

Bhupathi, Paes lose again

HARTFORD, Connecticut, Nov 20: The top-seeded Dutch duo of Jacco Eltingh and Paul Haarhuis rallied for a three-set victory over Frenchmen Olivier Delaire and Fabrice Santoro on Thursday in the 800,000 US dollars ATP Tour World Doubles Championship, reports Reuters.

Eltingh and Haarhuis, who have two Grand Slams among their eight titles this year, recovered after dropping the first set for a 4-6, 7-5, 7-5 over the seventh seeds, who were denied their second straight upset. The Dutchmen improved to 2-0 in the Green Group and clinched a berth in the semifinals.

But the second-seeded team of Mahesh Bhupathi and Leander Paes of India and the third-seeded Australian duo of Mark Woodforde and Todd Woodbridge both lost to 0-2 in round-robin play and were eliminated from semifinal consideration.

The fourth-seeded Canadian duo of Mark Knowles and Daniel Nestor beat the eighth-seeded American team of Donald Johanson and Francisco Montana 6-3, 6-2 to improve to 2-0 in the Gold Group and seal a semifinal berth.

Eltingh and Haarhuis improved to 42-4 this year and have reached the finals in nine of the 12 tournaments they have entered. But their remarkable run will come to an end after this tournament.

The 28-year-old Eltingh announced he would retire at the end of the year, and he and Haarhuis are trying to finish the year ranked number one for the second time and win their second World Championship.

Confederations Cup

French wants a fresh schedule

PARIS, Nov 20(Reuters/Internet): World champions France will take part in the FIFA Confederations Cup in Mexico in mid-1999 but want the dates changed again. French Football Federation (FFF) president Claude Simonet said on Friday.

"We are unanimous in our agreement to play the tournament but the dates are not right," Simonet said after a meeting of the FFF's federal council also attended by league (LNF) chief Noel Le Graet.

Le Graet earlier this week complained that the new July 28 to August 8 dates were impossible as they clashed with the start of next season.

The FFF, having pulled out once already when it was to have been held in January, said it will keep its word to FIFA president Sepp Blatter that France will take part in the tournament.

Simonet said he plans to discuss the dates with Blatter in Geneva next week.

July 28 is not such a problem but August 8 is far too late. The dates have to be brought forward or the tournament has to be shortened," Simonet said.

France pulled out of the original January 8-20 tournament because they would have had to send a side lacking more than half their squad as European clubs refused to release their French internationals from club commitments.

The new dates, however, fall in the late off-season and inside the start of the French and some other European championships, brought forward to accommodate an expanded Champions League.

The eight-nation event brings together mainly the champions of FIFA's confederations plus holders Brazil. But France, as world champions, were invited to represent Europe.

MU still saying yes to BSKyB

MANCHESTER, England, Nov 20(Reuters/Internet): Manchester United chief executive Martin Edwards said on Thursday the club's board are still backing the BSKyB bid for the club despite being urged to reconsider by hundreds of fans.

Hundreds of shareholding fans at a story Manchester United AGM called for Edwards to resign and urged the board to reconsider its backing for the takeover plans by the media group which is 40 per cent owned by Rupert Murdoch.

Although the offer has now lapsed and the bid is being looked into by the Monopolies and Mergers Commission, Edwards said he would back any similar bid from BSKyB.

"Today's meeting has not really made me change my mind," said Edwards.

"As a board we thought long and hard about the deal before recommending it. We have the hindsight of the figures and we know of the future prospects. It was a unanimous decision of the board at the time and no one has changed their mind since."

In October, BSKyB tabled a 623 million pounds (\$1.04 billion) bid for United which has been referred to the mergers commission by Trade Secretary Peter Mandelson.

Meanwhile United will not be buying a majority stake in Australian side Adelaide Sharks, said Edwards.

He said the two clubs did talk about joining forces but the discussions came to nothing.

McMillan quits cricket

CAPE TOWN, Nov 20: South Africa all-rounder Brian McMillan announced his retirement from international cricket on Thursday, reports Reuters.

"There comes a time when everyone has to re-assess their priorities and my time is now. I've thought long and hard about it, and I've chatted to (national selection convenor) Peter Pollock, and I have no doubt that now is the time to call it a day," McMillan said.

McMillan, 35, next month, scored 1,968 runs at an average of 39.36 in 38 Tests. He hit three centuries and thirteen 50s. The seamer took 75 wickets at an average of 33.83.

He was renowned for his prowess at second slip. He held 49 catches in Tests, many of them match-winners.

"He was the man we feared most - he had the ability to change a match with bat, ball and with a catch," said former England captain Mike Atherton after his country's five-Test tour in 1995.

"He was a player we understood because he played the game like we did - he was uncompromising and very, very hard," said former Australian

skipper Allan Border. "There are many highlights," reflected McMillan. "The isolation-breaking tour of India in 1991, the wicket of Ian Botham, who was a childhood hero and is now a mate, in the World Cup

semifinal of 1992, the 1994 Test win against England at Lord's and the Aussie win in Sydney later in the same year."

McMillan said he would remain at Western Province, where he has two years of his contract to serve, and where he



relished the prospect of helping some of the country's best young all-rounders, like Jacques Kallis.

"If I were Jacques I would be considering the option of asking for the number five spot in the national side. He is batting at three but is bowling a lot of overs because he is so talented, he has what it takes to be a genuine all-rounder," McMillan said. "And he would be better off down the order."

For all McMillan's achievements on the field, he will be remembered by international players for a stunt he pulled on Border during Australia's tour of 1994.

Having exchanged strong words with the famously terse Border about a debatable lbw decision just before lunch, McMillan feigned fury as the players left the field. He appeared minutes later in the opposition changing room and approached Border.

"What did you say?" McMillan asked. Border, apparently, turned white before stammering "... er, nothing at all." McMillan was pointing an unloaded revolver at his head, borrowed from the security guard outside the Australians' door.

ATP Tour World Championships

Pete has a personal goal

HANOVER, Germany, Nov 20 (Reuters/Internet): Pete Sampras's obsession with finishing world number one for a record sixth successive year has added extra spice to this week's ATP Tour World Championships.

American Sampras, who retained his Wimbledon title this year but has not been quite as impregnable as in previous seasons, is under threat from Marcelo Rios in the Hanover tournament for the top eight players on the tour which starts on Tuesday.

Chilean world number two Rios, who occupied the top spot for two periods earlier in the year, is a mere 33 points behind the American in the latest ATP Tour rankings, which makes the situation quite simple.

Whoever fares best at the \$3.5 million indoor event will finish the year as world number one.

Double U.S. Open champion Patrick Rafter, the world number three, would have mathematically good a chance but the Australian, hampered by knee problems, called his season to a halt after losing to American Todd Martin in the third round of the Paris Open earlier this month.

Rios could have knocked Sampras off his perch before Hanover if he had won in Santiago last week but he lost in the quarter-finals to little-known Juan Antonio Marin of Costa Rica.

His most dangerous rival's unexpected exit was naturally welcomed by Sampras, who had put himself in an uncomfortable situation by falling to Australian Jason Stoltenberg in the first round in Stockholm.

Sampras loves Hanover, where he has triumphed four times already. After victories in 1991, 1994 and 1996, he convincingly defeated Russian Yevgeny Kafelnikov in last year's final to finish the year in top spot for the fifth time in a row, tying the record set by Jimmy Connors from 1974 to 1978.

Helped by the withdrawal through injury of Rafter and Dutchman Richard Krajicek, Briton Tim Henman and Kafelnikov took the final two tickets to Hanover last weekend.

They joined Sampras, Rios, American Andre Agassi, French Open champion Carlos Moya, fellow Spaniard Alex Corretja and Slovakia's Karol Kucera.

Henman has qualified for the first time though he did appear as an alternate last year, winning his only match against eventual runner-up Kafelnikov. The alternate this year will be Henman's compatriot Greg Rusedski.

The tournament is played initially in a round robin format. The eight entrants are drawn into two groups where they all play each other. The first two from each group advance to the semifinals.

Rios, who has enjoyed a tremendous season with seven tournament wins, will fancy his chances, as will Henman and Kafelnikov, who have been in great form lately.

All three have performed well recently on hard courts similar to the ones in the Deutsche Messe Halle in Hanover. But if he stays free of the injury worries which have so often marred his season, the clear favourite has to be Sampras.

In order to get the record, the American decided to spend six successive weeks in Europe playing indoor tournaments, something he had not done since 1993.

"I'll do whatever it takes to do it because I think it's definitely up there with the greatest achievements in tennis," he said last month in Stuttgart. "I don't think it will ever be broken."

Sampras has often said that the rival he respected the most was Agassi, who was nowhere to be seen this time last year.

While Sampras was cruising to victory in the northern German city, Agassi, then a modest 122nd in the world, was sweating on the unglamorous challenger circuit in Las Vegas, trying to climb a few places up the rankings.

After an awful 1997 season, the former world number one has re-discovered his appetite for the game, regaining a place in the top five for the first time in more than two years.

Currently number four on the ATP list, Agassi has won five tournaments this year but he has often failed to produce when it mattered most on the big occasion.

A strong performance by Agassi in Hanover could pave the way for a renewed battle for supremacy between him and Sampras in 1999. That would be good news for men's tennis, which is badly in need of such a confrontation to hold the attention of the fans and the media.

setting her new 100m personal best.

Chinese officials have released a copy of a letter by Istvan Gyulai, the IAAF general secretary to back their case against Jayasinghe.

Gyulai's letter said: "I confirm that the IAAF doping commission considered the question of the athlete's reinstatement by the athletic federation of Sri Lanka. The commission does not agree to the reinstatement and will recommend to the IAAF council to refer the case to arbitration."

Gyulai added that he would give more information to the IAAF executive this week.

Britain's home office (interior ministry) declined to confirm or deny the report, but a spokeswoman said new anti-hooligan measures would be announced next week.

British police have built up an extensive database of known soccer hooligans, but was unable to prevent many of them travelling to France for this summer's World Cup because that would have required a court order.

Several British fans were charged and jailed in France following violence at this year's World Cup.

The Evening Standard said the planned new laws would also introduce heavier fines for hooliganism and make it easier to bar known troublemakers from matches inside Britain.

Only for Ronaldo!

MILAN, Nov 20: Ronaldo is literally working night and day to get fit for Inter Milan's crunch match here next Wednesday against Real Madrid.

Ronaldo has been plagued by tendon trouble over the past two months and this week had his personal physiotherapist flown over from Brazil.

The 22-year-old now trains with the rest of the squad in the daytime at Appliano Gentile and then gets worked on at night by Nilton Petrone in Milan.

Ronaldo's vast apartment near the San Siro stadium boasts a fully-equipped gym, along with a swimming pool, and Petrone is both treating the Brazilian ace and staying at his house guest.

And after a hard day's training, Ronaldo undergoes an hour of physiotherapy in the evening while watching TV, the Gazzetta Dello Sport said.

Inter's team doctor Piero Volpi quipped: "We have given him some homework to do. It's like when you're not very good at a particular subject - you have to do extra work to catch up."

"And Ronaldo, at the moment, needs to work even harder to get his fitness back. So he's training in the morning and the afternoon, but also at night."

Volpi welcomed the arrival of Petrone, who is expected to stay here at least until next Wednesday.

"From both points of view the psychological help and the extra work he's making Ronaldo do - we are very happy to have him here," he said.

The coming week is a crucial one for Inter's season. On Sunday, their chances of becoming Serie A champions will be sorely tested by league leaders Fiorentina, and on Wednesday they can stake their claim to a place in the European Champions' League quarter finals.

Ronaldo would like to play both matches, but team coach Gigi Simoni rated his chances of playing in Florence as 51 per cent, and that one per cent is just hope."

Bebeto bails Botafogo out

KINGSTON, Nov 20: A magnificent curling free kick from star player Bebeto earned top Brazilian team Botafogo a 1-1 draw with Jamaica in a friendly international, reports AP.

Bebeto's strike came one minute from full-time and cancelled striker Deon Burton's early superb goal for the home team in the 76th minute.

Wednesday's match was the first for the Reggae Boyz since their win over Japan in June in the World Cup and extended their unbeaten streak at home to 36 matches.

The fast-paced game saw the Brazilians having the better of the early play by making inroads in the Jamaican defence. Their best chance of the first half came in the third minute when junior's header from close range was parried by goalkeeper Aaron Lawrence.

The home team came into their own in the second half with the introduction of Burton, one of the heroes of Jamaica's pre-World Cup campaign.

Burton came close to scoring in the 50th minute but was denied when his firm shot was saved low down by goalkeeper Silva.

Bebeto was also denied by substitute goalkeeper Warren Barrett in the 63rd minute. His goalbound shot was parried by a sprawling Barrett after the Brazilian World Cup star was sent clear by a through pass from midfield.

Burton broke the deadlock in the 76th minute after a superb run by substitute Walter Boyd resulted in a cross that found the derby county player unmarked in the penalty area. Burton's acrobatic kick gave Silva no chance.

The Brazilians stepped up the pace and pressed for the equalizer. They were rewarded ticks before the final whistle when Bebeto's perfectly placed kick beat Barrett to the far post.

Britain plans to check hooligans

LONDON, Nov 20 (Reuters): Britain is planning draconian new laws to curb soccer hooligans who have repeatedly embarrassed the nation abroad, London's Evening Standard newspaper reported on Thursday.

Under the new measures, people known to be hooligans would be barred from travelling to matches in other countries even if they had never been convicted in court, the newspaper said in a front page report.

Any fan caught chanting racist slogans could be charged with a criminal offence under the planned laws, which will also include new curbs on ticket touts, the newspaper said.

Britain's home office (interior ministry) declined to confirm or deny the report, but a spokeswoman said new anti-hooligan measures would be announced next week.

British police have built up an extensive database of known soccer hooligans, but was unable to prevent many of them travelling to France for this summer's World Cup because that would have required a court order.

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Steffi Graf is disappointed with herself after losing a point to Monica Seles during their Chase Championship match in New York on November 19. Graf won 1-6, 6-4, 6-4. — AFP photo

Steffi's onslaught on

NEW YORK, Nov 20: (AP) Since recovering from her latest surgery, Steffi Graf has been winning matches as easy as 1-2-3.

On Thursday night, it was No. 6. She beat No. 1-ranked Lindsay Davenport on Sunday to win the Philadelphia tournament. That was two days after Graf beat No. 2 Martina Hingis and a week after she won the title at Leipzig, Germany.

In her first two matches at this season's Chase Championships Graf has defeated No. 3 Jana Novotna and No. 6 Monica Seles.

"The past two weeks have been amazing," said Graf, whose world ranking has skyrocketed from No. 91 on June 15 to No. 12 this week. "It has been amazing, really."

"I am just sitting there and I can't believe it. It has just been amazing. That is all I can say."

Graf reached the semifinals of this season-ending tournament by outlasting Seles 1-6, 6-4, 6-4. It was one for the record book.

It was her 12th consecutive singles victory since undergoing wrist surgery in September. She is 19-1 since winning a tournament in New Haven, Connecticut, in August. And in her last five matches, Graf has defeated four of the top six players in the world.

"I don't like to compare victories," Graf said. "Leipzig was great. Philadelphia was great. It's just been great to be able to keep on playing well after my injury."

In Saturday's semifinals, Graf will play the winner of tonight's quarterfinal match between Davenport and No. 8 Nathalie Tauziat of France.

"Right now I am in the semis and I have a pretty tough opponent next up," Graf said. "So that is all I am worried about right now. I mean, I have survived this far, so we will see what comes up next."

Tonight's other quarterfinal will pair Hingis against No. 6 Mary Pierce of France, with that winner meeting Romania's Irina Spirlea on Saturday. Spirlea advanced Thursday by beating Dominique Van Roost

of Belgium 6-2, 6-3. Graf's trip to the semis wasn't an easy one. She had to survive a nearly perfect start by Seles.

"In the first set, she just overwhelmed me," Graf said. "She overpowered me. I couldn't get a return in. My serve wasn't really effective at all."

"That is what I was trying to focus on in the beginning of the second set, just let her play a little more and try to find a little length in my shots. And finally the return started to come in."

The first set took just 24 minutes, and as she walked to her chair, she muttered aloud to herself in German.

"I really wanted to come out strong. I obviously played some clean tennis, wasn't making many mistakes and everything. It definitely was one of the better ones I have played this year," Seles said.

Graf solved Seles' serve for the first time in the third game of the second set, breaking her with a patented Graf forehand that landed deep in the corner.

Seles broke right back, and the two traded service breaks again in the seventh and eighth games.

But Seles made a few errors in the ninth game, and that was all Graf needed. Soon, the two were even at one set apiece.

Graf fought through four deuces to hold serve in the fourth game of the third set. Seles held from deuce in the next game.

On the changeover following the fifth game of the final set, Graf called for a trainer and had a blister on her right foot treated.

But in the ninth game, Graf finally got the crucial break.

It started when Seles buried a forehand in the net. Then Graf hit a forehand that Seles thought was long. Seles returned it into the net and looked at umpire Leanne White, seeking an over-rule. There wasn't one, and Graf had a love-30 lead.

Two more errors by Seles gave Graf the break, and the German served for the match.

Seles refused to surrender, fighting off four match points before Graf finally hit a forehand winner for the spot in the semifinals.

"Steffi was more consistent and she was willing to stay in some points longer, while I just went for too many shots," Seles said.

"I missed them because I was trying not to get into a long rally, and that I felt turned it around."

Although Novotna won last year's Championships, Graf is currently riding a 10-game winning streak at Madison Square Garden. She won the Championships in both 1995 and '96 before missing last year while recuperating from knee surgery.

Spirlea had her entire repertoire of shots working against Van Roost, who made her Garden debut this year.

After Van Roost held to start the match, Spirlea won five straight games. The second set was more even, but by then it was too late for Van Roost, who dropped her serve at love in the third game and at 15 in the eighth game.

Sunday's title match will be a best-of-5 sets, the only time women play more than three sets. The winner will collect 500,000 dollars, with 250,000 dollars going to the losing finalist.

Thai stadia all set

BANGKOK, Nov 20: All Asian Games venues are ready for next month's event here, organisers said Thursday, bringing to an end years of anxiety that stadia would not be finished on time, reports AFP.

Construction work had speeded up as the December 6-20 Games approached and only minor finishing touches remained. Thira Ophphanchai, chairman of the venue and equipment sub-committee said Thursday.

At the new Rajamangalastad Stadium, which will host the opening and closing ceremonies, "the scoreboard are being installed and will be completed by November 27," he said.

All training facilities at the three major Bangkok complexes and elsewhere in Thailand hosting the 36 sports were also completed, he added.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

- ACROSS
- 1 Feed-bag
- 4 Fragrant
- 9 Clintons
- 12 Personal question?
- 13 Put one's two cents in
- 14 In earlier times
- 15 Tourist attraction
- 17 Born often
- 18 Aussie avia
- 19 Guide
- 21 Riviera draw
- 24 Tackles' teammates
- 25 She's TV's Caroline
- 26 John Ritter's dad
- 28 Bulletin-board boxful
- 31 Hostels
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- computer
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