.

At stake, supposedly, is superiority of the sexes, not to mention the \$500,000 that goes to the winner.

Absent, however, in Battle of the Sexes III is the hype and tension that Riggs and King promoted smartly enough two decades ago to capture the nation's interest and draw more than 30,000 people to the Houston, Astrodome.

"It's an entertainment event rather than an emotional battle of sexes," Navratilova said. "If we'd played this 20 years ago it would have been more tense because of the times."

Most of the tension surrounding this match came between attorneys for the two players who negotiated contracts to try and even the odds between the 40-year-old Connors and his 35-year-old female rival.

When Riggs played King at the age of 55, it was the 26-year age difference that served as the handicap between the two players. Connors' handicap is that he will be limited to one serve and have to play half of each of his doubles' lanes.

"People don't know how much of a handicap one serve is," Navratilova said. "It's going to be difficult for him."

Navratilova said attorneys went through 15 drafts of contracts for the rules, cover-

ing everything from court size to the type of balls to be used. But a late dispute still arose over whether the line painted down the middle of Connors' doubles' alleys should be in or out.

"The lawyers somehow squiggled it in his contract that says the inside of the line

Bresnik hired as Becker's coach

ESSEN, Germany, Sept 25: Three-times Wimbledon champion Boris Becker, who split with his former Czechoslovak trainer Tomas Smid in June, has hired Austrian Davis Cup captain Guenther Bresnik as his new private coach, reports Reuters.

The 24-year-old German, who has slipped to eight in the world rankings, said on Thursday he planned to start working with Bresnik at next week's ATP tournament in Basel, Switzerland. "The next few tournaments will be a test of how we can work together," Becker told reporters here on the eve of Germany's Davis Cup World Group relegation playoff against Belgium.

Bresnik, 31, will be Becker's third coach since he broke off his arrangement with Australian Bob Brett in March last year.

Becker tried to work with German Davis Cup captain Niki Pilić but the trainer could not combine the two jobs.

Becker said he did not need a coach with him every day and Bresnik, who coaches Switzerland's Jakob Hlasek as well as the Davis Cup team, planned to continue with his other commitments.

The German said: "I need the optimum preparation for tough matches. When you are feeling good you can win three of the five matches at a big tournament without a coach."

is out, while mine says the outside," Navratilova said. "The line is in, it shouldn't even be on the court."

Connors called the complaints much to do over nothing.

"She's made a controversy over everything," he said. "She should really only get one serve. I gave up the space."

Both Navratilova and Connors are guaranteed appearance money, reportedly as much as \$500,000 apiece, for the match, which will be televised nationally on pay-per-view for a suggested price of \$24.95.

Navratilova, however, says the win is more important than the \$500,000 extra that will go to the winner.

"The money will be a nice bonus but that's not what we're playing for," she said. "I'd rather give up the half million and win."

Navratilova, a 4-1 underdog in betting at the Caesars Palace sports book, said she has been practicing against men in trying to be able to handle the harder shots and more aggressive game played by the men professionals.

She knows she must change her game, even with the added court, to survive.

"How well I'll be able to attack, I don't know," Navratilova said. "I know I won't be able to serve and volley as well as against women. Against men you can't just keep it in play. You have to force the action."

Connors said he knows exactly how Navratilova will play.

"She's going to play like a man," he said. "I'm going to play like I always have."

Connors, a youngster of 21 when Riggs was worn down in a losing effort to King, says he is out to even the score for male tennis players.

"I've been waiting 20 years to get even," he said. "It's been playing on my mind for that long. I want to set it straight."

Riggs, for one, has no doubt

he will.

"I predict a blowout," said Riggs, who will serve as colour commentator for the match. "He's a great, great match player, a great money player. She hasn't got a clue about how tough this guy is."

Tampa Bay Lightning's top farm team, reports AP.

The 20-year-old, 142-centimeter (4-foot-6), 59-kilogram (130-pound) French Canadian became the first woman to compete in one of

Rheume breaks the sex barrier

TAMPA, Florida, Sept 25: Manon Rheume made some history, then made the roster of the Tampa Bay Lightning's top farm

team, reports AP.

The 20-year-old, 142-centimeter (4-foot-6), 59-kilogram (130-pound) French Canadian became the first woman to compete in one of

the four US major professional sports leagues Wednesday night when she was the starting goaltender in the National Hockey League's expansion team's exhibition game against the St. Louis Blues.

She shrugged off the historical significance of the occasion, rejected seven of nine shots she faced in 20 minutes and said she plans to continue pursuit of her dream in the Lightning's minor-league system.

"It's not important to me to be the first woman to play in the NHL. I didn't come here to do that. I came because I love hockey," Rheume said. "If I didn't try, I wouldn't know what I could do."

Tampa Bay general manager Phil Esposito rated her performance "a 7 1/2" and said the club wants to give Rheume a chance to develop as a player with the team's Atlanta minor-league affiliate.

"I can't wait to see her in training camp next year. The question is how much can she progress," Esposito said. "I think she can play. I really do."

Rheume led the Lightning onto the ice to a standing ovation from the crowd of 8,223 in Florida State Fairgrounds Expo Hall, which seats just over 10,000.

She made her first save 40 seconds into the game. Jeff Brown scored from just inside the blue line at 2:21 and Brendan Shanahan knocked the puck in from in front of the net 14 minutes later.

In between goals, Rheume was steady and made one save that brought the crowd to its feet — stopping Nelson Emerson from point-blank range on a power play by dropping to the ice and blocking the puck with her left leg.

She left after the first period with the score 2-2 and was replaced by Wendell Young, who finished the game won by St. Louis 6-4.

"I was very nervous. I didn't think about being the first woman. I thought about doing my best and concentrating on the puck," Rheume said, adding that she plans to accept

the offer to play in the minors. "I've never practised every day. My junior team practised two days a week. I don't know what I can do if I practise every day."

Rheume, whose father is a hockey coach in Canada, began playing the sport with her brothers as a 5-year-old. She made history last year when she appeared in one game in the Canadian Major Junior Hockey League.

And Meyers, who attended the Indian Pacers' NBA camp in 1979, is the only other woman who has tried out for a team in one of the four US major pro sports — baseball, American football, basketball and ice hockey. However, Meyers never appeared in a game.

In a publicity stunt in 1968, would-be jockey Penny Ann Early played for one second in a regular-season game for the Kentucky Colonels against the Los Angeles Stars in the American Basketball Association — an upstart league which eventually merged with the NBA in 1976. Early, signed to a one-game contract, inbounded the ball in the second period and the Colonels immediately called a timeout and removed her from the lineup.

Esposito admits that publicity was a major factor in the decision to invite Rheume to training camp. Still, he thinks she was deserving of the opportunity to pit her skills against those of NHL players.

Three more African nations withdraw from WC qualifier

ZURICH, Sept 25: Uganda, Mauritania and Sudan have withdrawn from 1994 World Cup qualifying, FIFA announced Thursday, and soccer's governing body indefinitely postponed Libya's matches because of a UN embargo, reports AP.

Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Sao Tome and Principe, Malawi and Gambia withdrew earlier this year, but FIFA allowed South Africa, Namibia and Benin to enter the tournament late.

B'ball relegation play-offs from today

Sports Reporter

The classification round of the 1992 Partex First Division basketball league begins today at the wooden-floor gymnasium to decide the two teams to face relegation among the five last teams in the points table.

The three teams from Group A are Josephites Club, Hornets Sports Club, and Dhaka Wanderers Club while the two others two fill the numbers are Eagles Club and Backstroke Boys Club.

Josephites play Backstroke Boys Club in the first match starting at 4 pm while Hornets Sporting Club face Eagles Club in the second match at 6:30 pm.

Earlier six teams — Angels, Panthers and Dharmketu from Group A and Azad Boys, Greys and Dhaka Winners from Group B — qualified for the super league scheduled to begin from October 8.

Cash incentive for swimming medalists

MINNEAPOLIS, Sept 25: American swimmers who went for the gold at Barcelona might be swimming for dollars in the 1996 Olympics, reports AP.

In an effort to reward America's best swimmers and to encourage faster times, the US Swimming Federation's board of directors on Wednesday unanimously approved awarding prize money to medalists in major international competitions.

"We're putting a larger pot of gold at the end of the rainbow," said federation spokesman Jeff Dimond. "The word 'amateur' has long been gone from the lexicon. The word now is 'eligible athlete.'"

The plan still must be approved by the federation's House of Delegates, which meets Saturday in the Minneapolis suburb of Bloomington.

Under the proposal, medal winners in the 1994 World Championships at Rome would split \$600,000 in prize money, and medalists in the 1996 Olympics at Atlanta would split \$800,000.

The plan is to award three points for a gold medal, two for a silver and one for a bronze, then divide the purse into shares.

If \$600,000 would have been available for Barcelona, where American swimmers won 11 gold medals, nine silver and seven bronze, a gold would have been worth about \$31,000, a silver about \$20,700 and a bronze about \$13,300.

Financial incentives for athletes are common in other countries.

The Spanish government awarded prizes for all medalists this year, ranging up to \$80,000 for an individual gold medal winner. Also, a private company has established a \$1 million trust for each of Spain's gold medalists, to be paid out starting at age 50.

The Taiwan's government paid each member of its Olympic baseball team \$220,000 for winning the silver medal. A gold medal would have been worth \$400,000.

"It's what the rest of the world is going to," Dimond said. "Motivation is not the issue."

Athlete refuses to return home

ADDIS ABABA, Sept 25: An Ethiopian athlete who refused to leave with her team after this month's World Junior Athletics Championship in Seoul is free to go anywhere she chooses, an athletics official said on Thursday, reports Reuters.

Sebat Belay, head of the Competitive Sports Department in the Amateur Athletic Federation, said Meseret Dekele, 17, could go to the United States or any country that would accept her or return home.