

Davis Cup World Group ties

Becker back for Germany

LONDON Feb 1: Boris Becker returns to Davis Cup tennis for Germany this weekend...

Stefan Edberg now ranked seven in the world and in form Magnus Larsson will play singles...

will form a makeshift doubles partnership. By contrast, Spain have taken their strongest squad to Vienna...

Austria have one world class player in Thomas Muster, but Alexander Antonitsch, Gilbert Schaller and Gerald Mandl are ranked way below.

Outside Europe South Africa's team - Wayne Ferreira, Marcos Ondruska, Pietie Norval and Gary Muller - shoulder a responsibility not just for winning but for bringing back the crowds and money to tennis when they take on Australia in Durban.

After a slump in the popularity of the sport, the team thought it might have to scratch from the Davis Cup before securing last minute part-sponsorship and government help.

Australia have brought a six-strong squad - Patrick Rafter, Richard Fromberg, Jaimie Morgan and Andrew Ilie and the doubles pairing of Mark Woodforde and Todd Woodbridge - to South Africa, planning to make a final choice later in the week.

The strongest tennis nation, the United States, take on France without the world's top two players Pete Sampras and Andre Agassi, who contested the Australian Open final last Sunday.

Instead Jim Courier and Todd Martin will be joined by doubles team Jared Palmer and Richey Reneberg against a rather pale French team, none of whose players fared well in Melbourne.

But Yannick Noah, who led France to their first victory in over half a century as non-playing captain in 1991 when they beat the US in the final, may provide some new spark on his return to the job.

His team consists of Guy Forget, Arnaud Boetsch, Cedric Pioline and Olivier Delaître.



BORIS BECKER

Last year's losing finalist Russia are also looking forward to a none too taxing tie in Antwerp against Belgium, while Switzerland, losing finalists three years ago take on the Netherlands in Geneva.

Italy have a good chance in Naples against a weakened Czech Republic, whose top players Petr Korda and Karel Novacek said they would not play because of lack of interest and money.

Italy have called up Andrea Gaudenzi and Renzo Furlan for their singles play for the tie on clay, while Stefano Pescosolido and Cristian Brand

Germany, winners three times since 1988, take on a Croatian team spearheaded by big hitting Goran Ivanisevic in one of eight World Group first round matches starting on Friday.

Becker, who led the Germans to their first triumph in 1988 and helped them defend the title the following year, has decided to return to the team after an absence of more than two years.

His decision to pull out of the event to concentrate on his ranking in 1993 came under heavy fire from Stich who led the country to their third victory in 1993.

At one stage of a very public slanging match, Stich, who said Becker should not be allowed to pick and choose when to play Davis Cup, said he would not represent his country if Becker returned.

With Stich and Becker playing singles and doubles, the Germans have a good chance of clinching this weekend's tie after the first three matches. But they will be wary of the lanky Ivanisevic on the fast indoor surface.

Holders Sweden begin their defence of the title close by in Denmark with no plans to change their 1994 winning formula.

Former world number one

Date moves into quarters

TOKYO, Feb 1: Fifth-seeded Kimiko Date of Japan had to play a close and lengthy game again Wednesday before reaching the

quarterfinals of the Toray Pan Pacific Open tennis tournament, reports AP.

Date, No. 10 in the world, scored a 6-1, 2-6, 6-2 triumph over Japanese qualifier Yone Kimio in the second round match.

Date took the first set by scattering deep shots, forcing Kamio off balance, but lost her pace and became erratic in the second set. She collected points at crucial times in the third set to win the match, which lasted more than one hour, 30 minutes.

Date needed nearly two hours and full sets before beating lower-ranked American Patty Fendick 4-6, 6-3, 6-1 in the first round Tuesday.

"I had good concentration in the first set but lost it in the second set," Date said. "It's hard to keep up my pace throughout the match. It's a mental problem."

Sixth-seeded Anke Huber of Germany beat American Gigi Fernandez 3-6, 6-1, 6-2 in the first round match.

Japan's Naoko Sawamatsu fired powerful and well-placed ground strokes to trounce American veteran Zina Garrison Jackson, who frequently failed in her service returns.

Sawamatsu scored a 6-1, 6-2 triumph over Jackson in the first round match.

Jackson, once ranked world No. 4, has now dropped to 24th.

"I know this fast surface is advantageous for a serve-and-volley player like Jackson, so I tried to fire deep shots to keep her away from the net," Sawamatsu said. "It's always nice to win a first round match."

In the second set, Jackson jumped to 40-love in the first game but had to play three deuces to keep it. The American broke the sixth game while Sawamatsu broke the third fifth and seventh.

Sawamatsu, the quarterfinalist in last week's Australian Open, is now ranked 17th, a high for her career.

In other second round match, eighth-seeded Iva Majoli of Croatia outlasted Kristie Boogert of the Netherlands 3-6, 7-6 (7-2), 6-4 to advance into the quarterfinals.

Japan's wild-card entry Kyoko Nagatsuka, after losing the first set, rallied to beat American qualifier Debbie Graham 1-6, 6-4, 6-2 in one hour, 35 minutes in another first round match.

Top-seeded Conchita Martinez of Spain, 1994 Wimbledon champion and second-seeded Mary Pierce of France, the 1995 Australian Open champion, each drew a first-round bye.



Czech couple Radka Kovarikova and Rene Novotny perform their routine during the short programme at the European Figure Skating Championships in Dortmund on Jan 31.

Romanian gymnastics coach jailed

BUCHAREST, Feb 1: A Romanian gymnastics coach was jailed for eight years on Tuesday for beating to death an 11-year-old girl during a training session, reports Reuters.

The court heard testimony that Gheorghe flew into a rage during a training session on the balance beam in November 1993, throwing the tiny Giurca to the ground and beating her.

The girl died in hospital several hours later. "If sports performances are built on physical and moral ordeal, all the gold medals that Romania won throughout the years mean nothing," Adriana's father told Reuters.

Romanian sports officials have rejected accusations that beatings were used in training to turn Romanian gymnasts into top performers.

Commenting on Adriana Giurca's death, Romanian Gymnastics Federation president Adrian Stoica called it an "unfortunate event." "Such behaviour is unusual in our gymnastics schools," he said, adding: "It was an accident."

But Adriana Giurca's teammates told the court that corporal punishment was "normal" in their school whenever they failed to perform up to their trainers' standards.

We accepted the beatings and the pain because we were convinced that this would open the door to top performance for us," a young girl gymnast told a court hearing last week.

Octavian Bellu, chief trainer at Romania's Olympic Gymnastics Centre in the Transylvanian city of Deva, said that despite changes in Romania since the 1989 fall of communism, what he called, "an iron discipline" was still the best way to attain top performances.

Another belt for Foreman

LOS ANGELES, Feb 1: George Foreman has added another title to his International Boxing Federation and World Boxing Association heavy-weight crowns - from the recently formed World Boxing Union, reports AFP.

The WBU is largely the result of a split within the World Boxing Organization. Its president, John Robinson, is based in London and its vice president, Ed Levine, is based in Miami.

A source close to promoter Bob Arum said he did not yet know if the new belt would be up for grabs when Foreman makes his first defence against Germany's Axel Schultz on April 22 at Las Vegas.

The WBA has refused to sanction that fight, and threatened to strip Foreman of the title if he goes ahead with it.

The WBA wants him to fight top-ranked contender Tony Tucker of the United States.

Foreman's lawyer Henry Holmes said he will sue the WBA if it takes action against Foreman over the Schultz fight.



Anke Huber of Germany makes a forehand return against Gigi Fernandez of the United States during her first round match in the Toray Pan Pacific Open in Tokyo yesterday. Huber won 3-6, 6-1, 6-2.

No Graf, no Seles, no gloss?

MELBOURNE, Feb 1: Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario was diplomatic when asked if it was fair that her beaten opponent in the women's singles quarterfinals should get the same play cheque as Jim Courier for his epic loss to Pete Sampras, reports Reuters.

Naoko Sawamatsu of Japan, who won only four games in her straight sets defeat, and the other three quarterfinal losers had each taken home US \$47,000.

Ninth seed Courier had in contrast battled for a marathon four hours for the same money before going down in five sets to the world number one in one of the greatest matches seen at Flinders Park.

More significant was that the women's quarterfinal matches were played in a half-full Centre Court stadium a sign that something is wrong with the present women's game.

Without injured number one Steffi Graf with Monica Seles still in self-imposed exile after her 1993 stabbing in Germany and with last year's retirement of Martina Navratilova, the Open had not only lost some of the starts but some of the quality as well.

There had been rumblings among the tennis writers and in the crowd in the first week as eventual finalists Sanchez-Vicario and Pierce swept past bemused opponents, dropping a few games here and there.

Come the semifinal and the tennis writer of the national newspaper The Australian had enough.

"Have I seen a single, solitary memorable game of women's tennis? It hurts me to say it, sisters, but I have to confess I have not," Wanda Jarmorok wrote after Sanchez-Vicario and Pierce moved to the finals without dropping a set in the tournament.

"Surely there can be no reason why women's tennis should be inherently less interesting than men's. It's the same game, goddammit," she added.

The reason perhaps was

that the appeal of the women's game had always been that while it lacked the power and speed of the men, it provided the personalities and could also offer grace and great excitement.

But at this year's first Grand Slam Sanchez-Vicario and the fourth-seeded Pierce had played at a level above the other women.

The seeds in the Spaniard's half of the draw had all disappeared by the quarterfinals and the world number two had the unprecedented experience of reaching the finals without playing a seeded opponent.

The Spaniard tried to argue that the pressure was the same, that her unseeded opponents must have been good to get so far in the tournament, but the results told the story, Sanchez-Vicario

Stockton set to break Magic's mark

SALT LAKE CITY, Feb 1: John Stockton, who was set to break Magic Johnson's career NBA assist record Wednesday night against Denver, is a reluctant record-setter, and Utah's All-Star playmaker knows the only way out of the spotlight lies in his own gifted hands, reports AP.

"I'll be glad when it's over with and we can go back to normal," Stockton said Tuesday, smiling through gritted teeth. "Normal is that we have a pleasant but distant relationship with you guys."

The hype began as the Jazz point guard started his 11th pro season at 9.383 career assists, 538 short of Johnson's mark. But as he got closer, Stockton found a trickle of interview requests had become a flood.

After his 14 assists in Monday's 115-80 victory over Minnesota put him just 11 shy of becoming the NBA's most prolific passer ever, Stockton eluded reporters.

After Tuesday's practice, however, he dutifully appeared for a crowd of broadcasters and sports writers.

dropped only 23 games in six matches. Jarmorok did not enjoy the two semifinals and nor, she said, did the crowd. "They made such dull viewing that the spectators chatted much of the play," she wrote.

"First Conchita Martinez," she said, "then Marianne Werdel-Witmeier, were made to look slow and inept by their superior opponents."

"It was only going to be a matter of time before each was dispatched to the history books. But believe me, that time dragged."

The women's game plainly needs another star like Monica Seles or, even better, a return of the winner of eight Grand Slam titles who disappeared from the game after she was stabbed at a Hamburg tournament in April, 1993.

Seles, still only 21, mixed off-court show business with supreme skill and artistry on the court and with Steffi Graf gave the game a genuine high-quality rivalry.

With the date of the injured Graf's return uncertain - she has played only one match in almost five months - women's tennis might now be looking to Pierce and Sanchez-Vicario to lift the game and win it back some credibility.

"Expectations that Saturday's final might be the forerunner of something special proved premature with Pierce far too powerful for a strangely out-of-touch Sanchez-Vicario, whose serve let her down badly."

And neither player has the presence of Graf or the sheer magnetism of Seles.

Only Seles handed roses to the crowd before a match, turned up to a post-final news conference wearing a bonnet and period costume and had weird haircuts.

The tournament organisers had already attempted to head off a potentially brief and one-sided women's semifinal day by beefing it up with a men's semifinal.

They must be desperately hoping that next year Graf will be back, that Seles will make a reappearance and that Pierce has added some off-court start quality to her obvious talent on court.

Renewal of long rivalry

NEW YORK, Feb 1 (Reuters): Nobody can make Heike Drechsler jump like Jackie Joyner-Kersey.

Because the German world champion long jumper doesn't often go up against the American ex-champion, Drechsler regards Friday's contest at the Millrose Games in Madison Square Garden as "the best competition of the indoor season, just because I get to jump against Jackie."

The confrontation between the two greatest jumpers of the past decade highlights a meet that includes 11 Olympic and 19 world champions, including Russian pole vaulter Sergei Bubka, Moroccan legend in the mile Said Aouta and US decathlete Dan O'Brien.

Since 1983, when Drechsler won her first world title at age 18, either she or Joyner-Kersey has ranked as the world's leading long jumper in each year except 1989, when neither woman competed.

Drechsler had won 27 straight long jump competitions before pulling out of the 1987 World Championships in Rome. It was there that

Joyner-Kersey began dominating the event, winning a string of gold medals that included the 1988 Olympic title in Seoul and the 1991 World Championships in Tokyo.

That lasted until the 1992 Olympics in Barcelona, where Drechsler, Silver medalist in Seoul, finished first and Joyner-Kersey was third. Drechsler also captured the gold medal on home soil, at the '93 worlds in Stuttgart.

What's more, the on-field rivals have become "fast off field friends."

"Of course when we are in competition, Jackie is my greatest motivation to jump far," said Drechsler. "But out of competition, we like each other very much. The first time I met her was in '87. She is a very nice person, very natural and never arrogant."

The same could be said of the soft-spoken Drechsler, the angular, graceful native of Jena in the former East Germany, where fraternising with rivals from across the wall was strongly discouraged.

"We never could talk with athletes from the western countries," Drechsler said. "It was forbidden. I'm so glad that's history now. We can talk

or go to dinner or talk about which events we will do."

The choice of events seems greater than ever for Drechsler, who, in 1986, equaled the 200-meter world record set by countrywoman Marita Koch and who last year, in her first multi-sport event since 1982, sported the best heptathlon score of the year with 6741 points.

Until then, the heptathlon had been the domain of Joyner-Kersey, the double Olympic champion and world-record holder. "I did the heptathlon just for fun," said Drechsler, who is now thinking of training for the event at either the 1995 World Championships in Goteborg, Sweden or the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta. "I think if I compete against Jackie, it will motivate me for a better score," Drechsler said.

Still, Drechsler recalls the intimate atmosphere of Madison Square Garden where a creaky, wood-chipped 110-meter track is wedged along the wall supporting the lower rows of spectators. "The people are so close," she says. "That you can feel all of their noise."

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down. Includes a solution time of 22 mins and a word search for SPAT, SOV, PISH, LULU, IDI, ACHE, ICEBOXES, LEER, DECENT, TUMBLE, SUE, ASYE, PHI, SEL, ERROR, TUCK, NOD, AGRA, ARENA, WEB, SEW, CARD, ALP, PURVEY, DALLAS, EPEE, ICEHOUSE, STAR, NON, WAIT, TOMY, GOD, SUNS.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with numbers 1-56 indicating letter positions.

CRYPTOQUIP

KBRJRPRI WIZNY WXICRJERI KDIYN DPRICZQR, BR RXIJN CZQR XJE X VZVCB. Yesterday's Cryptoquip: LOCAL DENTIST MARRIED FUSSY MANICURIST; THEY STARTED FIGHTING TOOTH AND NAIL.

Today's Cryptoquip clue: J equals N

The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.