

Marseille under scrutiny

GENEVA, July 12: The European Football Union (UEFA) was set to open an inquiry into Olympique Marseille's five-year reign in French football after more revelations of match fixing emerged from police investigations into fraud at the club, reports AFP.

"We knew certain things would all come out one day," Gerhard Aigner, UEFA's general secretary, admitted here today.

Aigner said they had suspected the worst when former Olympique Marseille owner Bernard Tapie had confronted them. They barred Marseille from defending the European Cup in 1993.

Marseille were expelled after trying to bribe three Valenciennes players before a match they won 1-0 to clinch their fifth successive French League title.

"Mr Tapie did not mince his words about what went on in football," Aigner said. "We could imagine there was something behind it but could not act without any proof. We couldn't intervene if no other club denounced them."

When former Bordeaux club president Claude Beuzat accused Tapie of match-fixing five years ago, Tapie persuaded the then Budget Minister Michel Charasse to unleash his tax inspectors. Beuzat was eventually jailed for fraud and embezzlement.

However, he said they had expected police investigations into fraud at Marseille would supply proof of corruption.

He said the matter would be raised at Friday's UEFA management committee meeting although they might decide to wait for French law to take its course.

Jubomir Barin, a Croatian football agent who worked in France for two decades, has confirmed Jean-Pierre Bernes claim that Marseille bought five or six matches a season from 1989 to 1993.

Barin, arrested by Interpol in Germany, told fraud investigators that Marseille paid 310,000 francs (60,000 dollars) to AEK Athens to obtain a 1-1 draw in November, 1989, after the French side had beaten AEK 2-0 in Marseille in the European Champions' Cup.

Raymond-Luc Larnaudie, Barin's lawyer, said his client also told investigators that Marseille's former owner Bernard Tapie asked him to see the referee before Olympique's match with Glasgow Rangers in the 1991 European Cup which ended in a 2-2 draw.

Bernes, Marseille's former general manager, claimed his club also bought a European Cup match against Spartak Moscow later that year.

Former AEK president Stratos Gi-dopoulos described the accusations as "pure imagination."

Tapie is appealing a two-year jail term, one year suspended, for ordering Bernes to fix the match against Valenciennes in 1993. The French champions then beat AC Milan 1-0 in the European Cup final five days later.

Wright renews contract with Arsenal

LONDON, July 12: England striker Ian Wright has extended his contract with Premier League Arsenal by two years, the club said Tuesday, reports Reuters.

It is another boost for Bruce Rioch, whose appointment as manager last month coincided with news that captain Tony Adams had agreed to a new long-term deal. Wright joined Arsenal in 1991.

Rioch has announced Arsenal's determination to fight the likes of Manchester United, Blackburn, Liverpool and Newcastle for the title by investing 12.25 million pounds sterling (19.47 million dollars) in Italy.

First Rioch landed 7.5 million pounds (11.92 million dollars) Dutch striker Dennis Bergkamp from Inter Milan and this week he snapped up England captain David Platt from Sampdoria for 4.75 million pounds (7.55 million dollars).

Graf & father in trouble for tax evasion

BONN, July 12: Wimbledon champion Steffi Graf and her father are under investigation by tax authorities, a prosecutor said Wednesday. German newspapers said they are suspected of tax evasion, reports AP.

Tax investigators searched the posh Graf family villa in southern Germany on May 23, said Mannheim prosecutor Peter Wechsung. That was six days before the start of the French Open, which Graf also won.

Other properties were also searched but Wechsung would not provide details.

"I can confirm there is an investigation and that on May 23 there were searches against Stefanie Graf and her father Peter Graf," Wechsung said.

Cartons of documents were taken from the villa in Bruhl as evidence, said the newspaper Bild Zeitung.

Graf, 26, has a huge fortune from her tennis career and endorsements. Bild said she is worth more than 100 million marks (72 million dollars). Unlike some German sports stars, she has not moved to tax havens such as Monaco to avoid Germany's high taxes.

Examination of the seized documents is expected to last several more weeks, another newspaper said.

German tennis officials said Tuesday that Graf, fresh from her sixth Wimbledon singles title, has pulled out of Germany's Federation Cup semifinal match against Spain later this month because of back problems.



AN AFP 1989 file photo of German Wimbledon champion Steffi Graf and her father Peter. Fraud squad officers investigating possible income tax evasion, raided the Graf's home in Bruhl on May 23, a Bonn newspaper report said yesterday.

Guenter Seles' fixation

HAMBURG, Germany, July 12: Monica Seles has not given up her fight to put the fan who stabbed her at a tennis tournament two years ago behind bars, despite losing an appeal, reports Reuters.

The lawyer of the former world number one on Tuesday announced another appeal against a Hamburg court's decision to hand out a two-year suspended sentence to 41-year-old Guenter Parche.

The East German lathe operator plunged a kitchen knife into Seles' back during a match at the 1993 Hamburg Open. Seles has not played competitively since the attack, although she is presently planning a comeback.

Last April, Seles lost an appeal against the controversial sentence for grievous bodily harm. Her lawyer had asked the court to jail Parche for five years for attempted murder.

A ruling on the new appeal is not expected to be made for around six months.

SA Open part of ATP Tour no more

JOHANNESBURG, July 12: The South African Open tennis championships will drop out of the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) Tour next year after Swiss businessman Zeljko Franulovic bought the dates for the tournament from Tennis South Africa, reports Reuters.

Andre van Heerden of Tennis South Africa said Franulovic had bought the dates from the South African governing body on Tuesday, and would stage a tournament in Lansanne next year. The Open was scheduled from April 3-10 this year.

"I don't think it's the end of the road but it will require a lot of hard work to rebuild tennis in this country from here," Van Heerden said.

"I think Tennis South Africa must go back to grassroots, build up its development structures and then try to get tennis back on the road with satellite events. It will be two or three years before they can realistically look at staging the Open as an ATP event again."

Schools h'ball opens

Shaheed Nabi High School and Rajarbah Police Lines High School reached the final of the sixth Bata Schools handball tournament yesterday, reports UNB.

The two teams will play the final on Friday at 4 pm.

In the day's first semifinal, Shaheed Nabi High School eliminated Motijheel Model High School 18-16 after leading the first session 9-8.

Khokon scored six goals while Priyatosh and Kamol netted four each for the winners. Kaiser scored five goals and Raju four for the losers.

In the other semifinal, Rajarbah Police Lines High School outplayed Rifles School and College 25-10 after dominating the first half 11-6.

Khaled contributed 12, Mesbahuddin 6 and Mosharraf 5 for the winners while Shahidul netted 4 and Sajjad 2 for the losers.

The third place deciding match between the two losing semifinalists — Motijheel Model High School and the Rifles School and College — will be held today at 4 pm.

No way back for Kanchelskis

MANCHESTER, England, July 12: Andrei Kanchelskis' departure from Manchester United looked inevitable today after the Russian winger launched a blunt attack on manager Alex Ferguson, reports AFP.

The 26-year-old star, linked with a possible move to Premiership newcomers Middlesbrough, claimed his manager was ignoring him.

"I can't see myself playing another game for Manchester United," said Kanchelskis — one of the key players in United's 1994 double-winning side.

Kanchelskis, who could join former United teammate Bryan Robson at Middlesbrough, said: "My heart is with United but I can't stay for one reason — and that's the manager. Our personal problems are just too big."

Ferguson, already under fire for selling Mark Hughes to Chelsea and Paul Ince to Inter Milan, has reluctantly agreed to let the Ukraine-born player leave but says that will not happen until United have found a replacement.

Grigory Esaulenko, Kanchelskis' advisor, said "I think Andrei would sign for Bryan Robson in five minutes. He needs a manager who has believed in him."

"We also think Bryan is going to build a very good team. I know he has the money to take Andrei to Boro."

The first hints of a rift between Kanchelskis and Ferguson came more than two years ago when the winger, who moved to Old Trafford from Donetsk in 1991, failed to command a regular place in the United title-winning side.

Relations deteriorated dramatically last season and Kanchelskis also claimed United had failed to diagnose a hernia problem, which later required surgery and sidelined him for the last two months of the season.

Robson is currently in South America tracking a Brazilian star, believed to be Juninho, and is not due back on the side until the end of the week.

But he has already said on record: "I'd love to have Kanchelskis in my side. And if Alex is prepared to release him I'd be very interested."

Kanchelskis' determination to quit Old Trafford comes despite desperate pleas by United fans — many of whom have visited his home — for him to stay.

Where soccer counts cost

RIVERA, Uruguay, July 12 (Reuters): After the last World Cup, it was hard to believe that Colombia's national soccer team could continue to exist.

Midfielder Gabriel Gomez and coach Francisco Maturana received death threats hours before a crucial match with the United States, while defender Andres Escobar, who scored an own goal in that game, was shot dead shortly after returning home.

How could anyone play for a team if they are murdered for making mistakes, a shocked world asked.

Striker Faustino Asprilla announced he would never play for his country again after the shooting, while Maturana and captain Carlos Valderrama had already vowed to quit the team.

Yet one year on, Colombia are competing in the Copa America with a side that bears a striking resemblance to the one that took part — and flopped — at the 1994 World Cup.

Asprilla and Valderrama have both returned, while other stalwarts such as midfielders Freddy Rincon and Leonel Alvarez and defenders Wilmer Cabrera and Alexis Mendoza are also still there.

The coach is Hernan Dario Gomez — assistant to Maturana at the World Cup.

But despite similar faces, Colombia have changed.

There have been none of the brass promises made before the World Cup when, buoyed by a 5-0 win away to Argentina, Colombia arrived in the United States amid claims they were the new Brazil and vowed to set the competition alight with their

"fantasy football."

Instead, Colombia are in a subdued mood, promising little and shunning publicity.

"Football is a sport and to lose is normal," Gomez said in an interview.

Colombia were knocked out in the first round of the World Cup after losing to the United States and Gomez knows that being knocked off a pedestal is a painful experience.

"We got carried away and the public got over-excited. Then we came down with a bump. We thought we were better than Romania when we weren't although I would say that we are a better team than the US," he said.

Gomez added that the players were also unsettled by having a title contenders' label attached to them.

But despite the failure, Gomez said he still believes in the old guard, some of whom have represented Colombia for the best part of a decade.

"They are our best players. It's not easy to replace someone like Carlos (Valderrama). I haven't stopped believing in them just because they lost a couple of games."

"After the World Cup, everyone felt bad. But with time and the players doing well with their clubs, they have thought things over and decided to return."

The death threats have also subsided — though nobody guarantees they will not return — while it has since come to light that Escobar was killed not by an angry soccer fan but because he got into argument with a stranger. In Colombia, such arguments are sometimes settled with a

gun.

Earlier this month, Humberto-munoz Castro was convicted of murdering Escobar and sentenced to 43 years in prison.

On the field, Colombia still show the same qualities and defects as before.

In an 1-1 draw with Peru and then an 1-0 win over Ecuador, they knocked the ball around with aplomb in midfield and the defenders were adept at playing their way out of trouble.

Even goalkeeper Rene Higuita likes to show off his ball control and dribbling skills.

But it all goes wrong in the last 30 metres as the players try one intricate pass too many and, for all their ball control, Colombia create relatively few clear cut chances.

"Our mentality has always been to play this way, to knock the ball around and find an opening in the middle of the defence and no matter how much you want to change this mentality, it's very difficult," said World Cup goalkeeper Oscar Cordoba.

He added that the 5-0 win over Argentina was one of the rare occasions when Colombia let the opponents do the attacking.

"We waited to attack, we just sat back and we had Asprilla and (Ivan) Valencia playing on the wings," he said.

Will they every return to the peaks scaled in Buenos Aires on a cold winter evening two years ago?

"There is a lot of talent in Colombia. Our soccer has a bright future," said Gomez.

Soccer returns to Cambodia

PHNOM PENH, July 12: Cambodia will host their first international football for more than 20 years when a Chinese side plays three games this month, reports AFP.

The visit by the side from the Chinese city of Shenzhen is largely symbolic. The Cambodian national side and two club teams who will play Shenzhen at the Phnom Penh Olympic Stadium on July 18, 22 and 23 are not expected to win.

The games are part of Cambodia's attempts to get back into international sport — specially after the International Olympic Committee readmitted Cambodia so they can take part in the Atlanta Games next year.

The matches will also be in preparation for the South East Asian Games in Chang Mai, Thailand in December.

Teams from former Soviet-bloc countries visited Cambodia in the mid-1980s during Vietnam's occupation. But Shenzhen will be the first internationally recognised international competition in Cambodia since the Khmer Rouge took over in 1975.

The Cambodian national team was then ranked among the best in South East Asia. But it has had little success since, losing a friendly in Thailand 8-0 in 1993.

Ravy Khkek, co-president of the committee preparing for the South East Asian Games said there was little money for training so no one expects a win against Shenzhen.

"We just want to show the youth that we can do something at that level," he said. "If we win it will be by accident... but maybe we can win some matches, maybe we will create some surprises and not finish last."

Becker smells a rat

LONDON, July 12: Boris Becker has criticised Andre Agassi, his Nike sponsor and the alleged preferential treatment he received at Wimbledon.

Becker, who lost to Pete Sampras in Sunday's Wimbledon final, made the remarks to German reporters following a post-tournament party, British newspapers reported Tuesday, reports AP.

Becker, a three-time Wimbledon champion, complained that he played only once on Centre Court before his semifinal victory over Agassi, while the top-seeded American played five of his six matches there.

"It cannot just be a coincidence that it is always Agassi at 2 pm on Centre Court," Becker said. "It would be interesting to see how he played if he was always on Court 2 at noon."

Becker alleged that commercial influences were involved.

"I think Nike have something to do with this," he was quoted as say-

ing. "The other companies just can't compete with them. The company puts pressure on the tournaments and money plays a big role. You saw it at the French Open, and I am worried it will happen at the US Open. I fear it will be like playing in a Nike house."

A Wimbledon spokesman said the idea that Nike or any other company or individual could influence the order of play was "preposterous" and pointed out that two-time defending champion Sampras had played only one Centre Court match before the semifinals.

"I think it's absurd to suggest that Nike would try to influence what court players play on," Nike spokesman Keith Peters said. "I don't know how the tournament organisers manage things."

"I will point out that Agassi is currently ranked No 1 in the world. It probably makes sense for him to play on Centre Court where more people can see him."

Agassi has a reported 10-year, 100-million dollar contract with Nike.

At Wimbledon he wore an all-white outfit including baggy, knee-length pants and a white bandanna with the Nike logo.

"They do not have enough money to buy me," Becker, who has a contract with rival company Lotto, was quoted as saying. "I wouldn't want my son wearing the things Agassi does."

Becker said Agassi, for all his public appeal, is not popular with the other players.

"Agassi is not someone the players like very much," he said. "He is always on his own and doing his own thing. He doesn't have much in common with us."

"He never opens up to the rest. Perhaps that's one of the secrets of his success. If he were to open up more, perhaps fewer players would fear him."

Becker's negative feelings may stem from the feud between Agassi and his former coach, who now coaches the German.

For Morcelli sky the limit

NICE, France, July 12: Algerian Nouredine Morcelli and Venuste Niyongabo of Burundi are planning world record attempts over 1,500 and 2,000 metres respectively at the Nice Grand Prix on Wednesday night, reports Reuters.

Morcelli, who last week in Paris set the 2,000 world record in four minutes 47.88 seconds, will be trying to improve on his own 1,500 metres world record of 3:28.86 set in Rieti, Italy, in September 1992.

Last week in Lausanne, Niyongabo, 21, ran 3:32.37, the fastest 1,500 in the world this year, and clearly feels ready to attack Morcelli's nine-day old 2,000 mark.

Like Morcelli, Niyongabo has also been in blistering form this season and improved his own personal best in the 2,000 by over four seconds when he clocked 4:54.02 in the golden gala in Rome a month ago.

Significantly, neither man ran in Stockholm on Monday and both clearly believe that the warm, still

night air of the Mediterranean will aid their attempts.

Just along the coast at Monte Carlo almost a year ago Morcelli ran a 3,000 metres world record.

His world record run in Paris last Monday means he now holds the best times over 1,500, 2,000 and 3,000 metres as well as the mile.

In contrast, Niyongabo will claim his first world record if his attempt proves successful. Niyongabo races at 2015 local time (1815 GMT) while Morcelli goes in the 1500 at 2125 local GMT (1925).

Meeting promoter Robert Bertojo was having to wait until late tonight or Wednesday morning to see just who was going to compete in Nice following Monday night's Stockholm Grand Prix.

With a budget of only seven million francs — the smallest of all 15 Grand Prix meetings — Bertojo regularly assembles a superb field for his meeting.

This year is likely to be no exception with nine world and Olympic champions expected to take part.

One star absentee will be former

Olympic 110 metres hurdles champion Roger Kingdom, who was forced to pull out after suffering an injury in Stockholm when he finished fourth behind three other Americans — Mark Crear, world indoor champion Allen Johnson and Courtney Hawkins.

Although none of the Americans are running here the 110 metres hurdles field is still a high quality one.

World record holder Colin Jackson will be looking for a return to form after suffering from tonsillitis amid doubts that he might not defend his world title in Gothenburg next month.

With no 100 metres scheduled, the sprinters will do battle over 200 metres. World champion Frankie Fredericks of Namibia, world silver medalist John Regis of Britain and Norway's European champion Geir Moen are expected starters.

French woman Marie-Jo Peherec, the 1991 world and reigning 400 metres Olympic champion, will carry local hopes in what should be an excellent 400 race against American world champion Jearl Miles and Australian Cathy Freeman.

Mali's family needs solace

NEW HAVEN, Connecticut, July 12: The Special Olympics organisation will be responsive to the needs of the family of a drowned athlete, said Timothy Shriver, president of the Games organising committee, reports AP.

But Shriver would not say Tuesday if that meant monetary compensation for the death of Ramesh Mali, a 21-year-old soccer player from Nepal.

An advocacy group for people with mental retardation has requested compensation for the family of Mali, who drowned while in the United States for the 1995 Special Olympics World Games.

Chuda Mani Tandukar, the president of the Parents Association for the Mentally Retarded in Kathmandu, said he sent a request by fax to Special Olympics International seeking compensation for the death.

Tandukar also wants some accountability in the death.

"The incident which occurred we regard as an act of negligence and its responsibility from the host as well as the delegation from Nepal," Tandukar said in the faxed statement.

"This has stunned us the parents and the Nepalese people in general. We humbly request the Special Olympics International to look after compensation of that poor family."

Shriver said Tuesday that he had not been directly contacted by the group and thus could not be sure the group speaks for the family.

"I don't know really who they are," he said. "Let me put it this way: We're going to support the family and be responsive to the family's needs to the fullest extent that we can possibly, humanly be. I cannot comment on a second- or third-hand request from an organisation."

Shriver said Special Olympics officials were in regular contact with the Nepalese Consulate in New York, the Nepalese delegation to the Olympics and the family.

"If there are issues or concerns that the family has, that the delegation has, we try to be very responsive to anything that's communicated to us in terms of their wishes, disposition issues, issues for support," Shriver said.

The question of whether Special Olympics would compensate the family monetarily would depend on what the family requests, Shriver said.

He declined to comment about who should be held responsible for Mali's death. However, he did say that in general host towns are not liable for athletes' safety with medications and similar issues.

The state medical examiner's office in Farmington on Tuesday positively identified a body found on a rock jetty at a state park as that of Mali. The body was identified using the athlete's photo ID from the World Games.

The body was found Monday by a camper, four days after Mali disappeared at Hammonasset Beach State Park in Madison. He was last seen alive in chest-deep water in Long Island Sound.

Mali arrived in the United States on June 26 for the World Games in New Haven. The Nepalese delegation left Connecticut on Monday.

NBL Div I v'ball

Sports Reporter

Titus Club, Bangladesh Rifles, Dhaka Shabuj, Bangladesh Police and Dilkusha registered facile straight-set victories in the NBL First Division volleyball league at the court adjacent to the Dhaka Stadium yesterday.

Titus beat Brothers Union 15-11, 15-6, 15-1 for their seventh successive victory. Rifles defeated Sonali Bank 15-5, 15-1, 15-4 for their sixth win in a row. Shabuj won against Chan Textile 15-11, 15-9, 15-4. Police demolished Madartek Mitani Sangha 15-6, 15-5, 15-6, while Dilkusha tasted victory for the first time in the league routing Textile Mills 15-6, 15-9, 15-8.

Azad SC were the only team to have to struggle, when they took 96 minutes to beat Nabajagorani Sangha 15-6, 17-16, 15-13.

Meanwhile, in the day's lone NBL Second Division Volleyball League engagement, Jiban Bima became runners-up defeating Victoria SC 15-13, 11-15, 15-10, 15-13.

Sampdoria sign Seedorf

GENOA, July 12: One day after selling English international David Platt, Sampdoria on Tuesday presented their newly-signed Dutch forward Clarence Seedorf, reports AP.

The 19-year-old player joined the Italian First-Division team on a three-year contract.

Sampdoria officials did not disclose terms but soccer sources in this port city estimated Seedorf's transfer fee from Ajax Amsterdam at 11 billion lire (6.8 million dollars) at least.

Seedorf, who was welcomed by dozens of fans as he arrived at the club headquarters, said he had "a very positive feeling about my transfer to Italy."

"I'm aware the Italian League is very difficult, but I'm certain I will do well here," he said.

Club president Enrico Mantovani said the team "is enthusiastic about the arrival of this boy."

"He was sought by several clubs. He's an outstanding acquisition for La Samp and for Italian soccer," Mantovani added.

At Sampdoria, Seedorf is going to make up for the departure of another Dutch player, veteran Ruud Gullit, who moved to Chelsea.



Action from yesterday's NBL First Division volleyball league encounter between Dilkusha and BTMC at the court adjacent to the Dhaka Stadium. Dilkusha won the match 15-6, 15-9, 15-8. — Star photo

Lucky Le Tissier

SOUTHAMPTON, July 12: Southampton's England striker Matthew Le Tissier was given the all-clear today after fears he would need surgery to cure a heel injury, reports AFP.