



Atlanta Braves owner and media mogul Ted Turner (L) waves to fans as a security guard displays the Baseball World Series Trophy in Atlanta on Oct 30. The Braves beat the Cleveland Indians in the final two days earlier.

Leconte lives up to mark

PARIS, Oct 31: Crowd favourite Henri Leconte showed glimpses of his old form to tame American veteran Aaron Krickstein in straight sets in the first round of the Paris Open on Monday, reports Reuter.

Leconte delighted fans packing the high-tech Bercy arena with some aggressive tennis on his way to a convincing 7-5, 6-3 victory. The gifted but erratic Frenchman, who has rarely gone further than the first round since reaching the semifinals in Doha last January, used powerful volleys and blistering returns to set up a second-round clash with eighth seed Sergi Bruguera of Spain.

such a good atmosphere and in a place where I've experienced very special moments," said a tearful Leconte after his unexpected victory. Twice a semifinalist in the star-studded indoor event in 1986 and 1987, Leconte, making his last appearance in the Paris Open, said he planned to enter next year's French Open before retiring. His emotional match came as the highlight of an otherwise dull first day in the 2,250,000 dollars tournament. US Open sensation Byron Black of Zimbabwe made a tentative start with a hard-fought straight sets win over Romanian qualifier Andrei Pavel. Black, who impressed by reaching the quarter-finals at Flushing Meadow in September with wins over Swede Thomas Enqvist and German Michael Stich, needed a tie-

Venus starts in style

OAKLAND, California, Oct 31: Exactly one year after making her impressive professional debut, future tennis star Venus Williams returned to the bank of the West Classic and posted a crushing victory on Monday, reports Reuter. Fifteen-year-old Williams, who took Arantxa Sanchez Vicario to three sets in her first match as a professional here last year, romped to a 6-2, 6-1 victory over South African Rosalyn Fairbanks-Nideffer in a first-round match. "I've made a lot of improvements over the last year," said Williams, who smacked 11 service winners during the match. "I realised I don't have to hit a winner off every ball. I've learned to set up my shots, I can hit a backhand slice and my serve is much better."

Florencia Labat 6-4, 6-4 and seventh-seeded Czech Helena Sukova took out American Jolene Watanbe 6-3, 7-6. But it was Williams that the crowd at Oakland Coliseum turned out to see and she left them and the veteran Fairbanks-Nideffer very impressed. The 34-year-old Nideffer, who has been ranked as high as 15 in her career, said Williams' serves are as hard as she has faced. "There aren't a whole lot of players who can serve like that, who can count on so many free points off their serve," said Fairbanks-Nideffer. "It is surprising that someone can play so seldom and be so confident. I thought she would come out nervous," she said of Williams, who played just two tournaments this year. Williams, who is taking a week off from classes at a private high school in Florida, overpowered her opponent from the back court.

Ma mustering up 'army'

BEIJING, Oct 31: "Ma's army." China's famous running team from Liaoning which broke up so painfully last winter, is coming together again albeit without its star Wang Junxia, reports AFP. Coached by wonder-trainer Ma Junren, the "army" brought about Chinese athletics' stunning entry on the international scene in 1993. But it was wound up after most of its member quit, worn out by "General Ma's" strict discipline, amid accusations that he was not sharing the bonuses the team won. Nevertheless, it could soon be back. A few of the deserters are already in training again at Ma's training camp at Dalian, a port city in the northeastern province of Liaoning. The Yangtze Evening Post listed those runners back with or about to rejoin the guru of Chinese athletics in an issue received in Beijing Monday. Wang Yuan is already back in training with Ma after several months with Wang Junxia, the women's world record holder at 3,000 metres and 10,000 metres. Liu Dong was the 800-metre gold medalist in the 1993 World Championships and thrown out of Ma's camp a several months later for indiscipline. But she has already made contacts for a "transfer", the paper said. Wang Xiaoxia has also said she wants to return to the fold of the famous coach. But

according to the paper neither Wang Junxia nor Zhang Linli are expected to return for the moment. Like most of his former proteges, Ma Junren says he wants the revamped version to be different from his former team. "I have made mistakes. I must take responsibility for them but now I want to rebuild Ma's army," he said in Nanjing weekend, received in Beijing Monday. Ma also says that, with Qu Yunxia and his new recruits, he is more confident of doing well for China at next year's Atlanta Olympics. After long months of silence, he took advantage of the third Inter-City Games, which finished in Nanjing Monday, to stage a grand return to the limelight. On the track his protegee Jiang Bo relegated Wang Junxia to second place in the 5,000 metres. Meanwhile, behind the scenes in the ancient imperial capital he and Wang dropped the hatchet. And even if Wang has ruled out coming back to train with Ma full-time, the champion has said she is

ready to work with him more regularly, under the guidance of her new coach Mao Dezhen. With the famous army back, China can expect to do well again at Atlanta, even if Wang Junxia goes her own way for the moment. An International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) dope-testing team found trace of the anabolic steroid nandrolone in the first sample tested after Jayasinghe won the 200 metres title at the Asian Championships in Jakarta last month. "Inter-services hockey" JESSORE, Oct 31. Bangladesh Army retained the title of inter-services hockey championship after playing to a goalless draw with Bangladesh Air Force at the BAF Base Matruh Rahman here today, reports UNB. Bangladesh Navy finished runners-up in the three-day meet.

It's a matter of time for Sampras

PARIS, Oct 31: Pete Sampras will recapture the number one spot from fellow American Andre Agassi next week, a spokesman for the ATP Tour said on Monday, reports Reuter. Sampras, who was overtaken by Agassi last April, earned 215 points by reaching the semifinals in Essen last week. This kept Sampras in second place in Monday's rankings with 5,048 points compared to Agassi's 5,279. But Agassi, who won the Paris Open last year, is out of the lucrative indoor event which started on Monday with injury and will drop 559 points. Sampras, who fell to Agassi in the quarterfinals here last year, would only lose 125 points if he is beaten in his opening match in the second round against either Swede Jonas Bjorkman or Frenchman Arnaud Boetsch on Wednesday.

"It's a bit more complicated than that because under the ATP Tour rules, they can compensate some of the points they lose with points from other tournaments, but anyway it is certain that Sampras will be number one on November 6, even if it's not for long," the spokesman said. He added that Agassi, or even world number three Austrian Thomas Muster, who won in Essen on Sunday, could move past Sampras the following week. The race for the privilege of ending the year as the number one player would ultimately be decided in the ATP Tour World Championship starting on November 13 in Frankfurt.

Tyson raring to go

LAS VEGAS, Oct 31: Former heavyweight champion Mike Tyson looked impressive in a short surprise open sparring session on Monday as he prepared for Saturday's bout with Buster Mathis Jr, reports Reuter. Tyson, who demolished lightly-regarded Peter McNeeley in an 89-second mismatch three months ago, had not sparred in public since his release from prison, creating rumours that his skills may have deteriorated. There was little evidence of any deterioration Monday. Tyson aggressively dominated a three-round sparring session, demonstrating an active jab, effective combinations and strong body shots. "I believe if I continue to cultivate my skills, I will be a formidable force in boxing," Tyson said during an impromptu news conference following the work out.

Jayasinghe's anxious two-day

COLOMBO, Oct 31: Asian sprint champion Susanthika Jayasinghe, who has returned one positive dope test, will have her second sample tested in Tokyo on Thursday, Sri Lankan athletics officials said on Tuesday, reports Reuter. An International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) dope-testing team found trace of the anabolic steroid nandrolone in the first sample tested after Jayasinghe won the 200 metres title at the Asian Championships in Jakarta last month. "Inter-services hockey" JESSORE, Oct 31. Bangladesh Army retained the title of inter-services hockey championship after playing to a goalless draw with Bangladesh Air Force at the BAF Base Matruh Rahman here today, reports UNB. Bangladesh Navy finished runners-up in the three-day meet.

Maradona means magic

BUENOS AIRES, Oct 31: Thirty-five may mark the end of many careers in soccer but Argentine superstar Diego Maradona, who celebrated his birthday on Monday, feels half his age and as sharp as ever, reports Reuter. "I hope that God will give me the necessary strength to continue running like I have in each game. I turn 35 but feel like 18. This is like a dream," Maradona told local radio. "I have incredible strength and really want to continue giving all I have to the (players) and my happiness to the people." Following a 15-month suspension for drug abuse, the outspoken, controversial striker has made an incredible comeback, leading his

new team Boca Juniors to win 13 points out of a possible 15 in five games. They have won four times and drawn once. The Maradona magic — which many considered gone forever — is back in full flow, pushing Boca to the top after many a dull campaign. But Maradona's exploits are not limited to the pitch — next week he will deliver a lecture at Oxford University. From the podium where Mother Teresa spoke of Christian piety and Indira Gandhi of the sufferings of the Indian people, Maradona is expected to speak of his deeds. These include leading the Argentine team to World Cup victory in 1986. Ironically, Maradona will be lecturing in the country whose side were knocked out of the 1986 World Cup by a

controversial goal he apparently scored with his hand. The incident, which still upsets many English fans, has passed into the soccer annals as the "hand of God" case. Less Godly still was his shooting with an air rifle at journalists who were filming him from the gate of his weekend home, where he had locked himself up with his family in February 1994 after vowing to hang up the boots for good. But for Argentines who idolise him, these are things of the past. Even President Carlos Menem, a fan of Boca's arch-rivals River Plate and a former critic of Maradona's ways, wished him well on his birthday. "Argentine soccer has recovered a brilliant figure," Menem said.

Marshall skips World Open

LONDON, Oct 31: World number two Peter Marshall will miss next month's World Open championship in Cyprus because of ill-health, reports Reuter. The England number one, who missed the recent US Open because of flu, said on Monday he had decided to pull out of the Nicosia event because he had been unable to put in sufficient training. FIFA experts in Seoul SEOUL, Oct 31: A delegation from international football's ruling body FIFA arrived here Tuesday for a week-long inspection of South Korea's plans to host the 2002 World Cup, before travelling on to rival candidate Japan, reports AFP. The team, led by Horst Schmidt, general secretary of the German Football Association, will inspect facilities in Seoul and other cities before leaving on November 6 for a similar tour of Japan, the Korean World Cup bidding committee (KOBID) said. It is the first FIFA inspection team to visit since Japan and South Korea, vying for the 2002 tournament to be staged for the first time in Asia, handed in their official bidding documents in September. Before being escorted by South Korean Soccer Association president Jung Mong-Joon, Schmidt said his team would look into South Korea's arrangements such as security, broadcasting and facilities. KOBID officials said. They said the FIFA team had been invited to a goodwill soccer match later in the day between South Korea and Saudi Arabia, arranged to promote Seoul's bid for the finals. The FIFA team also includes Scottish Football Association general secretary Ernest Walker, South African Football Association executive president Solomon Morewa, US Soccer Federation executive director Hank Steinbrecher, and Richard Bunn representing the international television consortium.

Tulio in scoring spree

RIO DE JANEIRO, Oct 31: Striker Tulio scored twice as Botafogo beat Portuguesa 2-0 at the weekend, taking his tally in the Brazilian Championship to 14 goals and putting his team top of their group in the second stage of the competition, reports Reuter. Tulio opened his account with a spectacular effort from the edge of the penalty area in the first half and made the game safe for Botafogo when he converted a penalty in the second. Flamengo striker Edmundo, who has been the subject of intense transfer speculation in the last week, had a less happy time in his team's 1-1 draw with Vasco da Gama. "The animal" showed only glimpses of the form which led Flamengo to pay 5 million dollars to sign him from Palmeiras in May. Edmundo could also be in trouble after a newspaper published a photograph on Monday in which he appeared to be making an obscene gesture to the Vasco fans. Striker Marcelo put Vasco ahead from a free-kick but missed a penalty early in the second half before Flamengo midfielder Djair equalised from another free-kick six minutes from time. Earlier, Romario, who now lags six goals behind leading goalscorer Tulio in the competition, wasted two good chances to put Flamengo level. Botafogo's win put them ahead of Corinthians — who beat Sao Paulo 1-0 — on goal difference at the top of Group A. The winners of each group in the second stage, in which the teams play those in the other group, will join first

stage group winners Cruzeiro and Fluminense in the semifinals. Vasco's point put them second in Group B behind Santos, who stayed top despite being hammered 4-0 away by Vitoria. Vasco as level on points with Internacional, Goias, Atletico Mineiro and Fluminense, who will take a bonus point to the semifinals if they win the second stage as well. Argentina's former World Cup goalkeeper Sergio Goycochea made a crucial mistake as Guarani lost 2-1 away to Internacional, failing to get to the ball and allowing striker Neto to nip in and score the winner in the last minute. South American champions Gremio, who have a reputation for uncompromising play, were involved in another rough game, with three sendings-off in their 1-0 home win over Sport Recife. Gremio midfielder Dinho received his fourth red card this year while Sport midfielder Alex and defender Sandro were both dismissed for fouls on Gremio striker Paulo Nunes.

Juninho joins Boro mates

MIDDLESBROUGH, England, Oct 31: Juninho trained with Middlesbrough on Monday, less than 24 hours after arriving at his new English club following his long flight from Brazil, reports Reuter. Manager Bryan Robson said the Brazil midfielder was keen to train with his new teammates, including Bolivian international winger Jaime Moreno who is acting as his interpreter. "Juninho will be eased in gradually. We will have a full scale practice match on Thursday, when he will be given the role we want him to play," said Robson. Middlesbrough are confident Juninho will make his Premier League debut at home to Leeds United on Saturday after a hitch over the transfer deal is amicably settled with Sao Paulo. Club chief executive Keith Lamb said there were no problems with the deal but that the first half of the 4.75 million pounds sterling (7.5 million dollars) transfer fee would not be paid until the international clearance certificate was received for the player. Lamb added: "I understand the certificate is on its way. I won't put on any pressure unless the certificate has not arrived by Tuesday or Wednesday. We are confident Juninho will play against Leeds United."

The 22-year-old Juninho received a warm welcome when he arrived at Teesside airport on Sunday night from Heathrow after the flight from South America. Juninho pleased the fans by draping a Brazilian flag over his suit and open-necked shirt and then wearing a red and white Middlesbrough scarf.

Inter's elation for Englishmen

ROME, Oct 31: Englishmen Roy Hodgson and Paul Ince were praised on Monday for their part in helping rejuvenated Internazionale draw 1-1 with arch-rivals and league leaders AC Milan in Sunday's Serie A derby, reports Reuter. Hodgson, Inter's new coach, was praised for the way he has galvanised the side since his recent arrival in place of the sacked Ottavio Bianachi, and more remarkably, Ince finally earned some praise after scornful assessments of his play since his arrival at the start of the season. The England international midfielder, who has regularly scored lowest in the media's post-match assessments, picked up the team's highest score in the Corriere Dello Sport for his gritty performance. The headline in the Gazzetta Dello Sport read: "Inter are Milan's equals, regenerated by Hodgson, they keep face in the derby." Referring to the former Swiss national coach as "Mr Roy", the newspaper said Hodgson's impact on the team was already evident.