

BBC boycotts Boycott

LONDON, Jan 28: Former England cricketer Geoff Boycott was axed by the BBC on Tuesday pending the outcome of his appeal against a conviction for assaulting his ex-girlfriend, reports AFP.

The 57-year-old former opening batsman, who played 108 Tests, captaining England four times and scoring 33 centuries, was expected to play a substantial role in the BBC's radio output during England's winter Test series against the West Indies, which starts this week.

But the BBC have reviewed their position following Boycott's conviction — in his absence — in a French court, who fined him 50,000 francs (7,800 dollars) and gave him a three-month suspended prison sentence for punching Margaret Moore during a stay in the French Riviera town of Antibes in October 1996.

Boycott, who became the first cricketer to score a 100th first class century in a Test match in 1977 on his home ground of Headingley, is still likely to figure in BBC Television's recorded daily Test match highlights, edited from Trans World International's (TWI) live production.

But a BBC statement has made it clear he will be dropped from their Test match special live commentary, to be broadcast on Radio 4.

The statement read: "While legal proceedings are still pending, the BBC feel it would be inappropriate for Geoffrey Boycott to appear on the BBC."

"We understand TWI will continue to employ him as one of their team of commentators, providing edited highlights of the West Indies Test matches to BBC TV."

Alberto has no love for Wimbledon

MELBOURNE, Jan 28 (AP): Alberto Berasategui, the Spaniard who brought some big names down to size at the Australian Open until his defeat today, will not play at Wimbledon unless forced.

"I would like to play (at Wimbledon) maybe some year, I don't know if it is going to be this one," Berasategui said after going out to Chile's Marcelo Rios in the quarterfinal.

But the man who beat Andre Agassi and world number two Pat Rafter on the Melbourne Park hardcourt said he doubted he could ever be a grass court player.

"I don't have any aspirations for that because, the way I play and the kind of grip I have, I think it is very difficult for me," he said.

The Spanish clay court star has played in every Grand Slam event except Wimbledon, and reached the French Open final in 1994.

But Berasategui may have to play under rule change proposed for 2000 when the top 20 players will be compelled to appear in all four Grand Slams.

He holds his tennis racquet in such an unorthodox way that the best official description is an "over-rotated western grip."

Berasategui hits the ball with the same side of the racquet on both the forehand and backhand sides.

Liverpool leave it late

LONDON, Jan 28: Robbie Fowler scored in the 82nd minute to give Liverpool a 2-1 victory over Middlesbrough Tuesday in the first-leg semifinal of the League Cup, reports AP.

Middlesbrough, finalists and losers last season in both English cups — and also demoted to the First Division from the Premier League — went ahead at Liverpool in the 29th on a goal by Paul Merson.

Liverpool equalised in the 31st on the blistering 25-metre strike from Jamie Redknapp.

Liverpool controlled play in the second half and missed three good scoring chances with about 20 minutes left in the match before Fowler got the winner.

The two clubs meet Feb 18 in the second leg. Arsenal were to face Chelsea on Wednesday in the other semifinal.

All odds on Hingis down under



MELBOURNE, Jan 28: Defending champion Martina Hingis swept past Mary Pierce on Wednesday but expects to be taken to a higher level of pressure against Germany's Anke Huber in Thursday's Australian Open semifinals, reports AP.

Hingis, who won the first of her three Grand Slam titles here a year ago, predicted Huber would provide a tougher test than a disappointing Pierce after her 6-2, 6-3 victory over the American.

Hingis has lost six of eight matches against Martinez,

but is seeking her place in a second final. She lost the Australian Open title to Monica Seles in 1996.

Huber, 23, has worked hard to keep her emotions in check here and believes her newfound calm approach is helping her game.

"I was much calmer today in the important moments," she said of her win over Sanchez Vicario.

"I didn't need to play my best today," Hingis said. "I didn't make that many winners — she just missed so many balls."

Hingis has plenty of respect for Huber, the No 10 seed carrying Germany's hope in the absence of injured Steffi Graf.

"Huber just fights until the last point," Hingis said. "She doesn't hit the ball as hard as Pierce, but she puts a lot more balls in."

Huber set up a match against the No 1-ranked Swiss with a 7-6 (9-7), 7-5, win over waning Spaniard Arantxa Sanchez Vicario.

Both women's semifinals will be played Thursday with No 2 seed Lindsay Davenport pitted against Conchita Martinez of Spain.

It is Davenport's second Grand Slam semi in a row and only the second of her career, but Huber looms as the largest threat to Hingis.

Hingis has won five of her eight official tour matches against Huber and they split one apiece in an exhibition event in December.

Seven of the eight Tour contests have gone to three sets. The only one decided early was their previous match on hardcourt — a 6-3, 6-0 win to Hingis in Los Angeles last year.

Hingis enters the semifinals with higher expectations than a year ago, when she carried a No 4 seed.

"Last year it was easier for me to go into the tournament," she said. "Nobody really expected me to do that well. I just did my job out there. I took it easy and all of a sudden I was in the finals and I won the tournament."

Along with 12 titles in 1997, Hingis also gathered a lesson in how to cope with pressure.

No-one can come up with a suitable argument to suggest Hingis can be beaten here.

"I'm probably mentally stronger and more self-confident than I was last year, and so far it's going well," she said.

Huber has never won a

"Actually I broke a racket at 4-all but I played the important points very well. I stayed quiet and concentrated."

Huber said she was boosted by her exhibition tournament victory over Hingis in Frankfurt in December.

"It's always nice to beat a No 1 player, it doesn't matter if it's an exhibition or a real match," Huber said.

"I have been able to play my way quietly through the draw and personally I expected, or wanted, to get to the semis."

"Now I'm going to look to move in on the final."

but won their most recent match, in Philadelphia last year, 6-3, 6-0.

She was a beaten semifinalist at the US Open and described reaching the last four as "a little bit of a new thing."

"I don't think many people expected me to get there," Davenport said.

"I have been able to play my way quietly through the draw and personally I expected, or wanted, to get to the semis."

"Now I'm going to look to move in on the final."

SHOULD I START PLAYING WITH YOU? World No 1 Martina Hingis seems to be talking with her racquet during her Aussie Open quarterfinal against Mary Pierce in Melbourne yesterday. The Swiss superstar romped into the last four with a 6-2, 6-3 victory. — AP/UNB photo

1998: Alberto Berasategui, conqueror of US Open champion Patrick Rafter and a resurgent Andre Agassi, lost the magic from his legs and unorthodox forehand Wednesday and fell to Marcelo Rios, reports AP.

The ninth-seeded Rios used his left-handed shots to pry Berasategui out of his comfort zone and advanced to the Australian Open semifinals with a 6-7 (6-8), 6-4, 6-4, 6-0 victory.

"I think I have a pretty good chance" of winning the tournament, said the 22-year-old Rios, who made two Grand Slam quarterfinals last year but now is in his first semifinal.

Kiefer, a Wimbledon quarterfinalist last year, served 14 and third rounds I was two sets down, and I said, 'One more time,' and I did it," said Escude. A promising junior who had to play his way up through the satellite tournaments before starting to find his way on the regular tour.

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"I feel more comfortable than ever," he said. But, he added, "everybody is playing good. I think it will be tough."

Rios now faces France's Nicolas Escude, who beat Germany's Nicolas Kiefer 4-6, 3-6, 6-4, 6-1, 6-2 and set a record for most times in a Grand Slam coming back from two sets down.

Escude did it three times — against Sweden's Magnus Larsson in the first round, against American Richey Renberg in the third round and against the No. 29-ranked Kiefer. He also beat French Open champion Gustavo Kuerten in four sets in the second round.

Escude, who has climbed from No. 415 in the rankings a year ago to No. 81 now, is the first French man to reach the Australian Open semifinals coming back from two sets down.

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