

Sport

Pak selectors still sitting on the fence

KARACHI, Jan 8: Pakistani selectors who met here Sunday to pick the cricket squad for the forthcoming World Cup have delayed the decision until Friday, officials said, reports AFP.

Zafar Altaf who chaired the meeting gave no reason beyond saying that the selectors wanted to observe certain players who were currently participating in the Wills Cup domestic tournament.

Cricketing sources here, however, said the delay was due to differences over the possible inclusion of former captain Javed Miandad in the national side. Miandad is a serious contender, Altaf told reporters.

"We have no doubt about his cricketing ability," Altaf said, adding: "But we want to take another look at his fitness."

Miandad left for London late Sunday on a private visit, but is expected to return in two or three days, Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) sources said.

The World Cup — jointly hosted by Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka — is to start on February 15.

Miandad — who has not played for Pakistan since December 1993 after suffering a leg injury — has said he would be available for the World Cup.

The ace Pakistani batsman had scored nearly 8,000 runs in one-day internationals and over 8,000 in Test cricket.

Newspapers said Basit Ali, who tried to step into Miandad's shoes, may not find a place in the final squad, and suggested the squad was likely to include Miandad.

Altaf said the PCB had also decided to organise a national cricket camp from January 24 in which four matches will be played between two Pakistan sides.

Besides 18 Test players attending the camp some more players would also be invited to play in these matches.

"Fitness and training of the players was the prime goal of the camp," Altaf said, adding that he wanted to see the boys get into peak physical shape just before the event.

Foreman's farewell bout called off

NEW YORK, Jan 8: George Foreman's planned farewell fight against Michael Moorer, scheduled for here on February 29, is off for a second time, according to a newspaper report Sunday, reports AFP.

New York Newsday said the bout, set for Madison Square Garden, might not come off because of comments made by Foreman and promoter Bob Arum about trying to arrange a fight later this year with Mike Tyson.

The comments undermined the promotion of Foreman-Moorer as the final fight in the career of the 46-year-old former champion, who has been stripped of the titles he won by beating Moorer in 1994.

TVKO, the pay-per-view backer of the Foreman-Moorer fight, wants protection against possible financial losses because of those statements, which were hastily retracted once the sponsor's anger was known.

Foreman was set to receive 9.6 million dollars for the fight while Moorer would have gotten three million dollars.

Tyson is set to fight British boxer Frank Bruno for the World Boxing Council title in Las Vegas on March 16, with an eye on other crowns held by Bruce Seldon and South African Frazier Botha.

A big money fight deal has also been discussed for Tyson this year, but mainly against Riddick Bowe late in 1996. Talks of a Tyson-Foreman bout have come almost totally from Foreman's Promoters.

The Foreman-Moorer fight was planned to be the centerpiece of the Garden's 25th anniversary celebration of the first Muhammad Ali-Joe Frazier bout, which took place there on March 8, 1971.

Ali and Frazier are expected to take part in promotional events, but Arum said he has not finalised anything with Ali. Arena officials said the fight could lose some of its luster and purse without Ali and Frazier as part of the package.

German spikers book Atlanta berth

BREMEN, Germany, Jan 8: Germany's women volleyball team booked their passage for the Atlanta Olympics on Sunday with a surprise victory over their Russian counterparts in Bremen, reports AFP.

The Germans won a close-fought encounter by 3 sets to 2 — 4-15, 15-9, 15-8, 15-14 — to defeat the Russians for the first time since 1987.

Apart from Germany, Brazil, China, Cuba and the United States have also qualified for the Olympics.

Russia have a second chance to claim a berth when they play a tournament in Japan at the end of May.

Brian now on way back?



LONDON, Jan 8: West Indies' record-breaking batsman Brian Lara is likely to play in next month's World Cup after winning selection in a provisional 20-man squad, his agent said on Monday, reports agencies.

Lara's future has been in doubt after he refused to tour Australia in protest against a fine imposed by the West Indies Cricket Board of Control following this year's tour of England.

He was fined 10 per cent of his tour fee, about 310,000 dollars, for going "absent without leave."

Lara returned to domestic cricket at the weekend, scoring a century in trials for the Trinidad and Tobago side, and on Monday his agent Jonathan Barnett said he had spoken to the 26-year-old Trinidadian about the World Cup.

"I feel confident he will be in a team," Barnett said.

Andre all keyed up

MELBOURNE, Jan 8: Andre Agassi is finally over a nagging chest muscle injury and ready to defend his Australian Open tennis title, reports AP.

The flamboyant American flew into Melbourne on Monday to complete his preparation for the first Grand Slam tournament of the year and said he was upbeat about his prospects.

"It's nice to be healthy again, feeling ready — and to start off here is a good secure feeling for me," he said.

"I had never played here before until last year and it's nice to know that when I've been away from the game a little bit I can come back to a place where I'm treated so well."

Agassi, who was red-eyed and shaven-haired at Monday's press conference, will play in the eight-man Colonial Classic event — which runs from Wednesday to Saturday at nearby Kooyong — to round off his build-up to the Open.

"Needless to say, my energy level is high," he said. "I've been away for a little bit, so you are always enthused to get back," he said.

The chest injury ruled Agassi out of the Davis Cup final against Russia in Moscow and the American said a lack of match fitness was his major concern.

"I'm as confident as I ever am, but it's not ideal for me to come into the tournament without playing a tournament for a few months," he said.

During his time away from the court, Agassi has been spending time in the gym keeping up his fitness and working on cardiovascular programmes.

Barnett also said Lara would not be playing county cricket this year after pulling out of his three-year contract with county champions Warwickshire.

Lara was quoted in Monday's Daily Telegraph as saying he would be "delighted" to consider a good offer from an English county.

Warwickshire chief executive Dennis Amiss said later on Monday the county were set to sign South African pace bowler Shaun Pollock after agreeing with Lara when they terminated his contract that the West Indian would not play for any other county this year.

Meanwhile, in Brisbane, West Indies cricket captain Richie Richardson said Sunday that the controversy over missing star batsman Brian Lara isn't foremost on his mind.

"I'm not even thinking about it at this point," Richardson said after his team's 14-run victory over Australia in a one-day match at the Gabba ground on Sunday.

"My main interest is to get the guys to play well enough to get into the finals and to win the world Series. After that I will start thinking

about what might happen when Brian comes back."

Richardson said he was not aware of how relations were between Lara and the West Indies Cricket Board after the star batsman was named in the provisional squad.

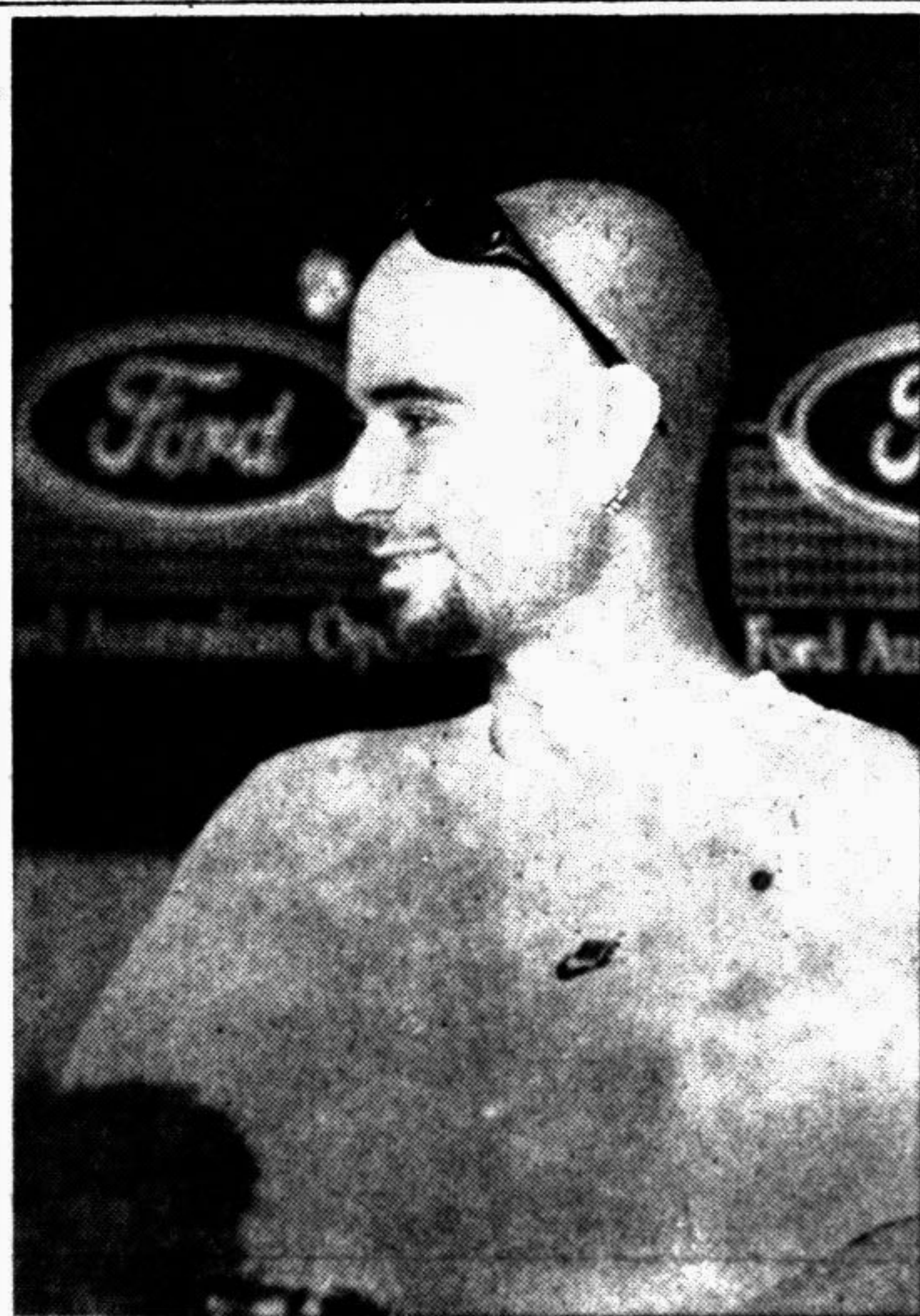
"I know things were written in newspapers but I don't know exactly what transpired back there regarding Brian Lara and the West Indies Cricket Board," Richardson said.

"I know that he is included in the 20 names which is not even a squad really, they just needed 20 names and his name was submitted."

Richardson said a player of Lara's quality would always be welcomed back into the team. But he also said any player should abide by the board's rulings and pay the penalty if disciplined for any reason.

"It's a pity that such a great talent had to miss the game," Richardson said. "The quicker the problem is sorted out and we get Brian Lara back the better."

"You can't afford to have that talent not playing the game but if he does something wrong he must pay the consequences."



World number two Andre Agassi, with his head fully shaven, appears at a press conference in Melbourne yesterday. Agassi is in Australia in preparation for the forthcoming Aussie Open which starts on Jan 15.

— AFP/UNB photo.

Haynes hounds England

SHARJAH, Jan 8: West Indies beat England by five wickets in the NEPC World Masters cricket series at the Sharjah Stadium here today, reports BSS.

Scores: England — 231 for four wickets (Mike Gatting 101 not out, Paul Terry 65; Sylvester Clarke two for 49).

West Indies — 233 for five wickets (Desmond Haynes 125 not out, Vivian Richards 60; John Emburey three for 31).

Korda tames the tyro

DOHA, Jan 8: Petr Korda outlasted Younes el-Aynaoui 7-6 (7-5), 2-6, 7-6, (7-5), prevailing in a two-hour and 21-minute battle Sunday to win the \$35,000 Qatar Open tennis his first title since December 1993, reports AP.

It's Korda's seventh career title and came against a 24-year-old Moroccan who only entered the tournament as a wild card after Frenchman Henri Leconte pulled out because of an injury.

The 27-year-old Czech's title comes just three months after a hernia operation to cure him of a nagging groin injury that hampered him for 18 months.

Backed by huge Arab support in the 3,500 strong crowd, the 24-year-old el Aynaoui broke first to lead 2-1 in the first set but Korda broke back immediately.

It was Korda's turn to go up a break at 4-2 but the 110th ranked Moroccan earned his second break in the ninth game to send the set to a tiebreaker.

El Aynaoui, who had been broken only once this week going into Sunday's final, steadied himself in the second set, holding his service throughout and breaking Korda twice.

But it didn't last long. Korda opened the third set with a break and then gave it back three games later.

After sending the match to a second tiebreak, el Aynaoui saved one match point but was powerless on the second.

Korda hugged his wife Regina and 3-year-old daughter Jessica at court-side.

El Aynaoui, who defeated top seeded Thomas Muster in the semifinals, had only appealed in one final before — in Casablanca in 1993. He took home almost \$52,000 to take his earnings over the \$1.5 million mark.

Korda announced that he would not play in the Sydney tournament next week because of a sprained ankle and because he could feel his hernia "throbbing inside."

The tournament is a warm up event for the Australian Open, which is the first Grand Slam of the season.

Wiesner breezes into Round Two

HOBART, Australia, Jan 8: Top-seeded Judith Wiesner of Austria won her first-round match Monday against American Lindsay Lee 6-2, 6-3 at the US 107,000 dollars Tasmanian International women's tennis tournament, reports AP.

Wiesner, ranked 23rd and coming back from a back injury that forced her to stop playing tournaments last September, said she felt she could play better than she did in Monday's match on the Domain Tennis Centre's Rebound Ace courts.

"I wasn't that confident coming into the tournament," she said. "When I started, I just tried not to make too many mistakes and find my rhythm and I didn't move very well."

Wiesner said she had concentrated on getting her first serves in because Lee, ranked 45, attacked the ball.

"I still have a lot of things to improve if I want to go far in the tournament," Wiesner said.

In another match, seventh-seeded Elena Likhovtseva of Russia defeated countrywoman Elana Makarova 6-2, 4-6, 6-1.



Graham Stuart (R) of Everton volleys the ball past a Stockport defender during an FA Cup encounter in Liverpool on Jan 7. The teams drew 2-2.

— AFP/UNB photo.

Milan masterly menace



ROME, Jan 8: AC Milan, starting the year in crushing form on a freshly-laid pitch, brushed aside Sampdoria 3-0 to go three points clear in the Italian soccer league on Sunday as league rivals Fiorentina drew at Roma, reports Reuters.

First-half goals from Christian Panucci and Montenegro striker Dejan Savicevic and a brilliantly-taken 56th-minute shot by Italian World Cup star Roberto Baggio handed Milan their first home win in three matches at a wet San Siro.

Sampdoria played the last five minutes of the match with 10 men after Roberto Mancini was carried off on a stretcher following a serious collision with Milan's newly-crowned European player-of-the-year George Weah.

Hospital officials said later Mancini had fractured his left eye socket and would undergo further tests.

The incident happened just a few metres from our bench," said Sampdoria coach Seven-Goraneriksson. "We all saw that Weah did not do it on purpose. Mancini took a really heavy blow, really heavy, but it was complete accident."

The win left Milan on 33 points ahead of Fiorentina on 30 with just one match to go to the season's midpoint.

Florentina travelled to Roma's Olympic stadium for a match billed as a clash between the visitors' Argentine striker Gabriel Batistuta and his Roma compatriot Abel Balbo.

Balbo looked like winning the battle with goals in the fifth and 50th minute to send Roma 2-0 up, but Fiorentina rose to the challenge with Anselmo Robbati scoring in the 61st and then Batistuta hitting the equaliser in the 70th.

The goal briefly made Batistuta the league's top-scorer with 11 but Igor Protti overtook him later on 12 with two second half goals to help struggling Bari thrash Inter 4-1.

The result was Inter's heaviest defeat since English manager Roy Hodgson took over at the club late last year.

Parma stayed third on 28 points after being held to a 2-2 draw at a 10-man Torino while Lazio's challenge faltered.

They went down 1-0 to Napoli after Croat striker Alen Boksic was sent off for throwing a punch in the 40th minute.

Milan had paid 250,000 dollars to have the pitch re-turfed in time for their opening game of the new year after coach Fabio Capello had complained about the poor condition.

Savicevic scored in the 38th, picking up on a defen-

sive error by Sampdoria to burst clear into the area and then beat the despairing keeper with a calm right footed shot.

Baggio, who joined Milan from champions Juventus last summer, scored after dribbling past several defenders.

Juventus, given a ferocious talking to after the new year break by coach Marcello Lippi, beat Atalanta 1-0.

Striker Fabrizio Ravanelli, who had looked a prime candidate to be dropped, scored with a 58th-minute penalty.

The match was marred by nasty incidents near the end when a group of fans threw coins at and insulted Roberto Bettega, vice-president of Juventus, as he tried to leave the ground.

The club's sporting director, Luciano Moggi, also had to be escorted from the stand by Carabinieri police.

Atalanta played with 10 men after striker Sandro Toller was sent off in the 78th minute for a second booking.

Parma twice took the lead at Torino but conceded two goals through poor defending despite dominating the match.

Torino had midfielder Paolo Cristallini sent off in the 69th minute but it merely spurred them on and French defender Jocelyn Angloma grabbed the equaliser in the 78th.

DFB for gentlemen's deal



BONN, Jan 8: Germany's 36 First and Second Division soccer clubs on Sunday voted to maintain by 'gentlemen's agreement' a limit of three foreign players per side which has been outlawed by the European court, reports Reuters.

The German Football Federation (DFB) had argued for a voluntary agreement until the end of the 1995-96 season to give national federations more time to organise opposition to the court ruling.

But immediately after the 36-0 vote in a hotel near Frankfurt, Bayern Munich president Franz Beckenbauer expressed doubts whether the agreement — which the DFB has no means to enforce — would hold.

Guinea still undecided

CAIRO, Jan 8: The Confederation of African Football (CAF) said it expected to hear today whether Guinea would step in as a last minute replacement for Nigeria in the African Nations Cup later this week, reports Reuters.

CAF spokesman Viken Djizmedjian said Guinea was worried that the withdrawal of the African champions two weeks before the start of the tournament in South Africa had left its national team to little time to prepare.

"This morning the Guinean ambassador came and asked for a final 2 pm (1200 GMT) deadline, while they have a meeting between the football federation and the government," Djizmedjian told Reuters.

"They said they wanted to come in good shape," he added.

Nigerian sports minister Jim Nwobodo said last week his country was pulling out of the tournament because of fears that players could be in danger in South Africa, which has led a campaign against Nigeria over the hanging in November of nine minority rights activists.

In a statement released on Friday, CAF said its organising and executive committees would decide later this month what sanctions they would impose on Nigeria.

"What happens when a club is struggling for survival, a thousand supporters are clamouring outside the gates and the club has a perfectly legal possibility of playing more foreigners," he said.

He promised that Bayern would stick to the agreement out of solidarity with the other clubs but added: "It would certainly have been more sensible to abolish the limit right away and bow to the EU decision, as will eventually happen anyway."

In a lawsuit brought by Belgian player Jean-Marc Bosman, the European court ruled last month that limits on the number of foreign European Union nationals a club could field and the sport's transfer system contravened EU law.

Stephan Engels, coach of once-mighty Cologne, last week announced his intention to field all the club's five foreigners together in a bid to stave off relegation from the Bundesliga.

But Cologne president Klaus Hartmann pledged his club would also stick to the accord.

DFB president Egidius

Braun, also vice-president of the European governing body UEFA, said it was necessary to find a solution which applied to the entire continent, not just the 18 federations in the EU.

"For instance, we can't have a two-tier system in European Cup matches, saying that the Russians and Hungarians can field only three foreign players, but EU clubs can have 10."

"That can't be right. UEFA will do everything to prevent this," Braun said.

Even after the accord, Germany's professional clubs face more uncertainty.

The court's ruling outlawed the payment of fees in transfers between EU countries for players at the end of their contracts, and is likely to mean the end of such payments in domestic transfers too.

Most clubs rely on a balance-sheet valuation of their players to meet DFB conditions for obtaining a licence. The DFB has yet to decide how to react now that clubs cannot expect to make any money from the sale of playing staff.



Fourteen-year-old Chinese prodigy Han Xue (R) is being congratulated by fellow competitor Jaime King of England on the victory podium after the women's 50 metres breaststroke final of the Hong Kong Swimming World Cup on Jan 7. Han broke the world record with a time of 31.11 seconds.

— AFP/UNB photo

The mire of militarism



LAGOS, Jan 8: Nigeria's 'Super Eagles' soccer team, enraged over the government's boycott of the African Cup championship, will refuse to play for Nigeria in the next World Cup, a newspaper reported Sunday, reports agencies.

In addition, professional clubs across the country have reportedly threatened to boycott the 1996 soccer season to protest missing the Africa Cup.

The independent Concord newspaper said 'Super Eagles' team members passed a resolution Saturday calling the government move the 'gravest disappointment in our career' and vowing not to wear Nigeria's colours at the 1998 World Cup.

Meanwhile Nigerians have started counting the cost of their country's decision to stay out of the forthcoming African Nations Cup.

Besides the Super Eagles team, which looked forward to the football tournament to show the world it is in top form, many Nigerian individuals and companies have

been badly affected.

Coca-Cola, for one, launched a big promotion three months ago promising all-expenses-paid trips to South Africa to contest winners.

It has spent at least 100 million naira (1.17 million dollars) so far on the promotion, the Guardian on Sunday newspaper reported, quoting a source in the company.

One of Nigeria's star attackers, Daniel Amokachi (Everton), appeared in ads for the promotion on radio and television.

A Lagos-based public relations house, which won television rights to the 32 matches, meanwhile has yet to decide what it will do, now that Nigeria's side is out of the competition.

It has already received payments from clients who wanted advertisements to be relayed on television during the matches.

But now it is not sure if state-run Nigerian television is still interested in covering the continental competition, the Guardian on Sunday reported.

Individuals are affected as well.

A Lagos bricklayer, Temitope Balogun, who said he starved himself to raise money for a colour television on which to watch the Super Eagles play, said Nigeria's withdrawal has rendered his action "an unwise economic suicide."

Some newspapers which have sold advertising space in editions coinciding with the competition also fear their clients might insist on being refunded.

"It is going to have negative effect on the development of soccer in Nigeria," the editor of a Lagos-based sports newspaper told AFP.

"A whole generation of players can suffer repercussions, including inability to get exposure in international competition, which they need badly to improve on their performance," he said.

"South Africa would have also provided a launching pad, a big market to pick up big football contracts," said the editor, who requested anonymity.

Sources close to the government said Sunday that pressure was still being brought to bear on the government to back down on its decision not to send the Super Eagles to South Africa.

Some prominent Nigeri-

ans and statesmen were still making a last-minute effort in that direction, while Nations' Cup organisers are still looking for a replacement for Nigeria.

The Confederation of African Football (CAF) said in Cairo on Saturday that Nigeria, which has refused to take part in South Africa because they feared for their players' safety, would be replaced by Guinea. The tournament starts on January 13.

But Guinea government spokesman Ibrahim Sylla said later that the CAF had not officially notified Guinea of its decision and that there was not enough time to prepare for the competition.

DPRK wrestlers to compete in Asian meet

TOKYO, Jan 8: North Korea, which said last week it would compete in the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, has moved to seek Olympic wrestling berths, a news report said today, reports Reuters.

North Korea has filed a preliminary application to enter the Asian Wrestling Championships at Xiaoshan, in eastern China, in April, to seek Olympic berths, the Central Wrestling Association of China was quoted by Kyodo news agency as saying.

The Chinese wrestling body told Kyodo in a telephone interview it was notified that Pyongyang would send a 20-strong team to the week-long event starting on April 4.

Last Wednesday the International Olympic Committee (IOC) said North Korea had confirmed it would enter the Summer Games, completing a full international line-up for the first time.

Communist-ruled North Korea, which in recent years has skipped many major international sports events, was last to accept the invitation sent to 197 national Olympic committees for the Atlanta Olympic games, which begin on July 19.

Kyodo said Olympic berths would be given to the top four finishers in each freestyle division at the Asian championships. In each of the Greco-Roman divisions the top three wrestlers would qualify.