

Mystery man's wild gamble

LONDON, June 26: A mystery British gambler with a remarkable ability to pick sporting winners stands to win 201,069 pounds sterling (309,600 dollars) if Germany win the European Championship, reports Reuter.

Bookmakers William Hill said on Tuesday the punter, whose identity they do not know, had placed a 122 pounds "accumulator" bet in April with nine sporting selections.

He picked Manchester United to win the English Premier League and Glasgow Rangers to win the Scottish title. He picked the winners of three other English divisions, the winner of Britain's rugby league cup competition and the winners of the 1,000 and 2,000 Guineas horse racing classics.

"It's an incredible strike rate which means that he effectively has over 33,000 pounds running on to Germany to win the tournament," William Hill said.

Beware of a short circuit!

LONDON, June 26 (Reuters): When the going gets tough, the English traditionally settle their nerves with a nice cup of tea.

And when it gets tougher, there's virtual stampede for the kettle. If tonight's Euro '96 semifinal between England and Germany is settled in normal time the National Grid expects a power surge equivalent to more than 700,000 kettles being boiled.

But if it goes to a penalty shootout the increase in power will shoot up by more than 60 per cent, the equivalent of 1,120,000 kettles, equaling the "record" set after a similar shootout between the two nations at the 1990 World Cup.

Segal's ode to sportsmanship

LONDON, June 26: A poet has put pen to paper to call for sportsmanship between football supporters as passions rise on the eve of today's Euro '96 semifinal between England and Germany, reports AFP.

Tamar Segal, 74, who has written verse on subjects as diverse as the IRA Brighton bomb and the Gulf War, said the nationalist build-up to the match was "very sad."

She called her poem, written about a week ago, ode to joy — because of the opposition from some English MPs to the music of that name by German composer, Beethoven being used as a theme for the Championship.

Segal said her poem was particularly relevant given the sabre-rattling before the big match at Wembley.

"I think it is very sad, because this is an opportunity to show Britain at its best," she said.

"We talk about the thugs of other countries, but we must show an example. We must show our hospitality, sportsmanship and fairness."

The tournament as a whole is a very important occasion, a chance to show our sportsmanship both on and off the field.

"This becomes more important as we get nearer towards the final, where everybody has got to realise that everybody is trying their best and somebody has got to win, and somebody has got to lose."

Her poem ends: "The score is important. For dreams to come true. But it is sportsmanship that matters. As we welcome sporting visitors. To these friendly shores."

Germany's spirit sinks

LONDON, June 26 (AP): Three of his team had already limped home with injuries and star striker and captain Juergen Klinsmann was pessimistic about kicking another ball in Euro '96.

Suddenly Berti Vogts looked the hot favorite team once beaten even before Wednesday's semifinal against England at Wembley.

"We are playing against the host and a co-favourite and our chances have sunk," Vogts said on the eve of the game. "We are hurting greatly from the absence of key players."

Klinsmann was getting laser and power treatment and massage in the hope he may play some part in the final, if the Germans got there.

"It's a frustrating situation," said the striker, who has scored three goals in two games and 38 minutes. "I was really looking forward to the game, but this kind of injury usually needs 10 days of rest."

The physiotherapists are working around the clock. They think they might be a small chance of me playing Sunday if we reach the final."

Already without defender Jurgen Kohler, midfielder Mario Basler and striker Fredi Bobic, who was the third player to go home Tuesday with a dislocated shoulder, Germany had limited resources as they faced a confident England team before 77,000 fans at the home of English soccer.

With Inter Milan midfielder Paul Ince returning from suspension, England was sure it had the manpower in all parts of the team to match a German lineup which usually prides itself as having no weaknesses.

Refs robbing fairness!



MANCHESTER, June 26 (AP): The 'Fair Play' flag and emblem are everywhere at the European Championship. Yet the players seem to be ignoring it and referees, under pressure to enforce the laws, are getting the red card from coaches and the media for some crazy decisions.

Spain, Romania and Bulgaria have gone home complaining about legitimate complaints about fair goals being disallowed. Referees stand out as a prime target for criticism, from coaches, players and observers.

"We not only played against 11 players and 70,000 fans but also against three officials," said Spanish forward Julio Salinas, who had a perfectly good quarterfinal goal against England disallowed for offside. "It was impossible to win."

"The referee made two basic mistakes," complained Spanish coach Javier Clemente. As well as the Salinas blunder, French referee Marc Batta also refused the Spaniards a penalty during a 0-0 tie and the hosts went through in a penalty shoot-out.

The Croats, making their debuts in the competition, were also furious with Swedish referee Leif Sundell after their elimination by Germany.

The way he did his job was a little bit disgusting," Croatian defender Slaven Bilic wrote in a newspaper column after his team was beaten by Germany 2-1 in the quarterfinals despite strong appeals for a penalty.

Many teams also gripe about an excess of yellow cards that has robbed some semifinal teams of some of their best players at this vital stage of the championship.

The Czechs will face France without four of their stars in Wednesday's semifinal at Manchester's Old Trafford. The four were among 10 players from both teams shown the yellow card by German referee Hellmut Krug in the 1-0 quarterfinal victory over Portugal and many observers said they were unlucky to be banned from such an important game.

"The criticism (of the referees) is justified," said Godfried Dienst, the Swiss referee who led the 1966 World Cup final at Wembley. He claims referees no longer have authority over the highly-paid professionals and hence have to resort to an excessive use of yellow cards.

And when push comes to shove, fair play has gone out the window, despite the signed pledges, emblems on the shirts, shaking of hands before the games and almost ritual parading of the "Fair Play" flag around the grounds.

Bulgarian star Hristo Stochkov, who also has a perfectly good goal against Roma-

nia disallowed for off-side, was slinging racial slurs in the face of his direct marker, Marcel Desailly of France, when they met in another group game. He admitted it went on but argued it was common practice among most players when faced with a dark-skinned opponent.

Ironically, Desailly has made it to the semifinal even though he was guilty of a handball offence inside the area in the France-Netherlands quarterfinal and Spanish referee Manuel Lopez Nieto awarded a free-kick outside.

Coming into the finals, the UEFA instructed referees to be especially strong on foul play and not shy away from awarding yellow cards. But the lack of consistency has sparked furious criticism.

Bilic intentionally kicked Christian Ziege in the chest when the German was down on the ground, but referee Sundell, who stood only a few

steps away and appeared to see the incident, didn't even deem it worthy of a yellow card.

Also, a series of blunders has heaped criticism on what are supposed to be Europe's finest referees.

Sundell, again, failed to catch an obvious handball on the goal line by Scot John Collins in a 0-0 draw with the Netherlands and the Dutch later said it cost them victory.

"The referee was standing in a bad position. It was a big mistake," fumed Dutch coach Guus Hiddink, calling the tie anything but fair.

Romanian Dorinel Munteanu fired an excellent drive onto the underside of the bar, which bounced well over the line before careening out. Danish referee Peter Mikkelsen and his linesman failed to spot it, resulting in a 1-0 loss to Bulgaria and out went Romania.

RIVALRY ON THE RECORD



LONDON, June 26 (AFP): Record of previous meetings between England and Germany (West, East, United) ahead of today's European Championships semifinal at Wembley: 1930

Table listing football matches between England and Germany from 1930 to 1993, including scores and tournament details.

Fancied France Czechmated

Czech Republic made it to the finals of the European football championship for the first time in 20 years with a 6-5 tie-break win over France in the first semifinal at Old Trafford, according to BBC news monitored here last night.

The Czechs, making their first appearance as a singular entity since their divorce from Slovakia, will take on the winners of the second semifinal between hosts England and Germany in the final on June 30.

The win is something special for the Czechs, the pre-tournament underdogs, who prevailed over their fancied opponents in the tie-breaker after the stipulated 90-minute and the 30-minute sudden death extra time ended goal-less.

For France, it may remain a memorable evening that ended in a nightmare for more reasons than their semifinal debacle; it was their first defeat in 28 matches.

N'ganj natants lift age-group title

Narayanganj lifted the inter-division age-group women's swimming championship '96 title at the Women's Sports Complex pool, Dhanmondi, yesterday.

On the concluding day of the two-day tournament, Narayanganj, who dominated Day One with seven golds, added six more golds to their account which took their tally to 13 out of total 36 golds.

Comilla and Rajbari earned the second and third position with eight and six golds respectively.

Table titled 'MEDALS TALLY' showing medal counts for various teams in the swimming championship.

No way out for Blazevic

ZAGREB, June 26: Croatia's soccer federation has rejected coach Miroslav Blazevic's resignation after the team's Euro '96 exit, saying he must honour a legal contract, reports Reuter.

"We think this (resignation) was only a moment of weakness and anger, but nothing that will last," federation deputy director Vlatko Markovic told Reuters on Tuesday.

"We neither have another candidate for his post nor do we contemplate (choosing one)," he said.

Resignation is out of question," Markovic told the Novi List daily earlier in the day. Blazevic has signed a contract with the Croatian football federation. That contract is a law that must be respected.

Blazevic was quoted by another newspaper, Vecernji List on Tuesday as saying his resignation would stand.

Croatian newspapers reported that Blazevic was deeply disappointed by Sunday's 2-1 quarterfinal defeat by Germany. He quit the following day.

Euro '96 crowds cross in mark

LONDON, June 26: Crowds at Euro '96 have topped the one million mark, reports Reuter.

The total for 28 games is 1,086,021 an average of 38,786 per game.

This figure will rise to over 1.25 million after the semifinals and final.



The jubilant Narayanganj women's swimming team, which won the inter-division age-group swimming championship title with 13 golds, pose at the Women's Sports Complex pool, Dhanmondi yesterday. — Star photo

Frankie's fantastic feat



HELSINKI, June 26: Namibia's Frankie Fredericks ran the fastest 100 metres of the year and just failed to match the world record at an international athletics event on Tuesday, reports Reuter.

Fredericks clocked 9.87 seconds, just 0.02 seconds outside American Leroy Burrell's world record of 9.85 set in Lausanne nearly two years ago.

Britain's triple jump world record holder Jonathan Edwards, athlete-of-the-year in 1995, jumped a season-best of 17.82 metres to comfortably win his event and revive his Atlanta Olympic chances after a disappointing start to the season.

Fredericks was helped in his magnificent run by a following wind of 1.9 metres-per-second, but the time was legal.

"It's the best I've run and obviously I'm tremendously happy," he told reporters. "It was cold, but I reacted well. I ran a good race. Now I know what I'm capable of running."

He beat Briton Darren Braithwaite who clocked 10.13 with Canadian world champion Donovan Bailey third on 10.15.

Fredericks, quickly away and never headed, came home about five metres clear of Braithwaite with Bailey just behind.

The winning time was 0.05 seconds faster than the 9.92 of Trinidad's Ato Boldon and American Dennis Mitchell set earlier this month and, until Tuesday, the season's best legal marks.

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Elsewhere, world record holder Fernanda Ribeiros of Portugal clocked the fourth fastest time of the season to win a hard-fought women's 5,000 metres in 14 minutes 52.66 seconds, ahead of Finland's Annemari Sandell.

German javelin thrower Boris Henry also improved his personal season's best, winning his event with a throw of 86.48 metres — the sixth best this year, and Britain's Kelly Holmes won the women's 800 metres in a fast one minute, 58.53 seconds.

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New rule, bane or boon?



LONDON, June 26 (AFP): "The golden goal rule, designed to increase the drama of international football, is killing off the nerve-racking excitement of extra time."

That is the verdict of England's players who, along with the Spanish were the first to experience the new rule in Saturday's quarterfinal at Wembley.

The England squad and coach Terry Venables and previously been all in favour, anticipating that the search for the decisive goal would mean an open and attractive 30-minute extra time.

But the evidence of Saturday's gut-wrenching tension had clearly altered the opinion of Venables and his men after the penalty shoot-out triumph which earned them a clash with old-rivals Germany on Wednesday.

"The thought before we went through it was that the attitude would be 'let's go out, get a goal and we've won it,'" said Stuart Pearce.

"But if anything it went the other way, made the teams more cagey, although you have to remember there were two tired teams out there."

Fellow defender Gary Neville added, "I think the extra-time is like another penalty shoot-out."

"Everybody is so nervous because you know if you make one mistake, give one goal away, you'll be walking off the pitch."

"It's not like you've got any chance to get it back. Once it goes to extra-time it becomes a bit of a lottery to be honest."

It was a view shared by skipper Tony Adams. "I think everybody's of the opinion that it's not going to change result in teams attacking too much," said the Arsenal star.

"You're all scared to death of going out that way, and it just had a negative effect on the game."

"Because you're really tired by that stage, your first thought is just about protecting what you've got, because if you push forward and get caught out that's the end."

"You haven't got any chance to recover, there's nothing you can do. At least if you've got 30 minutes you've got that chance."

And Venables, so strong a proponent beforehand, when he had described the rule as a good idea because "it's in football, now believes it is 'counter-productive'."

The coach added, "I think what we saw at Wembley is going to happen every time you get into that situation."

"On Saturday we both had the unfortunate experience of being the first teams to do it, but I just don't think it makes you brave, makes you search for goals."

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Wells whacks Berkshire



LONDON, June 26: Vince Wells smashed 201, the second highest one-day score ever in England, as Leicestershire advanced to the second round of the Nat West Trophy on Tuesday with a 106-run victory over Berkshire at Grace Road, reports Reuter.

The home county rattled off 406 for five off their 60 overs — the second biggest score in the history of the competition — when Wells, who last week hit 200 in a county championship match against Yorkshire, blasting five sixes and 26 boundaries in his 165-ball knock.

Only Alvin Kallabharan's 206 for Warwickshire against Oxfordshire in 1984 stands above Wells' score in England's limited overs record books.

Somerset hold the record for piling up the biggest total in the competition with their 413 for four against Devon in 1990.

Berkshire chased valiantly. Harry Hall scoring his side's first century in the competition as the visitors reached 300 for six in reply.

Hall hit 106 off 91 balls with 16 fours and shared a stand of 152 in 24 overs with Moxon's opening stand of 143 from 32 overs with Michael Vaughan (64) was the platform for Yorkshire's 345 for five, with Australian Michael Bevan racing to 69 from

only 42 deliveries. Embury bagged the ninth hat-trick in the history of the competition as Northamptonshire breezed to a nine-wicket victory over Cheshire at the County Ground.

The 43-year-old former England spinner polished off the Minor Counties' innings by dismissing tail-enders Simon Renshaw, Andy Greasley and Nigel Peel with the first three balls of the 51st over.

Worcestershire skipper Tom Moody hit 123 off 129 balls including three sixes and six fours to steer his side to a 43-run victory against Glamorgan.

A 101-run fifth wicket stand between Trevor Penney (90) and Dougie Brown (67) laid the groundwork for holders Warwickshire's 133-run win against Cornwall.

Former England players Martyn Moxon and John Embury starred in their countries' victories.

Moxon hammered two sixes and 13 fours in his competition-best score of 137 off 157 balls as Yorkshire crushed Nottinghamshire by 205 runs at Headingley.

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Lady luck matters most



BIRMINGHAM, June 26 (Reuters): Talent, toil, technique and tactics may go a long way towards soccer success but the most important asset any team can have is the ability to ride its luck.

None of the four semifinalists at Euro '96 are in any position to dispute that, but for the fickle finger of fate, their chins would now be down on those chests currently selling with pride.

Instead of discussing the chances of England, Germany, France or the Czech Republic taking the trophy, fans and the media could as easily be debating whether it would be Spain, Croatia, Portugal or the Netherlands.

The hallmark of a good team is that it wins when it's not playing well," said French trainer Aime Jacquet after his side's penalty shoot-out victory over the Dutch, quoting the oldest soccer maxim — and the least controversial.

Would Argentina have won the World Cup in 1986 but for their good fortune that the referee was the only person in the world not to notice Diego Maradona's "hand of God" when he scored against England in the quarterfinals?

Would England have won it 20 years earlier if a Russian linesman had not wrongly believed that Geoff Hurst's shot, which proved to be the winner, had hit the back of a net rather than the crossbar?

There's not even a question mark about Denmark's incredible luck in winning the last European Championship four years ago.

They only got into the finals as last-minute replacements when Yugoslavia were thrown out as a political sanction.

The luck levels at Euro '96 are probably at an all-time high. England and France both reached the last four thanks to shoot-outs