

Steffi might taste doubles

TOKYO, April 26: World number one Steffi Graf said Friday she is ready to play a rare doubles match with Anke Huber in the Fed Cup tennis world Group first round tie between Germany and Japan. This weekend, reports AFP.

"I don't think I've played a doubles for probably about two years. It's been a while. I'm not used to playing singles and doubles very much, but I can," said Graf on the eve of women's team competition.

Huber will take on Japanese number one Kimiko Date in the opening singles match on the hard court of the Ariake Coliseum, followed by Graf, who will play Naoko Sawamatsu.

Graf and Huber are scheduled to play the last doubles match against Ai Sugiyama and Kyoko Nagatsuka after two reverse singles on Sunday, but they can be replaced as substitutions are allowed up to one hour before the doubles begins. Graf said the final decision would be made after the four singles matches Graf holds a perfect 6-0 won-loss record against Date, ranked seventh this week, and is 3-0 against Sawamatsu, ranked 28th. Huber has a 1-1 record against Date and 1-0 against Sawamatsu.

The winner in their first-round matches will advance to the World Group semifinals in July, taking on either the United States or Austria.

The four other nations competing in the top World Group are France and Argentina, and South Africa and Spain.

Arantxa, Conchita oblige

BARCELONA, Apr. 26: Spain's top two women's tennis players have changed their minds and will compete in a Federation Cup first round tie against South Africa after all, a Spanish tennis federation spokeswoman said today, reports Reuters.

Arantxa Sanchez Vicario and Conchita Martinez, ranked two and three in the world, accepted the federation's offer to pay them seven million pesetas (55,000 dollars) each after initially saying they would not pay for less than 10 million.

The federation had already twice raised the amount after first offering three million then 5.75 million pesetas and was facing financial difficulties.

Yesterday, at the last moment, they accepted the offer of seven million pesetas, the spokeswoman said. She did not give a reason why the players had changed their minds. Sanchez and Martinez were to leave for Murcia today to train with the rest of the team for Saturday's first round World Group match. They will join Marin Antonia Sanchez, Virginia Ruanoo and Gala Leon.

Italian soccer bosses in a dilemma

ROME, Apr. 26: There's a battle brewing over whether veteran Italian soccer stars like Roberto Baggio and Gianluca Vialli can play at the Atlanta Olympics, reports AP.

If national soccer federation president Antonio Matarrese gets his way, Italy will field only players aged 21 and under.

But Mario Pescante, head of the Italian national Olympic committee (CONI), wants to send the three over-age wildcard selections new rules permit.

"Our soccer team should go to Atlanta with the best possible team to win a medal. Other teams are already prepared to field their older players; why can't we?," Pescante argued Wednesday.

"I understand Pescante, who reasons like the CONI president and a fan," Matarrese said. "But this matter will be decided by the federation and no one else, and personally I'm against sending players who are older than 21."

Matarrese and Olympic soccer coach Cesare Maldini will discuss the matter at a meeting Tuesday.

The sport's European governing body, UEFA, said in February it will not abide by new rules allowing teams to field up to three players over the age of 23 for the Olympics.

The change was made by the IOC and soccer's world governing body, FIFA, to make the often lackluster Olympic soccer competition more appealing. At previous Games, only players aged 23 and under were eligible.

But UEFA is sticking to its rule that only players 21 and under can take part because they were involved in the qualifying rounds, which doubles as the European Under-21 championships.

EAGA Games inaugurated

GENERAL SANTOS, Philippines, Apr. 26: President Fidel Ramos formally opened the first East Asian Growth Area (EAGA) Friendship Games today, bringing together 700 athletes from Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines, reports Reuters.

Ramos flew to the southern city of General Santos to launch the three-day competition, saying they were intended to expand "Our relations beyond just economic co-operation and trade to people-to-people interaction."



World No 1 Steffi Graf and compatriot Anke Huber smile while talking to reporters at a press conference in Tokyo yesterday after the draw for the Federation Cup '96 World Group first round encounter between Germany and Japan was made. — AFP/UNB photo

Rotterdam culprits banned

LONDON, Apr. 26: Hooligans involved in violence at Wednesday night's soccer match between Germany and the Netherlands in Rotterdam will be banned from the European Championships in England, officials said Thursday.

Tournament director Glen Kirtson said the German and Dutch soccer associations had promised to prevent the troublemakers from travelling to England.

"We have received a full report on the incident from the Dutch FA and the German FA," Kirtson said. "They have assured us that steps will be taken to prevent the fans who were arrested last night from attending Euro '96."

Working in conjunction with the police, we will continue to target known troublemakers," he said. "We do not intend to let a tiny minority of hooligans spoil the enjoyment of the vast majority of law-abiding supporters who will be attending Euro '96."

Forty-seven people were arrested before and during the match in Rotterdam on charges ranging from disrupting public order to assault with a knife.

Rotterdam police spokesman Ger de Jong said Thursday that most of those arrested were released after paying a fine. But 14 remained in custody and six attended court proceedings Thursday.

The rest are scheduled to appear in court Friday.

At the end of Germany's 1-0 victory, riot police made baton charges at German fans who were attempting to smash seats in Rotterdam's Kuip stadium.

Hooligans also smashed windows in downtown Rotterdam cafes.

Two fans, one German and one Dutch, were hospitalized with knife wounds, De Jong said.

Both teams are expected to bring large contingents of fans to the European Championships, which run from June 8 to June 30.

The Dutch play their first round matches at Villa Park in Birmingham and at Wembley. Germany will play their games at Old Trafford in Manchester.

Detective Inspector Peter Chapman, head of the football unit at the National Criminal Intelligence Service, said he would discuss Wednesday night's violence with his counterparts in Germany and the Netherlands as a matter of urgency.

"We need to know who these people were and what they were arrested for," he said. "If there are means for stopping them from coming here, we will look at it closely."

Chapman, whose organization will play a key intelligence role in policing Euro '96, said the trouble did not come as a surprise.

"We know about the potential between the Dutch and German fans," he said. "Historically, there have been disorder problems when Holland have played Germany."

Plans to combat hooliganism include the use of police spotters — foreign officer travelling with their country's fans to identify known troublemakers to local police.

Known hooligans will be refused entry at ports by immigration officers.

Assistant Chief Constable Malcolm George, the police officer responsible for security at the championships, described the events in Rotterdam as "shocking" and "tragic."

The other aspect is to target the criminal element that attaches itself to large events like this," he said.

"We will monitor the ports and we will be targeting individuals. We will also be observing the place where people are likely to congregate."

But George said his prime goal was to look after the large number of genuine fans who will travel to England from Europe.

"It's a sporting occasion not a policing occasion and we're aiming to make it a festive event," he said.

Germany tipped to win Euro '96

LONDON, Apr. 26: British bookmakers installed Germany as favourites to win the European Soccer Championships after the Germans' 1-0 victory over the Netherlands on Wednesday night, reports AP.

Germany have always been in the first two in the official odds but this is the first time they have been clear favourites," Ladbroke's spokesman Paul Austin said Thursday.

Germany beat the Netherlands, the previous favourites, on a penalty by Jurgen Klinsmann in Rotterdam.

Ladbroke's listed Germany at 9-2, followed by Italy at 5-1, the Netherlands at 11-2, hosts England at 6-1, Spain at 7-1, France at 8-1 and Portugal at 10-1.

The other teams were rated as follows: Croatia 12-1, Bulgaria, Romania and Russia 16-1, Denmark 25-1, Switzerland and Turkey 50-1, Scotland and the Czech Republic 80-1.

Middlesbrough extend Robson's services

LONDON, Apr. 26: Middlesbrough's Bryan Robson was firmly ruled out of the running for the job as England coach on Thursday when it was announced his contract with the Premier league club was to be extended by two years until 1999, reports Reuters.

Robson, 39, is understudy to Terry Venables, but has always felt he needs more club-level experience before taking on the England job.

But he said on Thursday: "The deciding factor that really swayed me was the way that the people of Teesside have backed the team and turned up in their droves week in and week out."

"I always knew Middlesbrough were well supported but until this season I would never have believed they could attract crowds of 30,000 for every home match."

After a dismal mid-season spell, Middlesbrough have lifted themselves comfortably clear of the relegation zone. Robson's big name signings including Brazilians Juninho and Branco and England midfielder Nick Barmby.

Keeping in mind all these aspects, a new revolutionary concept was developed incorporating music with a new and much safer exercise technique. It is recognized as Aerobics. This method is easy to follow, simple to carry through and totally enjoyable. Frequent variations and modifications are done in designing the aerobics classes to make it more effective. A good aerobics class is in fact more than an aerobic programme as it includes isolation strength work, flexibility, agility, coordination as well as providing safe and social forms of exercise.

Today exercise is no longer an ordeal or tedious chore. It has appeal and pleasure. Thanks to the exercise scientists who worked hard behind it and whose relentless effort and perseverance made exercise more exciting, interesting and safe. Nobody ever dreamt that exercise to music will become so popular and would attract millions of participants all over the world.

The reason why dance exercise became so successful is, it makes exercise fun. There is music, energy, variety, colour, people, challenge, and most importantly — results. People keep coming back because they can see for themselves and feel for themselves the art becoming physically fit. And, they are having a good time doing it.

People may think that dance exercise is a passing fad and with the passing time public's fascination will fade out. If ever people decide that health and fitness are no longer important, dance exercise will disappear, and I think that day will never come.

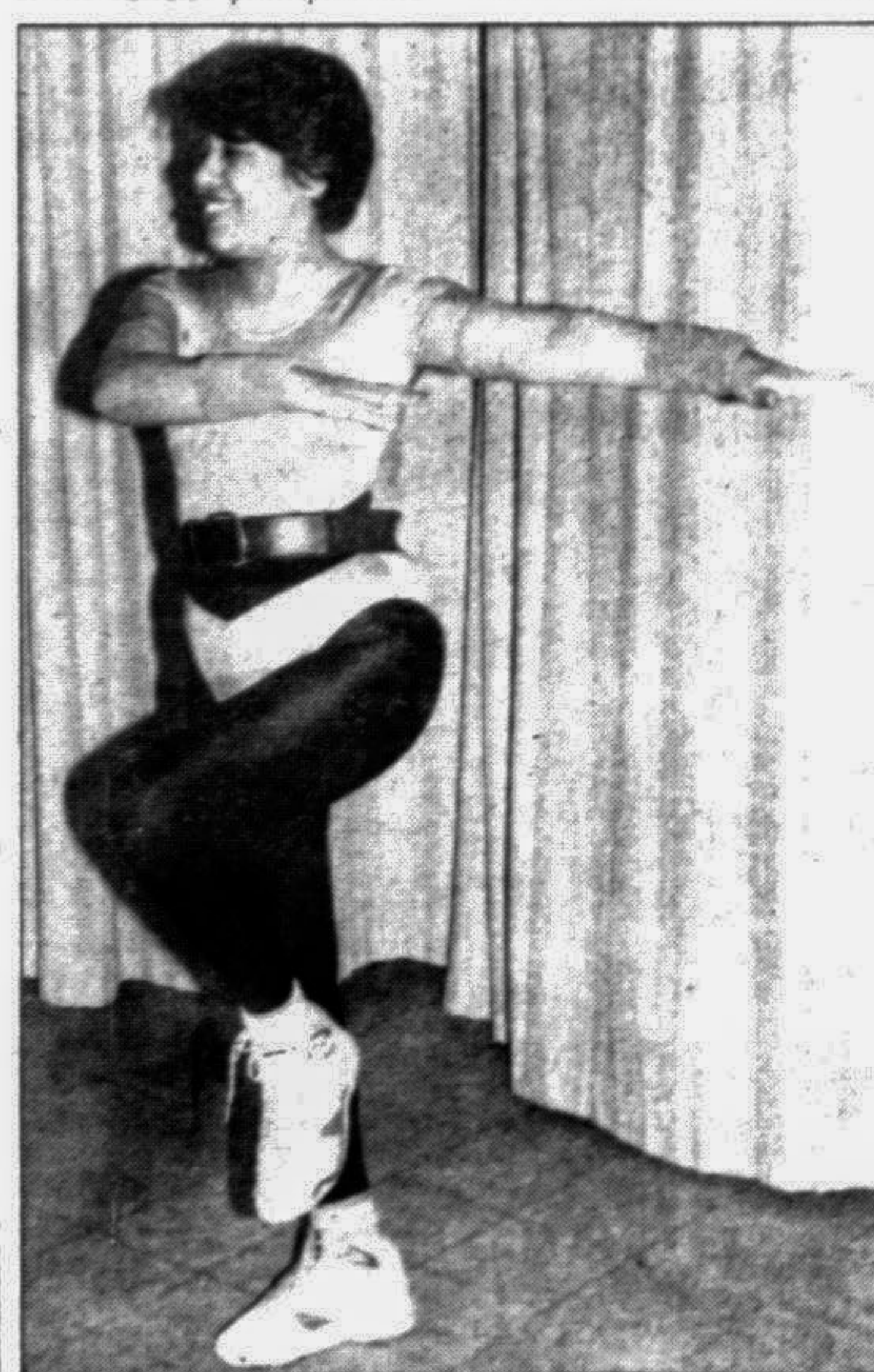
Meher Akhter is a trained aerobics instructor.



Fitness: Fun & feeling

Not long ago, to acquire a shapely figure, free hand exercise was limited to some routine physical performance sans scientific understanding of the exercise principles and

the knowledge about the potentially dangerous exercises. The conception about fitness was poor, the classes were hopelessly monotonous, the instructor's lack of motivation



A lady practising aerobics.

— Stat photo

Meher Akhter is a trained aerobics instructor.

Rios, Costa coast into semis



MONTE CARLO, Apr. 26: Chile's rising star Marcelo Rios and Spaniard Alberto Costa powered their way to a semifinal clash between clay-court specialists at the 1.9 million dollars Monte Carlo Open on Friday, reports Reuters.

It took Rios just over an hour to dismiss Sweden's Magnus Gustafsson in straight sets, 6-3, 6-4, in their quarter-final.

Costa was even faster, ending compatriot Felix Mantilla's promising path from the qualifying rounds to the quarter-finals 6-3, 6-3.

Rios will be trying to reach his second consecutive ATP Tour final after losing in Barcelona to Austrian Thomas Muster.

Costa, a quarter-finalist at the French Open and the first player to beat Muster on clay last year, will be trying to do even better in 1996.

"There's a new generation of players doing alright on clay and that's good news for the game," said Rios, seeded 13th.

The Chilean, who is expected to make it into the top 10 in the next ATP Tour ranking, was far too young and too fast for veteran Gustafsson, back in normal form after a shoulder operation in 1994 almost ended his career.

Earlier on Thursday, Andre Agassi and Boris Becker joined the big-name exodus leaving the holder Thomas Muster as the only top 10 seed left in the draw.

Both ill-prepared on clay, Agassi and Becker each lost their third round matches in straight sets to Costa and Rios respectively.

The German world number five, who narrowly missed recording his first-ever victory on clay here last year was too

short of match practice to upset the in-form Rios, losing 6-4, 6-3.

Agassi fared even worse against Costa, being booed off court after a crushing 6-2, 6-1 defeat in 54 minutes.

"It is very difficult, very difficult. Movement is everything in this game and if you don't move as well as your opponent, then you have to play great shots," said Agassi.

The American did not make 30 unforced errors in this one-sided match and only serving 38 per cent first serves throughout.

"The crowd was almost as disappointed as me. You go out there and you try hard and they expect you to do well and it's disappointing," he added. His next tournament on the surface starts in Hamburg in 10 days time.

Costa was, in contrast, full of confidence after the win. "On clay, I'm a dangerous man," he said.

Muster easily dismissed Spanish qualifier Carlos Moya 6-2, 7-6 and said he was gradually playing his best tennis on the slow surface, but the Monte Carlo crowd will have to live without a replay of last year's final between Muster and Becker.

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Mixed emotions at PSG



PARIS, Apr. 26: Paris Saint Germain's successful yet troubled season resumes at home to Lille on Saturday — their first match since the club announced coach Luis Fernandez was stepping aside, reports AFP.

Fernandez gave no reason for his decision at a time when PSG are still on course for both the French League and the European Cup Winners' Cup, in which they face Rapid Vienna in the final.

However Fernandez did say he told PSG supreme Michel Deniset of his decision to leave before the Cup Winners Cup semifinal second leg against Deportivo Coruna a week ago.

Fernandez added: "It was a difficult decision to make, but I don't regret it. We'll have to see in what capacity I can still work at the club."

The events are not dissimilar to two years ago when it was clear coach Artur Jorge, now Switzerland's coach, was

going to leave just weeks before winning their second league title.

Admittedly Fernandez' side once 10 points ahead, now trail Burgundy club Auxerre by a point with three matches left.

On Tuesday, PSG could only draw 0-0 with bottom club Martigues, which has put Auxerre, who host Saint Etienne today firmly in the driving seat.

In Germany, leaders Bayern Munich are at home on Saturday to Hansa Rostock, defending their points lead over Borussia Dortmund. Bayern striker Jurgen Klinsmann is in top form, fresh from his successful spotkick against Holland on Wednesday.

Borussia Dortmund, who stopped a run of four games without a win by beating

Dusseldorf last week, host Hamburg.

Close behind the leading two are the UEFA Cup hopefuls in third-placed Borussia Mönchengladbach, Munich 1860 in fourth place, and fifth placed Hansa Rostock. Borussia Mönchengladbach entertain Dusseldorf on Sunday and Munich 1860 travel to Freiburg on Saturday.

And Mönchengladbach's Swedish international Martin Dahlin faced a possible eight-match suspension for elbowing an opponent in a Bundesliga match, the German federation (DFB) revealed on Thursday.

Dahlin was sent off on April 16 for elbowing Kaiserslautern's Axel Rost.

Atletico Madrid, six points ahead of Barcelona in the Spanish table, play at home to UEFA Cup hopeful Valencia in Saturday's only match. Barcelona travel to Sporting Gijon in one of Spain's 10 Sunday fixtures.

But neither Barcelona nor Atletico will be worrying about qualifying for Europe as they will surely fill the European Champions Cup place and Cup winners' Cup spot.

That would mean the UEFA Cup places being filled up to fifth spot, with Valencia, Espanyol and Tenerife currently on course.

Meanwhile Jesus Gil, president of Atletico, was banned from performing his presidential duties for 10 matches.

A Spanish football federation committee on Thursday banned him for his physical and verbal assault on the Compostela manager Jose Gonzalez Fidalgo on March 8.

Asprilla's bad luck!

BOGOTA, Apr. 26: Faustino Asprilla, who scored the only goal in Colombia's World Cup qualifier against Paraguay on Wednesday, found later that he had been robbed during the match, the RCN radio network said Thursday, reports Reuters.

It said thieves broke into Asprilla's hotel room during the match in the Caribbean port city of Barranquilla and made off with a gold chain and 1,000 dollars in cash.

Asprilla, who plays for English Premier league side Newcastle, could not immediately be reached for comment.

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Last season's runners-up Beijing, Guo An, suffered a surprise 1-0 defeat to the August First Army team.

In other matches, Shandong and Guanzhou Apollo played to a goalless draw in Jinan. Guangdong Hongyuan tied Jilian 1-1 in Guangzhou, Dalian Wanda beat Tianjin Samsung 3-0 and Shenzhen was held to a 0-0 draw by Guangzhou Songri.

The ambitious Shenhua team are negotiating to sign three French players, one of whom played in the French national team in the 1992 European Championships.

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