

Becker-Bjorkman first round tie

MUNICH, Germany, Sept 16: Defending champion Boris Becker will face Sweden's Jonas Bjorkman in the first round of the Grand Slam cup, tennis richest tournament, in pairings drawn Monday, reports AP.

The tournament, which runs September 23-28 in Munich's Olympic Hall and carries a purse of 6 million dollars, also will see Pete Sampras against Felix Mantilla of Spain in the first round.

A blessing in disguise!

WACO, Texas, Sept 16 (AFP): Mirnae Johnson overcame an injury-filled season to win a 400m title. Now the American figure skater struggles in 1997 will help his bid for gold at the 2000 Sydney Olympics.

Johnson suffered a strained left thigh in a 150m match race in Toronto against Canada's Donovan Bailey.

Far from in top form, Johnson entered the world meet on a special invitation and struggled in silence with thigh, hip and lower back pain. But he won the world title in 44.12 seconds.

"It was my slowest world championship of the three but that was unimportant," Johnson said. "I just wanted to win. It's one of my biggest wins. In a way, most races I know if I run as fast as I can I'm going to win. I didn't know that this time."

"People see now that I'm not just good in the flowers. I can be good in the bushes with thorns as well."

Johnson has returned home here and will travel to Australia and South Korea for sponsor obligations before beginning full rehabilitation of his left leg.

Epic Davis Cup duel on cards

WASHINGTON, Sept 16: (agencies): Extra tension was the last thing needed in this week's Davis Cup semifinal tie here between Australia and the United States.

But after Aussie Pat Rafter rolled over Michael Chang in a semifinal on his way to the US Open title and a world number three ranking, the stage was set for an epic showdown between the legendary Davis Cup foes.

This makes it a lot more interesting," Chang said. "If we were to win, it would make it a little sweeter."

Play begins here Friday on the Fitzgerald Center hardcourts with world number one Pete Sampras, second-ranked Chang and Jim Courier and Alex O'Brien pacing the hosts.

Rafter and Mark Philippoussis lead the Aussies, with the world's top-rated doubles duo of Todd Woodbridge and Mark Woodforde also ready.

The Woodies have set aside squabbles in the wake of a first-round ouster at the US Open and are favourites against whatever tandem the US send forth, likely Sampras in an unusual doubles role with Courier.

Combined with Rafter's resurgence in the US national championship and the defeat of Sampras in the fourth round of the Open, US players have something to prove.

"You don't need any extra incentive to play in the Davis Cup," Sampras said. "You're playing for your country."

The winner faces either Sweden or Italy in November for the trophy.

The Americans have a 24-19 record against the Aussies since their first Davis Cup meeting in 1905. But Australia's 15-14 in finals meetings and won the most recent duel, 4-1 in the 1993 opening round.

The Aussies have not won a Davis Cup tie in a US venue since 1973, when they swept the Americans 5-0 in the finals on carpet at Cleveland.

Steffi won't be co-number one a la Seles

STAMFORD, Connecticut, Sept 16: Steffi Graf will not return to the WTA Tour as a co-number one in the same manner Monica Seles was able to share the top spot after her comeback from being stabbed, reports AFP.

Tour officials said no discussions have been made about the German receiving a special ranking.

Instead, the WTA will use its "special ranking rule" that was written in case of long-term injuries such as that suffered by Graf, who has said she will be out through at least the tour championships in New York in November.

Graf would be eligible to return at number three because that was where she was rated after her final event before the layoff, in this case the French Open.

Graf could use her special ranking for entry into 11 tournaments, one of them a Grand Slam, should she be out until the Australian Open.

While her special ranking would be used for acceptance into events and some seeding cases, her actual ranking in the tour top 20 would be based on her prior showings over 52 weeks.

He is expected to compete in the singles, leaving veteran partners Omar Camporese and Diego Nargiso to play doubles.

The other member of the Italian team is Renzo Furlan.

Half revolution in English cricket

LONDON, Sept 16: English cricket officials were forced to admit defeat on Monday in their efforts to alter the face of the traditional county championship, reports Reuters.

The 18 first-class counties, joined by the MCC, voted 12-7 to retain the current all-play-all format, albeit with increased incentives for the top eight sides who will qualify for a new one-day Super Cup the following season.

Although there will be promotion and relegation in the new national league one-day tournament starting in 1999, the failure to introduce two divisions at first-class level disappointed English Cricket Board (ECB) chairman Lord Maclaurin.

County chairmen are very conservative and they have to be led along slowly and gently," he said. "Personally I would have gone for two divisions and I think that in my lifetime we'll get there. We'll give it three years and then see what happens."

The bulk of the other proposals put forward in the original "raising the standard" document last month have been retained, notably a restructuring of club and second team cricket.

Touring teams are also likely to face more representative sides on future visits to England, although the counties have been promised that their money-spinning games against the tourists will not completely disappear.

English Test players are also likely to be contracted to the ECB rather than the counties in future. Lord Maclaurin did not put a date on it but described the move as "inevitable."

C'wealth Games' cricket may lose attraction

SYDNEY, Sept 16: Next year's Commonwealth Games cricket tournament, which will go ahead without the traditional powers of England and West Indies, could be weakened further since Australia and Pakistan may send just second-choice sides, reports Reuters.

A spokesman for the Australian Cricket Board said today that it was likely that the Games in Kuala Lumpur would clash with Australia's tour to Pakistan.

"The tour dates haven't been finalised yet but they will be around the same time as the Commonwealth Games (September 11-21)," Patrick Keane said. "If that's the case then we'll be sending a team instead."

Cricket has been included in the Commonwealth Games for the first time next year, but has already suffered several body blows.

English officials last week announced they would not be sending a team because the Games coincided with the end of their domestic county season.

The West Indies are ineligible to compete as a single entity because they are represented by their individual states at the Commonwealth Games.

Kamaz to fight to the last

MOSCOW, Sept 16: Russian Premier league club Kamaz Naberezhnye Chelny vowed on Monday to take their fight to parliament after losing an appeal against a disciplinary ruling which dooms them to near-certain relegation, reports Reuters.

The league's appeals council left in force last week's disciplinary committee decision to dock six points for not paying a transfer fee on time. Nikita Simonyan, the league's first vice-president, said by telephone.

"They grossly violated the rules of the league and we gave them an extra month to rectify the situation but still they did not pay."

Simpson leaves Brentwood

LOS ANGELES, Sept 16: O J Simpson has moved out of the Brentwood mansion he once shared with his murdered ex-wife, a lawyer for the former football star said on Monday, reports Reuters.

Attorney Dan Leonard said Simpson, who lost the home in foreclosure after falling behind on his mortgage payments, has moved elsewhere in the Los Angeles area.

A civil jury in February found Simpson liable for the June 12, 1994, stabbing deaths of ex-wife Nicole Brown Simpson and her friend, Ron Goldman, the same jury ordered him to pay \$33.5 million dollars in damages.

Yayuk, Tamarine advance

TOKYO, Sept 16: Fifth seed Yayuk Basuki, saving herself in emergencies with surprise charges to the net, pulled out a 7-5, 7-6 victory Tuesday over France's Sarah Pitkowski in the first round of the Toyota Princess Cup tennis tournament, reports AP.

Another Southeast Asian player, Thailand's Tamarine Tanasugarn, also had to dig out of trouble for a 6-6, 6-4, 6-2 victory over Magdalena Maleeva of Bulgaria.

Japan's top player, Ai Sugiyama, beat Australian Anabelle Ellwood 6-3, 6-2, and Rika Hiraki, a winner in the French Open mixed doubles, defeated Japanese compatriot Yuka Yoshida 6-4, 6-1 in other matches in Ariake Colosseum, with the roof closed because of rain.

Basuki trailed 2-5 in the first set and then faced two set points at 4-5 and 15-40. She got back to deuce by charging in for a winning half-volley and then a smash. Four points later, she reached 5-5 with a forehand crosscourt.

The 26-year-old Indonesian broke for a 6-5 lead by forcing Pitkowski into a netted passing shot attempt and finished off the set with a good serve down the middle.

The second set looked easier, with Basuki taking a 5-3 lead, but Pitkowski saved two match points at 4-5 as Basuki sailed two backhands long.

Unable to serve out the match at 5-4 and after another service break — at 6-5, Basuki dominated the tiebreaker, serving her seventh ace of the day for a 5-1 lead and finally winning with a net charge that stampeeded Pitkowski into hitting long.

Tamarine, ranked 41st, won with heavy hitting, though Maleeva served up nine aces to her five.

The problem at the start, she said, was that the rain meant there was no court available to warm up, and Maleeva "was hitting every ball on the line. I was lucky in the second set — my serve was coming back."

She had to save two break points in a five-deuce game at 4-4 in the second set before breaking Maleeva to take the set.

Also advancing directly to the second round were the next three seeds — Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario and Conchita Martinez of Spain and American Kimberly Po. Po will meet Hiraki in her first match.

No. 6 seed Elena Likhovtseva of Russia withdrew because of a kidney infection. Russia's Anna Kournikova and American Mary Joe Fernandez had dropped out earlier. Kournikova with a foot injury and Fernandez because of illness. Japan's Haruka Inoue replaced Likhovtseva as a lucky loser, while Henrieta Nagyova of Slovakia took her place as a ninth seed.



Elena Vitrichenko of Ukraine demonstrates her flexibility while performing at the Aeon Cup rhythmic gymnastics championships in Tokyo on Sept 15. She won the bronze medal in the senior division individual finals. —AP/UNB photo

Rally of Indonesia Sept 19-21

The Rally of Indonesia, 11th round of the FIA World Rally Championship, begins on September 19 with 555 Subaru teams of Colin McRae and Kenneth Eriksson lying on 32 and 24 points respectively after completion of the Rally of Finland which finished August 31, says a press release.

The three-day event in the southeast Asian country will end on September 21.

During the period the competitors will travel a distance of 1122.96 kilometres on a gravel surface.

Here are some important information about the Rally of Indonesia:

Indonesia is a country of contrast. With over 13,677 islands it makes up the largest archipelagic country in the world. It has 250 different languages, smouldering volcanoes, verdant paddies, sapphire waters, dance, music and art.

Sumatra, with a land surface of 440,000 square kilometres is the second largest island of Indonesia, and fifth largest in the world. The equator runs across the middle of this western most of Indonesia's major islands.

North Sumatra is a land of great mountains, waterfalls, a vast lake, a mixture of cultural groups and plantations of rubber, tobacco, tea, palm oil and coffee.

TERRAIN AND CLIMATE: The stages are run on gravel and mud tracks that weave through palm oil, rubber and coffee plantations.

Indonesia has largely equatorial tropical climate tempered

Macau's maiden female matador

HONG KONG, Sept 16: A controversial bullfight in the Portuguese-run territory of Macau will feature a woman bullfighter this year, it was reported Tuesday, reports AFP.

Organiser Jose Pinto told local newspapers that Maria Manuela, 24, from Portugal will appear in the five-day, five million Hong Kong dollar (650,000 US) fiesta.

The event is aimed at attracting tourists to the territory, which has been plagued by gang warfare. Tourist arrivals plummeted 25 per cent in July amid battles which have killed 17 people since the start of the year. Rival gangs are fighting for control of Macau's gambling, loansharking and prostitution rackets.

The event, for which the Macau government has contributed 2.5 million dollars, is scheduled for September 27-28 and October 1, 4 and 5.

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Advertisement for 'নির্বাহী প্রকৌশলীর কার্যালয়' (Executive Engineer's Office) in Dhaka. It lists services for various departments and provides contact information.

Advertisement for 'Kamaz to fight to the last' and 'Simpson leaves Brentwood'. It provides news updates and contact details for legal services.

Advertisement for the 'Rally of Indonesia Sept 19-21'. It features a Subaru logo and text describing the rally's route, terrain, and climate.

The Daily Star TV Guide. A comprehensive listing of television programs for Wednesday, September 17, 1997, across various channels like STAR PLUS, PTV, ATN, DD 7, STAR MOVIES, STAR SPORTS, EL TV, and others.