

Sport

Dream bout needs only signing

LONDON, Oct 15 (Reuters/Internet): Evander Holyfield and Lennox Lewis have agreed verbally to meet in a heavyweight title unification fight.

Only their signatures on contracts are needed to close the deal. Rival promoters Don King and Panos Eliades and Lewis' manager, Frank Maloney, in London, brokered the fight earlier this week.

Holyfield, the WBA and IBF champion, and Lewis, the WBC world champion, are tentatively scheduled to fight in February or March. The venue will almost certainly be Las Vegas.

"I wanted to fight for the right reason and the right reason has always been to be the very best and to be the undisputed champion," said Holyfield, who is expected to make \$20 million.

"Now that things are in place and it appears that this fight can come off, then I look forward to it," he told Sky TV news late Tuesday.

Eliades said Lewis would accept a \$8 million purse for the fight, noting that his earning potential would increase dramatically should he win.

Mike Tyson downbeat

WASHINGTON, Oct 15: Former heavyweight champion Mike Tyson said he has no confidence to get back boxing license because he doesn't think the Nevada State Athletic Commission will do nice thing to him, reports Xinhua.

"I don't think they are going to give me back my license, to be honest," Tyson said after a workout on Wednesday. "I'm not sure of anything, especially anything nice happening to me."

For the last two weeks, Tyson has been training in a gym near downtown Phoenix awaiting a decision whether he is allowed to resume boxing.

"Some of the great fighters and great trainers and many of these great people in boxing can't even get their names in the paper unless they mention my name," Tyson said.

Tyson sided photographs for a small group of people today before entering the gym with his entourage for a few hours of training.

The five-member Nevada Commission will hold a hearing on Tyson's revoked license on Monday. The commissioners are expected to cast their final votes that day as well, said Marc Ratner, the commission's executive director.

"There certainly has been no prejudice whatsoever. He will have a fair and equitable hearing," said Ratner.

WBA meeting

BANGKOK, Oct 15: The World Boxing Association (WBA) opened its 77th annual meeting here today to review the organization's performances last year, reports Xinhua.

More than 400 representatives from 147 countries and regions are attending the conference which will discuss the WBA's regulations, and performances of referees, organisers said.

Former WBA champion boxers from Thailand, Khaosal Galaxy and Saen Sor Plerchit, will receive a special prize during the meeting which will be presided over by WBA president Gilberto Doza.

Mendoza said at the opening ceremony that the meeting will work out measures to ensure the continuity of WBA's regulations and create what it lacks in terms of regularity.

Boxing, he said, must conform with the drastic changes of the world and the WBA should meet the challenges of the 21st century.

Among the well-known figures attending the conference will be promoter Bob Arum.

As part of the conference programme, Tai Ratanapol Voparin is set to sign a contract today to fight Will Grigsby in the United States for the IBF flyweight title.

Rasmussen misses Indonesian Open

JAKARTA, Oct 15: Men's world champion Peter Rasmussen has dropped out of the Indonesian Open badminton here from October 28 because of an injury, reports AFP.

The Jakarta Post today quoted organising committee chairman Juniarlo Suhandianta as saying the Danish Badminton Association had notified him of the last minute withdrawal, but the nature of the injury was not known.

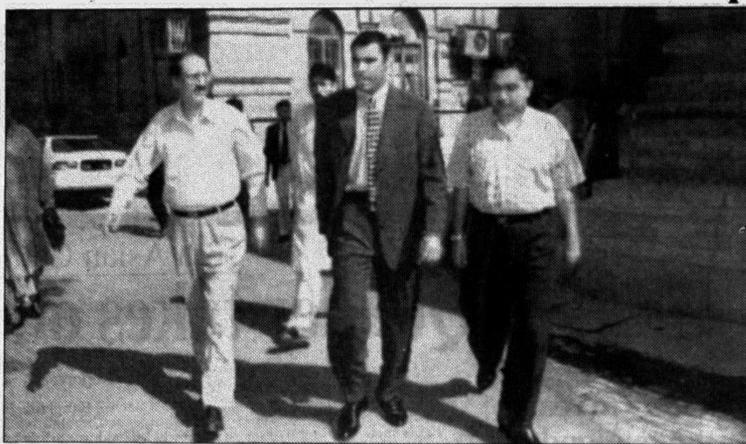
Other top Danes have already dropped out of the tournament including Peter Gade Christensen and leading women's player Camilla Martin.

The strong Chinese contingent was also almost certain to skip the tournament, though Hong Kong and Thailand had said they would attend, with Hong Kong urging the organizers to speed up visa clearance.

Juniarlo said the cause of the visa glitch was that one Hong Kong player, Tam Kai Chuen, held a certificate of identity, not a Hong Kong passport.

"We'll try hard to help them (the Hong Kong team) because they want to participate in the event," Juniarlo said.

Apart from Indonesia, which will be led by shuttlers Mia Audina and top seed Henrawan, players are slated to come from Denmark, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Poland, Thailand, Brunei, England and Nigeria.



Pakistan paceman Waqar Younis arrives at the high court in Lahore yesterday to give evidence on alleged match-fixing.

England to soup up season

LONDON, Oct 15 (Reuters/Internet): England have taken the first steps towards strengthening their domestic game by approving a two-tier one-day league to be introduced in 2000.

The 18 counties agreed on Tuesday to introduce two divisions into the Sunday league with three-up, three-down promotion.

They next meet in December to consider improving the quality of the county championship either two divisions or a regional early-season competition.

The first option would involve two divisions of nine teams each playing 16 games a season. Three counties would be promoted or relegated in each season.

The second would feature a regional tournament in May, grouping the counties into six regions, with each team playing five four-day matches. The county championship would then start in June.

At the core of both proposals is the need to strengthen the present county championship and reduce the gap between first class and Test cricket.

A similar meeting last year rejected proposals by the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) chairman Lord MacLaurin for a two-tier championship but now the counties appear to believe that change is necessary.

On Tuesday, the ECB announced that England would play seven home Tests matches and 10 one-day internationals annually from 2000, which will bring increased television money into the game.

The revenue will be distributed among the counties, who are aware that a successful national team is essential to keep the television companies, advertisers, sponsors and the watching public happy.

This week England captain Alec Stewart added his weight to the call for change, urging a reduction in the number of counties in order to increase the quality of the domestic game.

"All I would like to see is that the gap between our domestic game and Test cricket is smaller," Stewart said. "It's probably the biggest gap in world cricket."

Stewart, in his final news conference before England leave for their tour of Australia next week, said he did not think two divisions was the answer.

"The same amount of cricket would be played," he said. "If you reduce the quantity of cricket then the game improves."

Bangkok's pre-Asiad trials

BANGKOK, Oct 15: Thailand kicked off a pre-Asiad test of its Asian Games facilities on Wednesday with a glitzy opening ceremony in preparation for trials in 11 sporting events, reports AFP.

Deputy Prime Minister Bichai Rattakul chaired the opening ceremony with Chinese Olympic Committee vice-president Wei Jizhong ahead of the three days of sporting events starting today.

The ceremony was held at Hua Mark Sports Complex where the opening and closing ceremonies of the 13th Asian Games will be held. The Games will be between December 6-20.

Representatives of some 10 Thai sports associations will compete in the pre-Games in three major sports complexes in Bangkok, the coastal town of Pattaya and in Nakhon Sawan province.

The Games aim to test the sports facilities, none of which are yet complete, in addition to the telecommunications, security and traffic control provisions.

Competitors will take part in athletics, swimming, boxing, gymnastics, tennis, shooting, cycling, canoeing, rowing, windsurfing and soccer.

Advantage Cruzeiro

BELO HORIZONTE, Brazil, Oct 15: Locked in a four-way tie, Cruzeiro take the slimmest of advantages into their deciding game with Colo Colo of Chile in Mercosur Cup on Thursday night, reports AP.

Both teams have seven points — as do Brazil's Sao Paulo and San Lorenzo of Argentina. After 10 games, only goal-difference separates the four teams in Group E.

That's one edge for Cruzeiro. The Brazilians have a plus-three goal difference, while the visitors' difference is minus-two.

But with any combination of results still possible, the decision for the quarterfinal berth in Group E will go down to the final minutes of the final games.

Cruzeiro's campaign has been uneven, with two wins at home to go with two losses and a tie on the road.

Colo Colo, meanwhile, rebounded from two quick losses to win their next two games before tying San Lorenzo in their last game at home in Santiago. That may give the Brazilians another advantage.

No Group E team has lost at home in the series, and Cruzeiro have played well in cavernous Mineirao stadium.

ASEAN soccer in Vietnam

HANOI, Oct 15 (AP): Vietnam will host an ASEAN soccer tournament next month, with seven police teams expected to compete, local press reports said Thursday.

Vietnam's three police teams — from Hanoi, Haiphong and Ho Chi Minh City — will join police teams from Laos, Thailand, Singapore and Cambodia in the two-week competition that starts November 1. Ho Chi Minh City's Sports newspaper said.

Split into two groups, the teams will compete in Hanoi and Haiphong. The final, to be played in Hanoi, offers 60 million dong (4,300 dollars) for first place, 50 million dong for second and 40 million dong for third.

Vice Police Minister Nguyen Van Tinh told a news conference that the tournament will help strengthen cooperation among police forces in the region and will be a precursor to the future ASEAN Soccer Cup.

ASEAN groups Brunei, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

Ladic retires

ZAGREB, Oct 15 (Reuters/Internet): Croatia goalkeeper Drazen Ladic is retiring from international soccer after collecting a record 50 caps for the national side.

The 35-year-old Ladic, whose spectacular saves helped Croatia to third place in the World Cup in France last July, announced the decision after his country's 3-2 victory over Macedonia on Wednesday.

"It was my last game for the national team... It is time for someone younger to get a chance," Ladic said.

Reserve keeper Marjan Mrmic of Turkish side Besiktas is the most likely replacement.

Ladic was a fixture for coach Miroslav Blazevic, who selected him for Croatia's first international game against the United States in 1990 and has played him ever since.

"I am immeasurably sorry that he is leaving," Blazevic said.

Drug test

SYDNEY, Oct 15: Australian weightlifter Johnny Nguyen, has tested positive for a banned anabolic steroid stanozolol, it was reported today, says AFP.

Australian weightlifting federation president Sam Coffa declined to confirm the identity of the competitor that failed the test, but the Sydney Morning Herald reported Nguyen tested positive before last month's Commonwealth Games.

He was allowed to compete in Kuala Lumpur as the test results were not available. He failed to finish among the medals although he had gone as a favourite in the 54kg class.

Nguyen was the first Vietnamese-born Australian to compete at the Olympic Games. He finished 17th at Atlanta in 1996.

Germany: A long way to go

BONN, Oct 15 (Reuters/Internet): Germany, bidding to recapture a place at the top of world soccer, showed they still had a long way to go when they struggled to overcome Moldova in a European championship qualifier on Wednesday.

The 3-1 victory came as a relief for the reigning European champions, who had slumped to a 1-0 defeat away to Turkey in their opening group three match last Saturday.

But their performance looked embarrassing at times. "We saw what's still missing and that's experience," said new head coach Erich Ribbeck, who took over after

Berti Vogts stepped down under intense media pressure last month. "We're a young team and we need to learn."

Ribbeck has launched a rebuilding programme and picked several relatively untested players. The result was a shaky defensive display and without a string of brilliant saves from Oliver Kahn; the outcome would have been less favourable.

"I am not satisfied with the way we defended," said Ribbeck, who also paid tribute to Kahn's performance.

"Oliver Kahn proved that he belongs to the team," said Ribbeck. "We need him."

The Bayern keeper, eager to restore pride after his blunder which led to Turkey's goal in Saturday's game, was one of few

outstanding German players on the Chisinau pitch with striker Ulf Kirsten, who struck twice in the first half, and young midfielder Lars Ricken.

Germany, whose ageing stars bowed out to Croatia in a World Cup quarter-final last July in France, now lack reassuring defenders and an authoritative playmaker.

"We've got a lot of work to do but I'm convinced we will get better," said defensive midfielder Christian Nerlinger, who failed to shine on his second appearance for the three-time world champions.

"The only important thing is that we've won," added the Borussia Dortmund player.

"Anything else would have been a catastrophe," Bayer Leverkusen's Stefan Beinlich, who looked promising against Turkey, failed to orchestrate play this time and Ribbeck might have no other option than to recall him.

Borussia Dortmund veteran Andreas Moeller.

"I am ready to help," Moeller, one of several members of Germany's old guard cast aside by Vogts after the World Cup, told soccer magazine Kicker in an interview released on Thursday.

Moldova, thrashed 9-1 by Germany in the Euro 96 qualifiers, did not go down without a fight and earned several clear chances.

They even took the lead when Alexandru Guzun found himself unmarked right in front of goal and calmly slotted home from a corner in the sixth minute.

"They fought well and you have to give them credit for that," said Ribbeck. "They have fast, diminutive strikers who were a nuisance for our tall defenders, who are better in the air than on the ground."

Kirsten's two goals and another from Oliver Bierhoff before the break gave the visitors victory and they moved up from bottom to third in their qualifying group.

Germany, who meet Northern Ireland on March 27 next year in Belfast, are in a relatively weak group, which also includes Finland, and stand a good chance of making it to 2000 finals in Belgium and the Netherlands.

"Our goal remains to win our group and I still believe we can do it but it will certainly not be easy," said Ribbeck.



Teammates congratulating striker Ulf Kirsten (No 11) after scoring a goal during Germany's 3-1 win over Moldova in a Euro 2000 qualifier at Chisinau, Moldova on October 14.

Gaulish impotence still hurts

PARIS, Oct 15 (Reuters/Internet): France coach Roger Lemerre may live to regret the day the world champions failed to boost their Euro 2000 goal difference against tiny Andorra.

The French were held to a meagre 2-0 home win on Wednesday against a side they should have crushed in their first match at the Stade de France since beating Brazil 3-0 with apparently greater ease in the World Cup final three months ago.

Andorra, who barely have enough players for a reasonably competitive team, camped in their own half throughout the match with just two half-hearted shots at goal from a distance, both of them well wide.

But France, who opened the scoring against Brazil inside the half hour in July, took nearly twice as long to find the net against the Andorrans coached by Brazilian Manoel Miluir.

"My satisfaction is with the result and the three points won," Lemerre said.

France, having won 3-2 away to Russia on Saturday, are on course to decide first place in Euro 2000 group four with Ukraine, who have taken two more points from their three matches than the French, held 1-1 in Iceland last month.

"In the race for points we have got closer to Ukraine and that's what counts," Lemerre said.

But with the winners of the nine groups and best runner-up qualifying for the finals in Belgium and the Netherlands, goal difference could play a key role as the eight other second placed teams seek to qualify as best runners-up.

Ukraine, France's next opponents in Paris in March, have already scored twice away to the Andorrans without even trying when they won 2-0 in the principality on Saturday.

Monaco's David Trezeguet, the central striker was France's chief culprit, finding himself on the end of a string of chances but failing to put the ball away.

When Miluir said he hoped France would line up their centre forward from the World Cup final, he meant Stephane Guivarch who wasted two golden chances against Brazil. But as it happened Trezeguet was just as profligate.

"We played in their half as seven against 10, that's what made it so difficult to open the way to goal," Lemerre said.

Trezeguet's fellow striker in a three-pronged attack, Christophe Dugarry of Olympique Marseille said France lacked cool heads to work openings.

He said: "We didn't know which side to take them on. With Tony (Vareilles) we tried to stretch the defence, but we were cut off from the ball."

"Curiously, we got out of the jam by going through the middle, when normally the solution comes rather from the flanks."

Juventus midfielder Zinedine Zidane, architect of the World Cup final victory over Brazil, often tried to dribble his way through a mass of Andorran feet and incurred the defenders' wrath more than once for trying to force penalties.

Roma defender Vincent Candela, who broke the deadlock with the opening goal in the 53rd minute, joked that France may have been disconcerted by an unusual atmosphere in their giant home stadium.

"It's funny, because the (higher pitched) cries of support were not the same as usual," Candela said.

As a gesture of thanks to France's women World Cup supporters, the 80,000-capacity Stade, which was nearly full, opened one stand exclusively to women for a set low price.

No drink during matches

SYDNEY, Oct 15: Shane Warne's Victoria State cricketers have signed a 'no drink' pledge during matches, reports AFP.

At the instigation of coach John Scholes, the Victorians have agreed to go teetotal in the lead-up to and during Sheffield State games.

They have also agreed to stay off alcohol when representing the team at public receptions even though the club's major sponsor is Carlton and United Breweries.

Scholes is also encouraging the players — headed by Warne — to smoke less in public.

"The players have embraced it. We don't think it's acceptable for our public image and we don't think it is ideal when you are preparing for a cricket match," Scholes told the Melbourne Age today.

Vice-captain Darren Berry added: "What other sport allows you a drink during a game? We'll have our celebratory drink or whatever afterward, but if we're serious it's not right to be drinking at night when you're in the middle of a game."

But former Test captain Ian Chappell was stunned.

"If you're fit three or four beers don't hurt anyone, you'd be better having three or four beers than three or four cokes," he said.

Cork pulls punches

LONDON, Oct 15 (Reuters/Internet): England Test paceman Dominic Cork has threatened to quit as captain of his county side Derbyshire, in a move highlighting deep divisions in the club.

Cork said in a statement issued on Wednesday the club was split by power struggles and his authority as captain had been undermined.

The division has Cork and club chairman Vic Brownett on one side with committee members Andy Hayhurst and Harold Rhodes and second team coach Andy Brown on the other.

Cork said that promises made to him when he took over as captain last season had been "cast aside".

"The complete authority on playing matters which I was publicly promised by Mr Brownett has been challenged and overturned by others within the committee," Cork said.

"I do not wish to resign... but unless the committee is prepared to take the necessary steps to enable Mr Brownett to fulfil his promises to me, I will have no alternative but to stand down as captain."

Cork said he had advised the committee that it was necessary to make cuts in the playing staff

in order to create room in the budget for the club to recruit experienced senior players.

"Instead all expiring contracts were renewed and the club was left with a massive deficit," he said.

"On one thing above all I am adamant," he said. "There is no way that I will be prepared to continue in the captaincy if Harold Rhodes and Andy Hayhurst continue to exercise an influence over playing matters."

A French desire

HANOI, Oct 15: A French swimmer with a Vietnamese father is bidding for dual nationality so he can represent Vietnam in the Sydney Olympics in 2000, reports AFP.

Eric Huynh, a 30-year-old 50-metre freestyle specialist says he is not good enough for the French team but Vietnam was interested.

Huynh said he had received positive overtures from the Committee for Overseas Vietnamese and the Vietnamese Olympic Committee.

The civil servant said it was his dream to compete at the Sydney Olympics "before hanging up my goggles."

But while France recognises dual nationality, candidates for Vietnamese nationality must renounce their previous citizenship.

Woodforde sees off Ivanisevic

SINGAPORE, Oct 15 (Reuters/Internet): Australian Mark Woodforde got his revenge against the booing serve of Goran Ivanisevic on Thursday as the Singapore Open tennis tournament last yet another seed.

Woodforde ranked 98th, made sure that the bottom half of the draw was without a seed in the quarter-finals after beating the Croat 6-4 7-6 (7-4).

The Australian doubles specialist, who turned 33 last month, said it was one of the most satisfying days for him in some time after he sank to below 100 the world rankings.

"I can't complain about anything I did tonight. It's not often that happens," he said.

"On this surface I knew I had a chance to return Goran's serve, especially if his first did not land often enough. And it worked perfectly for me, though at the start I was groping a bit to get the ball back into court."

The players made an apparently cordial exit from the court just weeks after criticising each other.

Ivanisevic said after beating the Australian at the U.S. Open Woodforde was too old and should retire. The Australian said Ivanisevic had nothing more than a big serve.

Woodforde refused to reveal what was said after Thursday's match. "Let it be between Goran and me. We should have a bit of privacy," he said.

The battle of the left-handers was a fast paced serve-and-volley game.

The decisive break in the opening set came in the seventh game. Both men broke serve in the second before the tie-break where Ivanisevic's serve deserted him and one double fault and several missed first serves later, he was out of the tournament.

"I don't think I played bad tennis. Mark just played unbelievably. This court is so true. It doesn't afford much kick on my second serve, so he had little trouble returning. If he keeps playing like this he can definitely win the tournament," the Croat said.

Former world number one Jim Courier, a wild card entry, also moved into the quarter-finals with a tough 6-4 2-6 7-6 win over Sweden's Mikael Tillstrom.

Woodforde's doubles partner Todd Woodbridge went out to Dutchman Sjeng Schalken 7-6 (7-3) 6-4.

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