

Stars off sick at Stockholm

STOCKHOLM, July 9: A planned world record attempt on the 3,000 metres steeplechase was called off on Monday when Kenyan Moses Kiptanui pulled out of the Stockholm Grand Prix meeting with a cold, reports Reuter.

Gwen Torrence, American world women's 100 metres champion, also pulled out of the meeting after being taken ill. Britain's 1,500 metres runner Kelly Holmes withdrew too. She has sinusitis.

Kiptanui, the 3,000 steeplechase world champion and world record holder, had been suffering from a cold and Rajne Soderberg, a doctor who is also the meeting director, advised him not to run.

"Moses ran this morning but wasn't feeling well and I have recommended that he does not run tonight," Soderberg said.

"He has a cold which also bothered him in Oslo last week. He feels better but still has a chest cold.

"He cannot perform to his capacity and it is better he withdraws. Moses could risk further complications, something that might jeopardise his chances in the Olympics if he runs."

Torrence woke up on Monday morning with swollen mouth, lips, eyes and itchininess all over her body.

Soderberg said she had had an allergic reaction, probably to something she had eaten. She was examined by a second doctor and told not to run.

A planned attempt on the men's world 5,000 metres record was also shelved as fast Moroccan Salah Hissou decided to run the 1,500 metres instead.

Thais in Asian Cup soccer final round

SINGAPORE, July 9: Southeast Asian champions Thailand won a place in the final round of soccer's Asian Cup when two late goals gave them a 2-2 draw Tuesday with hosts Singapore in the deciding match of the Group Three qualifying round, reports AP.

The Thais, who needed only a draw to top the group, fell behind on two strikes by Singapore forward V Selvaraj in the 51st and 65th minutes.

S Natipong scored Thailand's first goal in the 69th minute before S Kitatsuk broke the local fans' hearts with an equalizer in the 71st minute.

Singapore, who were two points behind the Thais in the standings before the match, had needed to win to qualify for the final round, to be held in Dubai in December.

In an earlier match, Burma clinched third place in the four-nation group by beating the Maldives 4-1.

Burma's Myo Hlang Wing scored in the 10th and 90th minutes and Maung Maung Oo in the 78th and 85th minutes.

The Maldives' consolation goal came on a penalty kick by Ibrahim Rasheed in the 45th minute.

Beto dropped

RIO DE JANEIRO, July 9: Midfielder Beto pulled a groin muscle and was cut from Brazil's Olympic soccer team, doctor Lidio Toledo said, reports AP.

Beto was replaced by Marcelinho Paulista, who practiced Monday at the team's training camp in Teresopolis, near Rio.

Toledo said Beto had failed to treat an old injury and reported to training camp out of condition.

"He went Italy to sign a contract with Napoli and didn't do any exercise for the past 10 days," Toledo said. "How can he come here and hope to keep up with the others?"

Beto, a star on Brazilian champion Botafogo, recently signed with Napoli of the Italian First Division for a reported \$5 million dollars.

An artificial passer and dribbler whose taste for nightlife at times hurt his on-field performance, Beto was competing with Amaral for a starting midfield spot.

Sino reporter on the road

WASHINGTON, July 9: Senior staff from the Chinese embassy here turned out Friday to see off a Beijing sports writer on the longest leg of a 15,000-km Olympic bicycle tour that will take him to 17 countries, reports AP.

Tanned and bearded after biking through Athens and running a marathon in Greece, China sports magazine correspondent Pu Fanzhou, 38, loaded a rucksack on the back of his bicycle, and pedalled off south toward Atlanta.

In a rare public gathering, embassy staff including ambassador Li Daoyu gathered outside the large embassy compound under sunny skies for a picture-taking session with Pu.

"The American part will be the longest part of my journey, covering about 4,000 kilometres," Pu said through an interpreter.

He plans to bike solo for most of the trip, which will take him to the site of this year's Games in Atlanta, then to past Olympic venues St Louis, Los Angeles, South Korea, and Japan.

Pu's trip will conclude with a visit to Australia, which will host the first Olympic Games of the 21st century.

Embassy staff said Pu would file regular reports during his trip for readers in China, a fierce Olympic competitor.

Michael learns to rock

STOCKHOLM, July 9: American Michael Johnson, surprisingly beaten over 200 metres in Oslo on Friday, bounced back to win the Stockholm Grand Prix in 19.77 seconds — the sixth fastest time ever run, reports Reuter.

Johnson, how smashed Pietero Menna's 17-year-old world record when he ran 19.66 at the US Olympic trials in Atlanta last month, confirmed beyond any doubt on Monday that he was still favourite for the Olympic gold.

Frankie Fredericks, who ended Johnson's 21-race winning streak when he pipped him in Oslo, was not running on Monday but Johnson was up against Trinidad's Ato Bolden and American Jon Drummond, two men with serious medal hopes in Atlanta.

Johnson, bidding for a unique men's 200-400 metres double at the Games, was level with Bolden at the end of the curve but then stepped up a gear in the next 50 metres to pull away from the field and win by two metres from the Trinidadian who clocked 19.94.

Drummond was third in 20.05 but the ease with which Johnson ran such a fast time is bound to worry all his opponents.

Conditions were near perfect in Stockholm's Olympic Stadium with just a faint breeze contributing to a legal following wind of 1.1 metres-per-second.

The only runners to better Johnson's winning time are Johnson himself, Menna (19.72) and Americans Mike Marsh (19.73), Carl Lewis (19.75) and Joe Deloach (19.75).

Johnson, back in the country where he won the 200 and 400 gold medals at last year's World Championships, said afterwards: "I felt in control of the race. I feel like I am ready to do a 19.5."

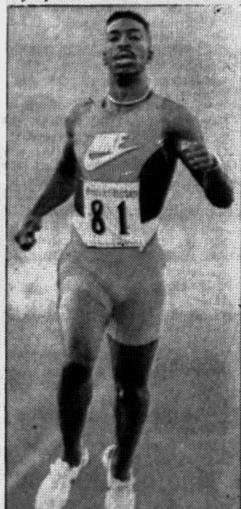
Asked if he thought that 19.50 would be the time he would need to run to win gold

in Atlanta, he said: "No, I don't think it is going to take 19.5 but I feel confident I can do it."

Johnson said he lost in Oslo because he made a mistake at the start but said that overall he was pleased with the way he was reacting to the gun.

"I've been running so much better this year because I have been getting a good six to eight first steps out of the blocks. I won't be running again before the Games.

"That will give me enough time to get home and maintain where I am at now before the Olympics start."



MICHAEL JOHNSON
Although beaten in the 200 Bolden scored a morale-boosting win of his own in the 100, even though his winning time was a relatively slow 10.07.

Bolden, who may run both the 100 and 200 in Atlanta, finished ahead of Drummond (10.09) and world champion Donovan Bailey of Canada, third in the same time.

Two planned world record attempts were called off before the meeting began.

Kenyan Moses Kiptanui, the world record holder and world champion in the 3,000 steeplechase, had to pull out with a chest cold but that did nothing to spoil Kenya's usual domination of the event.

They claimed the first seven places with Gideon Chirchir winning in eight minutes 07.97 seconds — the fastest time in the world this year.

A planned attempt on the 5,000 metres world record was also shelved when Moroccan Salah Hissou switched to 1,500 and ran a conservative 3:35.38 behind compatriot Hicham el Guerrouj who won in a blistering 3:29.59.

That makes El Guerrouj the third fastest man of all time behind Noureddine Morceli and Said Aouita.

The 5,000 metres produced a memorable finish with Daniel Komen winning in a Kenyan record time of 12:51.60.

American Bob Kennedy finished second in 12:58.75 and became only the ninth man — and the first non-African — to run under the magical 13-minute mark.

Britain's World Championship silver medalist Tony Jarrett was disqualified from the men's 110 metres hurdles when he was adjudged to have committed two of the four false starts.

American Olympic favourite Allen Johnson won the race in 13.25 seconds ahead of world record holder Colin Jackson of Britain in 13.37.

Ludmilla Engquist, who last week was cleared by her former country Russia to compete in the Olympics for Sweden, won the women's hurdles in 12.67.

Britain's Jonathan Edwards chalked up his 21st successive victory in the triple jump with a leap of 17.29.

"I was very pleased Kenny Harrison and the Cubans weren't here tonight," he said afterwards. "My legs felt dead to be honest and no-one jumped very well."

'King Carl's' last crusade

ATLANTA, July 9 (AFP): It would be hard to imagine Atlanta without Carl Lewis.

The cornerstone of world athletics since the early eighties, he almost deserves a ring of his own on the Olympic flag.

Yet the 35-year-old, bidding for his eighth gold medal as well as a record-equaling fourth long jump title in a row, came precariously close to missing his cue in June as the final curtain comes down on perhaps the greatest performer of all time.

In the end, Lewis, after failing dismally in the sprints, poached one of the final places on the United States team by just three centimetres, the distance that separated him from fourth-placed Mike Conley in the long jump at the US trials.

The International Olympic Committee, which had reshuffled the games schedule to accommodate Lewis's wildly optimistic dream of qualifying for the four events, must have breathed a collective sigh of relief.

Lewis may not have qualified for the 100 and 200m or the US sprint relay. Indeed, he may even struggle to make the Atlanta long jump final. But at least he will be there to sell the Games.

Lewis the salesman, indeed, has been far more effective than Lewis the athlete for years.

"King Carl", they call him in America ever since he emulated Jess Owens by winning four golds in a single Games at Los Angeles in 1984.

The stark facts, however, reveal that he lost his kingdom long ago.

At times it seems hard to separate fact from fiction, so adopt it as the Lewis tongue at finding cause for optimism.

Only Lewis would try to argue with statistics which show that he has not won an international sprint title for five years, nor any sort of title since 1992.

His last performance in a major athletics showpiece came in 1993, when he managed just one medal, a bronze in the 200m.

Last year, he was forced to miss the World Championships through injury, another sign of his increasing frailty.

He still managed a few Gothenburg headlines, however, with an attack on the championships and his successor at the pinnacle of athletics, Michael Johnson.

"It's boring. The electricity is not there," he had argued. "There's no buzz, there's something missing."

Nobody was surprised to hear him suggest that missing ingredient was Lewis himself.

"The one American they're trying to build up, Michael Johnson, he doesn't have it. He's not doing up. Michael Johnson, he doesn't have it. He's not doing anything for them. If I had been in the 100m final, it would have been sold out."

Lewis is wrong about Johnson — a man who can win a 200/400 World Championship double and break a world record in his final warm-up clearly does have it — and seems just as far off the mark about himself.

Ironically, however, he has not been alone in wanting to believe in a final fairy tale.

Never universally popular in

his heyday, he may have slipped out of the limelight in recent years but fans the world over have begun to dream, like Lewis himself, of one final sensation before the inevitable five years. But both the athlete, reiterating his warning of "don't write me off because I'm not dead yet", and the public tried desperately to convince themselves that things were back to normal.

Lewis' wily coach Tom Teletz captured the mood, saying, "He's got his confidence back. He's stronger now that he's ever been. He'll be tough to beat."

Except that there is nothing more normal than a 35-year-old losing more and more often in the hands of a new generation.

The Santa Monica Track Club veteran may not feel bound by such banalities as the laws of science. And he indeed has a point when he argues: "Well hell, I've won eight gold medals — am I really supposed to be like everybody else?"

But the US trials here in June put the King's ageing bones firmly in their place — last in the 100m final and fifth in the 200m.

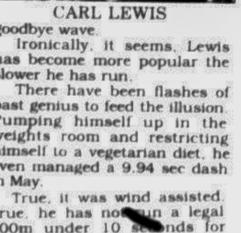
The obituaries were hurriedly penned that day, when Lewis suddenly sailed those extra three centimetres to land at a less-than-legal 8.30m, thus giving himself one last chance of a ninth golden moment.

If he were to succeed, he would add yet another extraordinary chapter to his long history of success, emulating Al Oerter's legendary four Olympic titles in a row in the discus.

And there is a glimmer of hope.

Cuban long jump world champion Ivan Pedroso, after all, imperial throughout 1995, has been injured all season and is unlikely to feature. Mike Powell, meanwhile, who produced a world record to beat Lewis in Tokyo in 1991, is no teenager himself at 32.

The stage, it seems, could not be better set for Lewis to produce one final leap of faith to astonish the world.



CARL LEWIS
goodbye wave.

Ironically, it seems, Lewis has become more popular the slower he has run.

There have been flashes of past genius to feed the illusion. Pumping himself up in the weights room and restricting himself to a vegetarian diet, he even managed a 9.94 sec dash in May.

True, it was wind assisted. True, he has not won a legal 100m under 10 seconds for

Euro giants set to clash

ZURICH, July 9: European champions Juventus of Italy and UEFA Cup winners Bayern Munich of Germany will clash on July 28 at the 100th anniversary tournament of Switzerland's FC Zurich, organisers said on Monday, reports Reuter.

Zurich will play local rivals and Swiss champions Grasshopper in a second match, with the two winners meeting in the tournament final the next day.

Georgia to tie up traffic

ATLANTA, July 9: Georgia officials said on Monday they will immediately begin to wing abandoned vehicles on Atlanta's freeways as part of an Olympics-related crackdown on passenger and truck traffic aimed at reducing the threat of terrorism, reports Reuter.

"Oklahoma City, New York and Saudi Arabia were specific threats. We don't want to see that happen here," said Sid Miles, commander of the Georgia state patrol. "We're taking all precautions to make sure nothing like that ever does happen here."

He was referring to fatal bombings attacks on a federal building in Oklahoma City, the World Trade Centre in New York city, and a facility housing US troops in Saudi Arabia.

Officials said anyone with a disabled vehicle should remain in or near it. "We have a number of security concerns with abandoned vehicles on the highway," Miles said.

Much of the city's freeway system is under camera surveillance and authorities have established a system to dispatch rescue trucks to make minor car repairs and provide fuel.

"Any car that pulls over on the side of the inter-state around the Olympic Village will be set upon immediately," Miles said. "Anything around the venues we're watching very closely, whether it's on the interstate or on side streets."

Proposal for Paralympics!

ATLANTA, Georgia, July 9: US Olympic committee president Leroy Walker will urge the International Olympic Committee to hold the Paralympics before the Olympics in the future to boost both events, reports AP.

Walker said he believes holding the Paralympics first would mean more spectators for the Games for the disabled, as well as giving Olympic organisers a chance to test venues.

"I think it deserves to have its day in the sun," Walker said of the Paralympics, which will be held after the Centennial Olympic Games end on August 4.

Paralympic officials agreed, but only if Olympic organisers could guarantee that facilities would be ready.

It could have enormous benefits if planning allowed for it, said Andy Fleming, president of the Atlanta Paralympic organising committee.

With the Atlanta Games scheduled to open on July 19, organisers were still working on some projects.

The Clark University buildings slated to house journalists were not ready on time and officials had to find alternative accommodation for those booked to stay there.

The Olympic transportation system was still 300 drivers short of the 3,600 target.

Randstad, the temporary employment agency responsible for hiring the drivers, said it had found 300 drivers, but they had yet to complete the training course.

Of the 1,450 buses being loaned to the Atlanta Committee for the Olympic Games by other US cities, 600 had arrived.

Another 400 were expected by the end of the week and all were expected to be in Atlanta by July 19, when the Games begin.

The new Centennial Olympic Park, which won't open to the public until Saturday, opened its gates for a private view on Sunday — and had to be closed because it was too crowded.

Some 50,000 people crammed into the global Olympic village pavilion and the park's central plaza, which was inspired by 1992 Olympic host city Barcelona's ramblas pedestrian street.

Tim Macy, ACOG's park manager, said the park would be able to handle bigger crowds during the Games, when more corporate pavilions will be open.

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The 'last Czar' in limbo

ATLANTA, July 9: Czar Sergey Bubka has ruled the pole vault as if were his own personal empire for over a decade. For the first time in years, however, trouble is brewing on the border. Thank goodness, things had got too quiet.

Olympic victory for the latest intruder — Okkert Brits of South Africa — could be just what the pole vault needs.

Bubka, the five-times world champion, had all but killed off

denied, however. Since Thierry Vigneron of France impudently vaulted 5.91m in Rome on August 31, 1984 — Bubka allowed the Frenchman to covet the world record for a matter of minutes — no man has got near to shaking the dynasty.

Bubka, simply, has been too quick, too strong, too good technically and too coldly calculating for his opponents.

Brits arrival, however, has changed that. The 22-year-old — nicknamed "the body" by his South African female teammate



SERGEY BUBKA

the discipline. His astute, bank-manager approach to record-breaking gutted the pole vault of real drama and spontaneity long ago.

The 31-year-old Ukrainian has broken 35 world records in all, 17 of them outdoors. The last 10 have seen a centimetre added each time up to the present mark of 6.14m.

For each of those centimetres, Bubka has banked in the region of 50,000 dollars, with the odd sports car thrown in to boot.

The achievements of the man from Lugansk cannot be

may not yet have the technique or the experience, but he can more than match the world number one in brute strength.

Brits is everything that Bubka is not.

He is spontaneous, wild — the uncharitable would say mad — unpredictable and he is fresh. If Bubka looks and vaults like an accountant, the long-haired Brits performs as if he were a surfer off a Cape Town beach.

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Pillay, man on a mission

ATLANTA, July 9 (AFP): Field hockey may not be a high-profile spectator event at the Atlanta Olympics, but one man promises to convert a few Americans to the sport before the Centennial Games are over.

India's Dhanraj Pillay is not only one of the greatest strikers in contemporary hockey, but his colourful personality is just what the doctor ordered in a sport bereft of characters.

Pillay, dark with long hair and unkempt looks, resembles former Dutch football striker Ruud Gullit — and is just as deadly in front of goal.

Pillay has been the backbone of India's hockey revival over the past decade, which has seen the former masters rise from a 12th-out-of-12 placing at the 1986 World Cup to gold medal contention.

And at 29, Pillay knows this may be his final chance to bring India glory in the shape of a ninth Olympic gold medal, but the first since 1980.

"I may never take part in the Olympics again, so it's got to be now. I will settle for nothing less than a gold medal at Atlanta," Pillay said.

"I am really geared up for the big one. India taught hockey to the world, but no-

one seems to remember that now. It's time to teach them a lesson again."

In a country where only



DHANRAJ PILLAY

cricketers enjoy high-profile status, Pillay became a national hero after India's stunning 5-2 win over arch-rivals Pakistan in the South Asian Federation games in December.

Pillay, who scored three times as India ran up a 5-0 lead, said it was his most memorable performance so far. But he sounded a grim warning to India's rivals at Atlanta, saying his best was yet to come.

"I think I am at my peak now. And so is the rest of the Indian team. We are confident of taking on any side. We fear no one," said Pillay, who plays in the French League when freed from national duty.

Pillay has often been labelled abrasive and selfish for playing as a soloist in a team game. But coach Cedric G'Souza, who masterminded India's revival, rejects the charge.

"Pillay is as much a team man as anyone else," G'Souza says. "You can't rein in a genius. If he make solo runs, it's not because he is selfish, but because he believes he can score on his own."

Scoring goals comes naturally to Pillay — as rival defences around the world will testify. An entire hockey-crazy country is praying he continues in the same vein in Atlanta.

Bosnia's road to harmony

SARAJEVO, July 9: Bosnia may not win any medals at the Atlanta Olympics, but with a Serb, a Croat and a Muslim in its team, it has already won the hearts of the people of Pell City, Alabama.

Pell City, a community of some 8,000 souls around 100 miles west of Atlanta, is hosting the handful of Bosnian athletes who will take the trip to

Atlanta this year for their first Olympics representing a country at peace after nearly four years of war.

"We have had great help from the people there," Izudin Filipovic, the secretary general of Bosnia-Herzegovina's national Olympic committee, told AFP in an interview in his Sarajevo city centre offices.

They said they liked our attitude to our team and are hosting our athletes. They are putting them up in their homes and building training facilities for us."

The tiny American community has raised 250,000 dollars to build up its sports facilities to help with training. "It's an American sort of rationality — charitable and at the same time they will benefit as well," said Filipovic, a former newspaper editor in Sarajevo.

The Bosnian squad left Germany for Pell City in mid-June. They are due in Atlanta on July 15.

Having got a special dispensation to send some 12 hopefuls to the last Olympics in Barcelona — a few months after war broke out in Bosnia in April 1992 — the newly-peaceful country is this year sending a team of at least eight sportsmen and women to Atlanta, Filipovic said.

"We are interested in sporting quality, not in what ethnic group our athletes come from," he said.

For us, the ethnic group does not count so long as they come from Bosnia. The people in our team are not Serbs, Croats, or Muslims. They are Bosnians," he said.

Only one member of the Bosnian team, 10-kilometre race-walker Kada Delic, is having an Olympic veteran, having competed in Barcelona in 1992.

She is a Muslim, Davor Vlasokovic, a judo player, is a Croat, while Janko Gokjovic, who swims the 100 and 200

metres freestyle, is a Serb.

Samir Karabasic, in the Kayak Canoe, and Fahrudin Hodzic, a wrestler, are Muslims and make up two more of the team while Nedžad Fazilija, also Muslim, is entering one competition the Bosnians ought to do well — in small bore rifle shooting.

The other entrants are Dijana Kvesic, another swimmer, and Ivan Pljugin, a marathon runner and paramilitary in the city throughout the war, training by running messages for the Bosnian Army when its telephones exchange was blown up by Bosnian Serbs.

The judo and shooting guys do have a chance of scoring well, even if they are not going to get a medal," said Filipovic. "We are not sending them there with the intention of scolding them if they do not win a medal."

"It is very important for us, after the war, just to be present, shoulder to shoulder with all the other nations."

"It means Bosnia does exist."

Sarajevo, of course, has long links with the Olympic movement, and in 1984 staged the Winter Games.

The sports facilities built for those Games — where Britain's Torvill and Dean won the ice dance — were destroyed at the start of the war which broke out when Bosnia claimed independence from Yugoslavia and Belgrade sent tanks, troops and paramilitaries in the city across the Drina river to back a Bosnian Serb rebellion.

After the war, estimated by the government in Sarajevo to have left over 150,000 dead, Bosnia is short on cash for sports facilities and has found it hard to raise the 265,000 dollars needed to send its team to Atlanta.

"Unlike other countries, the government has no money for this sort of thing," said Filipovic.



Allen Johnson (USA) (right) hurdles to win the 110 metres at the Stockholm international meeting on July 8 ahead of Britain's Colin Jackson (centre) and Cuba's Emilio Valle (not in frame). Johnson's time: 13.25 secs. — AFP/UNB photo