

Odds overwhelm Wimbledon

WIMBLEDON, June 29 (AP, Reuters): If you like underdogs, this is your Wimbledon.

When something popped in Boris Becker's wrist, it shattered the bottom half of the draw and opened the door for the first-time finalist at the five-bit tournament. Most of the big names are gone, and the players such as Neville Godwin and Thomas Sanderson are having the runs of their careers.

"So I guess there's an underdog player in the semis," said Godwin, a South African qualifier ranked No. 223 in the world. "I hope it's me."

Wimbledon had already suffered the loss of popular stars such as Andre Agassi, Monica Seles and Stefan Edberg when three-time champion Becker retired after hurting his right wrist while hitting a return on Friday during his third-round match against Godwin.

"I was one of the few who had a serious chance of winning the whole thing," said the No. 2 seed, who said he would remain in London until his doctor arrives from Germany to diagnose the injury. "I was playing great tennis. The draw wasn't too bad. I'm seriously disappointed."

The loss of marquee names, the European soccer championships, a subway strike and heavy weather have all helped drive down attendance every week at the All-England Club, which now must rely on the spirit of the overachievers to help carry the tournament the rest of the way.

"It feels good, it feels real good to just be in the second week," said unseeded American Mahdi Val Washington, who beat Bohdan Ulihrach of

the Czech Republic on Friday to advance to the fourth round before rain brought an early halt to play.

Until this week, Washington's longest Wimbledon winning streak was one. Godwin and Johansson, who beat qualifier Doug Flach on Friday, had never won three matches in a row anywhere on the tour.

For the first time since Wimbledon began seeding players in 1927, at least six of the top eight won't make the fourth round. No top 10 player is left in the bottom half of the draw, where 13th-seeded Todd Martin and unseeded David Wheaton are the only players that have ever made it as far as a Wimbledon semifinal.

Perhaps more indicative of the talent drain is that Wimbledon was able to schedule a match between two British men on Centre Court for the first time in 58 years.

Tim Henman was leading Danny Sapsford when the rains came again to suspend play for the day, and the match was scheduled to resume Saturday.

In other third-round matches Saturday, top seed Pete Sampras — now a prohibitive favorite to win his fourth consecutive title — hoped to avoid the upset trend as he faced 107th-ranked Karol Kucera of Slovakia. No. 4 Goran Ivanisevic, the other top eight seed left in the tournament, played Alexander Volkov of Russia.

As for Becker, who has won Wimbledon three and remains a huge favourite with the crowds, the feeling was that he was as jinxed as the tournament.

"It is a big disappointment for me," the dejected German said. "It felt I was ready for something major here."

Becker, who initially feared that he had broken his wrist, went to hospital for an X-ray examination.

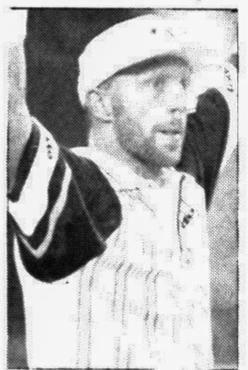
Tournament officials said Becker's own German doctor would be examining the wrist later.

The world number four, who won his first Grand Slam in five years with victory at the Australian Open in January, said he was convinced the injury was serious.

"I have had many injuries in my career before and I know when it is serious," he said.

Becker, who was one point down in the first-set tie-break, was clearly in agony after conceding defeat to Godwin.

"I hit the ball too late and my wrist gave way and I heard something pop," he said. "It is a very serious disappointment. I had a virus for a couple of months, and a muscle tear before the French." Becker said. "I almost can't believe what's coming next."



BORIS BECKER

'Football embassy' tries the diplomatic approach

John Perlmann writes from London

Tired of the dismissive way soccer fans are often treated, a supporters' group involved themselves in the organisation of the current European Championships. Gemini News Service talks to the enthusiasts who believe respect for the crowds generates good behaviour but who fear that big money may ruin the game.

WHILE thousands of soccer supporters milled around the stadium in the English city of Nottingham looking for tickets for the European Championship match between Croatia and Turkey, thousands of others already inside wondered why there were so many empty seats.

Numerous appeals had been made to tournament organisers to lift their ban on selling tickets at the ground on match day. The following day they reluctantly not much use to the people who waited outside the City Ground in vain.

The waiting fans caused no trouble. But for the Football Supporters' Association (FSA), it was another example of how officialdom often pushes up the fans' frustration levels.

For more than 10 years, FSA members have been promoting the view that the best way to get supporters to show respect to others is to treat them with respect.

During the European Championship, the FSA — formed in Britain after the 1985 Heysel Stadium riots that left 39 Juventus fans dead — has been working to put its ideas into practice.

In a little office just off Piccadilly Circus in central London, volunteers are dealing with what seem to be trivial issues. Scottish fans travelling down for the great "grudge game" against England call in to find out which bars are most popular with the Scots in London so they can avoid conflicts with English supporters. Some Danes wanting to avoid the black market in tickets ask if there are other options available. A group of London landlords call to offer cheap accommodation for fans who need it.

The FSA has carried out similar work at major tournaments before, believing that each little problem solved contributes to a more harmonious atmosphere.

It is volunteer work. Yvonne Fletcher, who works for a newspaper, has taken leave to help at this "Football Embassy", one of eight set up by the FSA in each of the English cities hosting the championship.

A long-time fan of Luton Town club, she says: "I just thought it was a chance to do something positive."

The FSA has produced guides to the host cities in each of the languages of the competing countries, as well as other pamphlets including one entitled: "Top Tips on how not to get ripped off."

Fletcher joined the FSA

when it was launched, "because they were trying to give fans a say in the running of the game." When the organisation was formed, Gemini News Service spoke to one of its founders, Liverpool supporter Rogan Taylor, who argued that callous treatment of supporters was a major underlying cause of violence.

Much could be achieved, Taylor said, if football supporters worked together "to re-

vent unfulfilled at two matches involving top teams Spain and Germany.

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The FSA has come a long way from its origins as a fringe pressure group. Successful campaigns have been fought against a government scheme which would have required soccer fans to carry identification cards, and the FSA is now consulted on many major issues confronting the game in England. In every city hosting the championships, the association has helped with the planning.

"We with anybody who might have anything to do with the tournament," Fletcher says.

The one issue on which the FSA was not consulted was ticket prices, and that is fast becoming the biggest issue facing grassroots supporters' organisations.

Fans wanting to buy tickets in advance had to negotiate a complex and frustrating system of sales in which it was not possible to buy tickets for individual matches.

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Sampras scared but Steffi sails

Sports Reporter

World tennis' two prolific number ones were involved in contrasting campaigns at the All-England Championships yesterday to reach Round Four of the fabulous tourney, dubbed already as the seeds' graveyard this year.

With the star performers in the men's circuit toppled in early tumbles, top seeded American Pete Sampras scraped through the third round overcoming an unexpected resistance from unseeded Slovak Karol Kucera 6-4, 6-1, 6-7, 7-6.

Sampras, bidding for his fourth Wimbledon, staged a gritty recovery from a third set down-trend to tame the Slovak in the fourth set.

Unlike Sampras, top seeded German Steffi Graf, whose own hopes of a repeat win have been boosted by the exit of her co-world number one Monica Seles, followed Sampras on to the Centre Court in contrasting style recording a straight-sets victory over unseeded Nicole Pietrangeli of the United States 6-2, 6-1.

Big-serving Croat Goran Ivanisevic once again hurtled down a barrage of aces to outclass A Volkov of Russia 7-6, 7-5, 6-3 on his way in the fourth round.

The women's draw has now lost eight seeds with number eleven Brenda Schultz-McCarthy of the Netherlands coming the latest casualty on Friday. She lost 5-7, 6-3, 10-12 to Belgian Sabine Appelmans, but there was straight-sets victory for last year's finalist Arantxa Sanchez Vicario, the fourth seed, and American Mary Joe Fernandez, seeded ninth.

Former French Open champion Vicario beat Japan's Nako Swamstus 6-4, 6-1 and Fernandez beat Argentine Florencia Labat 6-2, 6-0.

Japan's lone survivor Kimiko Date moved to the fourth round beating her opponent 2-6, 6-4, 6-2. French glamour girl Mary Pierce had an easy sail in the third round.

"I would have been happier to win but I was pleased. I'm consistent around 10.05. But what have I to prove?"

Christie, yet to beat the 10sec barrier this year and who lost his world title to Bailey last year, is expected to give his final decision over whether to run at Atlanta on July 1.

He may have failed to win here at the Charley Stadium on the edge of Paris but he was clearly delighted to beat the likes of world record holder Leroy Burrell, who came sixth, upcoming Jon Drummond and Ato Boldon of Trinidad.

Boldon, the second quickest man this year with a personal best of 9.92, could only finish fifth in 10.09. "It was bad," he said.

"I stumble in the blocks. I'm in the middle so signing a contract and my kitbag got lost on the flight here — no excuse but I just wasn't right for this race mentally."

Boldon's trainer Johan

Smith, however, seemed delighted. "A reality-check is no bad thing — nor is a reduction in the ego every now and again."

The best performances of the night came from triple world champion Algeria's Noureddin Morcelli and Frankie Fredericks of Namibia.

The Algerian got to within two seconds of his own world record in the 1,500m, finishing in 2min 29.50sec. He had beaten the 2,000m mark at the same stadium last year.

Fredericks, meanwhile,

Pele's prophesy

LONDON, June 29: Brazilian minister of sport Pele — in London for the climax of Euro '96 — on Friday pinpointed Steve McManaman as the key player to lead England towards glory at the 1998 World Cup, reports AFP.

Pele, star of Brazil's 1958 and 1970 triumphs, rates England, France and Germany as the sides to challenge holders Brazil in two years' time.

Pele has been impressed with the level of skill and spirit which took England to the brink of a place in Sunday's final.

"Tell the new coach to let England play the way they did the last three games. Don't make big changes," he said.

He added: "They were a little bit nervous in their first game against a weak Switzerland side but after that they performed with patience and intelligence and deserved to beat Germany."

"They were the better team, but as so often happens, nearly always the best team loses in penalty shoot-outs."

But he feels that in Liverpool ace McManaman England possesses a rare talent. "Two years from now he will be one of the great players in Europe, forecast the former Brazil striker.

"He reminds me of George Best the way he dribbles. I saw him play two or three games and he was the one who worried defenders, but I just don't understand why he played so wide."

"He should have been in the centre. The coach should involve him more and let him have much more of a free role."

Pele urged Hoddle: "My view is to let them play the way they did against Germany. They controlled the game and the way they performed was a big surprise to me."

"They can be one of the strong teams at the next World Cup — as long as they don't change. Often when a new coach comes in he wants to make changes, but there is not need to complicate it."

Christie, smiling broadly, said: "My decision over whether to run at Atlanta was 70 per cent made before this race, now it's 80/20 but I'm not saying what I've decided."

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England looking ahead

LONDON, June 29: Euro '96 officials are confident that the success of the tournament will boost England's chances of staging the 2006 World Cup finals, reports Reuters.

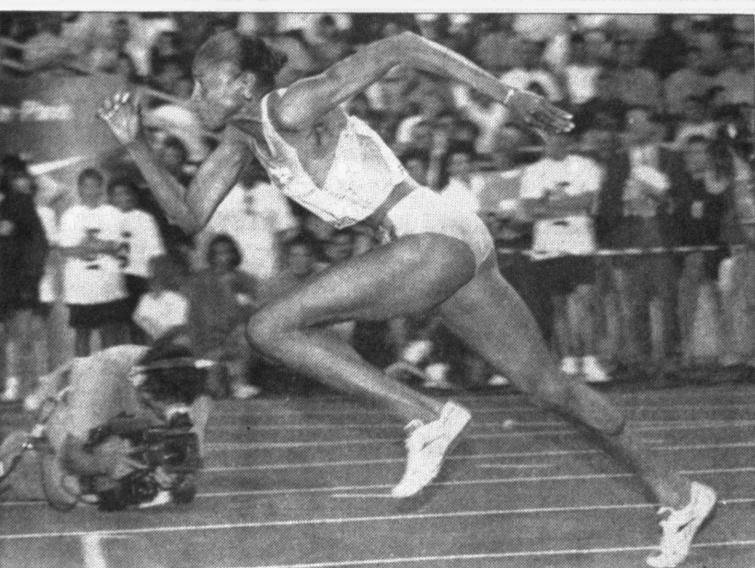
Glen Kirton, Euro '96 organiser, said on Saturday: "I think we have shown that we can stage a World Cup and in the very near future I expect the Football Association (FA) will decide to put our cap in the ring."

The Germans are in first and we have to take account of that. But bids don't have to be completed until the year 2000 and there's a lot of water to go under the bridge between now and then."

Kirton said the European Championship — England's biggest sporting event since the 1966 World Cup — had been a great success for the country.

Looking ahead to a possible World Cup bid, Kirton said: "We are quite capable of holding a 32-nation tournament on our own... but there is a developing trend towards shared events which means you can pool both resources and costs."

"I would be open-minded about talking to anybody about that — it needn't necessarily just be England and Scotland."



Marie-Jose Percec of France takes off at the start of the women's 400m at the Grand Prix meeting in Paris on June 28. Percec won the race. — AFP/UNB photo

Christie's self-assurance

PARIS, June 29: The Linford Christie saga continued here on Friday as the British Olympic champion crashed to 100m Grand Prix defeat — then behaved as if he had won, reports AFP.

The 36-year-old, yet confirm whether he will defend his Olympic title next month, finished in 10.05sec behind Canadian duo Bruny Sorin (10.03) and Donovan Bailey (10.04) but lifted both arms in celebration at the end of the race.

Christie, smiling broadly, said: "My decision over whether to run at Atlanta was 70 per cent made before this race, now it's 80/20 but I'm not saying what I've decided."

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LINFORD CHRISTIE

down in the 100m, timing 11.11 to finish third behind Nigeria's Commonwealth champion Mary Oryali (11.06).

Mutola, meanwhile, bidding to run 800/1,500m double at Atlanta, moved up to the longer distance and was third at the bell. The Mozambican almost tripped up with 200m to go before fighting her way to the front only for Gabriela Szabo to outspurt her in the run-in.

The Romanian, just 20 but with the world indoor title already in her trophy cabinet, smashed her personal best by over five seconds to win in 4:03.18 the best time this year.

There may have been no world records, but a series of other athletes also notched up 1996 best times.

Tonya Buford, world 400m hurdles silver medalist behind American teammate Kim Batten last year, turned the tables with a fine tactical victory, attacking over the final 40m to catch Batten and win in 53.54sec.

World champion Derrick Adkins responded in kind in the men's race, belying a mediocre start of the season to beat US trials winner Bryan Bronson and Samuel Matete, Zambia's 1991 world champion. The American timed 47.70, winning by a full five metres after a cautious start.

Marje Jose Per of France, the world and Olympic champion and virtually unbeatable over 400, produced another 1996 best time by winning in 49.47.

Sergey Bubka, meanwhile, beat his major Atlanta rivals by clearing 6m. Overt Brits of South Africa coming third with 5.85m Jan Zalzay won the javelin with 88.42m ten metres off his new world record.

USA kicks off 'foulball'

WASHINGTON, June 29 (Reuters): US officials kicked off a campaign on Friday to deter the use of child labour in making soccer balls and called on the international soccer federation to help with that goal.

The "foulball" campaign focuses on Pakistan, which exports about 35 million soccer balls a year, about one third to North America.

The campaign is asking the international football federation FIFA, the governing body of soccer, to only give its stamp of approval to soccer balls made without using underage labour.

"Every regulation soccer ball already has the FIFA mark on it, but that mark does not now have anything to do with whether this was produced by child labour," US Labour Secretary Robert Reich said.

"There is no reason that FIFA mark should also not include a guarantee that this ball was not made with child labour."

Soccer balls must be FIFA-approved for use in national

and international competition. A FIFA representative could not be reached for comment as the office in Switzerland was closed.

"If FIFA doesn't have the resources to monitor the industry, they should charge a nominal fee of 5 to 25 cents per ball to set up a fund to pay for monitoring, perhaps by UNICEF," Democratic representative Joseph Kennedy of Massachusetts said.

Reich said hand-stitched soccer balls are also being made in Indonesia and China and he intends to get more information on whether they are being stitched by children.

Reich called on the American sporting goods industry "to do the right thing" and support efforts against child labour — pointing to steps that Reebok and Nike are taking to prevent child labour from being used for soccer balls.

Global Exchange, a human rights organisation, criticised Nike for labour practices in Indonesia that it said included paying low wages and firing workers for protesting.

Nike said it required all its

manufacturers to sign a code of conduct saying they would abide by all the laws, wages, benefits and environmental matters of that country. "In Indonesia, on average, we pay double the minimum wage in our factories," Brad Figel, a lobbyist for Nike in Washington said.

The campaign, which is being coordinated by the International Labour Rights Fund and a network of groups, does not seek to stop purchases of soccer balls from Pakistan, but to ensure that children are not used to make those balls.

Soccer balls are produced in Sialkot in northeastern Pakistan near the Kashmiri border.

A spokesman for the Pakistan embassy in Washington said it was difficult to monitor who was stitching the balls because often that work was sent out to remote villages.

"When it's a choice between starving yourself to death or going out and working in a factory to make a few bucks to support your family, a lot of children end up doing that," Rifaat Hussain said.

Rahul's first tour ton

LONDON, June 29: Rahul Dravid, who fell five runs short of a Test century on his debut for India last week, hit his first 100 on tour as India's three-day match against British Universities ended in a draw on Friday, reports Reuters.

Dravid batting at number three, hit a six and 13 fours to finish unbeaten on 101 as India opted for batting practice to finish at 231 for three declared after starting the final day with a 242-run lead.

Batting at number seven in the second Test against England at Lord's Dravid fell for 95 ending Chris Lewis to Jack Russell.

Test wicketkeeper Nayan Mongia, opening the innings in Cambridge, also notched his highest score on tour with 65.

India played their last three-day match against Hampshire in Southampton starting today.

The third and final Test against England starts next Thursday at Trent Bridge. England lead the series 1-0.

Olympians meet Mandela

PRETORIA, June 29: President Nelson Mandela on Friday hosted a farewell party at his residence here for South Africa's Olympic team, wishing them well and proclaiming them official "ambassadors" in Atlanta, reports AFP.

It has become customary before any international sporting clash for the president to meet and greet competitors like rugby and soccer players to swimmers, cricketers and mountaineers. All South Africa's sportspeople claim the "Mandela magic" inspires them.

The president was then presented with a South African Olympic blazer and golf cap by hockey captain Alistair Fredericks.

The team will be given an official public farewell at Johannesburg stadium today before flying off to Atlanta on Sunday.

Warwickshire on a sticky wicket

LONDON, June 29: Warwickshire County Cricket Club were called Friday to appear before the Lord's pitches committee next week after a "below average" mark for a Test match pitch for the second successive year, reports AFP.

TCCB cricket secretary Tim Lamb said: "The board are concerned about pitch preparation at Edgbaston and we will be doing everything possible via the pitches committee to sort it out."

"The matter needs to be addressed urgently. Warwickshire have to accept there is a problem."

Last year's Edgbaston Test finished with a West Indies victory before lunch on the third day and this month's first Test against India resulted in an England win on the fourth morning.

Both pitches gave excessive help to seam bowling with extravagant movement and bounce.

Gooch's denial

LONDON, June 29: Former England captain Graham Gooch denied on Friday that he had fallen on to bad terms with his county Essex, despite being refused leave from the team to perform his new role as English selector, reports AFP.

Chairman to selectors Ray Illingworth wanted Gooch to travel to Worcester, presumably to cast an eye on Yorkshire opener Michael Vaughan and Martyn Moxon — although Gooch claims he was unaware of the fact.

But the Essex manager insisted, he remain with the team to play this weekend's round of county cricket.

"I'm happy with the situation," Gooch said. "Essex wanted me to play against Surrey and that's fine by me. I certainly have no complaints about the situation."

For his part, Essex secretary-general manager Peter Edwards said that the arrangement was all in good faith.

"It was not a question of us being awkward. We would have agreed to the request had we felt that Graham needed a break from playing. That was not the case," he commented.

Czechs Brits' choice

LONDON, June 29: Thousands of British gamblers have backed the Czech Republic at odds of 11-5 to beat Germany in Sunday's Euro '96 final, reports Reuters.

The public seem to be behind the Czechs, placing bets in their thousands, said bookmakers Ladbrokes. "People seem to want them to prevent the German from lifting the cup."

Germany are 1-3 favourites. Euro '96 has been Britain's biggest sports event ever in betting terms, with 80 million pounds (123 million dollars) staked.

Game 13 drawn

ELISTA, Russia, June 29: Russian world champion Anatoly Karpov and his American challenger Gata Kamsky drew on Friday the 12th game of the International Chess Federation (FIDE) World Championship, reports AFP.

Kamsky, playing white, offered a draw on his 54th move in a level position, and Karpov agreed.



PALESTINE JOINS THE OLYMPIC MOVEMENT. Majed Abu Marahil and Ihab Salamah (2nd and 3rd from the right), who represent their country in the Atlanta Olympics, igniting the torch in a ceremony held in Gaza city on June 28. — AFP/UNB photo