

ECB's quest to become more attractive

LONDON, Sept 9: English county cricket clubs were asked on Monday to vote on a proposal to split the national championship into two divisions in a bid to make the sport more attractive, reports Reuter.

A two-division format, with nine counties in each part, was one of the proposals in a document sent to all county clubs by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB).

The counties will vote next Monday on whether to back the proposal or an alternative plan to enhance the present 18-team county championship with a "Super Cup" one-day knock-out competition for the top eight teams.

ECB chief executive Tim Lamb said next Monday's meeting would look at the best way to move the game forward, adding: "There seems to be an almost universal recognition of the need for change."

Hingis atop the earners' list

ST PETERSBURG, Florida, Sept 9 (Reuter): leading money winners in women's tennis this year as issued by the WTA Tour on Monday:

Player	dollars
1. Hingis	3,096,311
2. Davenport	1,133,106
3. Majoli	1,129,087
4. Novotna	875,340
5. Seles	771,705
6. Fernandez	685,997
7. Sanchez-Vicario	681,392
8. Zvereva	676,778
9. Pierce	670,689
10. Coetzee	596,924
11. Spirlea	505,798
12. Fernandez	443,082
13. Martinez	427,479
14. Williams	426,861
15. Testud	371,858
16. Dragomir	357,747
17. Bollegraf	347,179
18. Arendt	336,452
19. Raymond	336,110
20. Huber	334,100

Days in dreadful disorder



CHICAGO, Sept 9: Former heavy-weight champ Muhammad Ali, his body gripped by Parkinson's Disease but his eyes flashing a fighting fire, said on Monday boxing was a tougher challenge than the illness he has battled for 16 years, reports Reuter.

"I'm still the greatest," the 55-year-old fighter said in a voice little more than a whisper during a news conference where he clowned with his wife, joked and made a red silk handkerchief disappear by sleight of hand.

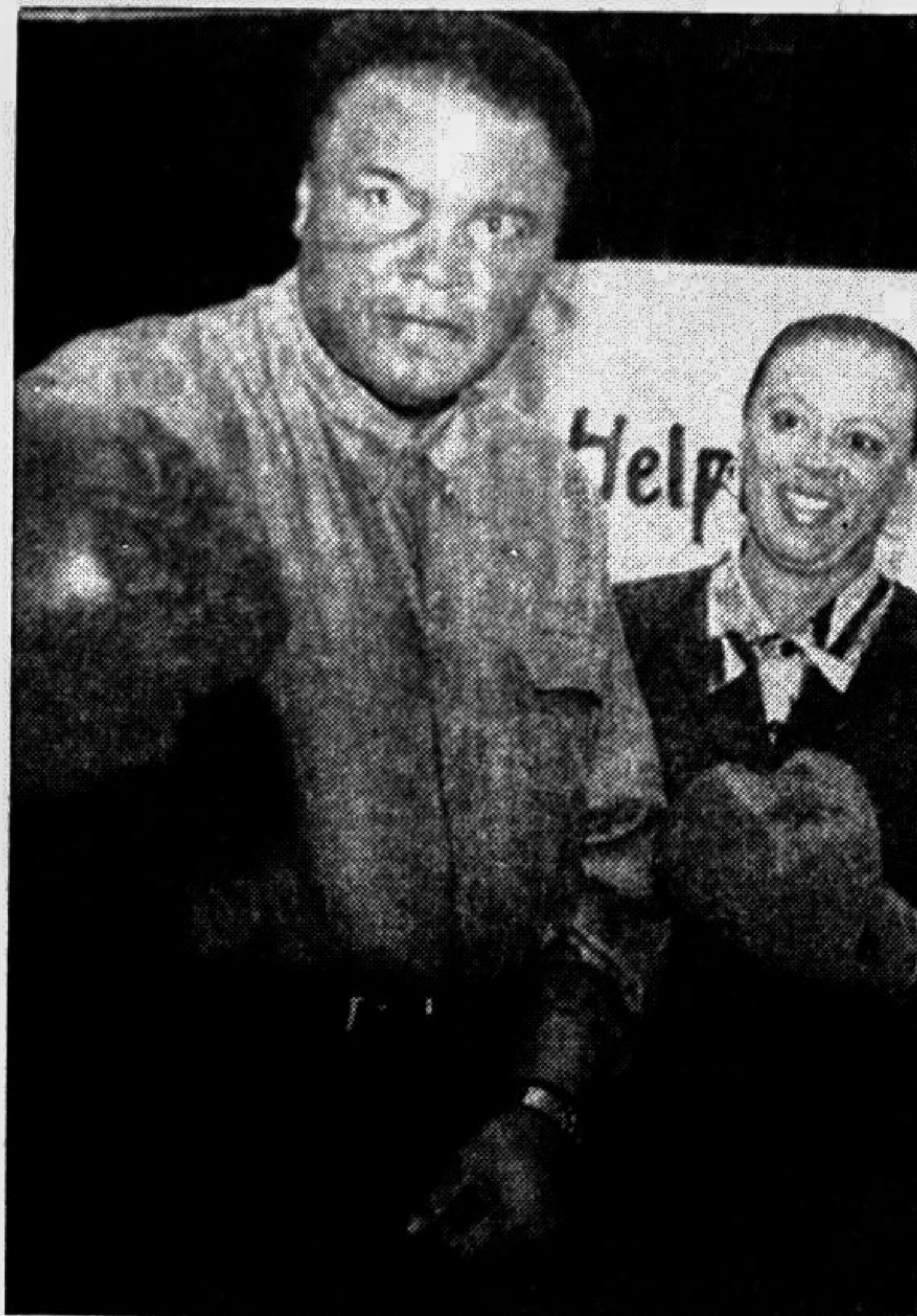
The rare public discussion of Ali's health came at a briefing called by a drug company, Pharmacia and Upjohn, to talk about medical advances in treating Parkinson's Disease.

Ali has been taking one of the company's drugs, Mirapex, which was approved for the US market in July. But his wife, Lonnie, told reporters the most dramatic improvement in his condition recently came from a different, 50-year-old drug that has brought back his ability to smile.

"There came a time when Muhammad was not smiling," she said, but a drug called Artane relaxed facial muscles that had been frozen by the disease. Ali entered the room in a shuffle, his trembling left hand in the front pocket of his black trousers. His wife said the disease, diagnosed in 1981, has not progressed significantly but is in fact full-blown Parkinson's Disease and a preliminary form of the disorder, as doctors first called it in his case.

The disease, which afflicts one in every 100 people over the age of 60 in the United States alone, is caused by a depletion of certain neurons in the brain which are critical to muscle control.

She said Ali follows a "hectic schedule," travelling the world



Boxing legend Muhammad Ali (L) pretends to throw a punch at a photographer during a press conference in Chicago on Sept 8. His wife Lonnie is on his left.

from his home in Berrien Springs, Michigan, in support of various charities. He exercises largely by walking, sometimes five miles a day, she added, though Ali disagreed, holding up 10 fingers.

In response to questions about whether trauma suffered during his career caused his condition, his wife said doctors do not believe there is a link, though it was possible the sport brought on the symptoms earlier than they would otherwise have appeared.

"There's a million and a half people with Parkinson's who've never boxed," the champ added. In response to one question Ali told a reporter, "See you at the gym." He later threw a few jabs to back up a point.

Asked what was harder, a fighting Parkinson's Disease or opponents in the ring, Ali answered, "Boxing's tougher."

At the end of the news conference Ali and his wife were handed red boxing gloves to symbolise their battle with the illness.

Ali rose to his feet and quipped, "I came all the way here, gave you a nice little talk and this is all you give me?" He then produced a small red silk which he made disappear twice in his hands, his eyes intent and gleaming.

"He's still very much a child at heart," his wife said. "He's very lucky. We count our blessings every day. It could have been a lot worse for him."

Cagers leave for Riyadh today

Sports Reporter

A 16-member Bangladesh national basketball team, including five officials will leave today to participate in the 19th Asian Basketball Confederation (ABC) Championship scheduled to begin in Riyadh tomorrow.

A total of 16 nations, split into four groups for the first round, are participating in the nine-day tournament. Top two teams from each group will qualify for the second round. Bangladesh, who are placed in Group B along with South Korea, India and UAE, will take on the Koreans in their inaugural match tomorrow. The two other first round matches are billed for September 12 and the day after against UAE and India respectively.

The members of the team are: Ayub Ali (captain), Abdur Rahman (vice-captain), Kamran Mahbub, Delwar Hossain, Mizanur Rahman, Aminul Islam, Nurul Amin, Nurul Huda Bhuiyan, Wahidul Islam, Iqbal Hossain, Fazle Rahim, Saiful Islam (manager), Tareq Khan Majlish (asst. manager), AK Sarkar (coach), Mizanur Rahman (asst. coach) and SM Intiaz Khan (referee).

Commemorative chess tourney

Sports Reporter

International Masters Ziaur Rahman and Reefat-bin-Sattar, national champion Enamul Hossain Rajib, Abdullah-al-Rakib and Abul Kashem Bhuiyan were jointly leading the commemorative chess tournament table with six points each after the seventh round held at the Russian Cultural Centre in the city yesterday.

Syed Ruhul Kabir Shiplu was trailing the leaders half a point behind on the day.

Besides, six players — Saifuddin Lovel, Monir Hossain, Fazal Mahmood, Hasibul Hasan Hanif, Arman Monir and Tofy — were at the crowded third spot after the round having five points apiece.

A total of 80 players are participating in the nine-round Swiss League meet jointly organised by Mikkhaal Moyshevic Botvinnik Chess Club, an affiliated organisation of the Russian Cultural Centre, and Leonine Chess Club to mark the 850th anniversary of the Moscow city.

BAF basketball

TANGAIL, Sept 9: The Air Headquarters Unit maintained their winning spree in the Bangladesh Air Force inter-base basketball championship at the BAF Base Paharanchapur, reports BSS.

The defeated host BAF Base Paharanchapur 72-47 in the morning.

The BAF Base Bashur beat the BAF Base Zahurul 106-58 in the afternoon.



Scene from the seventh round of the commemorative chess tournament being held at the Russian Cultural Centre in the city yesterday.

— Star photo

"I can't be without tennis anymore, I love this game"

Here is the remainder of the official text of Martina Hingis' post-final interview at the US Open.

Q. It was like many people were talking about the only thing that can keep you away from winning are horses.

MARTINA HINGIS: But actually before this tournament, I was testing a new one. I was never jumping as high as before this tournament.

I was coming into this tournament with having a great fun out there.

Q. You and Venus seem to get along okay. The other women have complained about her attitude. Do you consider that she has a problem with attitude or is it just you that's a nice person?

MARTINA HINGIS: Well, I think it's always hard when you're the newcomer on the tour. It wasn't very easy for me, too. The other players just look at you. They don't know what to expect from you because everything is — or everyone is talking about you, the media pay so much attention. If you don't bring the results, everyone is kind of not very happy because you haven't shown anything to the other players.

I think her first statements, they weren't very nice against the other players. Because, you know, she said, "I'm the best player in the world."

But she has changed very much from the other tournaments. When I saw the last two, three entries she made, she changed a lot. She became a much nicer person on the tour.

Q. Was that first set almost too easy?

MARTINA HINGIS: Well, I liked it the way it was (laughter). It's like, you know, the US Open Finals. If you win the first set 6-Love, okay, I take it.

But I still had to make my game.

Chris Evert has often talked about your incredible balance on the court, the way you're always on balance, almost always when you hit the ball, the way you walk around the court, the way you receive serve. Did your mother teach you how to balance on a court or is it something that's just natural for Martina Hingis?

MARTINA HINGIS: I think your charisma comes out on the court, the way you live your life out of the court.

Tennis is not the most important thing I want to do in my life. It's still right now, you know, I couldn't be without it. But especially when I fell off the horse, I kind of remember. "Well, I can't be without tennis anymore, I love this game so much." Just the charisma, I think, it just comes out natural.

Q. I didn't mean so much things, different things in your life, but the way you always seem to be ready to hit the ball.

MARTINA HINGIS: That's everything that comes up with your life. That's the way you show everything on the court, how you're in person, you show your balance, just your game, your charisma on the court.

I think the way Williams is out of the court, the way she also is on the court, she's always trying to do something, always having a lot of fun.

Everyone is the same on the court and off the court.

Q. What is the most important thing you want to do in your life? You just said tennis is not the most important thing you want to do in your life. What is the most important thing?

MARTINA HINGIS: I said right now it is the biggest thing I always want to do. Especially if you keep winning, there is no way, you have motivation, you always enjoy that. Especially in this final, I had so much players, especially when you hit great shots you want to hit. It's the greatest thing you can do.

Q. You've had a fabulous year. Martina, is there one moment or one match which you think years from now will be your favourite memory, favourite recollection of this year?

MARTINA HINGIS: Well,

I knew I was up 4-2. I just gave up one game. I thought, "Well, she was serving very well there." I shouldn't give up that one maybe. Then it would look different at all.

I was playing against the wind. She wasn't missing at all, especially the last two games. I was like I had to make the points myself.

Hitting it as hard as you can always against the wind. I also got tired sometimes. I was kind of just waiting for a mistake, just hitting big shots.

But I knew if I'm going to lose that game, I was going to serve with the wind and that's going to be easier. Even if it would be 5-4 for her, I thought I would make it to 5-All and then it would be a good game.

Q. How did you feel about the "racist" issue? Were you excited that she made it to the Finals?

MARTINA HINGIS: About the what?

Q. The racial issues, that so few black women have made it to the Finals. Did that affect you at all?

MARTINA HINGIS: (No response.)

Q. Are you excited about it? MARTINA HINGIS: I mean, it's always good to have new faces out there. Especially in women's tennis, there are so many coming up now. The thing is, very nice to watch a Finals like Hingis/Williams than having someone else there.

I don't care that much about who is on the other side actually. I think it's very good if you have all the people, all the races, all the world playing tennis.

Q. You say you ski. John McEnroe told other juniors to avoid skiing. Your legs. Don't you think skiing is rather risky?

MARTINA HINGIS: Well, I always do the risky things especially (laughter).

Q. Are you looking forward to next year and possibly starting a rivalry with Steffi or proving to her that you are No. 1?

MARTINA HINGIS: Well, as I said before, with Steffi, you have to wait what she's going to do in the next couple of tournaments, when she's going to come back. I don't know what's going to happen with her.

Q. Would your father have been watching this match?

MARTINA HINGIS: My father? I'm sure he was watching, yes.

Q. Martina, during the Grand Slam tennis championships, in the ladies events, prize money is so high, do you feel it should be best of five sets?

MARTINA HINGIS: Blah (laughter). I played only once in my life a five-setter against Steffi Graf. I'm not really that much into it, having the same thing again, getting cramps.

I know maybe I should be in better shape. I'd rather win it in three straight sets.

Q. Are there other interests that you have outside of tennis, other than really living the horses?

MARTINA HINGIS: I do a lot of sports. I do skiing, aerobics, boxing, so many other sports, rollerblading, biking.

Q. Martina, was it almost good for you that Venus took away a lot of attention during the two weeks from you, you

maybe that one when I beat Monica at the semifinals of the French Open. I've never been as happy as after that match, reaching the Finals, that was kind of like more than having a victory there.

Q. How big of an advantage did you have that you played in more tournaments than Venus? How much did that help you today?

MARTINA HINGIS: Well, I think that helped me.

Q. A lot, a little? MARTINA HINGIS: A lot, of course. But I can't manage her life. If she doesn't want to play anymore, she reached the Finals. She just has a different way to get to the top. I don't care what the other ones are doing.

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