

Lemerre replaces Jacquet

PARIS, July 27. Roger Lemerre was named France's new national soccer coach on Monday, edging out Jean Tigana to the No. 1 job in French soccer, reports AP. Lemerre takes over from Aimé Jacquet, who left the post after guiding France to the World Cup title on July 12. Lemerre has been given a two-year contract that takes him into the European Championships in the year 2000. Claude Simonet, president of the French Football Federation, said at a news conference. Lemerre, 57, became Jacquet's assistant in January, but has limited experience of top-level management. Before joining Jacquet, Lemerre was responsible for the French Army soccer team. The French Football Federation said Lemerre was chosen to maintain continuity. Tigana, Monaco's coach, was considered the other main candidate for the position.



Footballers leave for Qatar today

Sports Reporter

A 25-member Bangladesh football team leaves for Qatar today to play a couple of friendly matches in Doha, the capital of the desert kingdom.

The two friendly matches have been arranged by the Qatar Football Association (QFA) on the occasion of the Independence Day of Qatar. Prof. Shamim Zaman Bosunia, a last-minute inclusion, will lead the national side which includes 20 booters and five officials. The treasurer of the Bangladesh Football Federation (BFF) got the sudden call after the original selection Monirul Haq Chowdhury, a BFF vice-president, ruled himself out because of heart ailment.

Bangladesh, for whom it will be the first international appearance since their disappointing performance in the Kathmandu SAARC Football championship last October, will play the first match against their Qatari counterparts tomorrow.

The visitors will play their second match against Qatar Olympic team on July 31. Tall defender Jewel Rana will don the captain's arm band while Abu Yousuf will be the coach of the team.

The squad: Jewel Rana, Aminul Haq, Biplob Bhattacharyya, Hasan-al-Mamun, Masud Raha, Govinda Chandra, Prodeep Kumar, Rajani Kanta.

Kazi Nazrul Islam, Motiur Rahman, Iqbal Hossain, Mustafa Anwar Parvez, Alfaz Ahmed, Mizanur Rahman, Saiful Rahman, Anwar Hossain, Maksudul Amin Rana, Intiaz Ahmed Naqib, Arman Mia, Zakir Hossain, Prof. Shamim Zaman Bosunia (team leader), Shahriar Rumi (deputy team leader), Khurshid Alam Babul (manager), Abu Yousuf (coach) and Dr. Nazmul Haq (physio).

Kabadi league begins today

The fifth KM Mainuddin Smriti Premier Kabadi League gets underway today at the Outer Stadium, reports UNB.

State Minister for LGRD and Cooperatives Mofazzal Hossain Chowdhury Maya will inaugurate the league, organised by the Bangladesh Kabadi Federation.

Bangladesh Rifles' senior team will take on their junior string in the opening match at 5 pm.

A total of seven teams — Bangladesh Rifles Seniors, Bangladesh Rifles Juniors, Bangladesh Police A, Bangladesh Police B, Fire Service A, Fire Service B and Ansar and VDP — will compete on league basis.

The final will be played on August 9.



World No 1 Martina Hingis of Switzerland executing a backhand during her Federation Cup semifinal encounter with France's Amelie Moresmo at Sion on July 26. Hingis won 7-5 (6-7), 6-4, 6-2. — AFP photo

Spain, Switzerland in Fed Cup final



UNDATED, July 27. Spain knocked the United States out of the Federation Cup semifinals Sunday when Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario and Conchita Martinez beat Lisa Raymond and Mary Joe Fernandez, 6-4, 6-7 (5-7), 11-9 in doubles for a 3-2 victory, reports AP.

The match lasted 3 hours, 40 minutes and finished under floodlights before a boisterous home crowd waving red and yellow Spanish flags.

The victory was revenge for Spain following its 5-0 drubbing by the United States the last time they met in the Fed Cup in 1966.

Spain will play Switzerland for the title in September. The Swiss beat France 5-0.

In the first match of the day, Monica Seles crushed Sanchez-Vicario, 6-4, 6-0 to give the United States a 2-1 lead. Saturday's play had ended in a 1-1 draw.

Martinez, ranked seventh in the world, averted her team's defeat by downing Raymond, 7-6 (7-1), 6-4.

Seles, ranked fifth in the world, dominated her first rematch with No 4 Sanchez-Vicario since the latter beat her to take the French Open last month.

Sanchez-Vicario showed her trademark skill in chasing down just about everything, but

had trouble holding service. After holding serve to go 2-2 in the first set, she did not manage to do so again for the rest of the match.

In the other singles match, Raymond was serving for the first set at 5-4 but failed to hold service. It went to a tiebreaker in which she was swamped 7-1.

In the second set, down 2-4, she fought back to 4-4. But in the last two games she failed to win a single point.

Spain is a powerhouse in Fed Cup play, winning the title four times between 1991 and

1995.

Martina Hingis laboured before beating Amelie Mauresmo and clinching Switzerland's first appearance in the final. The 6-7 (6-8), 6-4, 6-2 victory by Hingis gave the Swiss an unbeatable 3-0 lead over defending champion France.

Patty Schnyder, the only player to win five tournaments this year, then completed the 5-0 Swiss sweep, defeating Julie Halard-Decugis 6-3, 6-2 before pairing up with Emmanuelle Gagliardi to beat Alexandra Fusai and Nathalie Tauziat 2-6, 6-3, 6-3 in the doubles.

"It was very tough," Hingis said of her match against Mauresmo. "Amelie played a tough match."

The tension between Hingis and her mother, Melanie Molitor, who also was the Swiss team captain, during changeovers was clearly visible, the teenager even flinging a towel back into her mother's face.

Hingis trailed 7-6 (8-6), 4-1 before raising her game to the level that has made her No 1 in the world.

"I was surprised by the way she played," Hingis said of her French opponent. "I used to wonder with what she beat the other girls. Today, I found out."

The contest marked the first time the two nations met since 1964 when France triumphed 3-0. It is also Switzerland's first time in the world group since 1994.

Athers walks into a storm



LONDON, July 27 (The Mirror/Internet): Mike Atherton and South African whirlwind Allan Donald were involved in a bus-up yesterday as England inched towards an historic series-leveling Test win.

The former England captain was given not out when he gloved a catch to wicketkeeper Mark Boucher when he had made 27 of the 247 victory target at Trent Bridge.

Umpire Steve Dunne, pilloried for giving Mark Butcher out lbw in England's first innings, remained unmoved and Atherton refused to walk even though TV replays showed he was out.

Donald worked the unshakeable opener over for the rest of a tremendous spell - physically and verbally.

At one stage he followed through down the wicket and shouted "Come on, mate" to Atherton, who stood motionless at the crease. Then he held his head in despair when Nasser Hussain edged another searing delivery and Boucher spilled the chance to break the superb second-wicket stand.

When Donald finally came off to give Atherton some badly-needed relief, he had bowled eight torrid overs for eleven runs.

To a man, the collection of former Test greats in the BBC and Sky commentary boxes were convinced Atherton was out.

But Ian Botham did not blame Dunne for getting it wrong.

He said: "Athers was definitely out - but that decision was the result of the umpire being put under massive, unfair pressure over the criticism of giving Butcher out to Donald on Friday. Our Sky replays have shown conclusively that it was

Donald and the close fielders stood in open-mouthed astonishment for so long that match referee Ahmed Ebrahim seems certain to fine the entire team for dissent.

The Bloemfontein Bomber had already suffered three rejected lbw appeals against Atherton and blew his top.

And his mood was not helped when the next 88mph delivery flew off Atherton's inside edge down to the fine-leg boundary.

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He said: "Athers was definitely out - but that decision was the result of the umpire being put under massive, unfair pressure over the criticism of giving Butcher out to Donald on Friday. Our Sky replays have shown conclusively that it was

the right decision, but he was slaughtered for giving it.

"As for Athers refusing to walk, I don't blame him for that at all."

South Africa coach Bob Woolmer said: "I have no problem with players not walking, but waiting for the umpire's decision."

South Africa had been angry enough earlier in the day when Jonty Rhodes was given out by Merv Kitchen, caught behind, when he clearly did not hit the ball.

Owenmania

LONDON, July 27 (The Mirror/Internet): Liverpool youngsters couldn't resist the urge to get a sneak look at their teenage idol.

Liverpool's return to the daily grind of pre-season training hardly rated as the most gripping event of the weekend.

But when you are a Liverpool fan and your hero is Michael Owen, then the chance to witness the return of the Golden One is one not to be missed.

They snatched drainpipes, scrambled up walls and even peeped through the Melwood training ground letterbox to spy on England's World Cup hero on his first day back at pre-season training.

Most of the youngsters who turned up at Melwood haven't got a hope of making it into Anfield when Liverpool meet Arsenal in their first home game on August 22, but that hasn't stopped them dreaming of following in Owen's footsteps.

Inside, the 18-year-old superstar posed for photographs with delighted fans.

Brazil claim beach v'ball crown

NEW YORK, July 27 (AP): On a pile of sand dumped on an ice-skating rink surrounded by skyscrapers, a pair of Brazilians showed why they are the world's top-ranked beach volleyball team and kept the sport's senior dude from adding another victory to his record list.

Guilherme Marques and Para Ferreira beat the US team of Karch Kiraly and Adam Johnson 12-11, 12-4 Sunday to win the gold medal at the Goodwill Games.

With almost 1 million pounds of sand imported from Canada to cover Wollman Rink in Central Park, a sport that is used to endless horizons of the seashore was played with huge shade trees nearby and the office buildings, hotels and apartment towers of midtown Manhattan looming above.

A near-capacity crowd of 2,800 was charged up early, hoping to see the 37-year-old Kiraly, who is often mentioned as his sport's Babe Ruth, Wayne Gretzky or Michael Jordan, add another title to the 130 he has won over his 12-year career.

It started well for the US team, but the Brazilians, the defending world champions, took control late in the first game and dominated the second to sweep the best-of-3 match for the gold medal.

The Brazilians, who shared 30,000 dollars as champions, definitely had age on their side, with the 29-year-old Guilherme five years older than Para, who is considered the best player in the world right now. Johnson, 33, and Kiraly, partners on the US professional circuit, split \$15,000 for winning the silver.

The US team had a 9-6 lead in the opening game, but the Brazilians ran off five straight points to set up a game point. Kiraly and Johnson managed to tie it 11-11 with Kiraly making a great diving save on one point and coming up with a great stuff at the net for the other.

The Brazilians got the serve back on the next play, then put the opening game away with an immediate point.

Guilherme and Para — just like Brazil's soccer players, they usually go by one name only — took command of the second game with a 6-point run for an 8-1 lead. The second game was much closer to the early round meeting that Brazil won 15-3, Kiraly and Johnson's only loss before the gold medal match.

What Kiraly and Johnson couldn't do, the US wrestlers could win gold.

They beat Russia 16-14 for the title, with victories from Sam Henson, Tony Purler, Cary Kolat, Lincoln McIlravy and Les Gutches.

Turkey beat Iran 16-13 for the bronze medal in a meet that had none of the loud political protests by anti-Tehran exiles that disrupted the US win over

the Iranians Saturday night.

American cyclists won gold, too, taking an unusual two-day team race over a squad of men and women riders from a handful of countries. Russia was third.

Gustavo earns a Mercedes

STUTTGART, July 27: Brazil's Gustavo Kuerten broke a title drought stretching back to last year's French Open when he beat Karol Kucera 4-6, 6-2, 6-4 on Sunday to win the million dollar Mercedes Cup, only his second ever singles crown, reports AFP.

The popular Brazilian finally added a second crown to the one that covered him in Grand Slam glory 14 months ago in Paris.

After losing the first set, "Guga" came back in the second and finally got the break back he needed in the third on the way to victory in one hour 53 minutes.

The 21-year-old claimed a cheque for 157,000 dollars plus a Mercedes convertible he and Slovakia's Kucera 16th in the world had never previously played each other.

Kucera, who denied Chilean Marcelo Rios the No 1 world ranking with a semifinal upset, raced off at the start, reaching a 4-0 lead in rapid-fire order on the clay of the Weissenhof club in 40 Celsius on-court temperatures.

Kuerten was able to respond only in the fifth game, when he finally held for 1-4 after 20 minutes on court.

The Brazilian got a break back against the Slovakian coached by former great Miloslav Mecir, in the sixth game, but Australian Open semifinalist Kucera won the opening set after 40 minutes on his second opportunity as

Kuerten looked to regroup.

The Brazilian started his turnaround with a break for 4-2 in the second set as Kucera's returning accuracy began to suffer.

Kuerten, cheered on by, among others, his mother and grandmother watching in the stands, settled into a rhythm and levelled the sets at one each from a Kucera unforced error on second set point.

"Guga" lost serve in the fifth game of the third set, but broke back on Kucera error to stay alive at 4-4.

The 13th-seed reached two match points in the 10th game, but needed only one as he sealed the victory with a backhand winner.

Bergkamp not for sale



LONDON, July 27 (The Mirror/Internet): Arsenal last night halted Real Madrid's hunt for superstar striker Dennis Bergkamp before it really got started.

The European Cup holders are reportedly planning a £20million bid for Dutch international Bergkamp.

But Arsenal made it clear that they are not interested in selling their prize asset at any price.

Manager Arsene Wenger said: "I believe very strongly that I want to keep what we have here already. I also want to keep the spirit and identity that makes the club so strong."

Arsenal insiders laughed off any suggestion Bergkamp, who scored one of the World Cup's finest goals when Holland beat Argentina in the quarter-finals, will be sold.

The club's official statement said: "We do not comment on transfer rumours and speculation."

But it was unofficially made clear Bergkamp, 29, is not for sale.

In fact, Arsenal are scouring Europe for a new striker to kick off their defence of the double on August 15.

Lazio's Croatian star Iker Boksic and Fiorentina's Gabriel

Battistuta are on their shopping list.

However, Wenger has admitted it is "unlikely at the moment" that he will sign AC Milan's Dutch forward Patrick Kluivert.

Real Madrid are being linked with Bergkamp because Holland's World Cup coach Guus Hiddink has just taken over at the club with specific orders to win the title.

They have the World Cup's top scorer, the Croatian Davor Suker, but he is unsettled. He wants to cash in on his success at France 98 by moving.

Bergkamp, however, is extremely happy at Arsenal and he loves living in England. He enjoys the fact that he is left alone away from the game after being tested throughout his two-year spell at Inter Milan.

He is also happy with his pay of more than £20,000 a week.

And Arsenal do not want to lose him just as he hits the peak of his power at 29, especially as they are making their first foray into the Champions' League.

In fact, Bergkamp turned down a move to Real Madrid before he left Ajax for Inter Milan.

Wenger spelled out his policy of hunting a new striker rather than planning to sell one.

Knee no more a problem



STANFORD, California, July 27: Steffi Graf's knee is stronger and she's getting back into shape. But Graf, who plays in the Bank of the West tournament that starts

Monday, still needs to regain the confidence of a champion, reports AP.

Graf, who has won 21 Grand Slam tournament singles titles and held the No. 1 ranking for an unprecedented 377 weeks, is attempting a comeback that began after reconstructive left knee surgery last year.

She resumed playing competitively in the weeks leading up to Wimbledon last month, and the knee has felt fine. And, despite battling sinus problems at Wimbledon, she is starting to get back into shape.

Now, the main objective is to play as many matches as possible before the US Open — which she has won five times.

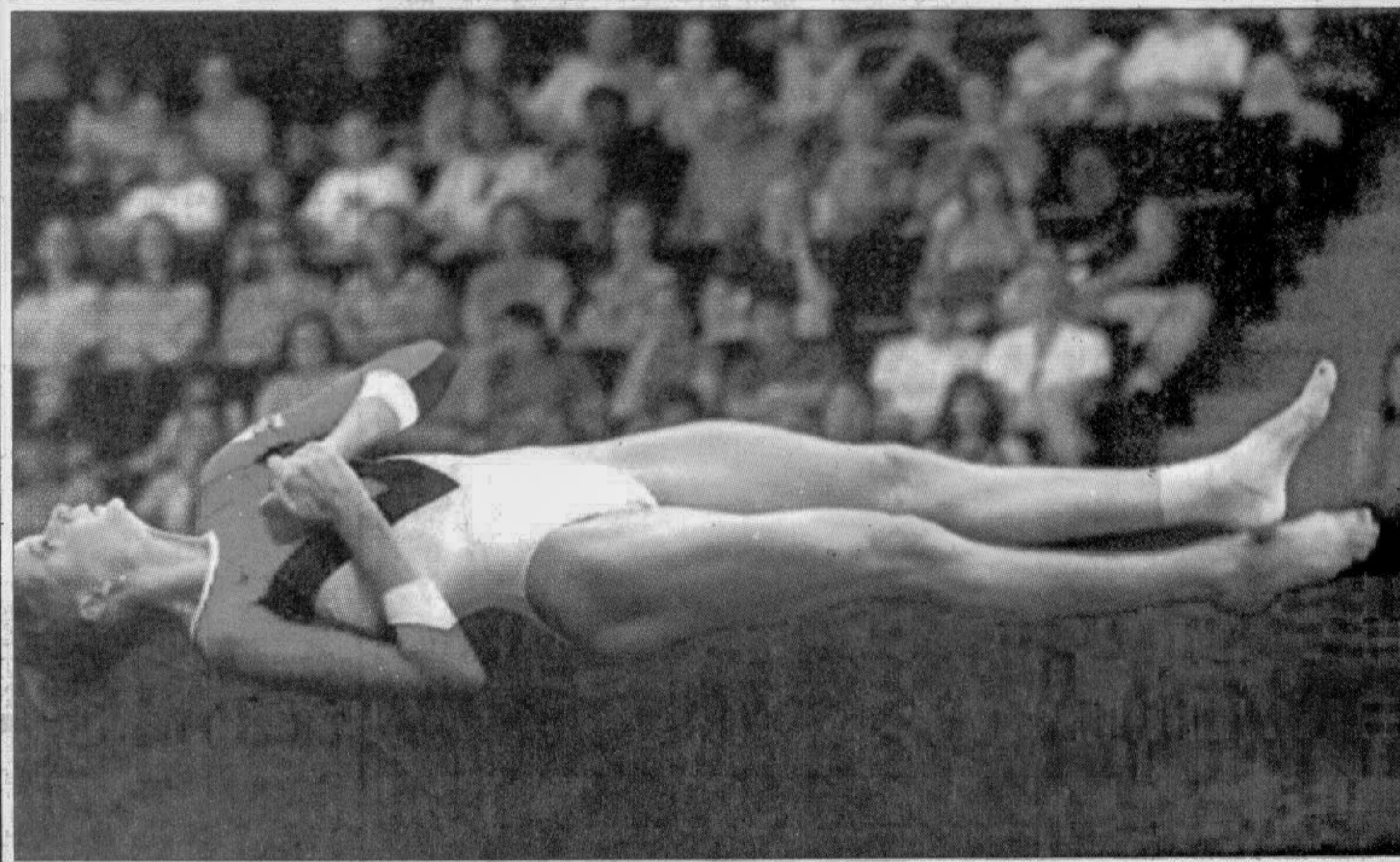
Those thoughts have disappeared for now, though the 29-year-old Graf acknowledges she's not completely sure what to expect from herself during the next few weeks.

"Right now I am entering a sort of a gray area where it's difficult to know how well I'm going to be doing," she said. "It seems like I need another two to three tournaments and then I'll feel comfortable and play the matches I want to and have the confidence I need."

Graf, who won an exhibition tournament in New Jersey last weekend, plans to play tournaments in San Diego and Montreal in the weeks following the Bank of the West event.

Graf is three short of Margaret Court's record of 24 Grand Slam singles titles, but said that mark never enters her mind. Especially now, when just getting back into top form is her main concern.

"I don't really have too many goals left," she said. "I've pretty much done it all. I've got my place in history, so there really is nothing much left."



DEFYING GRAVITY: Russia's Svetlana Khorkina caught suspended in the air by photographer Timothy A Clary during her Goodwill Games floor exercise routine at New York on July 26. Khorkina won the gold. — AFP photo

ERRATA

The 'press devil' was at it again. Part of Gordon Green's interview was printed twice in our issue yesterday. This was not to emphasise the importance of the article as we would hope many would let us believe. It was an inadvertent mistake. We will try our utmost not to repeat it. — Sport Editor