



A dated file photo shows German supper star Steffi Graf standing beside an Opel Astra at the international automobile exhibition in Frankfurt. Opel declared on Monday that it was not going to renew the sponsorship deal with the scandal-prone tennis player.
— AFP/UNB photo

Cantona's S African disciple!

JOHANNESBURG, Oct 17: A South African soccer player who landed a kung-fu kick on his own coach after being substituted has been given a one-year ban from the game, reports Reuters.

Rabali Blackpool's Austrian-born coach Water Rattmann needed treatment for a kidney injury after the incident, which was reminiscent of the flying kick on a fan which led to England-based French star Eric Cantona being banned earlier this year.

Rabali defender Ahmed Gora Ebrahim had six months of his ban suspended after expressing his remorse to the National Soccer League's disciplinary committee at the weekend.

Ebrahim was taken away in a police van after the incident in a First Division match against visiting Umtata Bucks in Thohoyandou, shown live on South African Television, last month.

Substitute after just 16 minutes, Ebrahim tore off his shirt as he walked off the pitch and then launched a Cantona-style kick at the coach.

The ban is effective immediately. Ebrahim has already had his contract cancelled by the club, who have since been relegated from the First Division with three rounds of the competition remaining.

Inferior seeding angers Pakistan

LONDON, Oct 17: Holders Pakistan protested to the World Squash Federation (WSF) on Monday about being seeded second to Australia in the World Team Championship being held in Cairo next month, reports Reuters.

Pakistan, who took the title from Australia by beating them in the final in Karachi two years ago, have been placed in Pool B in the qualifying section with third seeds England, hosts Egypt and Sweden.

They are likely to face a tricky semifinal against England while Australia, in Pool A, are scheduled to have an easier semifinal against fourth seeds Finland.

WSF executive director Ted Wallbuton said the seeding panel had taken into account the fact that six-times world champion Jahangir Khan, who helped Pakistan to win last time, had no retired.

This time world number one Jansher Khan leads their challenge but Pakistan's next best players are Zarak Jahan Khan, ranked 10th, and Mir Zaman Gul, ranked 34th.

Australia have world number three Rodney Eyles, fifth-ranked Brett Martin and ninth-ranked Anthony Hill.

The WSF said Pakistan's appeal would be considered within the next 10 days.

Booter banned for assault on fan

TOKYO, Oct 17: Japan's Urawa Reds soccer club said on Thursday it has suspended one of its players for four months for an incident in which he reportedly attacked a supporter, reports Reuters.

A spokeswoman for the Reds, one of the 14 professional teams in the J-League, told Reuters that defender Yoshinori Taguchi, 30, has been suspended until his contract expires at the end of January.

Media reports said Taguchi attacked a 26-year-old man who they said had harassed him in recent matches.

Dancing to Juninho's beat

MIDDLESBROUGH, England, Oct 17: Brazilian international Juninho received a rousing welcome here today, reports Reuters.

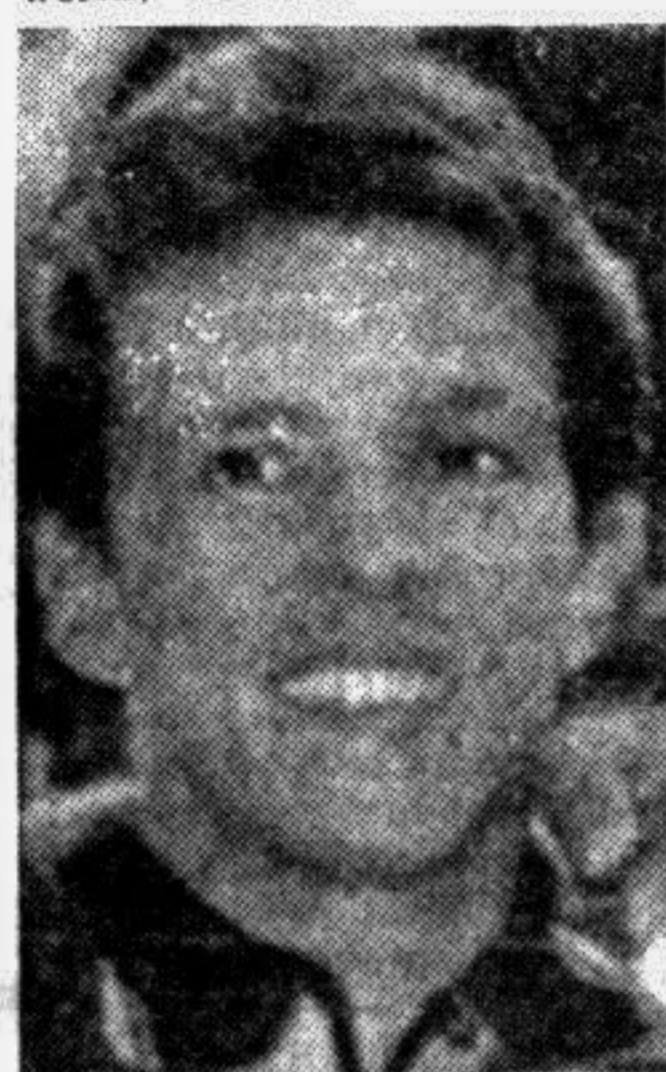
A 50-piece samba band gave a Brazilian flavour to the occasion at the Riverside Stadium but the cold and damp weather was distinctly English.

Juninho, signed from Sao Paulo for 4.75 million pounds sterling (7.47 million dollars), was accompanied by his father Oswaldo and mother Lucia and given a big cheer when he emerged from the players' tunnel with player-manager Bryan Robson.

"The reception was magnificent. I wasn't expecting anything like this," Juninho, whose words were translated by an interpreter, told a throng of more than 100 journalists.

Juninho is not really the only person in Middlesbrough football club. It's to do with the whole team.

Robson, whose team are fourth in the league table, said Juninho brought charisma to the game. "People talk about him settling in but he is a tough character and wants to be the best in the world," he said.



JUNINHO

"My players relish him coming and he believes the Premier league could be the strongest in the world with players like Gullit and Bergkamp already here."

Dutchmen Ruud Gullit and Dennis Bergkamp are in their first English seasons with London clubs Chelsea and Arsenal.

"He is still young still learning, I wouldn't have paid that sort of money if I didn't believe he could become one of the best players in the world," Robson said.

Asked about the winter in Middlesbrough, Robson interjected: "It's not exactly the North Pole. Maybe we should be getting him a snow plough instead of a club car."

Juninho will fly back to Brazil with his family on Wednesday to wait for his work permit to come through. The formalities are expected to be completed next week and he could make his Premier league debut on October 28 against Manchester United.

Bebeto on road to Japan

TOKYO, Oct 17: Brazilian soccer star Bebeto wants to play in Japan next year after the current Spanish league ends in May, a Japanese sports newspaper reported today, reports Reuters.

"I cannot say the name [of the Japanese team] with which I am negotiating, but it may safely be said that I will be in Japan next year," Bebeto was quoted as saying in a telephone interview by the Tokyo Chunichi Sports.

Bebeto, who scored three goals to help Brazil win the 1994 World Cup in the United States, now plays for Deportivo la Coruna and is the top scorer in the Spanish First Division with nine goals.

He gave the interview after his team lost to Atletico Madrid 1-0 on Saturday, the Tokyo Sports daily said.

The 31-year-old striker told the newspaper that one of the reasons he wanted to play in Japan was that he was hoping for financial stability.

"I am pleased with Spain and Coruna, but it is difficult for many fans to understand my situation. When the current season ends, I will make it clear [why I want to leave]," Bebeto was quoted as saying.

The daily said Bebeto gave up plans to play in Japan earlier this year following strong opposition from his club.

More than 50 foreign players, including a star-studded contingent of about

two dozen Brazilians now play in the 14-team professional J-League.

If Bebeto does come to Japan, he would be following several other members of the World Cup-winning Brazilian squad who are already earning millions of dollars to play in the J-League.

Jorginho and Leonardo are playing for Kashima Antlers, Zinho for Yokohama Flugels and captain Dunga for Jubilo Iwata.

The league also wants to raise its level as part of Japan's bid to host the World Cup.

Japan and arch-rivals South Korea are bidding to stage the 2002 World Cup finals, whose venue will be decided by FIFA, the sport's governing body, next June.

Mixed bag on Tokyo's bid

TOKYO, Oct 17: Japanese cabinet ministers were split today over the country's bid to stage the World Cup soccer finals in 2002, reports Reuters.

Foreign Minister Yohei Kono told an informal cabinet meeting the World Cup was something Japan should make efforts to achieve, but stressed the need to maintain friendship with rival bidders South Korea.

Post and Telecommunications Minister Isset Inoue also expressed mixed opinions, telling a news conference he was personally in favour of Japan and South Korea co-hosting one of the world's biggest sport events.

Inoue admitted such an arrangement would require the rules of FIFA, the sport governing body to be amended, but said it would help bilateral friendship between Tokyo and Seoul.

However, cabinet ministers eventually accepted a proposal by Construction Minister Yoshro Mori that the Tokyo government should make a firm bid to host the event.

"To avoid the recurrence of Nagoya city's failure of inviting the 1988 Olympics, our government should tackle the bid firmly," Mori was quoted as saying.

Mori called on Prime Minister Tomichi Murayama and his cabinet ministers to cooperate with the bid, telling them that South Korea's gov-

ernment and business community were united in their efforts to host the event.

In an attempt to avoid over-heated rivalry between the two countries, Kono broached the idea of co-hosting the event in a conversation with his then South Korean counterpart Han Sung-Joo last autumn, Kyodo news agency said.

South Korea are convinced they are best qualified to host the 2002 cup as they have reached the final rounds four times, while Japan had never survived the qualifying stages.

Both nations have already staged major sporting events.

South Korea can point to the successful hosting of the 1988 Olympics, although Japan was the first Asian country to stage the Olympics in Tokyo in 1964.

ing Monica for three matches," King said Monday night.

Seles, the co-ranked number one player in the world with Steffi Graf of Germany, was invited along with six others, including Martina Navratilova, Lindsay Davenport, Gigi Fernandez and Mary Joe Fernandez, to play in the final from November 25-26 in Spain. The four players to play will be announced Nov 15.

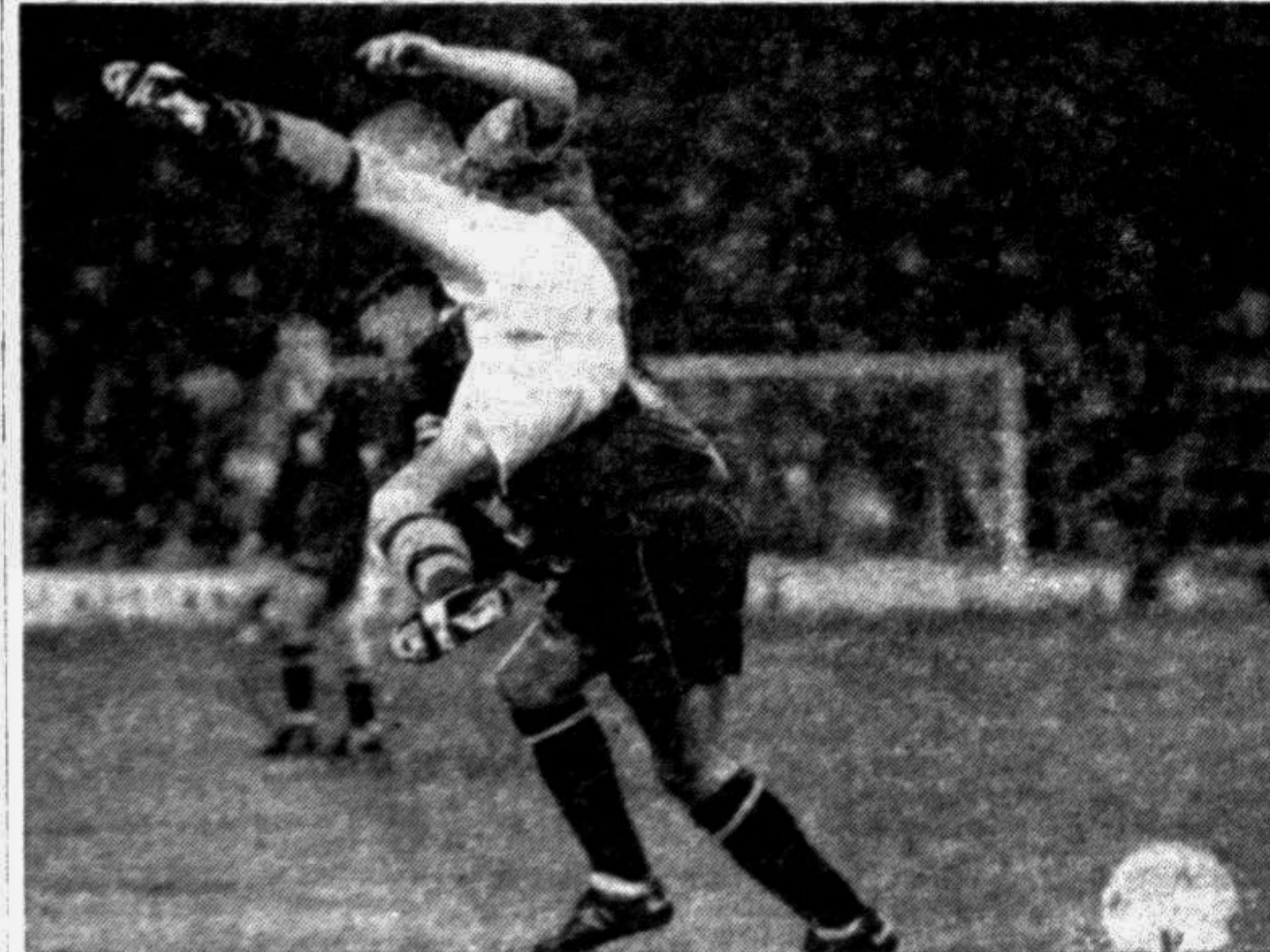
The idea of using Seles to play two singles matches and one doubles match in the best-of-five match competition has been endorsed by the other players, King said.

"When we played France all the players were saying, 'can Monica play,'" said King, referring to the team's semifinal victory in July.

"So, the American women want to win. They are not like saying, 'if she plays I won't get to play.' They don't get into that and that is very helpful because as the captain I don't have to deal with the ego thing. There hasn't been a question. They want her. They know, with her it will make a difference."

After being sidelined for more than two years after being stabbed in the back while on the court in Hamburg on April 30, 1993, the 22-year-old Seles had made a triumphant return to tournament competition in August, when she came back — without losing a set and followed by reaching the US Open final where she lost to Graf.

"I think she is the one to



A mid-pitch collision between two players of West Ham and Wimbledon during their English Premiership encounter at Selhurst Park in London on October 16.
— AFP/UNB photo

Peter Graf withdraws appeal

STUTTGAERT, Germany, Oct 17: The father of tennis star Steffi Graf has withdrawn a final appeal against being held in custody while German public prosecutors investigate allegations of tax evasion, court officials said today, reports Reuters.

Peter Graf, who has been detained in Mannheim since early August to stop him fleeing or concealing evidence that might support accusations he and his daughter dodged millions of marks in taxes, had failed to win previous appeals.

"He has withdrawn his appeal against remand in custody," a spokesman for Karlsruhe court authorities said. The court was due to make a ruling about Graf's final appeal this week.

The court official stressed that Peter Graf's decision was in no way an acceptance of guilt. The father of the multi-millionaire still has the right for his custody to be reviewed on a regular basis.

A revolutionary sporting judge!

ROME, Oct 17: Italian magistrate Maurizio Laludi, previously involved in Red Brigade guerrilla trials, will take over as Italian soccer's new sporting judge after the last incumbent resigned in protest last week, reports Reuters.

Laludi, 47 and a lifelong Juventus fan, was quoted today as saying he had accepted the job ruling on disciplinary offences committed in Italy's Serie A and B divisions.

"A magistrate is a magistrate... Juventus and Turin have nothing to do with it," he said when asked whether his own club loyalties would influence his judgement.

The previous Serie A and B sporting judge Alberto Fumagalli quit last Friday, saying he could no longer work with the Italian Soccer Federation after failing to get his way over controversial suspensions for players who take a dive.

Robson returns to Porto

PORTO, Portugal, Oct 17: Former England manager Bobby Robson returned on Monday to take charge at Portuguese champions Porto after a two-month absence for illness, reports Reuters.

Robson, who underwent successful surgery in Britain to remove a cancerous cist from his nose, plans to be on the bench for Porto's European Cup Champions' League home tie against Greek side Panathinaikos on Wednesday.

Porto, unbeaten in domestic competition for a year, head the Portuguese League with a three-point lead over eternal rivals Sporting.

Robson, who guided Porto to the championship last season, said he was feeling "fine" and "ready to get back to work."

Ref put in the dock

RIO DE JANEIRO, Oct 17: A referee is under investigation by soccer authorities in Brazil after lashing out at a player during a match, Globo television said, reports Reuters.

Luiz Vila Nova was in the process of sending off Semilde, a mid-fielder with Urubuetama in Sunday's Ceara State Championship match against Ferroviario, when he became incensed by something the player said and landed a fierce right hook on his chin.

Semilde responded by kicking the referee who was then restrained by players.

Man United mania in KL

By Bob Holmes

It is football season in Malaysia and one English team, Manchester United, seems to have taken the country by storm. Among its 100,000 fans in Malaysia, reports Gemini News Service, are members of royalty, a cabinet minister, TV personalities and a former Miss Malaysia.

IT is tropical, 8,000 miles from Old Trafford and intrinsically alien to their grey, industrial home, but nowhere will Manchester United's attempt to regain England's football premiership be followed with greater intensity than in Malaysia.

Better known for match-fixing than match-winning, Malaysia has never been a great football power, but the country's 17 million people have a deep passion for the game which has recently manifested itself in the form of United mania.

Here trendy young 'devils' don the Manchester red to the office and about town, local newspapers offer blanket coverage while the estimated 100,000 fans include royalty, a cabinet minister, TV personalities and a former Miss Malaysia.

For most of them and certainly for the 2,300 hardcore members of the official Manchester United Supporters Club, the new season cannot come soon enough.

Although a devoted few will make the annual pilgrimage to the shrine of Old Trafford the vast majority will have to be content with following their heroes from a distance.

However, that distance rapidly diminishes once you open the door to three rooms above a nondescript row of shops in Kuala Lumpur's satellite town of Petaling Jaya.

The walls are festooned with United paraphernalia including pictures of heroes past and present that range from the poignant -- a black and white shot of the Busby Babes just before the 1958 Munich air disaster -- to the provocative -- the poster that says "1966 was a great year for English football -- Eric (Cantona) was born."

There is a comprehensive library that includes match programmes, videos dating back to the 1963 FA Cup final and even stretches to Pink (the Manchester Evening News' football special) -- collectors' items in Kuala Lumpur.

Every conceivable knickknack and item of clothing is also available at special membership prices, but most impressive is the level of conversation. Indeed, but for the accents, you could be in Northwest England as the respective merits of Ryan Giggs' left foot, Andre Kanchelkshi's corner kicks and Andy Cole's shin splints are animatedly discussed.

And that is before a ball has been kicked!

"You should be here on match days," smiles Laurence How, the amiable founder, secretary and leading factotum of the club. "People come wearing United colours, stay up for the commentary and cheer wildly at every move."

According to How, an accountant, the neighbours have long ceased asking the police to keep the fans quiet. For all that, it is not a den of

MANCHESTER UNITED
8,000 miles



hoodlums. Far from it as only genuine fans are allowed to join, no food or drink is served and one of the house rules most strictly observed is: no praise to be given to the opposing team.

No other team's colours are allowed either -- although an exception was made for Middlesbrough when former United legend Bryan Robson joined the northeast club as manager.

Founded in April, 1993, the Malaysian branch is one of the most vibrant and sophisticated of the 100-plus United Supporters' Clubs around the world -- and the first in Asia -- with members from lawyers to hawkers, captains of industry to housewives.

"We're about at the level of Malta's branch," says How, "which is not bad considering most of the time. Martin Edwards replies," says How proudly.

For Malaysian football fans, disillusionment with their scandal-ridden domestic game has coincided with a period of United dominance and, to some extent, many people have leapt on the bandwagon.

"But we are very strict about who we let in," says How. "They must prove to me they're passionate about the club."

Eighteen months in incubation, the supporters club has been a happy marriage of those with a longtime love affair and youngsters whose idolatry is worthy of Beatlemania -- decades after the "Fifth Beatle," otherwise known as George Best, hung up his boots.

But any notion this phenomena was a passing fad was well and truly put to rest when a sorely-depleted United squad paid a pre-season courtesy call in early August.

No less than 50,000 people watched what was little more than a loosener against the local Selangor Selection side while an autograph session at the team's hotel drew 4,000 but, amid scenes of near-hysteria, had to be abandoned for safety reasons.

If any of the younger players still thought this Asian capital an unlikely choice for a warm-up tour, they likely would have changed their minds with further adulation and autograph-signing -- at the press conference!

Such was the demand to see the Red Devils in the flesh that special functions were organised such as an afternoon tea with the players for \$15 (including a T-shirt) which had to be limited to officials.

For those who came from the far corners such as Sabah and Sarawak, there was bitter disappointment as they did not get to meet their heroes and a row broke out between the supporters club and the tour organisers over how the players' time should be allocated.

Everyone, it seemed, had underestimated the magnetism of the English club whose players, had they stayed long enough, would have seen their football pubs rejoicing in the name 'Theatre of Dreams.'

Here, the walls are adorned with photographs of players and televisions play re-runs of old matches. There are no prizes for guessing which club has a virtual monopoly.

The last word must go to How, who is nothing if not a diplomat and is even helping local Liverpool fans set up their own fan club. When asked why he is aiding such deadly rivals, he replies: "When you are the prettiest girl in town, you don't worry about others." -- Gemini News

that has been going over 30 years and is so much nearer."

Indeed, United chairman Martin Edwards expressed his amazement when he popped in. "I just didn't expect this amount of enthusiasm so far from home," he said.

How estimates that United have at least 60 per cent of Malaysia's fans of British football, with Liverpool claiming 25 per cent and the rest nowhere. Asked why United has such a strong hold, How smiles and says three words: "Law, Best & Charlton."

"Even though they were a different generation, their magic is somehow still with the club," he insists. "Many of us follow British football more than our own and United are just the best."

He is one-eyed enough to brush over the club's 28-year barren spell without a championship and communicates regularly with Old Trafford, commenting on issues such as the recent sale of stars, Cantona's infamous kung-fu attack and the controversial purchase of Andy Cole. "And

About the Author: Bob Holmes is a British freelance journalist based in Kuala Lumpur.

Seles King's trump-card

NEW YORK, Oct 17: US Fed Cup captain Billie Jean King says she is looking forward to possibly using Monica Seles in singles and doubles in the final against Spain next month, reports Reuters.

"I would even consider using Hamed new WBO champ

CARDIFF, Wales, Oct 17: Naseem Hamed planted a left hook on Steve Robinson's chin in the eighth round Saturday to floor the WBO featherweight champion and win the first of what he pledges will be a series of world titles, reports AP.

The 21-year-old English-born son of a Yemeni father sent Robinson crumpling to the floor at 1:40 of the round to win the title before 16,000 of the Welshman's fans at Cardiff rugby stadium.

It was his 20th pro fight -- all victories -- and his debut as a featherweight. Hamed, who already has graduated from bantamweight to super-bantamweight, says he is targeting world titles up through lightweight and beyond.

For Robinson, it was his eighth defence of a title he won in April 1993.

The Welshman, right on the limit at 126 pounds (57.1 kilos) knew he would be in for a battering from the young challenger, who was 125 (56.7), and spent the entire fight covering up with his gloves almost constantly in front of his face.

beat still," King said of Seles, who had won eight Grand Slam singles titles before the attack.

The Yugoslav-born Seles became a naturalised American citizen in 1994, and has never before represented the United States in any international team competition.

Newcombe reckons himself

MELBOURNE, Oct 17: Former Wimbledon champion John Newcombe wants to stay on as captain of the Australian Davis Cup tennis squad despite its dismal record under his leadership, reports AP.

Australia were beaten 3-2 by Hungary in Budapest at the weekend, tumbling out of the elite World Group for the first time.

Last year, Australia only held on to their World Group spot by defeating New Zealand.

Newcombe's two-year contract now has expired. Nominations for the captaincy will open shortly and an appointment is expected to be made next month.

Newcombe made a controversial decision to name 18-year-old Mark Philippoussis and Todd Woodbridge as Australia's singles players against Hungary.

Woodbridge, who never had played singles before, lost both his singles to lower-ranked players, while Philippoussis was 1-1 but lost the decider.

"So, the American women want to win. They are not like saying, 'if she plays I won't get to play.' They don't get into that and that is very helpful because as the captain I don't have to deal with the ego thing. There hasn't been a question. They want her. They know, with her it will make a difference."

After being sidelined for more than two years after being stabbed in the back while on the court in Hamburg on April 30, 1993, the 22-year-old Seles had made a triumphant return to tournament competition in August, when she came back -- without losing a set and followed by reaching the US Open final where she lost to Graf.

"I think she is the one to