

WEEKEND SPORTS WEEKEND

Women get out of the kitchen and onto the pitch

by Phil Minshull from London

Women have been playing soccer for almost as long as men but their efforts have been only belatedly recognised with the sport's inclusion in the Olympics for the first time next year. Gemini News Service reports on the women's World Cup and the rising popularity of the women's game.

ANY chauvinists nodded in agreement when Manchester United manager Ron Atkinson said that women should be in the kitchen, the discotheque and the boutique but not in football.

Two years later, in 1989, the first Women's World Cup in China changed many minds, and the next Cup contest is likely to finally consign such thoughts to history.

The event kicks off in the Swedish town of Helsingborg on 5 June and finishes in the capital, Stockholm, 13 days later with 12 of the world's top teams fighting for the trophy.

United States, the holders, won in China by overcoming Norway 2-1. Two goals from Michelle Akers, arguably the best striker in the game, meant they far exceeded the achievements of the US team that have contested the men's version of the World Cup, including the one on home turf last year.

Traditional powers in the men's game such as European champions Germany, Brazil, England, Denmark, Norway and the hosts Sweden will be represented by their female counterparts in Sweden.

Nigeria's women have emulated their countrymen by working their way through the Africa qualifiers, while China and Japan have outstripped their male compatriots and qualified to represent Asia.

Group A consists of Canada, England, Norway and Nigeria; Group B matches Brazil, Germany, Japan and Sweden, while a tough Group C has Australia, China, Denmark and the US fighting out the quarter-final spot.

A major incentive to do well is that all the quarter-finalists, the top two teams in each of the three groups and the two best third-placed teams, will qualify automatically for the inaugural women's soccer tournament at the Olympics in Atlanta next year.

The big difference between soccer players from the two genders is not what happens on the pitch but off it.

"I was really surprised about how good it was," recalled England international John Fashanu after seeing his first women's match. But instead of the delirious packed stadiums of USA '94, matches are unlikely to be watched by crowds of more than 10,000, except for the final.

The number of journalists in Sweden is unlikely to reach one-tenth of the 7,500 who were in the US last summer.

Male stars such as Romario, Baggio and Klinsmann are all multimillionaires, but the best a top female player such as Akers can hope for is \$100,000 a year. There are, however, several professional leagues around the world, notably in Japan, Sweden and Italy, and a growing number of women are making a living from the game.

"It's good to be finally paid as a player," said Akers. "Now we don't have to bust our butts off the field to survive and train."

Despite its lack of profile, the women's game has a history almost as long as the men's. It was first played in a recognisable modern form around 1880, its roots, like the men's game, lying in the

northern industrial towns of England.

While the men were in the trenches in the First World War, women's teams were playing to crowds of more than 50,000 in England. But in 1921 the English Football Association banned women's football on spurious grounds of financial mismanagement.

The ban remained in force until 1970, since when the game has reasserted itself and grown in popularity around the world.

In the US, soccer is played by as many women as men as a major team sport in high schools and colleges. Elsewhere, barriers to growth remain. In Brazil, four times men's World Cup winners and the reigning champions, there has been a women's national championship since 1989 but the women's game is still not on the school curriculum.

In Egypt women's football is banned because of the Egyptian FA's observance of an Islamic fatwa (religious decree).

Responding to the global upsurge of interest in the women's game, FIFA — the Federation of International Football Associations, the sport's world governing body — have put a lot of support behind the World Cup.

In China matches played to relatively full stadiums and made a small profit but had little international impact.

This time FIFA are hoping for greater exposure and most of the games will be transmitted live through the European satellite and cable TV networks.

Associated development

programmes outside Europe will help the game gain in strength in countries where women's soccer is just starting to take off.

However, to the irritation of many women soccer players, the forthcoming tournament will be used by FIFA for another of their experiments with the rules of the game.

Time-outs, as many as four a game, have been introduced for the first time in a major international tournament. Coaches are allowed to call one each within the first 25 minutes of each half.

FIFA claim they are responding to coaches' suggestions but cynics wonder whether the move is just a ploy to slot in more TV advertising space in the event that the initiative wins general acceptance and crosses over to the men's game.

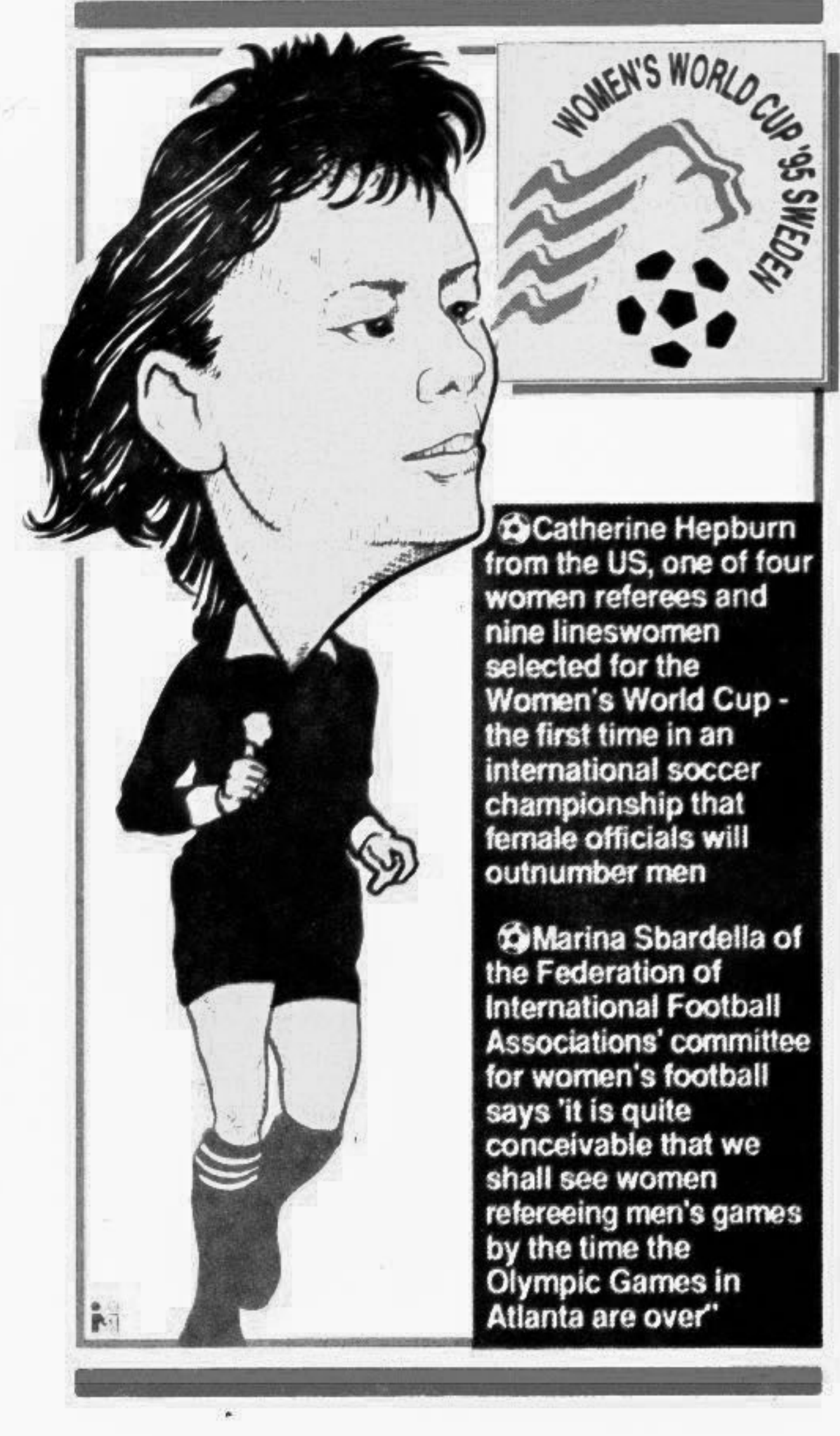
In addition, the tournament has been crammed into two weeks. Many of the women who lift the trophy in Stockholm's Rasunda Stadium on 18 June will have played six matches in 14 days.

Only a little imagination is needed to guess the reaction of Carlos Alberto Parreira, coach to the victorious Brazilians last July, if told his players had to suffer such exertions.

But then 19th century Irish playwright Oscar Wilde once described soccer as "a game for tough girls."

Perhaps he was right — Gemini News

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Catherine Hepburn from the US, one of four women referees and nine lineswomen selected for the Women's World Cup — the first time in an international soccer championship that female officials will outnumber men

Marina Sbardella of the Federation of International Football Associations' committee for women's football says "it is quite conceivable that we shall see women refereeing men's games by the time the Olympic Games in Atlanta are over"



STEFFI GRAF Back at Roland Garros with vengeance — Star File Photo

Fans show their annoyance with 'greed' T shirts

By Kelly McParland from Washington

America's national sport is making a comeback after a lengthy strike. But tens of thousands of fans have not returned to the stadiums. Now baseball's organisers, reports Gemini News Service, are wondering whether the clash over cash has permanently damaged the game.

ONE day after the end of the longest strike ever to afflict the United States' national game, big league baseball's Pittsburgh Pirates played host to the Montreal Expos.

When the strike began last August the Expos had the best record in the league. The Pirates themselves have a rich past, with five world championships dating back almost 90 years, and some of the most popular players ever to don a uniform.

It might have been an exciting match. Yet the vast reaches of Pittsburgh's Three Rivers Stadium — named for its picturesque site at the confluence of three important waterways — echoed empty. The official attendance was announced as just over 7,000, in a stadium that can hold seven times that number.

Though officials blamed rainy weather for the poor turnout, it was typical of a situation causing concern in the sport. Americans have long viewed as an integral part of the national character.

Increasingly upset at the antics of the game's millionaire players, crank owners and a culture that seems ever more concerned with the bottom line than bases and balls, fans are now simply staying away.

While no-one doubts the game will survive, it may never regain the popularity it once took for granted, or its status as America's pre-eminent sport.

"We've got a lot of mending to do," acknowledged Kevin Kennedy, manager of the Boston Red Sox, in a comment typical of the game's laconic style.

Around the 28 cities that make up major league baseball, evenly divided between the American and National leagues, attendance figures mirrored those posted in Pittsburgh.

A week into the new season, overall attendance was down 17 per cent. At Atlanta,

home of the team which twice in three years has appeared in the World Series, the game's ultimate test, fan support fell almost 50 per cent.

In San Francisco, home of Barry Bonds, one of the biggest stars, attendance dropped 45 per cent. Even in Toronto, winner of the last two World Series and the first team ever to draw more than four million fans in a single year, the number of empty seats increased 24 per cent.

The fans make no secret of the reason for their discontent. In New York youths in T-shirts emblazoned with the word "Greed" invaded the field during an early game and threw dollar bills at the players.

At Detroit's venerable Tiger Stadium, 20 people were arrested at the first home game of the season after pelting the players with bottles, hub cap and beer cans.

"I'm a working stiff and I haven't been able to relate to millionaire players," said New Jersey factory worker. "Life without baseball isn't bad. If I never see another game, it will not upset me."

Devotees of the sport area near unanimous the game has only itself to blame for its predicament.

Salaries have risen to the point where even mediocre players demand \$1 million or more a season. The stars earn \$5-\$6 million a year, and seem unaware of the gap that creates between themselves and the fans.

"This is not getting \$10 million a year or \$6 million a year," one player said during the strike. "I'd be willing to play this game for \$3 million."

Player behaviour has declined even as pay rises. Kids clamouring for autographs are routinely ignored, or forced to pay.

One player was arrested after tossing firecrackers at fans. Drugs have decimated the skills of some top players, while constant expansion has diluted the overall quality of play.

Team owners similarly draw little affection. Claiming they can no longer afford the salaries, they demand govern-

ment handouts and plush new stadiums at public expense.

The owners claim all but a few teams are losing money. Yet investors continue to line up to pay \$140 million apiece for expansion teams, or up to \$180 million for an existing team.

The games themselves take longer and longer to play, now often requiring a patience-testing three hours with frequent lengthy pauses to TV stations can fill broadcasts with more and more commercials.

Complaints have been building for years, but the crunch came when players walked out of strike last year rather than concede to tough financial concessions demanded by the owners.

Throughout the winter and into early 1995 the confrontation went on, forcing the cancellation of the World Series for the first time in 90 years.

Negotiators ignored pleas from fans, stadium workers and even the President of the United States to return to the field.

The strike ended only when federal labour officials ruled the owners had acted improperly in unilaterally altering playing conditions.

Players voted to return to work, though they remain without a contract. During the strike both sides sought public support for their case. Instead, they discovered fans were fed up with players and owners alike. To try and remedy the damage, clubs are offering discount tickets, reduced food prices and special promotions. Players have gone out of their way to improve their image, even going as far as being nice to the fans.

Once again the sign autographs, and publicly acknowledge the error of their ways.

Whether it is enough remains to be seen. The long lay-off gave fans time to gain a new appreciation of competing sports, which are thriving.

Baseball's players and owners can only hope it is not too late in the match for a comeback. — Gemini News

About the Author: Kelly McParland is a Canadian journalist based in Washington.

WTA's top 50

UNDATED, June 1 (AP): Top 50 women's tennis players according to rankings issued by WTA Tour.

SL	Player	Country	Points
1	Arantxa Sanchez Vicario	Spain	314.4390
2	Steffi Graf	Germany	267.2796
3	Mary Pierce	France	231.7000
4	Conchita Martinez	Spain	219.2555
5	Jana Novotna	Czech Republic	169.7567
6	Lipdsay Davenport	United States	149.2714
7	Magdalena Maleeva	Bulgaria	146.5000
8	Gabriela Sabatini	Argentina	135.7688
9	Kimiko Date	Japan	131.9714
10	Natasha Zvereva	Belarus	113.9176
11	Anke Huber	Germany	107.2701
12	Mary Joe Fernandez	United States	83.9583
13	Iva Majoli	Croatia	82.1682
14	Helena Sukova	Czech Republic	72.1250
15	Naoko Sawamatsu	Japan	70.3308
16	Brenda Schultz-McCarthy	Netherlands	70.0763
17	Amy Frazier	United States	69.9563
18	Amanda Coetzer	South Africa	62.7533
19	Lori McNeil	United States	62.5625
20	Julie Halard	France	59.9737
21	Gigi Fernandez	United States	59.8571
22	Judith Wiesner	Austria	57.2500
23	Martina Hingis	Switzerland	55.3333
24	Zina Garrison Jackson	United States	54.0914
25	Marianne Werdel Witmeyer	United States	53.3478
26	Yayuk Basuki	Indonesia	53.1250
27	Irina Spirlea	Romania	51.8421
28	Ines Gorrochategui	Argentina	50.0250
29	Lisa Raymond	United States	48.7375
30	Karina Habsudova	Slovakia	48.1786
31	Miriam Oremans	Netherlands	46.7778
32	Meike Babel	Germany	46.0385
33	Nathalie Tauziat	France	45.2143
34	Mana Endo	Japan	44.7500
35	Sabine Hack	Germany	44.0818
36	Sandra Cecchini	Italy	43.8200
37	Sabine Appelmans	Belgium	43.7789
38	Silvia Farina	Italy	42.6471
39	Larisa Neiland	Latvia	42.1474
40	Barbara Rittner	Germany	41.5500
41	Yone Kamio	Japan	40.1538
42	Nicole Bradtke	Australia	39.1000
43	Joannette Kruger	South Africa	38.8056
44	Angelica Gavaldon	Mexico	37.9412
45	Elena Likhovtseva	Russia	37.2500
46	Kyoko Nagatsuka	Japan	35.6786
47	Tami Whitlinger Jones	United States	35.5263
48	Katerina Maleeva	Bulgaria	34.9118
49	Lella Meskhi	Georgia	34.8333
50	Ann Grossman	United States	34.8095

ATP's top 50

UNDATED, June 1 (AP): Top 50 men's tennis players according to rankings issued by ATP Tour.

SL	Player	Country	Points
1	Andre Agassi	United States	4.705
2	Pete Sampras	United States	3.965
3	Boris Becker	Germany	3.265
4	Goran Ivanisevic	Croatia	2.921
5	Thomas Muster	Austria	2.675
6	Michael Chang	United States	2.669
7	Sergi Bruguera	Spain	2.663
8	Wayne Ferreira	South Africa	2.511
9	Yevgeny Kafelnikov	Russia	2.230
10	Magnus Larsson	Sweden	2.222
11	Alberto Berasategui	Spain	2.200
12	Michael Stich	Germany	2.171
13	Jim Courier	United States	1.978
14	Todd Martin	United States	1.880
15	Richard Krajicek	Netherlands	1.825
16	Marc Rosset	Switzerland	1.743
17	Stefan Edberg	Sweden	1.691
18	Andrei Medvedev	Ukraine	1.619
19	Andrea Gaudenzi	Italy	1.484
20	Thomas Engvist	Sweden	1.473
21	Jonas Bjorkman	Sweden	1.214
22	Karel Novacek	Czech Republic	1.142
23	Bernard Karbacher	Germany	1.124
24	Gilbert Schaller	Austria	1.099
25	Alex Corretja	Spain	1.094
26	David Wheaton	United States	1.085
27	Jason Stoltenberg	Australia	1.081
28	Jacco Eltingh	Netherlands	1.064
29	Guy Forget	France	1.040
30	Paul Haarhuis	Netherlands	1.009
31	Richard Fromberg	Australia	993
32	Mark Woodford	Australia	965
33	Francisco Clavet	Spain	948
34	Fabrice Santoro	France	947
35	Alexander Volkov	Russia	930
36	Alberto Costa	Spain	924
37	Aaron Krickstein	United States	911
38	Patrick Rafter	Australia	907
39	Olivier Delaitre	France	901
40	Malivai Washington	United States	865
41	Javier Frana	Argentina	835
42	Chuck Adams	United States	835
43	Jaime Yzaga	Peru	829
44	Andrei Chesnokov	Russia	810
45	Martin Sinner	Germany	798
46	Richey Reneberg	United States	785
47	Greg Rusedski	Britain	782
48	Marcelo Rios	Chile	775
49	Brett Steven	New Zealand	772
50	Todd Woodbridge	Australia	762

Stunning stories of Sino dopers

NEW YORK, June 1 (AP): Steroids for sale, right next to bee's jelly and condoms. State-of-the-art drug labs, with no drug tests in sight. Self-described doping experts who fidget when asked for details. Bonuses almost 10 times the average annual wage for winning an Olympic gold medal.

Those and many more mysterious scenes greeted top officials of the International Swimming Federation (FINA) as they tried to figure out just why so many Chinese swimmers have been failing drug tests while rapidly dominating the sport.

The officials' five-day mission to Beijing in March found that — despite an unprecedented 19 positive tests among top Chinese swimmers since 1990 — there was insufficient evidence of any government-directed system of doping, such as the one that helped build East Germany into a sports power. FINA said last month that it would not punish China, while warning

that more random testing of its swimmers probably would be ordered.

But the just-released full report from the four-member fact-finding team, offers an extraordinary peek at how difficult it is to place the blame for doping in sports or find what motivates athletes and their handlers to so blatantly break the rules.

The team, headed by Gunnar Werner of Sweden, interviewed 10 administrators and coaches, including Chinese Swimming Association general secretary Guo Qingling, medical supervisor Dr Weng Qing-Zhang and head national coach Chen Yunpeng, and six of the seven Chinese swimmers who tested positive for drugs just before or at last year's Asian Games.

Over and over, FINA officials were told that performance-enhancing drugs such as the steroid DHT, which showed up in most of the Asian Games tests, were available on the black market in China.

Ove and over, they also were told that none of those interviewed had direct knowledge of drug use. "During the interviews, it appeared that almost all the swimmers expressed surprise at the finding of DHT and their only explanation was that it could have come from Chinese medicine or Chinese herbal remedies. ... Most of the coaches were equally adamant," Werner's report said.

About two years ago, a spate of world-record performances by Chinese women distance runners produced speculation of doping and claims of astounding benefits of herbal medicines from the Chinese. Then, "Ma's Army" of runners heralded worm soup; now, swimmers such as Zhang Bin — who tested positive for DHT at the Asian Games — said they relied on Black Chicken and herbs.

Herbal brews and powders are considered medicine in China. The panel discovered that first-hand, visiting a

pharmacy and finding bee's jelly and ground deer's antler on the shelf next to condoms and aspirin. The antler powder was later analyzed and found to contain 5 per cent methyl-testosterone, a strength-building steroid.

The cultural differences — three of the four FINA members sent to Beijing were from the United States or Europe — were one area of conflict for the fact-finders. Language gaps and selective memories were another.

"He is 20 years old and has been swimming for five years, or at least so he thinks," Werner wrote of Zhang's interview. "This apparent dullness extended to his first inclusion on the national team just before the Asian Games, because he couldn't remember coach Chen's name."

Of Xiong Guoming, another DHT positive from Hiroshima, Werner wrote: "He had no explanation for DHT and was puzzled by it."

Baseball basics

- 1845 Rules codified by Alexander Cartwright
- 1867 National Association bars Black players
- 1871 First professional league
- 1947 First Black player, Jackie Robinson, allowed to take part in major league
- 1956 Last all-white team, Red Sox, finally signs a Black player
- 1970 Elimination of 'reserve clause' giving clubs total control over players

Sino open diving meet from June 9

SHANGHAI, June 1: A total of 15 teams from 14 countries and regions will take part in a three-day China open diving tournament from June 9. Xinhua news agency reported today, reports Reuter.

Among the teams are contingents from Japan, South Korea, Russia, United States, Canada, Germany, the Netherlands, Uzbekistan and Hong Kong, it said.

The event will feature men's and women's one-metre and three-metre springboard and 10-metre platform.

Among the Chinese stars will be World and Olympic gold medalist Fu Xiangxi, Tan Shuping and Xiong Ni, a silver medalist at the Barcelona Olympics, the agency said.