

Sport

Column One

SPORTS TALK



Steffi Graf

(World No. 1 tennis player)

"It's simply unbelievable. It's been like a dream because I didn't expect it to be possible."

After winning her seventh Wimbledon title on Saturday.

Sports

WHIZZ KID

COMPETITION FOR SCHOOL CHILDREN

Bangladesh tie with USA

BRIEF SCORES

BANGLADESH 190 in 44.3 overs (Bidyut 52, Akram 39, n.o.; Lotis 3 /42, Howard 2/48).

UNITED STATES 190 in 44.5 overs (Singh 4 /7, Texel 11, n.o.; Louis 23, A. Ion 3 /45).

Sports Reporter
ivation for a maiden victory against Bangladesh, but eventually ended up at par conceding their last wicket in the penultimate delivery of the innings.

In an exciting finale with the United States needing one run for a win from the last two deliveries, slow left-arm spinner Enamul Huq Moni, who was left with an unenviable task of bowing the last over, had the last laugh by outfoxing C Bannis, the last US batsman, hammered a rapid-fire 23.

Earlier, the Bangladesh total was built around a dazzling half century from opener Bidyut and a 30-ball-37 captain's knock from Akram Khan.

Bidyut, who had a disappointing first match against the hosts, returned to his usual form with a polished 52. The young right-handed batsman shared three vital partnerships with Athar Ali (19), Rupom (9) and Faruque (18) before falling to Louis leaving the Bangladeshi total comfortably poised at 116/4.

But Akram apart, the Bangladesh middle-order sams the service of an experienced Minhasz Abedin Nannu, who is nursing a sore shoulder, failed to carry the total to a predictable throw into the depth of despair.

Moni, who together with a watchful Pilot had earlier dismissed two US middle-order bats, finished most successfully among the Bangladesh bowlers with three for 45 in his otherwise expensive 6.5 overs.

In reply, the hosts, smarting from a 32-run defeat in their previous engagement on Saturday, came up with more major changes from last Saturday's line-up, opener Singh

lowest of notes when, struggling with a hamstring problem, he lost his world title in Gothenburg.

That image of a fallen champion, flat out on the track clasping his leg, can never obliterate one thing, however.

The British sprint champion was already at it last year, declaring that he would not defend his title — definitely.

Definitely became probably, then possibly, as Christie became less and less communicative, so his rivals, neither fooled nor impressed, spoke out more than more. Christie would hit the Atlanta tarmac running, they predicted.

They were right.

If Britain's team captain thought there was advantage to be gained in masking his Olympic ambitions, then he was wrong.

Christie, of course, has never been a straightforward character.

Former teammate Derek Redmond once said he was a perfectly balanced athlete, since he had a chip on both shoulders.

As for the British media — who he accuses of dubbing him 'Jamaican-born' when he loses and 'British' when he wins — they discovered long ago that if you were not for him, they were against him.

Last season, one row followed another.

There was the annual war of words with America's top sprinters. Then he got embroiled in an argument with the British athletics federation over money. Then he upset International amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) chief Primo Nebiolo by pulling out of the world indoor championships just four days before the start.

Soon after the death of his mother, Christie announced he had had enough. "When I get this season over, that's it," he said. "I'm definitely not going to the Olympic Games."

Media pressure, apparently, was to blame, from now on, he would run for himself — and run for fun.

Christie's disastrous 1995 season — which had begun so hopefully with a world indoor 200m record — ended on the

highest of notes when, struggling with a hamstring problem, he lost his world title in Gothenburg.

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Christie has never felt he has earned the respect he deserves, either from his rivals or his own national press, who argues constantly focus on negatives.

There was the time, for instance, when he escaped a drugs ban at the Seoul Olympics after revealing he had drunk ginseng tea. And when he threatened to attack journalists at Heathrow airport — "I don't want to see any bloodshed on this airport but if you want some..." or when it was revealed last year that his 16-year-old son by a teenage Roman had become a father.

The irony of course is that Christie seems to feel off conflict. So much so that some British journalists think he invites controversy on purpose.

So perhaps it was unwise of world champion Donovan Bailey to suggest that Christie's Gothenburg injury had been stage-managed.

The Canadian's assertion that "A fit Linford Christie ran that race. Absolutely no-one was injured in that race" must have seemed like a red rag to a bull. Particularly when both Bailey and Carl Lewis, Christie's oldest jousting partner, declared that the Briton was "bluffing the media" by suggesting he might not run in Atlanta.

Christie's final decision to compete, whatever it was based upon, must be right. The man who was once told by promoter Andy Norman that he "couldn't fill a telephone box" will help ensure the fullest of houses at Atlanta if he reaches the 100m final on July 27.

That race will give him the chance to cap his final chapter with the perfect punch-line. Christie may not feel he owes anything to anyone, but surely he owes that to himself.

As a bank-vault of gold medals,

Christie, who only broke through at the top level a decade ago as a 26-year-old after his coach Ron Roddan finally convinced him to put away his dominoes and take athletics seriously, will go down in history as an athlete's great.

His achievement — at one stage he held the Olympic, world, European, British and Commonwealth titles simultaneously and his major championship medals currently total 23 — cannot be questioned.

And he remains one of the most supreme racers of them all, his awesome physical stature matched by his ability to "psyche out" the most hardened of rivals. As Dennis Mitchell put it: "He is probably the most competitive athlete I have ever raced... if you question yourself with Linford, you are against him."

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