

Sport

Asia Cup tennis ROK move into semis

NEW DELHI, Nov 24: South Korea took an unbeatable 2-0 lead over Thailand to move into the semifinals of the ATF Asia Cup tennis tournament at DTA Deco courts here today, reports PTI.

Last year's runners-up South Korea won both the singles convincingly as Thai players failed to match their bettered opponents in primarily baseline duels.

Korea's number one Hyung-Talk Lee was given a good challenge by his Thai counterpart Narathorn Srichaphan before prevailing 6-3, 6-4 in 80 minutes and assure his country a semifinal berth.

Earlier, Hyung-Kuen Song, the Korean number two, thrashed Thailand's Rithiwanapong Attapal 6-2, 6-1 in less than an hour to put South Korea 1-0 ahead.

That number Narathorn, ranked 775 on the ATP computer — 500 places below Lee, gave some tense moments to the Korean, breaking him in the first game and racing to a 2-0 lead before Lee caught up.

Lee, who was a bit dull at the start putting easy returns wide, charged himself up and broke Narathorn in the fourth and sixth games of the first set for a 5-2 lead. Lee served out the first set at 6-3 when Narathorn's lob went wide.

The second set was a thriller and at one point it looked as if Narathorn would take the tie to the third set before Lee geared himself up and finished the match.

The Thai sent down some powerful crosscourt returns to which Lee had no answer. Lee took a 3-1 lead with a break in the third game and that was enough to win the set. He served deep and smashed Narathorn's lob for the win.

200 Iranians for Asiad

TEHRAN, Nov 24 (Xinhua): Iran will send a 200-strong contingent to compete in 25 sports at the Asian Games in Bangkok in December, Iran's IRNA news agency reported on Monday.

Iran will compete in archery, athletics, badminton, basketball, boxing, rowing, cycling, equestrian, fencing, soccer, gymnastics, handball, judo, karate, shooting, swimming, diving, water polo, table tennis, taekwondo, tennis, weightlifting, freestyle and classical wrestling and wushu.

Sports officials said they hope Iran will obtain good results in soccer, wrestling, karate, taekwondo and weightlifting.

More than just gold!

BANGKOK, Nov 24 (AP): When they go for the gold, Asia's athletes won't just be chasing medals. The regional economic crisis notwithstanding, many of the 42 countries sending more than 6,000 athletes to the Asian Games next month in Bangkok will be paying lucrative awards to those who strike gold, silver and bronze.

After all, national pride is at stake in the region's largest Olympic-style competition. Some countries are even raising the value of the awards above what they paid at the last Asian Games four years ago in Hiroshima, Japan, when the region was booming.

"It's the big event for every participating Asian country, even though we're battered by economic crisis," said Chairat Kamnuan, vice president of Thailand's Olympic Committee. "No one can afford to lose face in the games."

Chairat said that setting awards for winners is an important stimulant for Asian athletes — who don't have a future lined with huge pro football or basketball contracts — to do their very best.

The awards rank from several hundred to tens of thousands of dollars. Extra benefits are promised for record-breaking performances.

The biggest prizes appear to be offered by rich countries likely to win the fewest medals. Singapore, for example, is offering 250,000 Singapore dollars (154,000 dollars) to any of its athletes winning gold.

A silver will bring 125,000 Singapore dollars (77,000 dollars) and bronze 62,500 Singapore dollars (38,500 dollars).

Hong Kong is offering as much as 500,000 Hong Kong dollars (64,120 dollars), while Malaysia will pay individual gold medal winners 80,000 ringgit (21,052 dollars). The Malaysians are hopeful of winning the 100 metres.

South Korea hopes its athletes will collect 65 gold medals to come in second after powerhouse China. With a rocky economy and more medals to pay for, the Koreans will be giving modest gold medal bonuses of 3 million won (2,300 dollars). Silver and bronze fetch nothing.

China aims to capture more than 100 golds and will offer 4,000 yuan (440 dollars) for each one. In 1994, China won 137 — or 41 per cent — of 337 gold medals at stake.

Yuan Weimin, a sports vice minister, said recently that China plans to use the Asian Games to lay a foundation for the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney.

Laver feeling alright

SYDNEY, Nov 24: Four months after suffering a stroke which affected movement on his right side, Australian tennis legend Rod Laver has swung a racket again and he's playing golf, reports AP.

Laver said from his Palm Springs, California, home Tuesday that he knew if he could get back on a tennis court, he would make a full recovery.

"To be able to stand and see the ball coming and playing against my stroke it's the best medicine and best pills I could have taken," he told Channel Nine's A Current Affair television programme.

"I know that I've done well so far and I hope to keep improving on it and I'd like to get on that court and know that I'm here to stay."

Laver, who won 11 Grand Slam singles titles including four Wimbledon crowns, was filming a television interview in Los Angeles in late July when he suffered a stroke.

He was admitted to nearby UCLA Medical Centre where he spent the next six days in the intensive care unit (ICU) — with, at one stage, Australian players Pat Rafter and Sandon Stolle singing to him from the corridor.

"We wanted to come up and say hello to me but they couldn't get into the ICU, but they were outside the door singing 'Waltzing Matilda,'" Laver said.

Within hours of being released from intensive care, the 60-year-old was rushed back in with brain seizures and spent a further six weeks in hospital.

His wife Mary described the setback as being "hit in the head with a brick bat."

"We thought we'd won it and all of a sudden we hadn't and that was frightening," she said. Laver, who had to learn to walk and talk again, remains optimistic.

"I just knew I was going to get out of it," he said. "I feel like I'm in a fight. I feel like I'm going to recover and whatever it takes, I'll do it."

De Wolf joins casualty list

BRUSSELS, Nov 24: Michael de Wolf quit as coach of bottom-placed Belgian First Division club Kortrijk on Monday, reports Reuters.

Former Belgium and Marseille defender De Wolf was the fourth First Division coach to lose his job this season following the departures of Dutchmen Dennis van Wijk from Ostend, Arie Haan from Anderlecht and Johan Boskamp from Ghent.

De Wolf was replaced by Kurtjens in June, but he joined Kortrijk on a temporary basis by his deputy Jerry Vanaecker, Kortrijk said.



EIGHT OF THE VERY BEST: (L-R) Carlos Moya (Spain), Yevgeni Kafelnikov (Russia), Tim Henman (Great Britain), Alex Corretja (Spain), Marcelo Rios (Chile), Pete Sampras (USA), Greg Rusedski (Great Britain) and Karol Kucera (Czech Republic) during the draw of the ATP World Championship at Hanover on November 23.

Elites' battle starts

HANOVER, Germany, Nov 24 (AFP): Pete Sampras will make his final push for an unprecedented sixth straight world No 1 end-of-year ranking at the 3.5 million dollar ATP Tour World Championships, which begin here today.

The American was Monday drawn to battle against Red Court rivals Carlos Moya, Karol Kucera and Yevgeny Kafelnikov, while crowd-puller Andre Agassi is fighting for fitness after straining his back during a Monday training session.

Sampras begins the event with a match today against Kafelnikov, Moya then plays Kucera while Tim Henman takes on Marcelo Rios in the evening session.

World No 4 Agassi was drawn into the White Group headed by Rios along with Alex Corretja and Henman, but hurt his back during a practice session with Corretja.

"I went to hit a shot and managed to get a little stuck on the court and fell down," Agassi told to ATP Tour vice-president Graeme Agars. "When I stopped I jolted my back in a way where it went into spasms."

"It's creating all sorts of havoc." The Las Vegas right-hander skipped the draw ceremony, where his name was pulled by British rock singer Robert Palmer.

Sampras and rest of the elite Hanover field took to the stage during a live television telecast of the draw ceremony wearing suits and ties.

Even Rios, often considered surely, was on smiling best behaviour, his long hair pulled back into a trademark ponytail.

Only Agassi was missing. Should the 28-year-old American somehow not be fit for his Wednesday match, Britain's alternate Greg Rusedski would take his place, putting him into the same group as compatriot Henman.

ATP Tour officials said Agassi was undergoing therapy for the injury and had been given a Wednesday start at the six-day event to enable to him to recover.

Agassi is expected to replace the semi-retired Boris Becker in the crowd's heart at the Expo 2000 Centre when play gets underway.

"For me, this is a good opportunity to end the year with a lot of confidence, beating some top players, positioning myself higher in the rankings," said Agassi. "That's certainly something I'm looking forward to."

The top two finishers in the Red and White Groups advance to the Saturday semifinals with the final set for Sunday in a best-of-five format.

Aiming to break the record of five consecutive years at No 1 set by Jimmy Connors in 1974-78 is a huge motivating factor for Sampras, who has won almost everything in the sport.

"It's rare that you have something in your hands that you can maybe break forever," he said, speaking of the five-year mark.

"I know that but I can't worry about it or dwell on it too much. I'll just go out and play the tennis I can play and hope I can do it."

If Sampras does not win more matches then Rios here, the 22-year-old from Chile can take No 1 spot for 1998.

"There's pressure on Marcelo. I've done this for five years and he's yet to do it," Sampras said.

"I've put a lot of emphasis on the past couple of months," added the 27-year-old American, who spent six weeks on court in Europe until going home just over a week ago after a first-round loss in Stockholm.

UEFA keeps Galatasaray, Juventus waiting Postponement irks Turks

ANKARA, Nov 24 (Reuters/Internet): Turkey's sports minister said on Tuesday European soccer's governing body had acted disgracefully in postponing a Turkish-Italian club soccer match because of a diplomatic row between the two countries.

"To take such a decision about a country there should be war there. There are no such conditions in Turkey," Minister Mehmet Altun told Reuters. "This decision is a disgrace for UEFA," he said.

UEFA postponed until December 2 a European Champions League match originally set for Wednesday between the Italian club Juventus and Turkey's Galatasaray "in light of current tension between the governments of Turkey and Italy".

Thousands of protesters gathered in Ankara, burning Italian flags and goods in protest against an Italian court

ruling rejecting Turkey's arrest warrant for Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) leader Ocalan.

Turkey holds Ocalan responsible for the death of more than 29,000 people in an armed campaign for Kurdish self-rule in the country's southeast and seeks his trial on treason charges.

Juventus had been reluctant to travel to Istanbul to play the match on Wednesday because of their fears of anti-Italian reprisals. However, the UEFA decision, which followed a request by Juventus, means the game — while postponed — is still to be played at the Istanbul venue.

While recognising that neither of the two clubs should be held responsible, UEFA asked both governments "to undertake the necessary steps" to make sure the game can go ahead in a week's time.

Schukine said Turkey was sticking to its earlier commitments to ensure tight security at the match. "A 20,000-strong security force will be on duty to take measures before and after during the match," he said.

Following the decision UEFA general secretary Gerhard Aigner said on Monday: "We have indications that things will become more normal very shortly. The crisis is too hot and too recent for the game to be staged in two days time."

He added: "There are bound to be repercussions in one way or another. But UEFA had to give everyone involved the chance to do something constructive towards the relaxation of the atmosphere."

In Istanbul, Galatasaray deputy chairman Atilla Donat described the decision as "favouring Juventus". He said it would increase the pressure on Galatasaray players, who have an Istanbul derby against league leaders Besiktas three days before the new Champions League date and play Ankaragucu the following weekend.

The Daily Star Entertainment Guide

Wednesday 25th November (All programmes are in local time. The Daily Star will not be responsible for any change in the programme.)

BTV 3:00 Opening Announcement Al Quran Programme 3:13 Pictic Series 3:20 Cartoon Film: Bani To 3:25 Pushti Tathya 4:00 Khabar 4:05 Film Show: Zoo Adventure 4:45 Open University 5:25 Aamra Karbo Jai 6:10 Ceehanta 6:30 Khabar 6:40 Programme from Chittagong Centre 7:05 Krishi Tathya 7:25 Chhanda Anandi 8:00 News in Bangla 8:45 Drama Serial: Baitay 9:00 Musical Programme: Shudhu Chawa Pawa 9:30 Film Show: Mysterious Island 10:00 News at Ten 10:30 Badhan Hara 11:30 Khabar/The News 11:45 Close down.

BBC 6:00am BBC World News Followed by Weather 6:30 World Living: Future Fantastic: Weir Science and business investigations: invisibility cloak, a nuclear physicist trying to use telepathy for international espionage and sees an experiment that seems to generate energy from nothing. Followed by Weather 7:30 Asia Today. The latest news analysis and features from the BBC correspondents who live and work in the region 7:45 World Business Report: The latest business news with informed analysis from the world's financial centres. Followed by World City Guides 8:00 BBC News Followed by Weather 8:30 Asia Today. The latest news analysis and features from the BBC correspondents who live and work in the region 8:45 World Business Report: The latest business news with informed analysis from the world's financial centres 9:00 BBC News Followed by Weather 9:30 Asia Today. The latest news analysis and features from the BBC correspondents who live and work in the region 9:45 World Business Report: The latest business news with informed analysis from the world's financial centres 10:00 BBC News Followed by Weather 10:30 USA Direct: From New York Brian Barron and Melinda Wittstock bring the latest in news, entertainment and sport from across the USA including today's American Business News from Wall Street with Patrick O'Connell 11:00 BBC News Followed by Weather 11:30 World Focus: Reporters: A weekly programme of stories filed by BBC reporters from all over the world, ranging from analyses of major global issues to personal reflections and anecdotes. Followed by World City Guides 12:00 BBC World News Followed by Weather 12:30 World Living: Holiday this week the team report from Lanzarote, Florida and Switzerland. 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