

Beirut gala begins with bitterness

Iraqis on road to home

BEIRUT, July 13: The Arab world's biggest sporting extravaganza opened on Saturday evening amid pomp and ceremony as disgruntled Iraqi athletes reluctantly gave up their protest at Lebanon's refusal to let them take part, reports AFP.

The opening gala for the eighth Pan-Arab Games was attended by numerous Lebanese and international dignitaries including President Elias Hrawi, International Olympic Committee chairman Juan Antonio Samaranch and Arab League Secretary General Esmat Abdel Meguid, and tens of thousands of spectators.

Some 3,000 athletes from 19 Arab countries, along with hundreds of trainers and administrators and thousands of foreign spectators, are in Beirut for the Games which run until July 27.

But the 95-member Iraqi team, barred from taking part after pressure from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, gave up their protest just a few hours before the opening ceremony and headed back to Baghdad via Syria.

"We are leaving with lots of bitterness in our hearts because of this inhospitable change of attitude and the fact that our Lebanese brothers have been the victims of Kuwaiti blackmail," delegation leader Acl Tabra said.

The incident could sour the relationship between the two countries, which had recently begun reactivating trade ties for the first time in three years.

Before leaving the isolated Syrian-Lebanese border post at Masana, the Iraqi athletes cut the throats of sheep, chanted slogans insulting president Saddam Hussein and waved banners reading 'sport unites, but we are prevented from meeting our brothers.'

The Iraqis had been stranded since early Friday after making the gruelling 24-hour journey from Baghdad by road despite Lebanon's warning that they would not be allowed into the country.

A Lebanese official said the authorities imposed the ban for fear of upsetting Gulf Arab states.

Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, which have been pouring funds into Lebanon to help it rebuild after its devastating 1975-1990 civil war, have threatened to boycott the Games if Iraq took part.

Riyadh contributed 20 million dollars and Kuwait six million dollars to the reconstruction of the Beirut Sports City where the Games are taking place, which was flattened by Israeli warplanes in 1982.

The Iraqis complained that

they received an official invitation to the Games and accused Lebanon of selling out to the wealthy Gulf Arab states.

"The Pan-Arab Games should unify Arab youth and not a bringer of division and submission to worshippers of the US dollar," Tabra said.

In Baghdad, the Babel newspaper run by Saddam's eldest son, Uday, said: "It is shameful that the Lebanese government has succumbed to financial pressures and has sold itself for a few million dollars."

The Iraqi National Olympic Committee, chaired by Uday, also blamed the Arab League, which originally invited the Iraqi athletes to participate.

Games. Kuwait, for its part, hailed the Lebanese ban.

"This decision is the most important medal the Lebanese could award us," the president of the Kuwaiti Olympic Committee, Sheikh Ahmed Al-Fahd Al-Sabah, said Friday.

Lebanon, which cut diplomatic relations with Iraq in 1994 after an Iraqi dissident was assassinated in Beirut, has begun reactivating trade links with Baghdad in recent months.

Iraq was banned from the last Pan-Arab Games in Syria in 1992 because of the invasion of Kuwait two years earlier, but its athletes travelled to Jordan anyway to demonstrate at the



Scene from the opening ceremony of the eighth Pan-Arab Games at the Camille Chamoun Stadium in Beirut on July 12.

"We denounce this cowardly act by Lebanon, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and we pay homage to the Arab League and its secretary general for this lamentable failure," Babel said.

Meguid tried unsuccessfully on Wednesday to persuade Lebanon to allow the Iraqi athletes to participate in the

Syrian border.

The Arab Games were launched in Alexandria, Egypt, in 1953 and are generally held at four-year intervals.

They had been planned for 1996 in Beirut, but were delayed because of Israel's offensive against Lebanon which killed 175 people, mostly civilians.

Pan-Arab Games at a glance

BEIRUT, July 13 (AP): Some facts and figures about the eighth Pan-Arab Games being played in Beirut through July 27.

PARTICIPATION: The 22 members of the Cairo-headquartered Arab League are eligible to participate, but only 19 are taking part. Lebanon refused visas to the Iraqi team, while Somalia and Comoros are not taking part.

VENUE: Main events will be held at the Camille Chamoun Stadium, which Palestinian guerrillas turned into a base during Lebanon's civil war and Israeli forces pulverised in 1982. It was rebuilt over the last three years at a cost of 75 million dollars.

EVENTS: Twenty-one sporting events were scheduled, but four were canceled for lack of players: kick boxing for men and women, women's cycling, women's golf and women's yachting.

BIG AND SMALL: Host Lebanon with 563 athletes, coaches, trainers and administrators will have the biggest delegation. Djibouti is sending one athlete. Lebanon's table tennis player Liza Barikian at 13 is the youngest competitor.

HISTORY: Arab Games were first proposed in 1947 by Abdurrahman Azzam, then secretary-general of the Arab League. The first games were held in Alexandria, Egypt, in 1953 with eight countries participating.

GLITCHES: The 110-metres women's hurdles, scheduled for early Sunday, was postponed as the hurdles were locked up in room and organisers couldn't find the keys.



A Star file photo shows Wembley Stadium's majestic twin towers.

Wembley may lose the towers

LONDON, July 13: Wembley Stadium's twin towers, one of the most famous landmarks in world sport, could be demolished when the stadium is re-built, according to a report in The Mail today, reports Reuter.

The newspaper quotes from what it calls a secret document which considers knocking down the twin towers and relocating the pitch from its current east-west orientation to north-south.

Doing that would eradicate the mid-afternoon shadow that

falls across the pitch and tends to affect television coverage of events like the FA Cup final.

Plans to re-build Wembley, which dates from 1923 and is in dire need of modernising have been known for some considerable time.

But it has been widely believed that the towers would either be taken down and rebuilt or remain where they stand with the remainder of the stadium being razed to the ground and re-built.

An extract from the document published by The Mail reads in part: "The twin towers

will need to be demolished or relocated... the feasibility and cost of moving the towers requires further detailed investigation and the views of English heritage on relocation or demolition options require clarification."

The towers are listed as a Grade II protected building.

A spokeswoman for English Heritage said: "The stadium is listed Grade II. We broadly support development plans, even if it means substantial demolition, but we would like to see the twin towers and the connecting block kept."

Work on re-developing Wembley which has staged the FA Cup final since 1923 and was the venue for the 1948 Olympic Games, the 1966 World Cup final and last year's Euro '96 final, is due to begin in June 1999 and be completed by March 2002.

The new Wembley forms the centerpiece of England's bid to stage soccer's World Cup finals in 2006, but means that a proposed bid to host the 2001 World Athletics Championships has had to be put on hold because the new stadium will not be ready in time.

Politics an inevitable

BEIRUT, July 13: Politics can seldom stay out of sports, the head of the International Olympic Committee said Sunday after Kuwait's enmity for Iraq spilled into the eighth Arab Games, reports AP.

Host Lebanon refused to let Iraqi athletes participate in the Games, bowing to pressure from Kuwait, which is still smarting from Iraq's 1990 invasion and seven-month occupation.

"It is very easy to say that sports has nothing to do with politics. But you can find politics everywhere," IOC President Juan Antonio Samaranch told reporters.

Samaranch, a Spaniard who heads the IOC in Lausanne, Switzerland, was in Beirut to attend the opening ceremony Saturday of the 16-day Games that are meant to emphasise Arab unity.

"This problem is solved bit by bit, step by step," he said. "I am sure it will be solved."

Samaranch cited the thorny issue of the status of the Hong Kong Olympic Federation now that the former British colony is under China. He said the IOC recently reached a deal that will ensure the Hong Kong federation's independence.

Samaranch also praised the newly rebuilt Camille Chamoun Stadium in Beirut, an Olympic-class sports facility where the Arab Games are being held.

He said the stadium and other facilities have placed Lebanon in a good position to bid for the 2001 Francophone Games.

"Beirut was destroyed. Now you are in reconstruction phase. Lebanon has the capacity. You are a strong leader to hold Francophone Games," he said.

The Francophone Games are sponsored by La Francophonie, an organisation of 49 French-speaking nations. French is widely spoken by Lebanon's Christians.

Italy empty Indonesia

JAKARTA, July 13: Italy won both reverse singles matches and the only doubles Sunday, completing a 5-0 victory over Indonesia in their Fed Cup World Group 2 tennis play-off, reports AP.

Playing under sunny skies on a gravel court at Jakarta's Senayan Tennis Stadium, the more experienced Italians continued domination over the host's junior players.

Indonesia was forced to field its junior players for the two-day tournament after its top female player, Yayuk Basuki, chose to concentrate on lifting her position from 22nd in the World Tennis Association rankings.

"I actually think I could have been about half a second quicker, but I overtrimmed the boat on the back straight in my first flying lap. I'm quite happy though. We've made a lot of set up improvements since the last race in Chalon, we've got the weight distribution better and got some good props, so we feel we're back on track. For today we'll probably make a few setup changes, and try another new propeller. The wind direction could dictate the race — if the wind's off the land it will flatten the rollers and that should make it easier to read. If it's rough like this morning, that could throw the whole race wide

Lennox retains his belt

STATELINE, Nevada, July 13: World Boxing Council heavyweight champion Lennox Lewis retained his title Saturday when fellow Briton Henry Akinwande was disqualified at 2:34 of the fifth round by referee Mills Lane for repeated holding, reports Reuter.

Akinwande, a 7-1/2 to 5 underdog, was warned several times by Lane and had one point deducted from his score in the second round for holding and refusing to fight.

It was the second straight heavyweight title fight in which the veteran referee disqualified a boxer. Lane did the same to Mike Tyson two weeks ago in his bout against World Boxing Association champion Evander Holyfield after the challenger bit both Holyfield's ears.

Lewis was aggressive throughout. Akinwande made it easy for the harder-hitting Lewis by failing to use his physical advantages of speed and reach. The 6-foot 6-1/2 inch (1.99 metres) Akinwande, who has an 86-inch (2.18 metres) reach, seldom jabbed, threw few combination rights and displayed no foot speed nor lateral movement.

Lewis offered an explanation for Akinwande's lethargic, dreary performance: "I realised he wasn't mentally or physically tougher than me."

Lewis added: "I was disappointed because obviously he didn't want to fight. What can you do if a man doesn't want to fight? All he did was hold."

Akinwande said after the bout that his strategy was to "get close to him" — just the opposite of what the challenger's trainer, Don Turner, had said would be their plan. In fact, between rounds Turner urged Akinwande to move, jab and punch, as the challenger had done during preparation for this bout scheduled for 12 rounds.

"I tried to get close to him," said Akinwande. "I tried to make him step backward, but he didn't step."

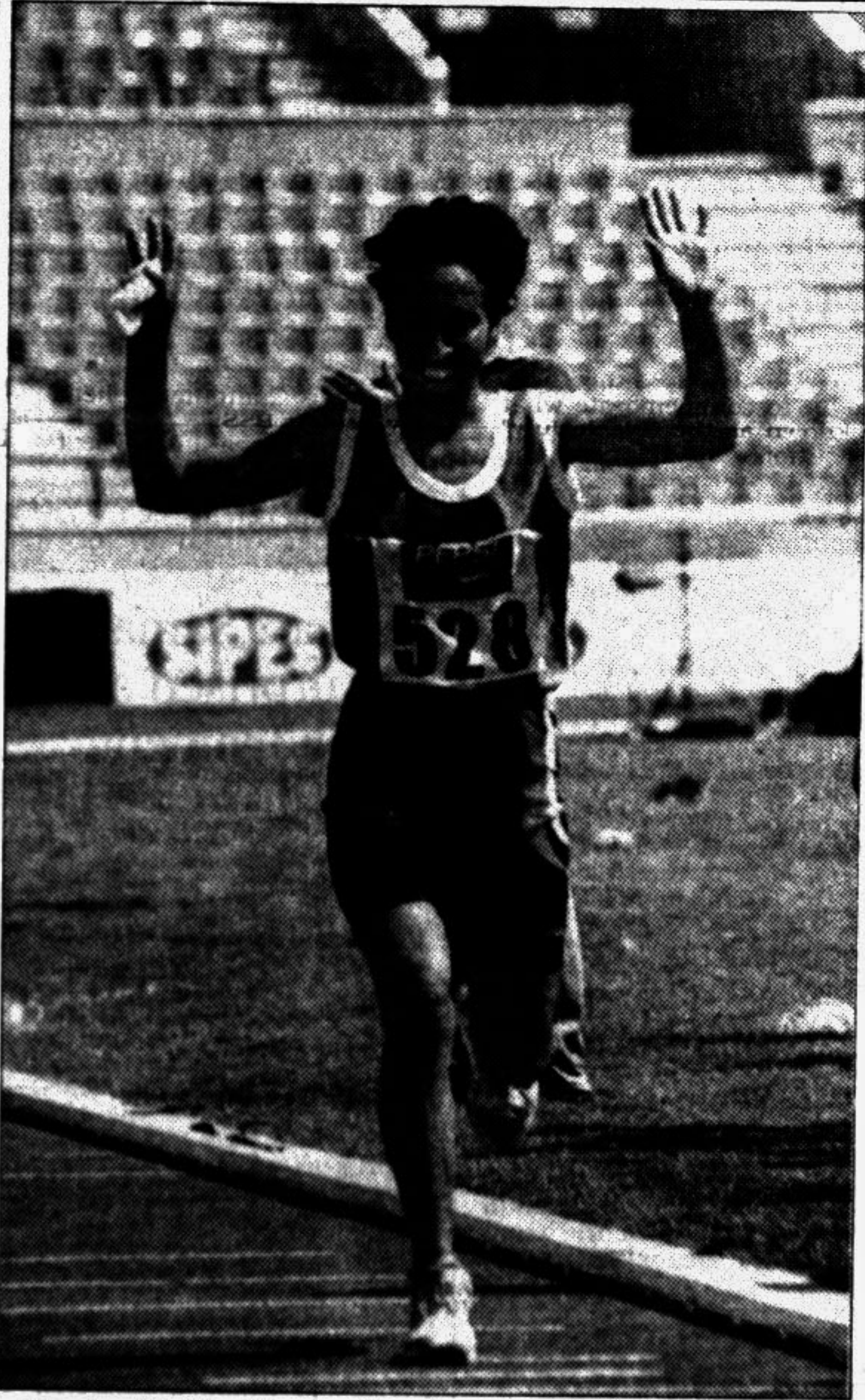
Lane did not want to disqualify the fighter, especially since the sport already was tarnished by the Tyson debacle. "It's the worst thing, a dog is the worst thing," Lane said.

"But there's a certain proto-

col and once you get outside of that there's nothing else you can do."

The Nevada State Athletic Commission suspended Akinwande and held his purse of one million dollars. Further action will be decided at a hearing that could come as early as next week.

The commission, which earlier this week suspended Tyson's license for at least one year and fined him 3 million dollars, under a new Nevada State law passed in the aftermath of his disgrace has the right to hold to 100 per cent of a fighter's purse. Previously, 10 per cent was the limit.



Algerian Dalila Mayal raises her arms in jubilation as she crosses the finish-line of the marathon race to clinch the first gold medal of the Pan-Arab Games in Beirut on July 12.

Americans, Swiss go up

LONDON, July 13: Martina Hingis and Jana Novotna, opponents in the finals at Wimbledon, both won first-round matches in Fed Cup play, reports AP.

Hingis, the Wimbledon champion, helped Switzerland to a 2-0 lead Saturday against Argentina, defeating Maria Jose Gaidano 6-1, 6-2 before a small crowd at Zurich. Patty Schnyder followed, defeating Florencia Labat 3-6, 7-5, 10-6.

Hingis drilled winner after winner to wrap up the match in a mere 49 minutes. "My serves were good," the 16-year-old said. "And she gave me the opportunity to go up to the net often because she didn't return very well."

At Prague, No 2 Novotna, playing with a strained abdominal muscle that hindered her at Wimbledon, overpowered Miriam Oremans 6-3, 6-0 in just 70 minutes to pull the Czech Republic even at 1-1 with the Netherlands.

She started poorly — going down 1-3 before breaking Oremans in the fifth game. She did not lose another game, wrapping up the first set in 42 minutes, then taking less than a half-hour to wipe out her opponent 6-0 in the second.

"At the beginning I was bit uneasy, but I think I didn't

make any mistakes," Novotna said.

She has withdrawn from the Czech Open that starts in Prague on Monday and complained of pain.

"I'm playing now against the recommendation of my physician," she said. "Next week, I really need to rest."

In the opening match of the day, Netherlands' Brenda Schults-McCarthy beat Czech Sandra Kleinova in two straight sets 6-1, 7-6.

Mary Joe Fernandez, Lindsey Davenport, Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario, Anke Huber, Iva Majoli, Barbara Paulus, Amanda Coetzer also won Fed Cup matches. But it was loser Barbara Shett of Austria who was the biggest surprise of first-round action.

South Africa's Coetzer, ranked sixth in the world, nearly wasted a big lead against Austria's Schett. Coetzer was leading 6-1, 4-1 and had two break points before Schett staged a remarkable rally. The Austrian took a 6-5 lead before Coetzer forced a tiebreak and won the match 6-1, 7-6.

Paulus then took just 85 minutes to overcome South Africa's Joannette Kruger 6-4, 6-4 and tie the match 1-1.

Snett's performance stunned observers. She said her game turned around when she became indifferent, apparently facing a 1-6, 1-6 elimination.

"I always told her she should just free up her game," said Austria's Federation Cup captain, Filip Krajcik.

Fernandez defeated Ai

Sugiyama 4-6, 6-2, 6-2 and Lindsay Davenport beat Naoko Sawamatsu 6-1, 6-3 to give the United States a 2-0 lead over Japan in a Fed Cup World Group 1 match.

"I felt comfortable going into my match knowing that we had won the first match of the day and held the lead," said Davenport.

The winner of the series advances into the 1998 draw. The United States was eliminated from this year's Fed Cup by the Netherlands.

Sanchez-Vicario defeated Rachel McQuillan of Australia, 6-2, 6-1. But Australian Annabel Ellwood beat Maria Luisa Serna of Spain to even the match at 1-1.

Huber, leading Germany while Steffi Graf recovers from knee surgery, defeated 15-year-old Mirjana Lucic of Croatia 6-2, 6-2 to deadlock that playoff at 1-1. Majoli, the French Open champion, defeated Meike Babel 6-2, 6-3 in the first singles match.

France and Belgium split their first two singles matches.

France's Alexandra Fusai, ranked 57th in the world and making her Fed Cup singles debut, rallied to defeat 19th-ranked Sabine Appelmans, 6-7, 6-3, 6-1.

Dominique Van Roost of Belgium took advantage of key double faults by Sandrine Testud of France to even it with a 4-6, 7-5, 6-4 vicarious Tauziat, who could not adjust to clay after reaching the quarterfinals at Wimbledon, outlasting Wynnie Prakusya 6-3, 6-7, 6-1.

Singapore will okay betting?

SINGAPORE, July 13: The Singapore government will soon decide whether to introduce legalised betting in the local soccer league, a minister said in remarks published today, reports AFP.

A study commissioned by the Singapore Sports Council has shown that it is possible to organise football pools in the island where a professional league kicked off only last year, the Sunday Times said.

Communications Minister Mah Bow Tan, who is also adviser to the Football Association of Singapore and the Singapore league, said a report on the findings had been presented to the government.

"We can expect a government decision soon. As adviser, I am in favour of it," Mah was quoted as saying.

The council had been looking into a betting system which could generate funds to promote the sport and prevent match-fixing by syndicates in this soccer-mad city-state.

Mah said he was aware of the sensitivity involved in having another form of gambling introduced here.

But safeguards exist to ensure that youngsters do not get involved in horse racing and other wagers.



Francesca Lubiani (R) of Italy gives the ball to her partner Gloria Pizzinchina after they beat Indonesians Liza Andriyani and Enny Sulistiyawati in their Fed Cup playoff in Jakarta yesterday. The Italians won the doubles match 6-1, 6-2.

Dhaka Club golf results

Sports Reporter

KU Chowdhury won the Dhaka Club Open golf competition on Friday, says a press release.

The event sponsored by Consultant Forum Limited, was participated by a good number of golfers who braved the elements to complete the 18-hole course.

OTHER RESULTS

Runner-up: Mosaddek Ali
Best Gross: Ishrat Mahmud
Back Nine: Azizul Haque
Front Nine: Raazul Haque
Longest Drive: S G Murtaza
Nearest to Pin: Above

Swiss Open Mantilla's

GSTAAD, Switzerland, July 13: Felix Mantilla defeated Juan Albert Viloca in the all-Spanish final of the \$40,000 Swiss Open tennis tournament Sunday, to collect his second consecutive title, reports AP.

Losing in the final last year to fellow Spaniard Albert Costa, sixth-seed Mantilla didn't let his second chance go to waste, quickly wrapping up the best-of-five sets final 6-1, 6-4, 6-4.

It was the sixth time in seven years a Spaniard walked away with the title. Russia's Yevgeny Kafelnikov breaking the streak with a victory in 1995.

"It was one of my best weeks ever," said Mantilla, who went through the tournament without dropping a set. "This is a very important tournament for me, one of my favourites. I hope in the future there will be more weeks like this for me."

Sargsian, Steven in Hall of Fame final

NEWPORT, Rhode Island, July 13: Sargis Sargsian became the first American to advance to the final of an ATP tour event, defeating Leander Paes 7-6 (7-3), 2-6, 6-3, in the Hall of Fame Championships, reports AP.

"It definitely makes me happy, but you don't want to be satisfied," said Sargsian, looking ahead to Sunday's final.

Sargsian will play New Zealand's Brett Steven, the eighth seed, who beat third seeded Grant Stafford, 6-3, 5-7, 6-4 in the other semifinal match.

Sargsian, 24, the fifth seed, rallied from a poor second set to defeat Paes, the seventh seed, breaking his serve in the sixth game of the final set. He also trailed 4-1 in the first set, but came back to win it in a tiebreaker.

"I just tried to relax, breathe and take it easy," he said.

It was an unusual semifinal for this grass tournament, as it was a battle of baseline players. Sargsian had only four aces, while Paes hit just one. There were four breaks of serve in the first set and seven overall.

Paes said he's not surprised that Sargsian, who is not known for his serve-and-volley game, has advanced to the final.

"The game's too competitive nowadays," he said. "I don't think he was a longshot to start."

"I'm not a grass player," said Sargsian. "But I'm always confident I can do well on grass."

The other match was more typical of a grass-court match. Steven used a strong serve (nine aces) and return game to knock off Stafford, a finalist here last year.

"I feel a bit lucky to get through, as well as Grant was playing," said Steven. "I've never played somebody who hit so many winners off my first serve."

In a doubles semifinal, Kent Kinnear and Aleksandar Kijevic defeated Bryan Shelton and David Dilucia, 6-4, 6-4.

Jones flies in Greece

CORFU, Greece, July 13: A strong cross wind and rough water in Corfu's Garitsa Bay made conditions very difficult for the drivers yesterday, as the three boats of the Gold Leaf F1 Racing team took to the water to qualify for today's Grand Prix of Corfu, fourth round of the ULM F1 World Championship, says a press release.

Jonathan Jones took second spot on the starting pontoon, with a time of 0:38.34 seconds. Massimo Roggero just under a second behind, on 39.27 seconds, in fourth place. Massimo set a little bit of F1 history, when he squeezed into the Top Seven Shoot Out. Roggero and Sugihara had ended the second qualifying session on the same time, and the race organisers decided that the only fair way to settle the question was to let both men in. Roggero was the most of the opportunity, seizing fourth place on the grid, and improving his best time by over four seconds. Chinese driver, Linwu Peng, in his first race with the JPGL team this year, was finding the rough conditions particularly difficult, not surprising as it was his first time on a saltwater course. He is learning from the experience however, and is hoping for calmer conditions today, a sentiment shared by all the drivers who will be starting the race.

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Massimo Roggero

"I feel much happier with the boat since the changes we've made after Chalon. I'd lost my way a bit, but now things are really starting to come together. I was lucky to get the chance to make the 'shoot out' and improve my time as the water got calmer. I will be trying to make the best start possible, and then we'll see what we shall see. Like all the drivers I will be hoping for smoother waters in the race."

Linwu Peng

"I've never driven in such rough water and so I was disappointed that my times were not better. My hope for the race is that the water will be a little calmer!"

American racer Scott Gillman took pole position for the fourth time this season, his time of 37.25 seconds smashing

the lap record of 39.93 seconds. All top five drivers were within the record time, which was set by Massimo Roggero last year.

Jonathan Jones

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1997 U.I.M. WORLD FORMULA ONE POWER BOAT CHAMPIONSHIP