

WEEKEND SPORTS WEEKEND



Former Argentinian soccer star Diego Maradona watches the French league match between Paris Saint-Germain and Auxerre at the Parc des Princes in Paris on Jan 4. —AFP photo

FIFA accepts Saudi burden

Riyadh, Jan 5: World soccer's governing body FIFA will take over the Intercontinental Championship starting in 1997, which will help the tournament, first conceived by Saudi Arabia, gain prominence, soccer officials said Wednesday.

A formal announcement is likely to be made by FIFA president Joao Havelange when he travels to Riyadh Friday to take part in the inauguration of the second intercontinental Championship.

Argentina, Mexico, Denmark, Nigeria, Japan and hosts Saudi Arabia are taking part in the \$1.5 million tournament that will run through January 13.

FIFA will supervise the tournament from next time, said Abdullah al-Athel, director of the current championship. "Saudi Arabia has done (that) which it can do and we are happy that we have contributed to the development of soccer," al-Athel told a news conference Wednesday.

In 1991 the soccer confederations of Asia, Africa, South America, the Caribbean and North and Central America agreed to organize the Intercontinental Championship.

The championship was to take place every two years with



JOAO HAVELANGE

each confederation hosting the event on a rotating basis. The first tournament was held in 1992 in Riyadh with Argentina winning in a field that included Ivory Coast, the United States and Saudi Arabia.

Since no other country offered to host the second championship, soccer-crazy Saudi Arabia agreed to host it for the second time. The tournament was to be held in 1994, but the World Cup and logistical problems forced the organizers to delay it until January 1995.

"The idea that FIFA should take over the tournament came in 1994 and it is surely good news," said Dato Peter Velappan, general secretary of

Leconte: Loved and lost?

Doha, Jan 5: One day after winning his first match on the ATP tour since June, French star Henri Leconte said Wednesday he still enjoys the game but is unhappy with some of the changes taking place in tennis, reports AP.

"We need a few more strong personalities on the tour because people are getting bored," said Leconte. "There's a new generation now and I

don't understand it! The atmosphere is different. Players practice and then go back to the hotels."

Leconte, who will turn 32 this summer, still remains a fan favourite despite starting his 16th year on the tour.

"I'm a part of the old generation of (Bjorn) Borg, (Guillermo) Vilas and (Ilie) Nastase. I started playing with a wooden racket," said Leconte whose career has been hampered in recent years by having to undergo surgery three times on his back.

On Tuesday night he came back from the brink of defeat to beat No. 5 seed Alexander Volkov of Russia in a three-set marathon at the Qatar Open.

harder each year and I'm too old to play in qualifiers. "Maybe, I'll go on to the over-35 tour. It could be more fun and there is certainly less pressure," added Leconte who has collected over \$3 million in prize money during his career.

Highlights of his career have included being runner-up at the French Open in 1988 and helping France clinch the Davis Cup against the United States three years later.

"It will be my 15th French Open this year. I want to play my best and stay fit. I am not pushing myself that hard because last year, I was dead with my back and shoulders," said Leconte.

Leconte will skip the Australian Open in Melbourne later this month as well as the Davis Cup first-round clash against the United States because of his impending wedding.

Leconte has always been a crowd favourite because of his on-court antics and impromptu playacting with spectators but he's worried about the changes being made to the game as administrators toy with the rules to boost the sport's appeal.

"He would rather have the sound of silence when he's on court than loud music blaring around the stadium. "Imagine if you played music in golf when Jack Nicklaus was putting. He wouldn't be very happy," joked Leconte.

German court to hear Seles' appeal

HAMBURG, Germany, Jan 5: A German court will hear an appeal by tennis star Monica Seles and prosecutors against a suspended sentence given to the man who stabbed her on court and curtailed her career, court officials said on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

Guenther Prache, an East German lathe operator who said he acted out of love for Seles' German rival Steffi Graf, got a two-year suspended sentence for stabbing Seles in the back with a kitchen knife during a changeover at the April 1993 Hamburg Open.

The court argued he was emotionally retarded and might not have been completely responsible for his actions.

But the higher district court in Hamburg decided the appeal against the leniency of the sentence would be heard. A court spokesman said the hearing would probably be in the spring.

The 21-year-old Yugoslav-born Seles was ranked number one in the world at the time of the attack, by which time she had already amassed eight Grand Slam titles.

But she has not lifted a racket competitively since then. She has said she wants to return to top-class tennis but has given no indication when that might be.



HENRI LECONTE

Before the two-and-a-half hour first-round encounter against Volkov, which he won 4-6, 7-6 (8-6) 7-5, Leconte hadn't won a match since the Halle tournament in Germany last June. Ironically, that too was against the Russian player.

"I will play this season and hopefully carry on for another two or three years. But if I have any more back injuries, I'll stop," said Leconte, who will marry bullfighter Marie Sara on Jan. 20.

"I love this game. I love playing tennis so it will be very difficult to stop. However, the circuit is getting harder and

Grobelaar probe to drag on

LONDON, Jan 5: The investigation into match-fixing allegations against Southampton goalkeeper Bruce Grobelaar is expected to last for at least another month, reports AP.

Police said Tuesday they would not be rushed into a decision over whether to press criminal charges over the allegations that first appeared in the Sun newspaper eight weeks ago.

Tax lands Shilton in trouble

LONDON, Jan 5: Former England goalkeeper Peter Shilton has been temporarily suspended as manager of Second Division Plymouth over a tax debt, reports Reuters.

Shilton, who won a world record 125 England caps, was given a deadline of Wednesday to settle an outstanding tax bill of 50,000 pounds sterling (£31,250 dollars).

Plymouth chairman Dan McCauley had threatened Shilton with dismissal unless the debt, stemming from his signing on fee at the club in March 1992, was settled.

Shilton, who retired from international football after the 1990 World Cup finals, said: "I have been suspended for a few days pending further discussions. After that I will have another meeting with the board."

Former Ipswich and Sheffield Wednesday midfielder Steve McCall has been appointed temporary player-manager of Plymouth.

Polgar sisters awarded

BUDAPEST, Jan 5: Hungarian sisters Zsuzsa, Zsófia and Judit Polgar were awarded an annual prize Wednesday by the International Chess Writers Association, which cited them as unique talents, reports AP.

The three shared the association's 1994 World Chess Oscar prize because Zsuzsa Polgar was the first woman to become a Grandmaster based on the men's ranking system. Judit has led the women's world rankings since 1988 and Zsófia was best on the second boards at the last two Chess Olympiads, the citation said.

"The Polgar family is unique in the world of chess," Dmitry Bjelica, the association's general secretary, said at the award ceremony.

Judit Polgar, 18, leads the International Chess Federation's women's ranking. Zsuzsa, 25, is third. Zsófia, 20, is sixth.

Their father, Laszlo, pushed them to chess excellence from early childhood. Judit became the youngest international grandmaster in history at 15 years, five months in 1991.

Silver sprinter tries to scrape off his 'drug tattoo'

By Phil Minshull

Horace Dove-Edwin, the Sierra Leone sprinter who finished second behind Britain's Linford Christie in the Commonwealth Games 100 metres but then tested positive for steroids, has spoken out for the first time since his disgrace. His arguments, reports Gemini News Service, raise issues of importance to many developing countries.

SIERRA Leonean sprinter Horace Dove-Edwin has broken his silence about the charge that performance-enhancing drugs helped him win silver in the Commonwealth Games. He captured hearts at the "Friendly Games" in Vancouver with his tears on the medal podium, only to turn into the villain of the hour when he tested positive for steroids. Now, after months out of sight, he has emerged from hiding to claim that he is innocent of any deliberate drug-taking.

"I want to take this up but you need a lot of finance," Dove-Edwin says of his disappearance from public view, which caused his national federation to tell the International Amateur Athletic Federation that it was worried about his welfare. The impression the media have got is that silence is a result but my federation has not been forward to contact me."

The sprinter was speaking in London after arriving from Atlanta in the United States, where he is a post-graduate sports studies student. He is seeking medical and legal advice before a hearing by his own federation, which so far has not even provided him with a ticket back to Freetown.

The main issue in his claim to innocence, he says, is that the forms accompanying his urine sample do not tally with the time he actually provided the sample. They say he was tested at a time when he had not even run in the final and not given a sample. I have a good alibi and didn't commit any crime."

His suspicions about a miscarriage of justice are heightened by his belief that he might inadvertently have been guilty of a lesser doping offence.

"I was taking a cold remedy but it didn't show up in my sample," he says. "However, afterwards I realised it was on the list of banned medications."

Cough and cold medicines on banned lists usually contain ephedrine, a mild stimulant, which normally carries a three-month competition ban.

His comment that "ignorance is no excuse but I didn't have a coach or manager and like a lot of developing countries we didn't have much medical guidance" should ring alarm bells for athletics federations in many developing countries.

Many small and poor nations now have international calibre runners and their athletics federations have a responsibility to inform their athletes about drug-testing procedures and banned substances. But their ability to do so often lags far behind their athletes' ability on the track and in some cases behind their athletes' off-track access to performance-enhancing drugs.

"When a doping case comes up they [the Sierra Leone federation] are in the dark because of its complexity. They don't know what to do next," he says.

The Sierra Leone Amateur Athletic Association failed to respond to eight IAAF requests for them to get in touch with

their athlete and inform him of his rights to a hearing. At one stage the Association faced the possibility of suspension from the IAAF.

They took weeks to respond to an IAAF request for information about Dove-Edwin which had been sent at the end of September.

The Sierra Leonean federation is like many in Africa. They believe their athletes are not on drugs and don't bother to inform them as to what is going on," says the sprinter. "Drugs in athletics are still

University survey claimed that two per cent of school pupils take steroids, usually to improve at rugby.

Dove-Edwin's case is just one of several African controversies on the drugs issue.

Best known is John Ngugi's case. Kenya's 1988 Olympic 5,000m gold medalist and five times world cross country champion has been fighting for more than 18-months to prove his innocence after refusing a drug test at his home because the testers did not have proper identification.

of a contraceptive pill she was taking at the time.

All the athletes concerned fear that even when they are cleared, the controversies will continue to haunt them.

"Even if I prove myself innocent," reflects Dove-Edwin, "this incident is always going to be with me. It's like a tattoo - it'll be with me for the rest of my life." — Gemini News

About the Author: Phil Minshull is a British sportswriter and broadcaster with a special interest in African sport.



Horace Dove-Edwin: 'We didn't have much medical guidance'

there despite all the IAAF's anti-doping measures. By the year 2000 they will still be there, although it might be in a different form.

"Africans don't make designer drugs and don't have the labs but they race on the international circuit and know who's taking drugs and how to get them. Education about drugs is being passed out between athletes."

South Africa's re-entry to world sport may also have an unpleasant side effect for African athletics. Several South African athletes have been banned for using performance enhancing drugs and South Africa is probably the one country in sub-Saharan Africa with the finance and know-how to obtain large quantities of banned products.

Steroid abuse has even permeated South African schools. A recent Cape Town

Other Kenyan athletes have confirmed that the Kenyan Amateur Athletic Association, representing the most successful athletics nation in Africa, never informed them about out-of-competition drug testing.

Two Nigerian cases are also making the headlines. World-class sprinter Chima Ajunwa tested positive for steroids at the 1992 Nigerian national championships, along with three other sprinters.

The Nigerian media has been pressing for her reinstatement because they claim that the testing procedures were flawed.

And Nigerian international hurdler Ime Akpan's case is weaving its way through IAAF arbitration and council hearings on a parallel course to that of Ngugi.

Akpan tested positive for steroids but claims she did not realise they were an ingredient

Asprilla under investigation

BOGOTA, Jan 5: Colombia's Public Prosecution Service has started investigations into an incident in which soccer star Faustino Asprilla was allegedly found drunk and carrying two fire arms in a public place, reports Reuters.

A spokeswoman said on Wednesday prosecutors could also investigate why police took two days to report the new year's day incident, during which time the Colombia forward left the country and returned to his Italian club Parma.

Parma had earlier denied Asprilla faced judicial proceedings over the incident in his native town of Tulua near the southwestern city of Cali.

"We have begun an investigation," said Martha Chavez an official with the Public Prosecution Service in Tulua, on Wednesday.

Police had said on Tuesday that Asprilla had been found drunk in a bar, where he was carrying two calibre 7.65 mm pistols and where he was also provoking other customers.

The guns were confiscated and Asprilla was ordered to report to authorities with the licences or face criminal charges, police said.

Chavez said the incident itself happened at 6.40 am local time on Sunday but was reported by police only at 8.50 am Tuesday.

In the meantime Asprilla left the country and arrived in Italy on Tuesday when he told reporters the only guns I've ever had are water pistols I spent a quiet new year in Tulua with my friends and family.

Parma, the Italian league leaders who face second placed Juventus in a crunch match on Sunday, said the Colombian authorities have reassured officials from the Parma club that there are no judicial proceedings or charges against Asprilla.

They put the incident down to high spirits, said the two weapons belonged to Asprilla's brother, and the matter would be closed with a fine.



An AFP file photo dated May 5, 1992, shows spectators evacuating from the Furiani Stadium in Bastia, a few minutes after a part of the stand collapsed prior to a soccer match between Bastia and the Olympique Marseille, killed 15 and injured 1,947 others. The trial of those considered responsible for the catastrophe began on Jan 4 in Bastia.