

WTA's top twenty

NEW YORK, Nov 25 (Reuters): WTA rankings after the year-ending Chase Championships on Sunday:

1. Graf (GER)
2. Graf (US)
3. Equal Sanchez-Vicario (SPA)
4. Novotna (Czech Rep)
5. Hingis (SWIT)
6. Martinez (SPA)
7. Huber (GER)
8. Majoli (CRO)
9. Date (JAP)
10. Davenport (US)
11. Paulius (AUS)
12. Sprules (US)
13. Rubin (US)
14. Schulz (NED)
15. Fernandez (US)
16. Decugis (FRA)
17. Habsudova (SLOV)
18. Coetzer (RSA)
19. Maleeva (BLR)
20. Wiesner (Aus)
21. Pierce (FRA)

IOC team ends visit to Rio

RIO DE JANEIRO, Nov 25: International Olympic Committee officials said on Sunday they were impressed with public enthusiasm for Rio De Janeiro's bid to attempt the 2004 Olympics, reports Reuter.

But the group, who completed their three-day inspection of the city on Sunday, also appeared concerned about the pollution of Guanabara Bay, the picture postcard by on which part of the city is built.

"The committee appreciated the enormous support given to the candidature by the Cariocas (natives of Rio) and the people of Brazil and the different levels of government," said Thomas Bach, president of the IOC's evaluation committee.

Bach was evidently impressed after the Rio 2004 committee laid on a host of sporting events on Copacabana Beach in front of the hotel where the IOC officials were staying.

These included an event in which tribe of Brazilian Indians in traditional dress took part in a log carrying race and a tournament of foot-volleyball, a sport frequently seen on local beaches.

Two other positive points were the participation allowed to non-governmental groups by the Rio 2004 committee and the fact that the sporting venues were concentrated in five areas of the City, Bach said.

The Olympic Stadium and Village would be built on the campus of the Federal University, which is on an island partly bordered by one of the city's most polluted rivers. During low tide and hot weather, it exudes an unbearable stench.

Steffi stops Hingis' run

NEW YORK, Nov 25: Steffi Graf, the best of her time and possibly of all time, capped a stellar year by beating rising star Martina Hingis in the season-ending Chase Championships on Sunday, reports Reuter.

The world number one was pushed to the five-set limit by the sensational 16-year-old Swiss player, but Graf answered the challenge to hold onto her title, winning 6-3, 4-6, 6-0, 4-6 and 6-0 at the two million dollar event at Madison Square Garden.

"Wherever she plays, she wins the tournament," Hingis, who was hampered by cramping in her thigh in the last two sets, said of the 27-year-old Graf. The German won all three Grand Slams she played this year, missing only the season-opening Australian Open to recuperate from foot surgery.

Graf volleyed back the compliment to Hingis, who last year failed to qualify for the elite 16-player field.

"As fast as she's going, she's definitely the one to look out for, no question," Graf said of Hingis, who will finish the year at a career high number four ranking in the world.

"The way she's been playing, without being afraid, with the freshness, I definitely see her as the one."

But right now Graf is the one.

Since winning her first major in 1987 at the French Open, Graf has won 21 Grand Slam singles titles. That is second best on the all-time list, three behind Australian Hall of Famer Margaret Court.

Graf will finish this year atop the world rankings for a fourth year in a row. Her \$500,000 dollar first place prize money pushed her earnings this season to more than 2.5 million dollars.

Her year was all the more remarkable in view of the nagging injuries she battled throughout. Last week she was forced to quite with a bad back in the middle of the Philadelphia final.

"If I had a wish list for next year, it would be my health, that is my top priority," said Graf, who iced her chronically sore left knee in the final two sets here. "I'm just physically not in the shape to be at my peak."

Not as visible, but more hurtful, was the year-long pain of her father Peter's imprisonment on tax evasion charges in Germany. His trial started two months ago and only last week was he released on bail.

Graf has now won the championships five times, after beating fellow German Anke Huber last year in another five-set final.

This one lasted nearly three hours, and Hingis almost did not make it all the way. A cramp in her left thigh hobbled her in the final games of the

championships five times, after beating fellow German Anke Huber last year in another five-set final.

But after that Hingis had very little fight left, and Graf pounced on her wounded foe in the last set. Graf showed no mercy to her tenacious foe, mixing in drop shots along with her usual barrage of groundstrokes.

—AFP/UNB photo

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