

Sport

Column One

Sports

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A safe ride for seeds

LONDON, June 30: The remaining big names survived almost intact in the power-packed top half of the Wimbledon men's draw on Saturday while Todd Martin could start dreaming of an unimpeded route to the final from the lower half, reports Reuter.

Top holder Pete Sampras, Goran Ivanisevic, 1991 champion Michael Stich and Dutchman Richard Krajicek all resisted the tide that had swept away so many of their high-ranked colleagues to reach the second week and the fourth round of the men's championship.

Though 14th seed Mark Rosset went out, the towering 'Swiss Alps' surrendered 4-6, 6-3, 4-6, 6-1, 6-3 to Australian Patrick Rafter to reduce to a record low of five the number of men's seeds left, the other members of the mighty serve-and-volley brigade could start planning for the blood-and-thunder battles beginning on Monday.

Sampras, going for his fourth successive title, will face French 16th seed Cedric Pioline, fourth seed Ivanisevic plays Rafter and 10th seed Stich trades firepower with Krajicek in matches which will please the purists — and bore critics of the big grass-court game rigid.

Down in the bottom section 13th seed Martin remained the only seed alive as South African Wayne Ferreira, the number 11, fell 7-6, 7-5, 1-6, 5-7, 6-1 to Swede Magnus Gustafsson.

Martin beat Italian Renzo Furlan 7-6, 6-4, 6-2 and following the departure of second seed Boris Becker because of an injury during his match with South African Neville Godwin on Friday, now faces the possibility of a place in the final without having to play a seed to get there.

The huge American, a finalist at the 1994 Australian Open and semifinalist at Wimbledon and the US Open that year, was composed at the prospect.

"I think it is essential for all of us left in the bottom half to really play one match at a time and be focussed each time they go on court."

"The guys who are unseeded and are in the fourth round have beaten the seeds. So I think they're playing as well as anybody in the tournament," he said.

The women's event lost fifth seed Anke Huber of Germany, who went out 7-6, 6-1 to Ai Sugiyama of Japan after suffering an inexplicable bout of dizziness and spots in front

of her eyes before and at the start of the match.

"I don't know what it was because I've never had anything like it before," said Huber, who had some treatment and who insisted it did not affect the outcome of her match.

Top seed Steffi Graf dropped the first nine points of her third-round clash but recovered to whip American Nicole Arendt 6-2, 6-1 in just

set thanks to an umpire's overrule that gave Kuchera an ace at a crucial moment in the 12th game.

"That was the only over-rule and to do it at that time I don't agree with," Sampras said.

Kuchera took the tie-break 7-5 when Sampras hit an easy volley at the net. "I took my eye off it but to miss a cripple like that," Sampras said.

The disappointment lin-



AI Sugiyama of Japan makes a double-fisted backhand return against Anke Huber of Germany during their third round clash of the All-England tennis championships on June 29. The unseeded Japanese player sent the fifth seeded German packing with a stunning 7-6, 6-1 win.

— AFP/UNB photo

42 minutes.

Spaniard Conchita Martinez, the 1994 champion who is Graf's projected semi-final opponent, overcame a difficult hurdle in American Lori McNeil, Graf's first-round conqueror in 1994.

Martinez, the third seed, trailed in both sets but won 7-5, 7-6, while there were straightforward wins for Czech Jana Novotna and 13th seed Mary Pierce of France, who is having her best Wimbledon on the grass surface alien to her.

Sampras overcame awkward Slovak Karol Kuchera 6-4, 6-1, 6-7, 7-6 in a gusty Centre-Court wind, losing the third set in three matches.

— AFP/UNB photo

gered through the early games of the fourth set as Sampras fell behind 3-0 but he gathered himself together to get the break back in the seventh game and won the tie-break 7-3.

"It wasn't pretty but I came through it," he said.

Pioline eliminated Czech Jana Kroslak 6-2, 7-6, 6-3 to earn his match with the champion.

Stich and Krajicek each needed four sets against Australian Sandon Stolle and New Zealander Brett Steven respectively while Ivanisevic beat Russian Alexander Volkov 7-6, 7-5, 6-3 and has not dropped a set in three matches.

— AFP/UNB photo

59 in the world.

Seles collected the Australian Open in January but has struggled since.

The shoulder injury, which will ultimately require surgery, has made her comeback a stop-start affair and at the French Open she lost to Jane Novotna in the quarter-finals.

As she headed for the Wimbledon turnstiles, Seles spoke of needing to reassess before the US Open in late August.

"I should have closed it out today tons of times and the key is to learn from this one," said Seles, who was a break up in the final set before a rain delay.

"I don't think the consistency of my game is there because I can play great some matches and terribly in others," said. reports AFP.

Sentiment was running high on the same court the following day when Edberg, 30 who retired at the end of the year, packed his bags for the last time at Wimbledon after falling to fellow Swede Mikael Tillstrom 4-6, 6-4, 7-6, 6-4 in the second round.

In growing twilight Edberg bade a dignified farewell to the courts he graced during an illustrious career.

He made the Wimbledon final in three successive years from 1988 and 1990, each time against Becker, and lifted the trophy twice.

"Nor has North Korea taken any step over the issue," he added.

South Korea will keep alive its offer and wait for a positive response from North Korea, which has appealed for emergency food supplies to avert famine following last year's devastating floods, newspapers said.

The Chosun Ilbo, a leading daily in Seoul, said South Korea was ready to foot part of some two million dollars requested by North Korea for its 70-member Olympic team.

The second seed felt something "pop," dropped his racket and grabbed his arm. Doctors diagnosed a party-ruptured tendon and told him to immobilise it for four weeks.

Becker, 28, who had the arm partly encased in plaster, said he was hoping to be fit to contest the US Open at the end of August. It was a bitter blow for Becker, who won his sixth Grand Slam title and his first in five years at the Australian Open in January.

"Coming in Wimbledon it is as bad as it can be. Wimbledon is the highlight of my year," Becker said.

The German, who missed the French Open through injury, had felt he was "one of

Czechs get a chemical scare!

ST ALBANS, England, June 30: The hotel where the Czech Republic squad is staying ahead of the European Championship final was evacuated after a chemical alert on Saturday, reports Reuter.

Four people were taken to hospital suffering from respiratory problems and two others treated on the spot after the incident at the Sopwell House Hotel in St Albans.

Kimiko Date of Japan makes the effort to slice a forehand shot against Kristie Boogert of Holland on the sixth day of the All-England tennis championships Friday. — AFP/UNB photo

Age-group tennis

Sports Reporter

Fahim Ahsan Romi and Niranjan Ram, the top seeds in the under-16 section of the national age-group tennis championships, set up a final clash with the second seeded duo of Salahuddin and Monir after eliminating their respective semifinal opponents at the Ramma Tennis Complex yesterday.

In the rain affected first semifinal, the Fahim-Niranjan pair outclassed Aziz Raj and Ahsan Habib 6-3, 6-4 while Salahuddin and Monir duo floored Selim-Imon pair with an identical 6-4, 6-4 score.

Olympic tennis outclassed

LONDON, June 30: The 1991 Wimbledon champion Michael Stich — one of only five men's seeds to survive the first week at this year's championships — has shrugged off tennis as an Olympic sport, reports AFP.

My private opinion is that tennis doesn't really belong to the Olympic Games, he said, after cruising into the last-sixteen of the men's singles at the weekend by beating Australian Sandon Stolle in four sets.

The recent French Open finalist, who declined selection for the Atlanta Games, said: "I made that choice because I won a gold medal (for doubles) last time and there's really not much more I can do to better that. I also wanted to give the chance to some other players to be part of the Olympic Games. It is a great experience."

But for tennis players, Wimbledon, the Australian, French and United States opens will always be much more important than the Olympic Games.

Track and field athletes and swimmers train for four years to go to the Olympics. It's the highlight of their careers. For tennis players it is not.

It was a great thing for me to take part. But I would rather be there in a different sport or as a spectator rather than find myself participating in the tennis tournament.

"One of the main problems is that the Olympics do not fit in. Look at the American guys who want to play the Games. They have to play three super nine events (Cincinnati, Indianapolis and Toronto), and then right after that it will be the United States Open. That's seven weeks of very intense tennis. I think it's impossible and I don't know how these guys are going to do it — especially with the heat and humidity."

The United States Open is much more important to me — not that I'm going to give back my gold medal. That is still an important part of my career.

ROK keeps door open

SEOUL, June 30: South Korea is keeping alive its conciliatory office to foot part of the bill for rival North Korea's participation in the Atlanta Olympics this summer, reports AFP.

"I should have closed it out today tons of times and the key is to learn from this one," said Seles, who was a break up in the final set before a rain delay.

"I don't think the consistency of my game is there because I can play great some matches and terribly in others," said. reports AFP.

The agency quoted government officials here as saying the IOC and Atlanta Olympics organisers asked South Korea to foot part of the bill for North Korean Olympic expenses.

Seoul gave an "affirmative" reply, but there has been "no further word from the IOC or the organising committees as to the amount South Korea is supposed to chip in," an unidentified official was quoted as saying.

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Graf, the trail-blazer

"I think maybe, some day when I stop playing and I'm looking back at my records the feeling will be stronger," she said.

The German joint world number one moved a step closer to a seventh Wimbledon singles title and 20th Grand Slam crown on Saturday and then said she had little time to reflect on the significance of her feasts.

"Obviously you get more in touch with history here than in any other tournament," Graf said after she blitzed American Nicole Arendt 6-2, 6-1 to move into the fourth round.

"There are a lot of memories, a lot of past champions that are coming and just the facility itself. But I'm not thinking about history when I go out on court. I'm just trying to play the match. Maybe at some other time but definitely not right now."

Graf, 27, won her fifth French Open title earlier this month to take her Grand Slam singles tally to 19, one more than Martina Navratilova and Chris Evert.

Only former Australian champion Margaret Court, with 24 titles, is ahead of the German on the all-time list.

Graf said she occasionally reflected on how much she had achieved but winning tournaments gave her more immediate pleasure.

LONDON, June 30 (Reuter): Tennis' master blasters have been trading compliments as well as rocket-powered serves at this year's Wimbledon.

The battle for the biggest delivery is fierce in the modern-day game, where space age technology has turned rackets into weapons that propel the ball at over 200 kilometres an hour and give players just 0.3 seconds to react.

World number one Pete Sampras, regarded by many as having the best serve in the

— Japan's Shuzo Matsuoka was top of the pace-list, clocking 214 kph, ahead of Philippoussis (210kph). The 1.94-metre Melbourne right-hander hardly eases the throttle with his second serve, registering a 202 kph second hit in losing to Sampras in the second round.

"The way he serves, it's just like he has two first serves," Sampras said of Philippoussis, known as "scud" on the circuit.

"There's nothing you can do, you just have to hang in

Becker's sigh of relief

LONDON, June 30: Boris Becker is hoping to be back for the US Open in August after the wrist injury he suffered on Friday was diagnosed as a partly-ruptured tendon, reports Reuter.

"I'm pretty happy that it's nothing more serious," Becker, whose right wrist has been partly encased in plaster, told the thought was top dog.

"I've always thought Goran Ivanisevic has the best serve I've ever played," the American triple Wimbledon champion said.

"There is no broken bone or anything. I am relieved it is nothing more serious because I want to play here in 1997 and 1998."

World number four Becker, a triple Wimbledon champion, injured his right wrist going for an awkward shot in the opening set tiebreak of his third-round match against South African qualifier Neville Godwin.

The German dropped his racket, winced in pain and was forced to forfeit the match.

Becker, 28, was reported to have been treated by three doctors including renowned Munich specialist Dr Hans-Wilhelm Mueller-Wilhahrt, until the early hours of Saturday morning.

The wrist is swollen and tender and Becker was told he would have to keep his right arm immobilised for four weeks, after which recuperative treatment would begin.

The US Open starts on August 26.

Reflecting on criticism of the penalty shoot-out system, he told BBC television: "The only other way would be to play until someone scores. The sudden death in extra time is not really working."

Seaman's suggestion

LONDON, June 30: England goalkeeper David Seaman, hero of the penalty shoot-out against Spain in the quarter-finals of Euro 96, suggested on Sunday the best way to resolve drawn matches would be to play until someone scores, reports Reuter.

Reflecting on criticism of the penalty shoot-out system, he told BBC television: "The only other way would be to play until someone scores. The sudden death in extra time is not really working."

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