

Taiwan's best showing ever

HONG KONG, Apr 3: Taiwan came out of the shadow of their powerful Asian neighbours Friday to reach the semifinals of the Asian Badminton Championships here for the first time, reports AFP.

A highly-charged 4-1 victory over Thailand in their last preliminary Group B encounter in the 30,000 US dollars tournament saw Taiwan achieve their best international team result.

"It is our best performance on the international stage. It has taken a long time in coming," said a delighted Taiwan manager Huang Ren-Ji Jie.

Taiwan will meet badminton powerhouse China in their semifinal today.

Hot favourites Indonesia will take on Malaysia in the other semi.

As in the preliminary rounds, the semifinals will be played on a Thomas Cup format with three singles and two doubles matches.

So long overshadowed by their more powerful Chinese cousins, Taiwan finally entered the limelight mainly thanks to a magnificent win over South Korea on the opening day, Wednesday.

Their doubles combination Gou Hsin-Ming with Yang Shin-Jeng, and Horng Shin-Jeng with Huang Chuan-Chen — propelled them to a narrow 3-2 win over the Koreans, and proved invaluable again against Thailand, Friday.

After Taiwanese number one Lee Mou-Chou had conceded the first singles to Thailand's Sompol Kukasemkij, 15-7, 5-15, 3-15, doubles pair Gou and Yang levelled the score by

beating Pramote Thirawitwata and Sakrapee Thongsaari 15-9, 15-13.

Taiwan's number two singles player, Lin Wei-Chen then defeated Teeranun Chinagta 17-14, 15-12 in a nail-biting match to give his country a 2-1 lead.

Taiwan's second doubles pairing, Horng and Huang clinched the tie, and a semifinal berth, by defeating Sompol and Kasemak Chatchuchinda 15-7, 15-5.

"We were confident of entering the semi-finals, especially after the way we had

Indonesia, who took preliminary Group B without losing a match, dominated the Koreans as they came a step closer to an expected final showdown against arch-rivals China.

With their top three singles players, Heryanto Arbi, Allan Budi Kusuma and Ardy Wiranata in perfect touch, the Indonesians have so far faced few obstacles in the tournament.

World number two Arbi, currently the hottest player on the circuit, hammered Park Sungg Woo 15-7, 15-6, while Kusuma defeated Le Yong Sun 15-8, 15-6.

Wiranata did not let up the pressure, although the match had already been decided by Indonesia's doubles pairs by the time he set about his 15-7, 15-3 win over Ha Tae Kwon.

Indonesia's semifinal opponents, Malaysia, were beaten 5-0 by China in the final Group A game.

Although resting their top singles player, Foo Kok Keong and doubles specialists Soo Beng Kiang, the Malaysians new generation of badminton players did not let China have it all their own way.

Up-and-coming teenager Yong Hock Kien and Ong Ewe Hock were the pick of the Malaysian team as they went down fighting in the singles to Chinese world No. 9 Wu Wenkai, and Wan Zhengwen respectively.

India meanwhile, will meet Singapore in the Division two final, today.

India defeated arch-rivals Pakistan 5-0 in the semi-finals while Singapore booked their berth with an equally convincing 5-0 win over Sri Lanka.

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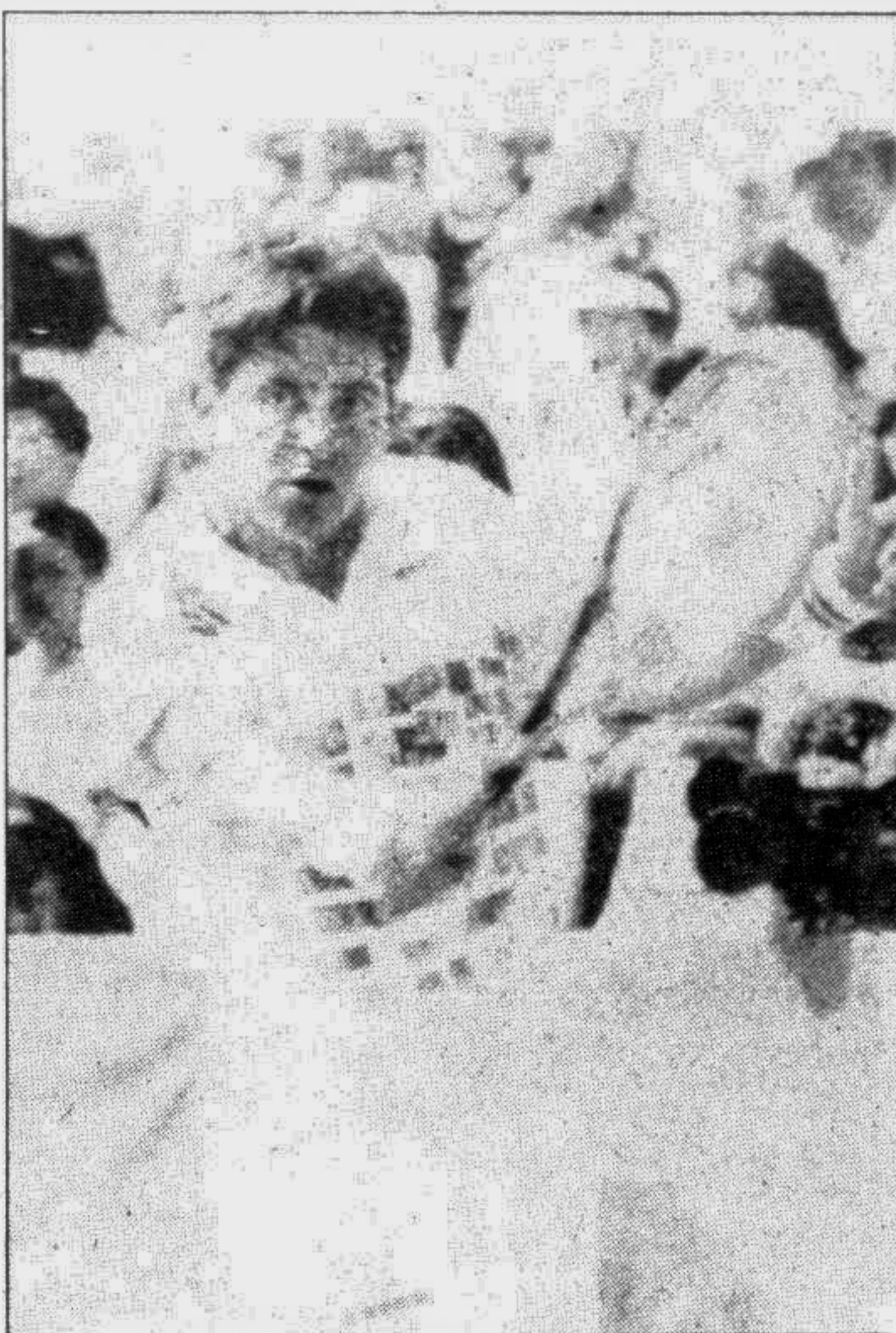
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ALLAN BUDI KUSUMA played against South Korea earlier in the tournament," said Taiwan manager Huang.

INDONESIA MARCH ON

The Indonesian juggernaut continued to scamroller the opposition, thrashing South Korea 5-0 in their imperious march into the semifinals.



Israel's Amos Mansdorf makes a backhand return to world number one American Jim Courier during the Salem Open tennis semifinal at Osaka, Japan yesterday. Mansdorf stunned Courier with a 7-5, 7-6 (7-4) win. — AFP photo

ROK to bid for 2002 WC

SEOUL, Apr 3: South Korea, boasting experience as the 1988 Olympic host, will bid to stage the World Cup soccer tournament in 2002 jointly with rival North Korea, sports officials said Thursday, reports AP.

Culture and Sports Minister Lee Min-sup reported the co-host plan to President Kim Young-sam. Ministry officials said they would seek talks with North Korea on the idea.

"If we host the international event with North Korea, it will greatly contribute to easing inter-Korean tension," said Kim Jung-nam, managing director of the Korea Football Association.

Kim said an organising committee would be formed

next month to win public support, as Seoul did for the 1988 Olympics.

But Kim said sports officials worried about a possible North Korean boycott.

"So we need full government support to create a favourable atmosphere," he added.

In 1991, the two Koreas opened sports exchanges across the heavily armed border and fielded their first united team in world table tennis and youth soccer championships.

But the Communist North has since cut off such exchanges for political reasons.

Tensions have increased over North Korea's decision March 12 to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and over their refusal to allow international nuclear inspections.

"A feasibility study on our plan has been completed," said a sports ministry official, speaking on condition of anonymity. He said Seoul is ready to stage the World Cup tournament alone if Pyongyang refuses to cooperate.

Kim and other sports officials said South Korea would have no difficulty in building soccer fields for the tournament.

"Other nations like Japan are going ahead to host the World Cup, but we are not worried because a three-year period will be enough for preparations," Kim said.

The host nation will be decided in 1996.

South Korea also is bidding to stage the Asian Cup Football Championships in 1996. The host nation will be decided April 29 in Singapore by the 17-member Asia Football Confederation.

Peter Velappan of Malaysia, the AFC's secretary general, reportedly supported the co-host plan during his visit March 28-31 to inspect South Korea's soccer facilities.

Two complaints of criminal sexual conduct and one of harassment were filed. The charges will be presented to a grand jury.

If indicted and convicted on all charges, Ebben could face up to 3 1/2 years in prison, Fahy said.

The team has suspended Ebben, Fahy said.

East Bengal rout Victoria SC

CALCUTTA, Apr 3: Defending champions, East Bengal stormed into the semifinals of the eighth Airlines Gold Cup football tournament when they pulverised Victoria Sporting Club of Bangladesh 6-0 in a group-A league match at the Sali Lake Stadium here yesterday, reports PTI.

The strong East Bengal forwards showed little mercy as they blasted three goals in each half and missed several other chances in a completely one-sided match.

Captain Kuljit Singh, Tausif Jamal, Subir Ghosh, Chibuzor and Baichun Ghutta were the East Bengal scorers while the first was a same-side goal. The Bangladesh outfit never even got a close look at the East Bengal goal.

East Bengal will now play arch rivals Mohun Bagan on Sunday to decide the Group-A champions. Mohun Bagan, who thrashed Victoria 5-0 in their opening match, have also qualified to the semi-finals from the three-team group.

Courier falls, Chang wobbles

OSAKA, Japan, Apr 3: Fifth-seeded Amos Mansdorf, overcoming a poor first service, shocked Jim Courier, the world's top-ranked player, in the semifinal match Saturday, setting up the finals with Michael Chang in the dirr 500,000 Salem Open Tennis Tournament, reports AP.

Mansdorf of Israel, ranked 36th, in the world, scored a 7-5, 7-6 (7-4) triumph over Courier in two hours' struggle on the hard court of Esaka Tennis Center in western Japan.

Mansdorf broke the third and 11th games and Courier broke back the fourth game of the first set.

After tying 3-3, Mansdorf jumped to a 6-4 lead before winning the second set tie-break at 7-4.

Mansdorf hit 43 percent of

his first serves against Courier's 54 percent. "I didn't serve very well today. I played not as well and



MICHAEL CHANG he (Mansdorf) played much better," said Courier. American Chang, second-

seed, had the tough match against French qualifier Stephane Simian before downing him 6-2, 3-6, 6-3.

Chang said, "I had a few opportunities to break Stephane in the second set but I wasn't able to convert. In the second set, he was down 0-40 and I wasn't able to convert there. That could be a major difference in a match like today. The second set was decided by one break as was the third. It just goes to show that it's not necessarily how many points you win out there, but which points, which can determine if you win or lose match."

American David Pate and Glenn Michibata of Canada beat Chang and Japan's Shuzo Masuoka 6-3, 3-6, 6-3 in the doubles semifinals.

The winning pair meets American Mark Keil and South African Christo van Rensburg in the finals Sunday.

Top four advance to semifinals

HILTON HEAD, South Carolina, Apr 3: Steffi Graf will meet Gabriela Sabatini and Jennifer Capriati

earned a showdown with Arantxa Sanchez Vicario after the top four seeds rolled into the semifinals of the 750,000 dollars Family Circle Magazine Cup tennis tournament on Friday, reports Reuter.

The top four kept all their quarter-final matches short on a cold, windy day, with each winning in straight sets.

Top seed Graf had the easiest time reaching the semifinals as she continued to fine-tune her clay court game.

The German world number two gave American teenager Chanda Rubin a 50-minute tennis lesson on the way to a 6-1, 6-2 win.

Graf, who had not played on clay since last July, has improved with each match.

"I'm playing much better," noted Graf, who lost her serve just once in the match.

"The first day I was awful. When you're playing your first clay court tournament you need a longer time to get into it."

Second-seeded Sanchez brought unseeded German Sabine Hack back down to earth with a 6-2, 6-2 thrashing.

Hack, who reached the final in Houston last week, had continued her upset run here by taking out two seeds in one day on Thursday. Hack run picked off fifth seed Manuela Maleeva Fragniere and 13th seed Gig Fernandez, before running into the fourth-ranked Spaniard, who was just too much for her.

Fourth seed Capriati, who turned 17 earlier this week fought through a tough first set with Amanda Coetzer, before moving down the South

African in the second for a 6-4, 6-0 win.

"The main thing was that I stayed patient the whole time," said Capriati, whose impatience led to consecutive early round losses in her last two tournaments.

"When it got tight in the first set, I didn't just totally lose it and start going for it and try to end the game," Capriati said.

Sabatini had the toughest quarter-final opponent in sixth-seeded Bulgarian Katerina Maleeva. But the outcome was the same as the third-seeded Argentine cruised to a 6-4, 6-2 win to take her expected place in the final four.

This is the fifth women's tournament this season in which the four top seeds safely reached the semifinals.

"This is probably what should happen," Sabatini said. "It makes a good tournament."

Dream run of a reserve side

BERLIN, Apr 3: Hertha Berlin's reserve team were Thursday savouring a trend for German football underdogs to come from lower and lower origins, reports AFP.

Last year's German Cup was won by a Second Division side, Hanover 96, who enjoyed a moment of glory in this season's European Cup Winners' Cup. But even they have been outdone by Hertha who beat Chemnitz 2-1 on Wednesday to reach this year's domestic cup final.

The Berlin team are amateurs, as well as reserves to the Hertha side which performs unimpressively in the Bundesliga Second Division. Banned from using professionals, they have still claimed some impressive scalps on the way to the final.

Before Chemnitz they beat cup holders Hanover 96 and First Division Nuremberg.

"We have been dreaming of the final, but we have to admit we were a bit lucky," said coach Jochem Ziegert, who added that team celebrations would be allowed to go on until the weekend. Then it is back to the regional amateur league.

In front of 56,000 fans, the latest chapter of the Amateurs' fairytale started four minutes

into Wednesday night when 18-year-old Carsten Ramelew put Hertha ahead. Sweeper Sven Meyer headed the second goal. Though Chemnitz pulled one goal back from a Steffen Heidrich penalty, Berlin gritted their teeth to reach the June 12 final against First Division Bayer Leverkusen.

Leverkusen have already beaten the Hertha Berlin first team in the quarter-finals of the competition.

Ziegert commented: "We had our backs to the wall in the second half, and Chemnitz always looked dangerous. But we were able to hold on."

All Berlin was celebrating the unlikely heroes on Thursday. Ramelew, scorer of the first goal which has made him the hero of the night, said: "Anything is possible in the final."

Amateur teams can compete in the German Cup so long as they do not field a player with a professional contract.

A victory in the final would throw the Hertha reserves into the spotlight of next season's European Cup Winners' Cup against the cream of the continent's professional sides.

If the dream goes that far, the German Football Federation might be persuaded to let Berlin use some professionals from the first team.

Leverkusen, who made it through to the final on Tuesday by beating Eintracht Frankfurt 3-0, are taking the Berlin threat seriously. Leverkusen coach Retner Clamund watched Hertha's match and said: "Berlin are at the peak of form. They should not be underestimated."

In last season's cup final, Hanover 96 beat Werder Bremen, holders of the European Cup Winners' Cup. Bremen got their revenge in the first round of this season's European tournament when the two teams were drawn against each other.

Big day for bettors

LONDON, Apr 3: British betting shops, expecting their busiest day of the year on Saturday, have estimated that people will wager 60 million pounds (92 million US dollars) on the Grand National step-leap race, reports Reuter.

"Fifteen million people will have a flutter on the big race," said a spokesman for Ladbrokes, one of Britain's biggest betting shops.

"The race is a national institution and draws the biggest sporting audience of any event all year," the spokesman added.

Bayern suffer second setback

BONN, Apr 3: German league leaders Bayern Munich's hopes of sealing a record 13th title suffered another setback on Friday when they were beaten 2-0 by struggling Wattenscheid, their second defeat in a week, reports Reuter.

A superb, long-range effort from Ghana international Ali Ibrahim in the 70th minute and Polish striker Marek Lesniak's overhead kick eight minutes later gave relegation-threatened Wattenscheid two valuable points.

Bayern were unbeaten away this season until last Sunday's 3-1 loss at Hamburg.

But the Bavarians, who a few days ago boasted a four-point lead at the top, are now in real danger of losing their pole position.

Second-placed Werder Bremen would go level on points with a victory at home against 1991 champions Kaiserslautern today and could take over at the top on goal difference if they win by two clear goals.

German national team libero Olaf Thon was the only player to shine for Bayern. The defence looked nervous and

their midfield lacked imagination, German World Cup captain Lothar Matthaeus rarely figuring.

Coach Ribbeck is looking around for a new striker to boost his side. Judging by forwards Roland Wohlfarth and Bruno Labbadia's disappointing form on Friday, the Bayern reports

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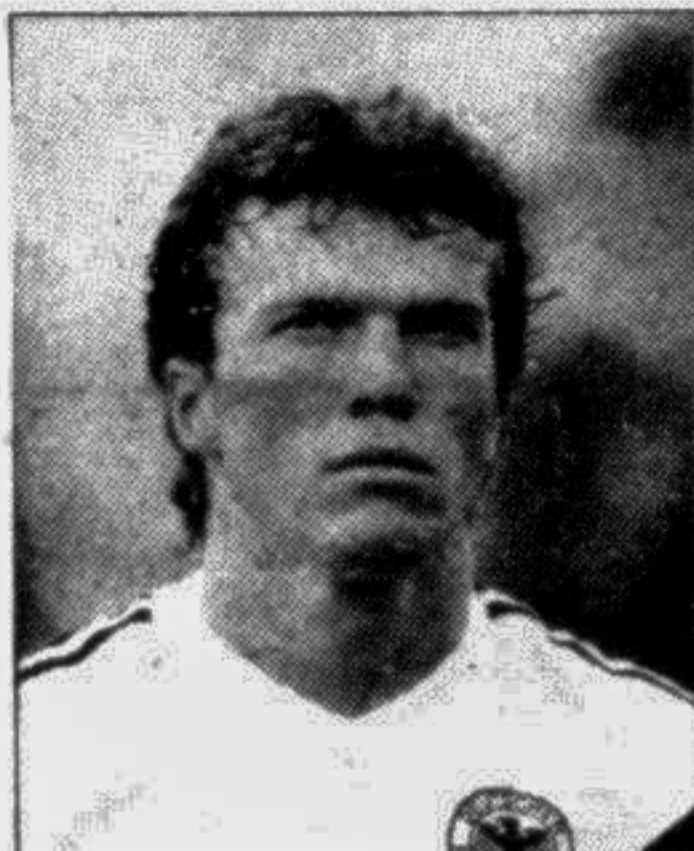
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LOTHAR MATTHAEUS coach needs to start spending his money quickly.

"After the defeat at Hamburg I said we played well but were unlucky to lose. Today we played badly and fully deserved to be beaten," Ribbeck said. "Thon was the

No more wild celebrations

RIO DE JANEIRO, Apr 3: Brazil referees have been ordered to clamp down on players performing elaborate dance routines to celebrate a goal, reports Reuter.

Namesnik, who finished second in the 400 IM final at Barcelona, clocked four minutes, 17.13 seconds in the event to beat Dutchman Marceel Wouda.

"I just came to this meet to salvage my season and I ended up winning a national title. I couldn't be more ecstatic or motivated for the future," Namesnik said.

The US record holder in the 400 IM said he wants to continue competing through the 1994 World Championships in Rome and maybe the 1996 Atlanta Olympics.

"I know I have a few good swims in me," he said. "I never really made a full commitment until a month ago."

Angie Wester-Krieg, at 28 the oldest woman competitor here, became the first double winner at the five-day meeting when she took the 2000-metre freestyle title in a personal best time of 2:03.84. She won the 200 butterfly on Thursday.

Other winners were Jon Sakovich in the 200-metre freestyle in 1:51.49 and 18-year-old Kristine Quance, who captured the women's 400-metre individual medley title in 4:42.08.

In the past month Brazil has been swept by a craze in which players celebrate by forming a group and then performing choreographed routines, some of questionable taste.

Four Flamengo players performed a routine on Sunday which would not have been out of place at the Moulin Rouge in Paris.

Corinthians players have introduced various style, including the "kangaroo dance," in which they hope in time down the pitch one after the other in a line. Another Corinthians routine resembles a rain dance.

Uniao Sao Joao players celebrated a recent goal by lining up and then going through a series of crab-like movements.

Other celebrations include dancing the lambada with the corner flag and "telephone celebrations," where the player picks up the public telephone which most stadiums have behind the goal and pretends to make a call.

But Brazilian Football Confederations refereeing director Ivan Mendes said referees had been told to class such celebrations as ungentlemanly conduct and punish offenders with the yellow card.

"They keep inventing new things. If we do not call a halt, there's no telling where this might stop."

VASCO UNDERMINED

Meanwhile, Vasco da Gama lost a 34-match unbeaten record in the Rio de Janeiro Championship when they went down to a surprise 1-0 defeat against Americano on the provincial teams notorious pitch.

Vasco were simply unable to play their normal game on Americano's bumpy, pot-holed field and there were so many long kicks upheld that the action at times bore more resemblance to rugby than soccer.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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