

SPORTS LETTERS WATCH THIS PAGE FRIDAYS Unprecedented Porto

LISBON, Apr 27: Porto became the first Portuguese club in 40 years to win the championship four seasons in a row with a typically efficient 3-2 home win over northern neighbours Boavista on Sunday, reports Reuters.

Porto, needing only a draw to clinch the title, were clearly determined to win their 17th championship in style before a packed house at Antas stadium. The last club to win the championship four times in succession was Sporting Lisbon between 1951 and 1954.

Bayern inch closer

MUNICH, Apr 27: Bayern Munich, facing a must-win situation, beat Bayer Leverkusen 2-1 Sunday in a match more one-sided than the score to keep alive their title hopes in the Bundesliga, reports AP.

The win pulled the defending champions to within one point of Kaiserslautern, who still control the race because the Otto Rehhagel-coached side has a match in hand while Munich has just two rounds left.

"We will try to win our last two matches and hope Kaiserslautern lose. After all, Kaiserslautern were nine points clear a few weeks ago," said Munich libero Lothar Matthaeus.

German national team player Michael Tarnat blasted a powerful 16th minute free kick from 25 metres, while Italian striker Ruggero Rizzitelli shook off two Leverkusen players to score the team's second goal in the 49th minute.

Brazil's Paulo Rink kicked in a short hopper on a cross in the 83rd minute for third-placed Leverkusen, who saw their last hopes for a Champions League berth slip away with a dismal performance.

"I'm speechless. The players knew what this match meant - it meant everything," said an enraged Leverkusen coach Christoph Daum.

Until Rink's unexpected goal, which injected a few minutes of drama and hopes of an equaliser before the whistle, Leverkusen failed to generate a shot on goal in the second half.

Kaiserslautern now have 63 points in 31 matches, Munich 62 in 32 and Leverkusen 53 in 31. Kaiserslautern could again put the pressure on Munich when they face last-place Arminia Bielefeld on Wednesday. A win would all but seal the first title for a promoted team in Bundesliga history.

Kaiserslautern stunned the Munich players Friday, erasing a 0-2 deficit against Borussia Moenchengladbach when Olaf Marschall headed in the 3-2 game-winner seconds before end.

FRANCE '98 SIDELINES

UNDATED, Apr 27 (Reuters/AP): Morocco's French-born coach Henri Michel has turned round the fortunes of the national team.

The north Africans have lost just three matches since the veteran Frenchman took over in October 1995 and easily romped through to the World Cup finals in France despite sharing the same qualifying group with the highly-regarded Ghanaians.

Michel, 50, is no stranger to the tournament. He coached France to third place in Mexico in 1986 and returned eight years later as coach of Cameroon in the 1994 finals in the United States.

new found confidence and introduced a new generation of internationals, who have been quickly snapped up by clubs in Europe and the Middle East.

THON'S INJURY NOT THAT SERIOUS

A torn ligament suffered by German national team libero Olaf Thon in a Bundesliga match Saturday is not expected to sideline him for the World Cup, doctors reported Sunday.

The injury in the right ankle occurred when Thon, who plays for Schalke, went up for a header in a 1-0 loss to Werder Bremen. He is expected to miss 10-14 days.

HADJI HAS NO REGRETS

Mustapha Hadji could have been playing in blue colours of the French national team.

Instead the 26-year-old flamboyant midfielder will go to the World Cup finals carrying the hopes of Morocco on his shoulders.

Hadji turned down a chance to play for the French under-21 team five years ago when he was a rising star at Nancy.

It was a difficult choice for Hadji, who had been born in Morocco but raised from an early age in the Lorraine region of France.

But the lure of playing for



Scene from the inauguration ceremony of Toulouse Stadium as a World Cup venue in the southwestern French city on April 26. —AP/UNB photo

His previous African experience at the World Cup was a painful one. Cameroon crashed in the opening round at USA '94, though a lack of pre-tournament preparation time was probably the most significant reasons for that.

This time Michel has spent more than three years moulding the Moroccan team for these finals - their fourth. Michel has given the team a

Thon, 31, has earned praise for his play and emerged as a key player on the national team since coach Berti Vogts called him onto the team earlier this season for the second time.

Vogts, who immediately turned control of the defence over to Thon, had been dissatisfied with the performance of the liberos who tried to replace Matthias Sammer, Europe's 1996 player-of-the-year.

Morocco in the finals in the USA in 1994 proved stronger than the prospect of graduating later in his career from the under-21 team to the full French squad.

It was a decision that Hadji has had no reason to regret. He is now going to his second World Cup having given his own career an international profile that has seen him play in Portugal and now in neighbouring Spain.

Chinks in champs' armour

RIO DE JANEIRO, Apr 27 (Reuters): Brazil soccer fans believe that a fifth world title is little more than a formality for a team that boasts players such as Ronaldo, Roberto Carlos and Romario.

But Brazil's opponents can take heart from the fact that the defending champions have learned little from the mistakes made in the past.

Over-confidence, a tendency for players to negotiate club deals during the World Cup and internal wrangling have all hit Brazil during previous tournaments and there are indications that they could strike again in France.

On paper, Brazil are clear favourites. They have lost only three full internationals since winning the World Cup in 1994, clocked up a run of 15 consecutive wins last year and their line-up makes formidable reading.

And despite some ill-fated attempts to vary their style and make it more European over the years, Brazil are still seen the team capable of bringing an exotic flavour to the World Cup.

Ronaldo is widely acclaimed as the world's best player and, after hitting a sticky patch at Inter Milan and receiving criti-

cism from his club president, he now appears to be back to his best.

He will be partnered in attack by 1994 World Cup hero Romario, who is now 32 but is still steadily in and around the penalty area.

While it may be feasible to mark one of the pair out of a game, this simply creates more space for the other. To keep both quiet is a near-impossible task.

Behind them is 20-year-old Denilson, a player with the speed and dribbling skills of an old-fashioned winger.

Left-back Roberto Carlos, who was runner-up to Ronaldo in FIFA's player-of-the-year awards last year, packs the most lethal free-kick in the game and can put a swerve on the ball that mystifies experts.

Coach Mario Zagallo also

boasts a unique record in the World Cup - he has taken part twice as coach, twice as player and once as assistant coach and won the title on all but one occasion.

Zagallo's priority, in a country where winning the World Cup is seen as an obligation, is the title, rather than putting on a show.

"I would rather win playing ugly football than lose playing attractive football," he said during last year's Copa America.

"Efficiency in football is based on victories. Everyone wants to win and I'm no different."

It is a mark of Brazil's remarkable strength that talented players such as Barcelona strikers Sonny Anderson and Rivaldo, and Paris St Germain's Rai are unlikely to even make the Brazilian squad for France.

Brazil is easily the world's largest producer of soccer talent, churning out top level players seemingly non-stop. Hundreds of Brazilians play abroad, in countries ranging from Italy and Spain to Finland, Japan, Honduras and India, leaving Zagallo spoilt for choice.

Yet Brazil have also shown that they can be beaten.

They lost to Norway 4-2 in a friendly last year and in February were amazingly eliminated from the CONCACAF Gold Cup after losing 1-0 to the United States.

Critics are not convinced that Zagallo's chosen central defensive partnership of Junior Balano and Aldair is the most secure, while Taffarel, who is almost certain to be Brazil's first-choice goalkeeper for the third World Cup running, is seen as being past his best.

The old story that Brazil could be their own worst enemies also rings true.

In past World Cups, particularly in 1990, players have had their attentions divided by agents trying to negotiate transfers to new clubs.

This could happen once again, the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) has said that it will not ban cellular phones, inseparable companions to most players, thus enabling agents to be in permanent contact with members of the squad.

In-fighting has often pursued Brazilian World Cup squads and with so many stars, it could be a real threat once again. One local journalist described the national team as a "cauldron of vanities."

The atmosphere was not helped by a hair-shaving incident during the Confederations Cup in Saudi Arabia in December.

A group of player led by Vlavio Conceicao and Ze Roberto ran through the team hotel one night, burst into the rooms of the other players and shaved their heads using an electric razor.

It was passed off as a prank but several members of the squad, such as midfielder Leonardo and defender Goncalves, were reportedly far from amused. There is fear that kind of resentment could resurface in France.

Nat'l snooker Ghosh moves into semis

Narayan Chandra Ghosh of Narayangani Club, the national No 1, qualified for the semifinals of the 14th national snooker championship, defeating Amin Chowdhury of Dhaka Billiards Centre 5-4 (52-45, 46-21, 30-65, 44-34, 17-59, 39-66, 51-56, 62-28 and 50-28) in the quarterfinals yesterday at Dhaka Club Billiards room, says a press release.

In another quarterfinal S H Majumder of Dhaka Club defeated clubmate S Mahboob 5-4, (50-15, 51-53, 44-32, 52-28, 55-27, 63-55, 39-52, 23-55 and 57-17).

Earlier in the pre-quarter final matches NC Ghosh (NC) defeated A Bari Chowdhury (EC) 4-3, Amin Chowdhury (DBC) defeated clubmate Musleuddin Ahmed 4-3, SH Majumder (DC) beat Jason Salgado (Cth C) 4-2, S Mahboob (DC) beat SA Russel (GC) 4-3, Quamrul Huda (DC) beat J Karim (DC) 4-2, M Amirullah (DC) defeated Anwar Hossain (NC) 4-0, SM Sajjad (DC) defeated Manik Das (NC) 4-0 and Mofazzal Hossain (GC) defeated Mizanur Rahman (NC).

The other two quarterfinals between SM Sajjad and Mofazzal Hossain and Quamrul Huda and M Amirullah were in progress. The winners will meet in today's semifinals.

The best of 13 frames final will be held tomorrow at 11 am.

Statement of the year!

MELBOURNE, Apr 27: Australian leg-spinner Shane Warne believes only Sir Donald Bradman can be compared with Indian batsman Sachin Tendulkar in his present form, reports Reuters.

Warne joked the thought of Tendulkar could give him nightmares after the Indian batsman treated his bowling with little respect.

"He was unstoppable," Warne said today after returning from a tour of India and a one-day tournament in Sharjah.

"I don't think anyone, besides Bradman, is in the same class as Sachin Tendulkar, he is just an amazing player," Warne said.

Tendulkar has scored 1,130 runs in his past 12 innings against Australia, including a century in India's six-wicket win in the final of the Sharjah tournament on Friday.

"I'll be going to bed having nightmares of Sachin just running down the wicket and belting me back over the head for six."

It really is such a challenge to bowl to him. He had one of those series in which he couldn't do anything wrong. Everything he tried worked," Warne said.

Warne waits to know his fate

MELBOURNE, Apr 27: Australian leg-spin wizard Shane Warne will learn this week whether a shoulder injury could sideline him for six months, reports Reuters.

Warne has aggravated an old injury to his right shoulder and needs corrective surgery that could force him to miss the tour of Pakistan, starting in September.

Speaking to reporters today on his return from a tour to the sub-continent, Warne said: "the worst scenario is six months which means I will miss the Pakistan tour, and the best scenario could be six to eight weeks."

Warne will visit a specialist on Tuesday to assess the injury, local media reported. Australia are scheduled to play three Tests during a tour to Pakistan between late September and early November.

Warne has been troubled by soreness in his shoulder for the past 18 months.

He can no longer throw the ball without pain and it is feared Warne may have sustained tendon damage while fielding in a limited over international against Zimbabwe in India two weeks ago.

Real leading race for 2nd spot

MADRID, Apr 27: Real Madrid inched closer to securing the Spanish league's No 2 spot and a definite place in the next European Champions League despite only drawing 2-2 against lowly Merida on Sunday, reports AP.

With just three rounds left to play in the league, the draw left Madrid in second place with 60 points, two ahead of Athletic de Bilbao who drew 1-1 against Celta.

Celta now have 56 points as do Mallorca and Betis, all still contenders for the No 2 spot.

Madrid, however, may not need to depend on the league placings if they win the Champions Cup final against Italy's Juventus on May 20.

FC Barcelona, who were proclaimed 1997-98 Spanish league champion last week, drew their 35th-round game Saturday 1-1 against city neighbours Espanyol that left them with 74 points.

No. 4 Mallorca lost to Betis 2-1 the same day.

On 35th-round results Sunday were: Compostela 3, Valencia 1; Salamanca 4, Sporting de Gijon 0; Atletico de Madrid 2, Tenerife 2; Zaragoza 2, Racing de Santander 0 and Oviedo 0, Valladolid 1.

Real Sociedad plays Deportivo de La Coruna to finish the round Monday.

A priceless phenomenon

RIO DE JANEIRO, Apr 27 (Reuters): From the breathless high altitude of the Bolivian Andes to the mud and snow of a Moscow spring, it seems that nothing can stop Ronaldo scoring goals.

The world's best paid and most feared player is set to experience his first World Cup in France and claims he wants to celebrate by breaking Frenchman Just Fontaine's record of 13 goals in a single tournament.

Ronaldo, who has scored 25 goals in 35 full international appearances, is the man Brazil's opponents will have to stop if they want to knock the world champions off their pedestal.

He can strike from almost anywhere.

In a March friendly against Germany, Ronaldo had barely touched the ball until the last minute, when he raced through the German defence and calmly slotted home the winning goal.

In last year's Copa America final against Bolivia, Ronaldo appeared to have been suffocated by the high altitude of La Paz, which lies at 3,600 metres above sea level. But he needed only one chance, in the 79th minute, to give Brazil the lead in a match they went on to win 3-1.

And not even the appalling conditions in snowbound Moscow could stop him scoring twice for his club Inter Milan in April's UEFA Cup semifinal match away to Spartak.

He has come a long way since his childhood days when he lost out on a chance to join Rio de

Janeiro club Flamengo's youth training set-up because he could not afford the train fare. Ronaldo was eventually picked up by Sao Cristovao, a smaller Rio club, before making his professional debut for Cruzeiro in 1993 at the age of 16.

Fifty goals in two seasons quickly raised eyebrows around the world. Ronaldo was sold to Dutch side PSV Eindhoven in 1994, then moved on to Spanish club Barcelona in 1996 and Inter Milan in Italy the following year.

He made his national team debut when he came on as a substitute against Argentina in a friendly in March 1994 and scored his first international goal the following month against Iceland. Ronaldo was included in Brazil's 1994 World Cup squad but did not play.

For all this, Ronaldo has had lean spells and suffered some vicious criticism from the Italian media when the goals temporarily dried up this season at Inter Milan.

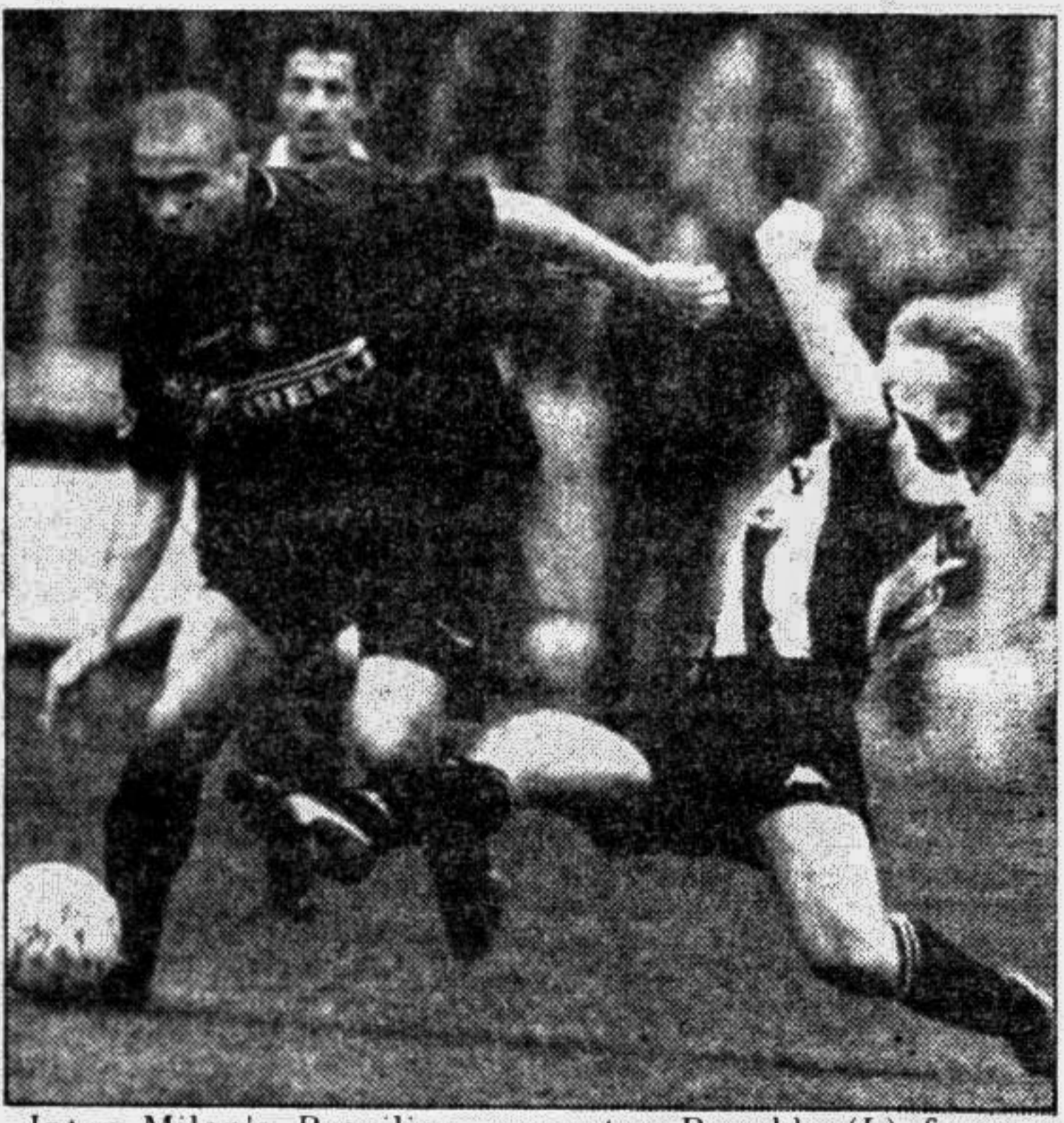
In France, he will relish the opportunity to silence any remaining doubters for good.

Milan beat MetroStars

VARESE, Italy, Apr 27: Serie A's AC Milan beat US Major League Soccer team New York-New Jersey MetroStars 3-1 Thursday in an exhibition match featuring a handful of players headed to this summer's World Cup, reports AP.

Filippo Maniero fired two goals past MetroStars keeper Tony Meola in the opening eight minutes. Striker Patrick Kluivert, a mainstay of the Dutch national team, added the hosts' third goal in the 36th minute.

Meola, the starter for the United States at the last two World Cups, is battling for the third keeper spot on the American roster for France '98.



Inter Milan's Brazilian superstar Ronaldo (L) faces a sliding tackle from Juventus' Didier Deschamps during their Serie A clash in Turin on April 26. Juve won the match 1-0. —AP/UNB photo

The Daily Star World Cup Quiz '98. Win These Breathtaking Prizes!!!. Round 2. Prizes include Philips CD Mini System, Sanyo Twin-Tub Washing Machine, Philips Rice Cooker, and 5 Dozen Philips Bulbs. All Prizes Courtesy: Transcom Electronics Ltd.

Competition Information, Prizes and Rules

- Information: The Daily Star World Cup Quiz '98 is a series of competitions on World Cup Soccer being held in France from June 10 to July 12, 1998. Rules: Residents of Bangladesh are eligible to participate in the Daily Star World Cup Quiz '98. Employees of The Daily Star and Transcom Electronics Ltd and their immediate family members shall not be eligible to participate.

The Daily Star World Cup Quiz '98, Round Two Ends April 29, 1998

Tick (✓) the correct answers. 1. For World Cup '98, who was last to qualify? Iran [] Iraq [] Ireland [] 2. The Final of World Cup '98 will be played at Paris [] London [] Rome [] 3. Who is known as Brazil's "white Pele"? Zico [] Romario [] Pele [] 4. 1974 champs Germany played Final against Holland [] England [] Brazil [] 5. Which one is Danish star Brian Laudrup? [] [] []

SIX NO TRUMPS

A K Sayeedul Huq. THOSE WHO DOUBLE SLAMS REACHED VOLUNTARILY OFTEN REGRET (Hand # 25)

Bidding (Neither side vulnerable). North: S: AX, H: JXX, D: QXXX, C: AQXX. West: S: XXX, H: 1098X, D: X, C: XXXXX. East: S: KXXX, H: KQXX, D: XX, C: KJX. South (D): S: QJ9X, H: AX, D: AKJXXX, C: X.

The moment South found a fit in Diamond, he became ambitious and checked Aces. East doubled 5 Hearts (a lead directing) and 6 Diamond for penalty. The Play: West opened 10 of Hearts, declarer played J from dummy and captured the Queen with Ace. He inspected the dummy and faced with the possibility of making the slam if an opponent could be found with 3-carder King of Clubs. He therefore led a Club and went up with the Ace and played back a small Club when the J appeared. Next he played Ace of Diamond and entered the dummy with Diamond Queen. On the third Club the King appeared from the East hand. Ultimately, the declarer threw his loser in Heart on the fourth Club and surrendered a Spade for the contract of Six Diamond doubled.

Orlando, Florida, Apr 27: Jim Courier, coming back from an arm injury and a plunging ranking, beat top-seeded Michael Chang to win the US clay court championship Sunday, reports AP. The 7-5, 3-6, 7-5 victory was an about-face from Courier's plunge to 57th in the world. Courier, a former world no. 1, also overcame an upset stomach and cramps midway through the third set, then fought off three break points that would have left Chang serving for the match. He won five straight points to hold at 5-4 and then, leading 6-4, broke Chang with some pinpoint service returns. Courier won a tournament for the first since he defeated Magnus Gustafsson in the final at Beijing last October. Courier, looking exhausted, lifted his arms as the crowd stood and whistled, including many friends and relatives from the nearby Dade City area where he grew up. He had his legs packed in ice for a few moments before accepting the winner's trophy. The win was worth 37,000 dollars, and will move Courier from no. 57 to possibly as high as 40 when the new rankings come out Monday. Chang, ranked 12th and the tournament's defending champion, continues to fade.