

Graham Taylor faces a bleak future

LONDON, Nov 19: England manager Graham Taylor is facing an uncertain future and almost certain dismissal — not to mention continuing vilification from an increasingly rabid tabloid press corps, reports Reuters.

His Welsh counterpart Terry Yorath has started a war of words with his bosses and has been sounded out by clubs in Greece and Turkey.

Northern Ireland's manager Billy Bingham has retired.

Scotland's newly appointed coach Craig Brown is just two days into the job on a permanent basis following the resignation in September of his predecessor Andy Roxburgh.

While their international bosses face up to their own personal nightmares, more than 100 of Britain's top players know they can book their summer holidays anywhere in the world next June and July because none of them will be playing in the World Cup finals in the United States.

That was the bleak, sobering scenario facing the devastated soccer elite of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales on Friday, two days after all four countries officially ended their involvement with the 1994 tournament.

The only representation from the British Isles will be the Republic of Ireland, coached by Jack Charlton, ironically a member of the England team who won the World Cup in 1966 and whose first choice side almost all play their league football in England.

One other English manager will be involved — Roy Hodgson who has taken Switzerland to their first finals for 28 years.

But unlike Charlton and Hodgson, almost everyone else associated with British soccer has been left wondering where it has all gone wrong because when the World Cup finals kick off there will be no British teams present for the first time since 1938.

Failure to qualify is a disappointment for all four countries — but is a major blow to England where the soccer industry fears it will lose out on around 30 million pounds (44 million dollars) in lost revenue from associated sales, advertising and endorsements.

Most soccer experts agree that a drastic overhaul is needed because England's fall from grace has been a swift, inglorious one. Their almost unanimous call is for a move away from the long-ball game, for improvements in coaching standards — especially for youngsters — and for the top

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GRAHAM TAYLOR

players to play less matches.

Under former manager Bobby Robson, England reached the semifinals in 1990 and were only denied a place in the final by losing a penalty shootout to eventual champions Germany.

The blame for the decline since then has been laid almost unanimously on Taylor, who succeeded Robson immediately after those finals.

His task has not been helped by self-interested clubs and injuries to key players. But many feel those are not valid enough excuses — and say the technical abilities displayed by the players in Wednesday's largely meaningless 7-1 win over San Marino were woeful.

Bobby Charlton, a member of the victorious 1966 World Cup winning side who won 106 England caps between

1953 and 1970, pointed an accusing finger at the English Football Association and its theories on coaching.

"We have fallen years behind the rest of the world. I am now heavily involved in coaching youngsters and we are not able to teach them properly because of restrictions imposed on us by the authorities.

"In Germany, in Spain, in Italy, gifted boys can become members of the big clubs when they are seven or eight years old.

"They are taught the right way to do things from the world go. But that is not allowed to happen in England. Some of the San Marino players looked better on the ball doing the basics than we did and they are amateurs and our top men earn 8,000 pounds (11,000) a week. It was shameful.

Alan Mullery, who won 35 caps in an eight-year international career, was just one of dozens of voices who joined the chorus calling for Taylor's immediate dismissal on Thursday. It was hard to find any support for Taylor anywhere.

"He has taken our game backwards for three and a half years," said Mullery.

"His tactical thinking has been muddled, his selections have been a disaster. He should do the honourable thing and resign because he has failed in the major task handed to him which was to make sure he got England to the 1994 World Cup finals."

England's fate was effectively sealed when they lost 2-0 to Holland in a critical qualifier in Rotterdam a month ago.

Although England duly ended their unsuccessful qualifying campaign with the win over San Marino their performance was criticised for its sterility, imagination and control among the players.

San Marino even took the lead after only eight seconds — and held it for 20 minutes while England floundered.

former England international said on Thursday. "Those 20 minutes represent the absolute lowest point of England's soccer history. We were atrocious. But perhaps some good can come out of this — a major rethink of the way we run football in this country. It would be the only positive step ahead."

The English FA, run by ex-public schoolboys with loyalties to institutions like Oxford and Cambridge University, the Army, the Navy and the Royal Air Force, is a notoriously conservative body where reform moves along at a snail's pace.

But even the FA has been so stunned by England's failure to qualify for the finals for the third time in 19 years that Graham Kelly, the FA's chief executive, has hinted at what amounts to revolutionary change in the running of the national squad.

Kelly has said that a new two-man managerial team could be appointed with a younger coach being groomed to take over from a more experienced man — an exact copy of the system used to great success in Germany.

"We are interested in getting the structure right, looking at the system, long term, not just sacking Graham Taylor then appointing his successor as the next most successful club manager," says Kelly.

Perhaps there will be major reform in England — but all this has been proposed before.

Exactly 20 years ago this month, England failed to reach the 1974 finals when they were held to a draw by Poland at Wembley.

As the Daily Telegraph said then, in words frighteningly familiar today "The long difficult task of rehabilitation must begin immediately. The mammoth job now is to pick England off the floor, rebuild the squad, reshape the system and produce some new ideas."

The FA promptly ordered a full-scale investigation to "restore England's prestige."

Two decades on, millions of fans are still waiting for the improvement.

FIFA does not want to rock the boat

LONDON, Nov 19: Soccer's world governing body FIFA dismissed speculation Friday that Britain's four soccer-playing nations should combine into one team for future World Cups, reports AP.

For the first time, none of the four British nations — England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland — have made it to next year's World Cup in the United States.

One British tabloid, the Daily Express, suggested FIFA would support the idea of the four combining to enter a stronger team and making it easier for other nations to qualify.

But FIFA spokesman Guido Tognini said that wasn't true. "FIFA doesn't want to take anything away from anybody," he said. "People all over the world have discussed this idea but it has never come to us to decide."

"Sometimes we have heard people talking about it when two or three British teams, qualified. But it would mean big changes to the statutes and I don't think anyone would want that."

Some nations, notably in Africa where soccer is developing fast, have complained that Britain has four teams trying to qualify. If there were one, it would mean a better chance for other nations to get through.

Although the move would mean that star players such as England's Paul Gascoigne and David Platt, Welshmen Ryan Giggs, Mark Hughes and Ian Rush, and Scotland's Gary McAllister and Ally McCoist all would be on the same team, the British nations would oppose the idea.

The four teams all have their own Football Associations and their own identities and one problem would be finding one man to be manager.

"It's about national pride," said Terry Cooper, a former England player who now is manager of division one Birmingham City.

"We invented the game, we should play it as England."

Sampras going great guns

FRANKFURT, Nov 15: It's been a great year for Pete Sampras, and it's looking better and better.

Sampras advanced to the semifinals of the ATP Tour World Championship Thursday by beating Stefan Edberg 6-3, 7-6 (7-3), reports AP.

The American, who is already assured of finishing the year as the top-ranked player, raised his round-robin record to 2-0.

Sampras won the tour-end-

ing event in 1991. Edberg, champion in 1989, is the only other previous winner among the current top eight players in the world competing in this dirr 2.75 million event.

Edberg, ranked fifth, is 1-1 and could still reach the semifinals if he beats Goran Ivanisevic in the last group match Friday.

Earlier, Ivanisevic overcame breathing problems and beat Sergi Bruguera 6-4, 7-6 (7-4) to keep alive his hopes of advancing.

Ivanisevic, ranked eighth in

the world, evened his record at 1-1 in the Arthur Ashe Group, after a three-set loss to Sampras on Wednesday.

Bruguera, the French Open champion who is ranked fourth in the world, is a clay-court specialist who has never beaten Ivanisevic on another surface. Following an opening-day loss to Stefan Edberg, Bruguera dropped to 0-2 and is out of contention.

Michael Stich, also 2-0, is a certain semifinalist from the Stan Smith Group. His semifinal opponent will be the winner of Friday's match between Edberg and Ivanisevic.

Andrei Medvedev, the rookie from Ukraine, beat Michael Chang 2-6, 6-4, 6-2 late Thursday to earn a semifinal clash with Sampras.

Chang has now failed to get past the round-robin section of the event in three attempts.

Medvedev, ranked sixth, rallied from a 4-1 deficit in the second set, winning five games in a row to level the score. He was a break down in the decisive set but came back once again. Medvedev saved to break points before serving out the match.

Sampras has won eight titles this year, including Wimbledon and the US Open. His singles record is 81-14 and he is the first player to win 80 or more matches in a year since Ivan Lendl in 1985.

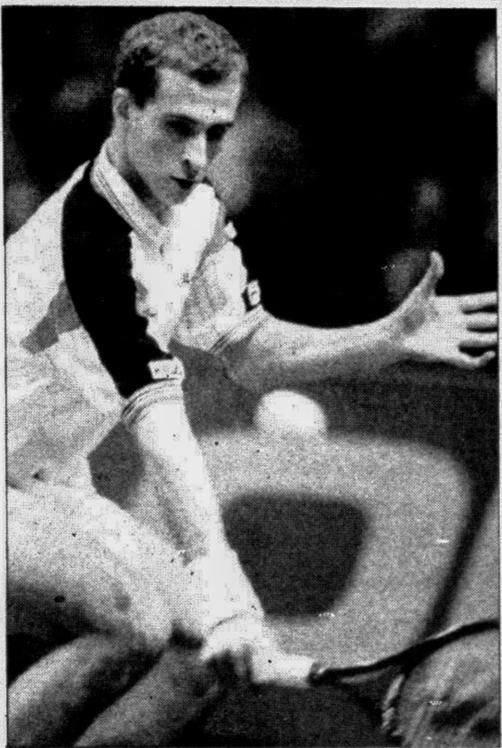
He broke for a decisive 3-1 lead, but had trouble putting the first set away. He fought off a break point after some erratic play, but finally clinched it with a service winner.

The two traded breaks at the start of the second set, but from then on it went with serve.

In the tiebreaker, Edberg served a double-fault and then hit a volley into the net to give Sampras a 4-1 lead. Sampras wasted two match points on Edberg's serve, but converted the third when Edberg's return sailed long.

Ivanisevic only served four aces against Bruguera, a dismal number for one of the biggest servers in the game.

Early in the second set, Ivanisevic was given smelling salts by the tournament doctor during two changeovers.



Andrei Medvedev of the Ukraine plays a delicate backhand return to world number two Jim Courier of the United States in their ATP match in Frankfurt, Germany on Nov 17.

Lineker goes to hospital again

CHICAGO, Nov 19: Former English national football captain Gary Lineker underwent reconstructive surgery on the big toe of his right foot in hopes of being ready for the coming Japan league season, reports AFP.

Lineker, 32, was a three-time English scoring leader, the top 1986 World Cup scorer and two-time footballer-of-the-year in his homeland. He signed two-season contract last year with Grampus Eight of Nagoya.

The toe problem stems from a 1991 injury that has not improved despite medication, the therapy and a prior operation. The operation was performed last week but revealed in public on Thursday.

They don't trust CODA

ATLANTA, Georgia, Nov 19: Residents of impoverished neighbourhoods facing renovation for the 1996 Olympics said they do not trust promises from city government officials who want revitalisation at any price, reports AFP.

"We don't object to people coming in to build buildings or clean up," said resident Greg Duhart. "But we do object to people coming in and doing whatever they want, thereby pushing current residents further outside the mainstrems of society."

The objections came at a hearing here Thursday with the Corporation for Olympic Development in Atlanta (CODA), a city government group aimed at easing construction projects in an area that has suffered from years of neglect and decay.

Ten major venues, the Olympic Village and many hotels are in the affected area, including the 200-million-dollar Olympic stadium now under construction.

"We're not trying to be violent or mean-spirited," Duhart said. "We just want things to be done right this time."

Clara Axam, CODA's president, said the Olympics give Atlanta the chance to create a new future for the city with positive changes.

"This is all about empowerment for the people in these neighbourhoods," she said.

The neighbourhood people, however, said they felt it was all about the Olympics and they were getting shoved aside for the Games' greater glory.

"Until the Olympics came around, there was no private interest in these communities. Stadium task force member Otis Hunter said.

"Now there are prospects for growth and investment in these communities. People feel these groups will come in to get rich quick and say to hell with the communities."

In the past, city governments destroyed many poorer neighbourhoods for commercial development with little compensation for land owners.

French coach vows to fight on

PARIS, Nov 19: French soccer team boss Gerard Houllier, under heavy pressure to resign following

France's shock exit from the World Cup, vowed on Thursday to fight on until next year, reports Reuters.

"We will see if they fire me but for the time being, my contract runs until 1994 and I intend to get back to work," Houllier told a packed news conference.

French federation president Jean Fournet Fayard confirmed Houllier would keep his job even though France, semifinalists in both 1982 and 1986, have now failed to qualify for two successive finals.

"We keep our trust in him," he said. "He is under contract until June next year and, as from today, there is no question of breaking that contract."

France, who needed only a draw to book a place in next year's World Cup finals, lost 2-1 to Bulgaria at the Parc des Princes on Wednesday with Emil Kostadinov scoring the winner in the last minute.

"We made silly mistakes to give away both goals but I feel sorry for the players because they deserved to be in the finals," said Houllier, who took over from Michel Platini follow-

ing France's poor showing at the European Championships in June last year.

Wednesday's match was the second time in a month that France lost and important World Cup qualifier in the dying minutes.

A month ago France were leading 2-1 at home against Israel with only seven minutes to play before losing 3-2.

On Wednesday the agony was even worse. France were only moments away from a place in the World Cup before Bulgaria scored to win 2-1 and qualify instead.

"I'm not looking for any excuses but if we missed our chance, I think it was rather against Israel then against Bulgaria," said Houllier.

After the Israel match, Platini, now heading the organising committee of the 1998 World Cup to be held in France, said he thought Houllier should resign if France did not qualify.

"I don't judge what he does as president of the organising committee and I think he shouldn't judge what I do," said Houllier, who was Platini's deputy when the former great playmaker was in charge of the national team. "But everybody knows that my relations with Michel are good."

They are not quite as good with Paris St Germain striker

David Ginola, how said before the match he was sick and tired of being left on the bench while Jean-Pierre Papin and Eric Cantona always had a place in the team.

But Houllier did not have too many kind words for the PSG striker either.

"David Ginola committed a crime by putting pressure on some players at a moment when fraternity was badly needed," said an angry Houllier.

The 44-year-old former English teacher, regarded as a soccer intellectual and an expert on tactical theory, said he had been under heavy pressure. "I'm not paranoid and I'm not saying some people are after me but I've had to prepare many matches with somebody making comments or writing something which put a lot a pressure on me," he said.

Houllier, who trained current league leaders Paris St Germain from 1985 to 1988 and took them to their only championship title in 1986, said things would never quite be the same in French soccer.

"It is certain that the team has turned a page and now we must concentrate on the European Championships in 1996 and on the 1998 World Cup," he said.

"There is plenty of work to do but I feel in a fighting mood."

Asian b'ball in semifinal stage

JAKARTA, Nov 19: South Korea will face China while North Korea will play against Iran in the semifinals of the 17th men's Asian Basketball Confederation (ABC) to be held on Saturday, reports AFP.

Defending champions China will face the second-ranked South Korean team after it crushed Taiwan 97-67 Thursday. China had led by 47-35 at half-time.

South Korea obtained its semifinal berth by beating Japan 89-66 earlier Friday.

By half-time, the South Koreans lagged by one point at 38-39 to the Japanese team, mainly motivated by Akifumi Yamatsuki and Hideaki Tayomi.

South Korea's Mon Kyung Eun was the star in both halves, reducing Japan's lead by three shots in the last minutes of the first, adding another three points six minutes before the game ended.

Fifth-ranked North Korea claimed its place in the semifinals after it easily crushed the high hopes of Saudi Arabia 74-61 (37-23). The Saudis had already scored an upset win against champions China in the preliminary rounds.

Russian gold drought ends

MELBOURNE, Nov 19: Viktor Tregubov and Sergei Syrtsov ended Russia's medal drought at the world weightlifting championships by sweeping the gold medals Friday in the 99-kilogram division, reports AP.

Syrtsov, world champion in 1991, won the snatch gold medal with a lift of 190 kilograms (418 3/4 pounds) and Tregubov then won the clean-and-jerk with 222.5 kilograms (490 1/2 pounds) and the overall title with a total of 407.5 kilograms (898 1/4 pounds).

Tregubov, the 1992 Olympic champion, edged Syrtsov out of the overall gold on body weight after they both had the same total.

He also got medals to replace his Olympic gold medal, which was stolen when his apartment was burgled six months ago.

"I won't be leaving these medals in my apartment," he said. "I will either take them with me when I leave home, or put them in a bank."

Tregubov also won a bronze medal in the snatch behind Syrtsov and silver medalist Nicu Vlad of Australia, while Boris Burvov of Ecuador took the bronze in both the jerk and overall total.

Romanian-born Vlad had been aiming to win Australia's

first-ever gold at a world championships but missed all three of his jerks — two at 220 kilograms and one at 222.5 kilograms.

"I just can't explain it," he said. "I have lifted 230 in training and lift 220 all the time."

Tregubov and Syrtsov, close friends and rivals, are among only six Russians competing in the world championships.

Russia originally was banned from the championships, along with Poland, after three of its competitors failed International Weightlifting Federation drug tests.

The Russians were readmitted after paying a US dirr 50,000 fine and cut back their team numbers because of financial difficulties.

"Not knowing whether we were coming to the championships or not made it difficult for us psychologically," Tregubov said. "It was hard to prepare the right way."

Tregubov also beat Syrtsov on body weight at the Barcelona Olympics. "That is the sport. There is nothing I can do," Syrtsov said.

In the women's competition, a shoulder injury to Xing Shuwen robbed China Friday of its perfect record — and indirectly sparked a political row.

Xing easily won the snatch gold medal in the new 83-kilogram division with a lift of

107.5 kilograms (237 pounds), but injured her left shoulder in the process and had to withdraw from the clean-and-jerk.

That opened the door for Chen Shu-chih of Chinese Taipei to win the gold medals for both the jerk and overall total.

Chen, who took the silver in the snatch with 102.5 kg (226 pounds), hoisted 127.5 kg (281 pounds) in the jerk for a winning total of 230 kg (507 pounds).

A row broke out after the gold medal ceremony when organizers declined to play an anthem for Chinese Taipei, leaving the medalists standing in silence.

Chang Chao-kuo, the head of the Chinese Taipei delegation, lodged an official protest and Chen said she was "bitterly disappointed."

Organizers said they were bound by International Olympic Committee rules which permit only the IOC anthem to be played when Taiwan wins international sporting contests.

China and Taiwan have had political differences since 1949, when the island state declared its independence. China claims Taiwan as part of its territory.

Officials said it was the responsibility of the Chinese Taipei delegation to provide the IOC anthem.

Pierce nips Navratilova

NEW YORK, Nov 19: Martina Navratilova met the future Thursday night. Her name is Mary Pierce.

The game is power tennis. Navratilova, playing in a tournament she won four times and facing an opponent less than half her age, lost 6-1, 3-6, 6-4 in the quarterfinals of the Virginia Slims Championships, reports AP.

"She hit a couple of forehands as hard as anything that I have seen," Navratilova said.

Pierce, 18, registered her second straight upset in this dirr 3.5 million season-ending tournament. She advanced to the semifinals where she will meet the winner of Friday night's match between No 2 seed Arantxa Sanchez Vicario and No 7 Jana Novotna.

Taking notice of what happened to the tournament's No 3 seed, top-seeded Steffi Graf took no chances, crushing Amanda Coetzer 6-1, 6-2 to grab a semifinal berth against the winner of Friday's match between No 4 Conchita Mar-

tinez and No 8 Anke Huber. Navratilova, 37, has said 1994 will be her final year on the tour. With her will go players whose games are built on touch, spin and guile. Remaining will be the young power hitters like Pierce and Monica Seles, whose idea of changing pace is hitting harder.

The Madison Square Garden crowd was solidly behind the woman who has won a record 166 tournaments. Pierce didn't let that bother her, and by the end the fans were roaring for her laser groundstrokes and service returns.

Several times Navratilova muttered "Yep" as the ball went whizzing past for a clean winner. On the final point, Pierce slammed a screeching forehand that found the far corner as Navratilova turned and walked off the court. She has seen enough winners in her 21-year professional career to know one.

The match wouldn't have been nearly as long — 1 hour,

56 minutes — nor as entertaining without the skill and determination of Navratilova.

Pierce couldn't miss to begin the night, and Navratilova had trouble unpacking her game.

Pierce, who now calls France home, overran the world's third-ranked player, breaking Navratilova at love in the fourth game and at 15 in the sixth. Twenty-four minutes into the match, Pierce zipped through the first set.

She began the second set as if she had a car double-parked, grabbing a love-40 lead on Navratilova's serve. But Navratilova didn't win more than 1,800 matches by folding.

Instead of heading to the net at every chance, Navratilova stayed back and traded groundstrokes. That meant Pierce no longer had a target for her passing shots, nor did she have the sharp angles she had in the opening set.

And Navratilova's hopes for a fifth Virginia Slims title were shelved until her final appearance next year.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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