

WC opener out of danger

CALCUTTA, Jan 9: The controversy surrounding the construction work inside the Eden Gardens, the venue of the opening ceremony of the Wills World Cup, cleared with the Calcutta Municipal Corporation revoking its decision to stop construction work, reports PTI.

The matter was sorted out after a meeting between the municipal commissioner, Ashim Barman and senior CAB official Gautam Dasgupta, setting at rest all doubts about completion of work on time for the opening ceremony of the mega event.

During his talk with the municipal commissioner, Dasgupta pointed that it would be difficult for the CAB to meet the deadline if the construction work inside the stadium was delayed.

The CMC has now allowed the CAB to carry on with the renovation project under the supervision of the public works department. The work will resume again from tomorrow.

The CMC had earlier described the construction as "illegal" on the ground that the CAB had not sought any necessary permission from the CMC in this regard.

China goes under trial

Beijing, Jan 9: China could host future Winter Olympics, according to the head of the country's newest mountain resort that next month will stage part of the Asian Winter Games, reports AFP.

Yabuli, China's biggest winter sport resort, in the northeastern province of Heilongjiang, was officially inaugurated on Monday, the China Daily reported.

It will be used for the ski events at the Asian Winter Games, which will be based in Harbin, the Heilongjiang capital.

According to Lu Jian, president of the Yabuli Tourist Ski Resort Ltd, the 34-million-dollar resort has been built to "international standards."

He said Yabuli was the proof that China could organise major events like the Asian Games but also future Winter Olympics.

A European style residential complex, made up of villas with wind mills on the top, will act as the Athletes Village during the Games from February 4 to February 11, the newspaper said.

More than 100 of the 999 windmills have already been built and will also provide some electricity for the village.

Guinea won't replace Nigeria

JOHANNESBURG, Jan 9: African soccer's ruling body said on Tuesday only 15 teams would play in this month's African Nations Cup in Guinea, because of Guinea's refusal to replace Nigeria, reports Reuters.

Reigning champions Nigeria pulled out last week, citing security fears for its players in South Africa, which has led a campaign against Nigeria over the hanging of nine minority rights activists in November.

Confederation of African Football (CAF) general-secretary Mustapha Fahmy told a news conference that its executive committee had decided that no country would replace Guinea.

"The competition will consist of 15 clubs after Guinea's refusal to accept our invitation unless Nigeria reconsiders its position not to participate," Fahmy said.

He declined to answer any questions, including whether Nigeria would be accepted back should it want to rejoin the competition, which kicks off this Saturday.

Tyson's plea turned down

WASHINGTON, Jan 9: The US Supreme Court on Monday rejected an appeal by former world heavyweight boxing champion Mike Tyson seeking to overturn his 1992 rape conviction, reports Reuters.

The 29-year-old boxer, who has won two fights since his release from prison on March 25, was found guilty of raping Desiree Washington in his Indianapolis Hotel room in 1991 when she was an 18-year-old beauty pageant contestant. Tyson had been making a best appearance at the beauty contest.

Tyson, who at 20 had been the youngest fighter to win the heavyweight boxing title, was released from an Indiana prison after serving about three years of a six-year sentence.

In his supreme court appeal claiming his constitutional rights had been violated, he challenged the state system under which prosecutors had the power to help select the judge who presided over his trial.

Harvard University law professor Alan Dershowitz also argued in the appeal that several defence witnesses had been improperly excluded from testifying at the trial. But the supreme court denied Tyson's appeal without comment. The high court in 1994 had turned down a similar appeal.

Kiwis go for wild gamble



WELLINGTON, Jan 9: Zimbabwe eagerly anticipate the prospect of a first Test win away from home after New Zealand named a highly inexperienced squad for the two-Test series starting in Hamilton on Saturday, reports Reuters.

The selectors have picked a New Zealand team long on latent but short on experience to contest what cynics have dubbed Test cricket's wooden spoon, and Zimbabwe will be looking to give the fresh-faced youngsters a spanking.

New Zealand's most experienced and successful Test bowler Danny Morrison has been deemed unfit to play, contrary to the fast bowler's own appraisal.

Fast-medium bowler Dion Nash has been omitted because of injury, while experienced slow-medium bowler Gavin Larsen has been dropped and paceman Simon Doull overlooked.

In their place comes a quartet of young bowlers that Zimbabwe's batsmen have been given the opportunity to study at close quarters.

Auckland paceman Kerry Walmsley, who played in two Tests against Sri Lanka last

season, is back in favour after serving a two-match suspension for abusive language last week.

Leg-spinner Greg Loveridge and fast-medium pair Geoff Allott and Robert Kennedy will make their Test debuts.

All four were exposed to Zimbabwe in one or both of the three-day matches played as build-ups to the Test series.

Zimbabwe won the first and drew the second.

"It's very nice to have had a look at them first hand for a couple of games," said Zimbabwe captain Andy Flower.

"It's always a little more difficult if you haven't seen someone blow."

Several Zimbabwe batsmen had the chance to spend valuable time at the crease during the build-up matches, brothers Grant and Andy Flower hitting 89 and 73 respectively in their first innings of the tour.

New Zealand coach and convener of selectors Glenn Turner has signalled his intention to develop new blood by dropping experienced batsmen Mark Greatbatch and Shane Thompson.

The side's weakness is compounded by Martin Crowe's continued absence due to a chronic knee injury. The master batsman has been

named in the World Cup squad and he has until January 24 to prove his form and fitness.

Wasim Akram exposed New Zealand's inability to handle high quality pace bowling when Pakistan crushed the home side in a one-off Test in Christchurch in December.

While not quite in the same league, left-arm medium pacer Bryan Strang, the pick of the Zimbabwean attack so far in New Zealand, and fast bowler Heath Streak, rated as world class by New Zealand's greatest bowler Sir Richard Hadlee, could cause problems for the talented but inexperienced New Zealanders.

SQUADS

NEW ZEALAND: Geoff Allott, Nathan Astle, Chris Cairns, Stephen Fleming, Lee Gernon (captain), Robert Kennedy, Greg Loveridge, Adam Parore, Dipak Patel, Craig Spearman, Roger Twose, Kerry Walmsley, Bryan Young.

ZIMBABWE (from): Andy Flower (captain), Grant Flower, Stuart Carlisle, Sean Davies, David Houghton, Alistair Campbell, Guy Whittall, Paul Strang, Heath Streak, Charles Lock, Stephen Peall, Eddo Brandes, Henry Olonga, Bryan Strang, Craign Wishart.

Peter Graf runs risk

STUTTGART, Germany, Jan 9: Tennis star Steffi Graf's father, in jail on suspicion of massive tax evasion, will not turn up to face a German state parliamentary committee probing the affair, his lawyer said on Monday, reports Reuters.

Peter Graf was scheduled to appear before a committee in the Baden-Wuerttemberg state parliament today but his attorney Steffen Ufer said, "I believe that the appointment will not take place."

He did not say why Graf planned not to attend.

Graf's snub would raise the prospect that the committee, probing alleged impropriety in the German authorities' handling of the case, could take legal steps to force him to testify.

Graf, 57, has been in investigative custody in a Mannheim prison since August as part of an investigation into accusations of multi-million-dollar tax evasion which also targets the world women's tennis number one.

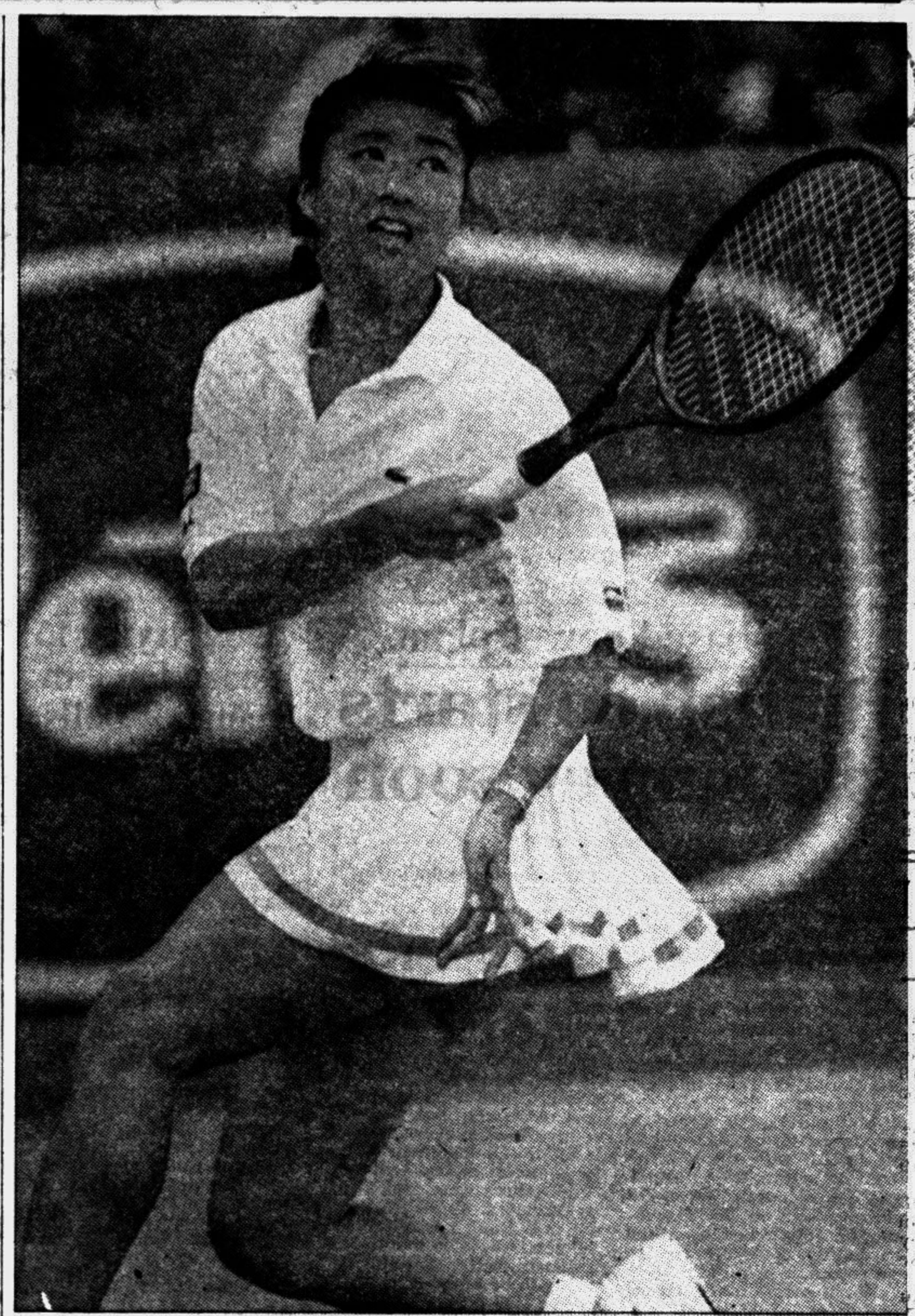
Prosecutors have successfully fought off several bids by Graf's lawyers to get him out of jail, saying there was a danger he could flee or alter evidence.

A spokesman for the Baden-Wuerttemberg parliament in Stuttgart said they had received no word that Graf was not planning to attend the committee hearing today.

The panel has the legal power to force Graf to appear and could vote on whether to choose that option. But even if he were forced to turn up, Graf could decide to say nothing for fear of prejudicing the continuing investigation.

Steffi Graf has consistently said she knew little about how her huge fortune was managed, having entrusted her financial affairs to her father and his advisers from a young age.

Prosecutors have said they have no reason to detain her.



Surprise-setter Naoko Sawamatsu of Japan follows through on a forehand during her encounter with Swiss prodigy Martina Hingis at the Sydney international tournament yesterday. Swamatsu stunned Hingis 6-4, 2-6, 7-5. — AFP/UNB photo

DD offered cold-shoulder



NEW DELHI, Jan 9: An Indian court rejected on Monday a petition by state television to stop a US marketing firm giving broadcast rights for this year's cricket World Cup to Rupert Murdoch's Star Television, reports Reuters.

State-run Doordarshan television immediately gave notice that it planned to appeal to the Supreme Court.

It had gone to the Delhi High Court after the US firm WorldTel, which bought the broadcast rights from the organisers, rescinded an agreement signed with Doordarshan in 1994 on the ground that the Indian company had missed an instalment payment.

Organisers of the World Cup tournament, to be held in India, Pakistan and Sri

Lanka in February and March, said Star Television, a Hong Kong-based satellite broadcaster, was signed up after the WorldTel-Doordarshan agreement broke down.

Doordarshan insisted that it had sent the last instalment of its payments but the cheque failed to reach WorldTel on time. A Doordarshan official claimed last week that WorldTel brought in Star simply because it had offered more money.

Going to court to try to have the Star deal annulled, Doordarshan insisted it had complete rights to World Cup coverage unless it agreed to sell part or all of them.

It argued that Indian law did not allow free private broadcasting from its soil without government consent.

In Monday's opinion, the High Court found: "The plaintiff's claims for injunc-

tion is not at all tenable."

It did, however, ask WorldTel to reimburse Doordarshan for its initial instalment payments.

"If at all the plaintiff has suffered damages, it could be compensated in terms of money," the court said.

Immediately after Monday's ruling, Doordarshan gave notice that it would appeal to the Supreme Court.

But cricket authorities said they wanted to make peace with Doordarshan, which serves most of India.

"We owe it to the millions," Indian cricket board president IS Bindra told Reuters, adding that Star had rights only for cable broadcasts.

"We have not given exclusive rights to Star. We are still open to giving terrestrial rights to Doordarshan," Bindra said.

Into morass of money

YAOUNDE, Jan 9: Cameroon, who play South Africa in the opening match of the African Nations Cup in Johannesburg on Saturday, are waiting for someone to buy their tickets to Johannesburg, reports AFP.

"We now hope to leave on Thursday," Cameroon coach Jules Frederic Nyongha said after the squad was stranded overnight when their federation failed to produce tickets for the flight to South Africa.

Cameroon invariably get involved in rows over money on the eve of tournaments. A players' strike was only just avoided at the last minute in both the 1990 and 1994 World Cup finals.

The players have agreed to defer demands for 1.8 million CFA francs (360,000 dollars) they claim is owed them from the 1994 World Cup finals and an American sports equipment supplier has promised 225 million CFA francs (450,000 dollars) if they win the African cup.

Government offices have so far handed over only 75 million CFA francs (150,000 dollars) of the 500 million CFA francs (one million dollars) agreed by the sports ministry for preparing for the tournament.

The sports department had to borrow from the private sector in December to send the team to play in a tournament in Gabon. Four friendly matches, against Ghana, Togo, Zaire and Mozambique, and a squad training session were cancelled because of lack of funds.

And a match against Liberia at Yaounde on Dec 24 is their only preparation for the African Cup.

The Cameroon federation, which denies having misappropriated FIFA money from the 1994 World Cup has no electricity and water at its Yaounde offices because of unpaid bills.

That tournament started with the first-choice goalkeeper banned after leading a strike over bonuses.

Prognosis on 'Pharaohs'



JOHANNESBURG, Jan 9: Although Egypt were the most impressive qualifiers for the African Nations Cup, doubts remain as to the real strength of the three-time champions, reports AFP.

In slamming six goals past Uganda and five past Tanzania and Ethiopia, the 'Pharaohs' looked awesome.

but they only drew at home and lost away to Mid-dleweights Algeria.

The one-goal loss in Algeria could be explained by the last-minute resignation of Dutch coach Nol de Ruiter, who feared for his safety in a city hit by civil war.

With Mohamed Salah in charge and 100,000 supporters backing them, the 'Pharaohs' were expected to exact revenge at home. They struggled, however, and had to come from behind to snatch a point.

Egypt then unleashed their frustrations on Uganda, who were buried under an avalanche of goals with Ahmed al-Kass getting three to finish leading scorer in the qualifying competition.

The national team used to consist almost exclusively of players from Cairo giants Zamalek and Al-Ahly, but under Salah the net broadened considerably.

This policy has been maintained by Ruud Korf, a Dutch star from the Johan Cruyff era, who moved in above Salah after guiding Egypt to the All-Africa Games gold medal.

Korf relies heavily on local talent with the major exception being Hani Ramzy, a polished defender whose outstanding performances at the 1990 World Cup earned him contracts in Switzerland and Germany.

In attack, Ali Maher from unfashionable Arsenal has proved a find, scoring four goals against Zimbabwe and Zambia in the recent Simba four nations' cup in South Africa.

Many observers consider Egypt among the favourites to lift the Cup, but a tough group and indifferent form suggest a difficult task for a country which has seldom impressed south of the Sahara.

Paired with hosts South Africa, bogy team Cameroon and dark horses Angola in the Johannesburg-based group of death, the sometimes temperamental north Africans are not even sure of a quarterfinals spot.

Spectators hit the target

CAPE TOWN, Jan 9: South African cricket authorities almost achieved their crowd target for the Test series against England despite the loss of eight full playing days out of a possible 25, reports Reuters.

"We budgeted for 275,000 in 25 days and we got 265,000 in 17 days. It indicates tremendous support for Test cricket in South Africa," said Ali Bacher, managing director of the United Cricket Board of South Africa.

Rain washed out six days during the series while South Africa's 10-wicket victory in the fifth and final Test came in just three days.

"Next summer we have three Tests against India and three against Australia. We have already planned meetings to not just match but improve upon this summer's wonderful turn out," Bacher said.

Top seeds in topsyturvy



SYDNEY, Jan 9: Canadian-born Briton Greg Rusedski beat second-seeded Richard Krajicek in a day of upsets Tuesday at the Peters international tennis tournament at White City, report agencies.

Only two men's seeds have survived the opening round — Krajicek, sixth seed Jan Siemerink and seventh seed Alberto Costa were upset on Tuesday while Arnaud Boetsch and Marcelo Rios lost Monday.

Marc Rosset withdrew with a broken finger. Top seed Goran Ivanisevic survived by defeating David Prinosil of Germany 6-3, 6-3, along with fifth seed Todd Martin, who won Monday.

In the women's event, eight seed Naoko Sawamatsu of Japan held off four match points before overcoming Switzerland's Martina Hingis 6-4, 2-6, 7-5, while Belgium's Dominique Monami earned a second round match against top seed Monica Seles with a 7-6 (7-3), 6-3 win over qualifier Veronika Martinek of Germany.

Krajicek failed to match the consistency of Rusedski and paid the price with a 7-6 (7-4), 7-6, (8-6) defeat. Although the Dutchman recovered Rusedski's break of serve for 3-1 in the seventh game, he played a disastrous tie-break and fell behind 6-0

with a double fault before launching a temporary recovery by winning the next four points.

But the double-faulted again to concede the set, and another double fault and a backhand error allowed Rusedski to recover a break that had given Krajicek a 4-2 lead in the second set.

"The bottom line is that I gave him too many free points, and it's tough to win a match like that," Krajicek said.

Costa was beaten 4-6, 7-6 (7-4), 7-5 by Australian Mark Woodforde in a two-hour, 23-minute marathon. Woodforde believed his better conditioning made the difference between them.

"The sun came out and it became hot and humid, and it was apparent even in the first set that he was breathing quite hard," said Woodforde.

Swiss starlet Martina Hingis was twice warned for racket-throwing after she frittered four match points to bow out.

It was always going to be a difficult first-up assignment for 15-year-old Hingis, who just missed out on the eighth seeding tournament place to Sawamatsu by two ranking points, but she could not put away the determined Sawamatsu in the 116-minute struggle.

"You feel the pressure of the people wanting you to win, you can feel it on the

court, and she was not an easy draw for me... I don't like these players who play very flat," she giggled.

Hingis shrugged off her racket-throwing histrionics, saying, "It's not broken, so there's no problem."

"I'm not the only one who does this thing, you see Mark (Rosset) and Goran (Ivanisevic) at the Hopman Cup in Perth... I'm not the only one."

Hingis, usually measured and composed in her matches, was given two warnings by the chair umpire when she hurled her racket from the baseline towards the net after losing points.

"It was really difficult to lose that match... she just played better at that time."

Hingis was serving at 5-4, 40-0 in the 10th game of the final set and held a fourth match point at advantage, only to be beaten and prise open an opportunity for the tenacious Sawamatsu.

Sawamatsu, who reached the quarterfinals of last year's Australian Open, beating top-ranked compatriot Kimiko Date along the way, said it was the biggest comeback of her career.

"When I was down 4-5 in the third I was still thinking if I can play better I can still beat her," said Sawamatsu.

"At that time I was starting to think about when I call my family in Japan what I was going to say."

Steroids smear Sinclair

SINGAPORE, Jan 9: Singapore's Jojo Sinclair, the first Asian woman to win a world bodybuilding title, vehemently protested and claimed her innocence today after testing positive for steroids, reports AFP.

"Believe me, I am not guilty," said the lightweight champion, who would be banned from competition for two years and stripped of her title if a test on a second urine sample this month in Belgium also proved positive.

"I wish there was a way that I can show I am innocent," Sinclair, who is married to an American and has a 12-year-old daughter, told a news conference organised by the Singapore Bodybuilders Federation (SBBF).

The Singaporean, who refuses to divulge her age but is believed to be in her 40s, said she had virtually no hope that the January 23 test on the second urine sample would turn out to be negative.

"There is a 99.9 per cent chance it will be positive again because it came from the same tube," said the bodybuilder, wearing a white blouse and black skirt and jacket over her muscular frame.

The SBBF said it had been informed by the International Bodybuilding Federation that one of the two samples she had submitted for routine testing at the World Championships in November had shown traces of stanozolol.

Bodybuilding, where competitors are judged on their muscle definition, is not recognised by the Interna-

tional Olympic Committee. But it will be included in the 2002 Asian Games and follows IOC rules as it presses ahead to join the Olympic movement, officials say.

Stanozolol is the muscle building drug Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson tested positive for at the 1988 Seoul Olympics.

Sinclair scored an Asian first when she won the world title in the lightweight division (52 kg) over 36 other competitors in Belgium, qualifying for the Miss Olympia contest in Atlanta later this year.

She was reportedly considering turning professional and approached by three magazines — Muscle and Fitness, Women, Physique and Flex — to represent them in the Miss Olympia competition.

Sinclair, who was misty-eyed but composed, said she had never taken drugs and only ate a lot of vitamins, trained hard and watched her diet as part of her year-long preparations for the competition.

Accompanied by her husband Jim, who said the family was devastated, the bodybuilder said she "just cannot put her finger on how she had tested positive," and uttered, "Only, God knows."

Asked about the possibility of failing the second test, she said, "I can take it pretty good. I can face the world."

Paul Chua, president of the SBBF, said the federation had tested Sinclair before the Belgian championships. Even that turned out to be positive,

but the result of the test came too late to withdraw her.

He said the federation was supportive of Sinclair's unprecedented decision to ask for a second test of the urine sample and would like to see her proven innocent.

"However, I wish to emphasise strongly the message that we will not lend any support, sympathise with or condone the usage of drugs — whoever it may be. We will take firm measures to suspend the bodybuilder in question," Chua said.

If the second test confirms the findings of the first, the federation will abide by the rules, suspend her for two years and pay a fine of 1,000 US dollars, he said.

Her gold medal will be returned and she will be stripped of her title.



GUILTY OR INNOCENT? Singapore's Jojo Sinclair, the first Asian woman to win a world title in bodybuilding, claiming her innocence, after testing positive for banned drugs, at a press conference in Singapore yesterday. Jojo's husband Jim is also seen with a grim face. — AFP/UNB photo

Winter sports

JHALAKATHI, Jan 9: A two-day sub-regional school and madrasah winter sports began here on Monday, reports UNB.

Deputy Commissioner Iqbal Uddin Ahmed Chowdhury opened the sports meet.

More than 200 athletes from six districts of Barisal division are taking part in 29 different events which included volleyball, badminton, basketball, hockey and athletics.

On the opening day, Jhalakathi district team won the boys' event in volleyball while Barisal district snatched the championship of girls event.