

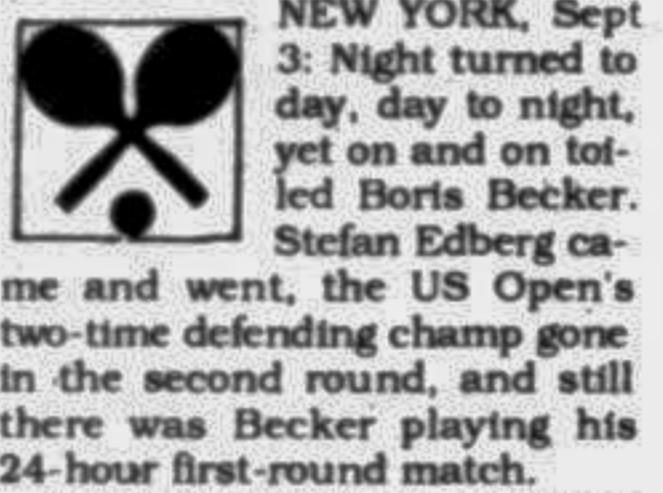
Sport



Fourth seed German Boris Becker makes a backhand return during his first round match against Russian Andrei Cherkasov in the US Open tennis on September 2. Becker came from two sets down to prevail 3-6, 6-7, 7-5, 6-4, 6-4 in the rain-delayed affair.

— AFP photo

Becker battles on, Edberg exits



NEW YORK, Sept 3: Night turned to day, day to night, yet on and on toiled Boris Becker. Stefan Edberg came and went, the US Open's two-time defending champ gone in the second round, and still there was Becker playing his 24-hour first-round match.

Edberg ended his marathon at last Thursday night, beating the rain, the heat, more rain and a pest Andrei Cherkasov to advance 3-6, 6-7 (10-8), 7-5, 6-4, 6-4 and land in the second round exactly 82 hours and 23 minutes after the Open began, reports AP.

Becker, the 1989 Open champ and No 4 seed this year, seemed doomed by his temper and his erratic shots in a match he wanted to play Monday. He started it Wednesday night, saw it suspended by rain after two points, and resumed Thursday afternoon.

Then, after several furious episodes of shouting at the umpire, and after a 1-hour rain delay following the third set that pushed the match into the night session, Becker regained his poise and his power and cut down his errors. The actual match time was 4 hours, 43 minutes, but it lasted from one night to the next.

And it turned, oddly, on an outburst by the normally composed Cherkasov. Up a break and leading 4-3 in the fourth set, Cherkasov angrily disputed a forehand volley by Becker that the Russian thought went wide. Cherkasov stomped around, fumed, marked the spot with his racket, then lost 10 of the

next 11 points to drop the set and go to a fifth.

Becker, who served 17 aces to Cherkasov's 5, thrives in five-setters with a 25-11 career record eight times after being down two sets. But he hardly wanted one this night with another match Friday against Jakob Hlasek.

Becker was pleased to still be in the tournament, but not amused by the schedule.

"I think this is not fair treatment to a guy like Becker, especially since they didn't have any big names on Monday," Becker said.

"If he's fit, he will go far," he said. 47-ranked Cherkasov said of Becker, who has won five of their six matches. "If he's not, he's going to lose, because five sets is very tough."

Edberg had chances, until he glanced up at one final lob. He couldn't reach it and he couldn't race back for it. And with that lob, he knew, the defense of his titles was over.

Edberg danced on the tight rope until he finally fell off, going down hard. He teetered precariously in the first round, surviving a five-setter just as he did three times before winning the title a year ago. He tried to do it again after losing the first two sets against 18th-ranked Karel Novacek, but this time Edberg fell 7-6 (7-3), 6-4, 4-6, 6-4.

Edberg's loss marked only the third time in the Open era that a defending champion has lost as early as the second round. Mats Wilander in 1989 and Ilie Nastase in 1973 were the two other champs to suffer such a quick exit.

The Edberg-Novacek drama

Edberg also became the sixth men's seed to fall, following five others who departed in the first round. Michael Chang, No. 7, had a brief struggle before advancing to the third round with a 6-1, 6-2, 4-6, 6-3 night victory over Nicolas Pereira, ending a 13 1/2-hour day of tennis at Flushing Meadow.

"It was one of those days," Edberg said. "He played a solid, good match. I was struggling with my timing. I couldn't generate any power for some reason. I was pushing the ball instead of hitting it."

Edberg, indeed, seemed on the verge of coming back in the fourth set. He hit a leaping overhead backhand to hold serve and tie the set 4-4. But Novacek, who out-aced Edberg 14-1, held with a clever combination of attack and baseline tennis.

When Edberg served to stay in the match, trailing 5-4, Novacek pounced on his first two serves to return brutal winners. Novacek then came up with another backhand return that Edberg netted. And after saving two match points, Edberg just watched in despair as a beautiful backhand lob by Novacek drifted over his head and safely inside the baseline.

Edberg, a Swede who lives in London, has never enjoyed playing in hot, humid weather. It bothered him in the first round when he nearly lost. It wasn't hot Thursday, but the clammy, heavy air wore him down.

Novacek was deservedly proud of the biggest victory of his life.

The Edberg-Novacek drama

was played out on the grand court at the same time Becker laboured on the stadium court. Rain interrupted that match moments after Edberg's loss.

In the women's draw, Martina Navratilova, seeking her fifth US Open crown but her first since 1987, made it into the third round, but was also surprised by the schedule makers.

"It was weird playing out there," she said following her 6-1, 6-3 dismantling of Sabine Appelmann. "I am glad I got out of the way."

"I played Monday at 1 o'clock and I played Thursday at night. It's like a third tournament going on here. I've been in New York hitting at Central Park and bidding my time."

According to board sources, the proposal, if approved, will require all players wanting to play for India or in Ranji Trophy, Duleep Trophy and other board organised fixtures, to be registered with it.

Once, they register, the sources say, the players will require the board's permission to participate in non-regular events like exhibition, charity and benefit matches.

If any player thinks that he can manage to do well for himself without registering with the board, "Good luck to him" the sources said.

The need for this step came about after the players went to the Supreme Court a few years ago accusing the board with interfering with their "right to work."

For the players, who are all categorised as professionals, playing in matches is their "right to work."

The board, after consulting legal opinion, has decided upon the scheme to register the players.

Public opinion has been expressed against the players participating in matches in which incidents insulting to the nation, like burning of the tricolour take place.

Three former India captains, Lala Amarnath, Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi and Bishen Singh Bedi, have also gone on record urging steps to prevent recurrence of such incidents.

Gurusinha to miss final one-dayer

COLOMBO, Sept 3: Shri Lanka's top-order batsman Asanka Gurusinha will miss Saturday's third and final one-day international against South Africa due to a recurring groin injury, reports AFP.

Gurusinha, one of the team's regular front line batsmen, has been replaced by newcomer Hemantha Wickramaratne in a 14-man squad announced Friday for the third match, a day-night clash at the Kettarama Stadium.

Wickramaratne played for a Board XI in a three-day game against the tourists last month but is yet to make it to the national team.

Wickramaratne, a left-hander like Gurusinha, may be challenged for the vacant slot if Sri Lanka decide to include an extra seamer. Fast bowler Chamika Ramanaikayake is awaiting a recall to the side if the need be.

Gurusinha was carried off the field after collapsing in a pain when racing to pick up a ball during the South African innings in Thursday's second one-day international which was also a day-night encounter at the Kettarama Stadium.

Despite the groin trouble, Gurusinha managed to return to the field to bat but could face only four balls before becoming part of the batting collapse that saw South Africa crush Sri Lanka by 124 runs.

— AFP photo

World champion Joko Suprianto of Indonesia and teammates leave Indira Gandhi indoor stadium yesterday after the structure developed leaks during heavy shower causing indefinite delay in the proceedings of the World Cup badminton championships. The Indonesians are favoured to take the cup.

— AFP photo

Litmond badminton has come to stay

Sports Reporter

Women shuttlers of the country from now on should look forward to at least one regular annual exposure — an exclusive badminton tournament to be held under the auspices of Bangladesh Women Sports Federation (BWSF) from September 4 to 7, Mokhtarul Rahman, chairman of the sponsors, Litmond Group, apprised his concern's decision to turn the meet into an annual affair.

"I was more nervous for that match than any match I have played in my career, including all the Davis Cup matches," he said of the all-American Wimbledon final against Jim Courier on Thursday.

"It was huge. I mean it was the biggest match I have played."

To anyone who watched Sampras become the youngest-ever US Open champion at 19-years of age in 1990, that the supremely talented serve-and-volleyer would one day become Wimbledon champion seemed inevitable.

Litmond are bearing the financial brunt of the three-day meet. They have paid Taka 50,000 more than two third of the Taka 65,000, budget earmarked for the tourney.

Although four top national players are not taking part in the inaugural meet, 30 shuttlers of five divisions — Dhaka, Rajshahi, Khulna, Chittagong, Barisal — and different schools, colleges and clubs have confirmed participation.

State Minister for Youth and Sports, Sadeq Hossain is expected to inaugurate the meet at the National Sports Council gym on September 4.

BCCI plans registration for players

NEW DELHI, Sept 3: The Board of Control for Cricket in India contemplating registration of players to check their participation in unauthorised tournaments, reports PTI.

The board, upset over the incidents in London earlier this week during a match between players from India and Pakistan, has put up this proposal as one of the important items for consideration in its annual general meeting to be held in Gwalior on September 29 and 30.

According to board sources, the proposal, if approved, will require all players wanting to play for India or in Ranji Trophy, Duleep Trophy and other board organised fixtures, to be registered with it.

Once, they register, the sources say, the players will require the board's permission to participate in non-regular events like exhibition, charity and benefit matches.

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— AFP photo

Sampras tells untold story

NEW YORK, Sept 3: Wimbledon champion Pete Sampras revealed on Thursday just how much pressure he had put on himself to win the world's most prestigious tennis title, reports Reuter.

"I was getting a little bit frustrated. But the Wimbledon victory was very big for me mentally."

He said reaching the final at the All-England Club was simply not good enough.

"If I would have gone down there and lost to Jim on grass, his worst surface, it would have taken me some time to get over it," he admitted.

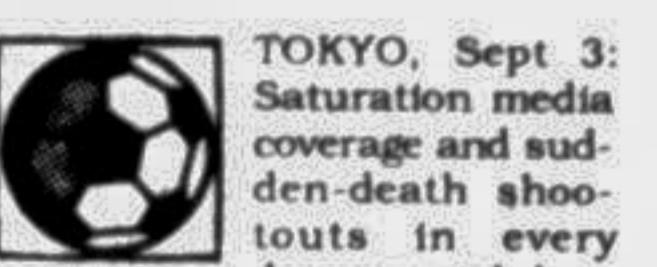
"I don't know how I would have dealt with it mentally. Fortunately I don't have to worry about that," he said.

Sampras became the top-ranked player in the world earlier this year, but has since dropped to number two behind Courier.

He can finish the year at number one with another US Open victory, but that would just be icing on Sweet Pete's cake. Piling up the major titles is what he is after.

"The bottom line here is winning major titles," he said.

Secret of J-League success



TOKYO, Sept 3: Saturation media coverage and sudden-death shoot-outs in every drawn match have made Japan's new soccer league a success, its chairman said on Friday, reports Reuter.

Saburo Kawabuchi said most of the credit for the J-League's successful debut was due to blanket press and television coverage before and after the May launch, the equivalent of about 15 billion yen (142 million dollars) in advertising.

"We must say Thank you to the Japanese press for letting us cut back on our advertising budget," said Kawabuchi. The J-League had, nonetheless, spent 500 million yen (4.76 million dollars) over the past two years on advertising.

Kawabuchi said the Japanese had apparently grown sick of sports such as baseball and had been seeking a new professional sport. The birth of the new soccer league met their needs.

"I think the Japanese have understood for the first time that soccer is an aggressive, speedy and colourful sport."

Recent polls showed soccer now rated as one of the nation's most popular sports.

Kawabuchi said 48 foreign players from 14 countries were playing in the 10 team league.

He said he hoped to raise the skills of Japanese players and to expand the number of teams from 10 to 16 over the next 10 years. Two new clubs were expected to join the league next year.

Kawabuchi said he was confident that Japan's bid to stage the 2002 World Cup finals would be successful.

Japan have never played in the World Cup finals but are

one of six teams to have reached the second round of the Asian qualifying competition.

The J-League is the only championship in the world to adopt two 15-minute periods of sudden-death extra-time followed by penalty shoot-outs. J-League teams, which feature international soccer stars such as Brazilian Zico and Alcindo and former England captain Gary Lineker, have filed stadiums around the country. Television coverage has attracted the sort of viewing figures previously confined to long-established sports such as baseball and sumo wrestling. Kawabuchi said the Japanese had apparently grown sick of sports such as baseball and had been seeking a new professional sport. The birth of the new soccer league met their needs.

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Brazil's probable victory would leave them level on points with Bolivia at the top of the group.

Two teams go through from the group which also includes Ecuador and Uruguay, who meet in Guayaquil on Sunday.

Brazil's 6-0 win over Bolivia last Sunday has lifted the pressure off the players and coach Carlos Alberto Parreira, at least for the time being.

Striker Bebeto and midfield strong man Dunga are both suspended. Bebeto received a second yellow card against Bolivia while Dunga was sent off.

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