

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's 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, April 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 Reuter.

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 and 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 due 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 Runao and Gala Leon.

Italian soccer bosses in a dilemma

ROME, April 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 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

"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, April 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 Reuter.

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 cooperation 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, April 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 Kirton 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," Kirton 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 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 sta-

dium. 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 coun-

terparts 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."

Chapmen, whose organisation 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 receive convictions may be refused entry to ports by immigration officers.

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

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.

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