

Tenerife coach terminated

MADRID, Dec 22: Juan Manuel Lillo has been sacked as coach of Spanish First Division club Tenerife, club officials announced on Monday, reports Reuters.

A club spokesman said names being considered for the job included former Wales and Real Madrid coach John Toshack and Argentine World Cup winner Ossie Ardiles, whose coaching experience includes a stint at English club Tottenham Hotspur and most recently in Japan with Shimizu S-Pulse.

The Canary Island club's tours held a midnight meeting after Tenerife could only manage a 1-1 draw at home to bottom club Extremadura on Sunday and decided that Lillo had to go.

Tenerife are in 19th place, one place off the bottom, and have not won at home in the league this season.

At 33, he was the youngest First Division coach.

He took over at Tenerife in February and initially was hailed as the club's saviour after guiding the club to safety after a season-long battle against relegation.

Novotna returns down under

MELBOURNE, Dec 22: Wimbledon champion Jana Novotna will play in next month's Australian Open here after a three-year break, organisers said today, reports AP.

The confirmation of the world number three's attendance has boosted the Australian field to 19 of the world's top-20 women players along with all the top-20 men.

Novotna, who lost in the 1993 and 1997 Wimbledon finals, broke through for her first Grand Slam title at Wimbledon last July when she beat Frenchwoman Nathalie Tauziat.

The 30-year-old Czech served and volleyed, lost to Monica Seles in the 1991 Australian final.

Uzbek athletics coach dead

BANGKOK, Dec 22: A coach from Uzbekistan's Asian Games athletics team has died of a heart attack in his hotel room, police said Tuesday, reports AP.

Evgeny Godlevsky, 63, was pronounced dead Monday on arrival at a Bangkok hospital. He had complained earlier of chest pains at the medical centre of the athletes' village.

Godlevsky was the second Asian Games coach to die during his trip to Bangkok for the regional Olympic-style event, which ended Sunday.

Rizvi Fuulile Zain, swimming manager for the Sri Lankan team, died of a heart attack December 14.

Game, set and match to women's tennis in '98

LONDON, Dec 22 (Reuters/Internet): After suffering years of sniping from the men's Tour, women's tennis savoured the sweetest sensation of all in 1998 - success with a hint of revenge.

The men still hit the ball harder, play five sets rather than three and earn more money. But the women's Tour now has the more potent advantages of charisma and personality in depth.

GREAT YEAR FOR WOMEN'S TENNIS

The season-ending tournaments epitomised a bad year for the men's ATP Tour and a great 12 months for the women.

In a thrilling final at the Chase Championship, 18-year-old Martina Hingis beat Lindsay Davenport, who had ousted her as number one a month earlier.

The ATP Championship in Hanover, by contrast, was ruined by injuries. Pat Rafter pulled out before it started and world number two Marcelo Rios soon followed suit.

An exhausted Pete Sampras failed to make the final but still clinched the number one spot for the sixth year in succession.

The American seems weary with the daily grind of full-time tennis and complained he wanted more respect for his achievements, which included a fifth Wimbledon title this year.

Hingis and Davenport were happy to talk of a battle-royale for the number one spot in 1999 with a resurgent Steffi Graf, the Williams sisters and veterans Monica Seles, Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario and Jana Novotna in the frame.

BATTLE FOR TOP SPOT

Davenport beat Hingis in the US Open final for her first Grand Slam title and the American then took over the number one spot from the Swiss who, this time last year, had looked set to dominate women's tennis for many years to come.

"Overall it was the most interesting year in women's tennis in a decade," said Jana Novotna whose Wimbledon triumph was probably the biggest triumph-jerk of 1998.

"We had four different Grand Slam champions. If you compare that to a couple of years ago when we had such a dominating era with Steffi and Monica, I think this year was the most interesting and best year for the women's game."

While Sampras remains the biggest name in men's tennis, his domination is its greatest problem.

Viewed the best player of the past 25 years by his peers, the

American still struggles to capture the public's imagination and will never set pulses racing like Andre Agassi or Pat Rafter.

Another dilemma for the men's tour is that top players rarely meet, either on or off the court, meaning rivalries to equal Borg/McEnroe or Lendl/Becker never have a chance to grow.

BRIEF STINT AT NUMBER ONE

Sampras revealed in November he had never had a conversation with Rios, who floppingly pushed Sampras off the top of the tennis tree during the year.

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But she was surprisingly beaten by Seles in the French Open semifinals and, from then on, seemed to take her foot off the pedal as she enjoyed being a teenager rather than a tennis automation.

Seles, mourning her father who had died three weeks before, was beaten by Sanchez-Vicario in the Paris final, the Spaniard's third French Open title, despite winning the second set 6-0.

But even that gripping final was overshadowed by Novotna's two-set defeat of France's Nathalie Tauziat at Wimbledon. The Czech had lost the 1997 final, still haunted by her defeat by Graf in the 1993 final when she led 4-1 in the deciding set.

But her nerve held, despite a late crisis of confidence, and there was hardly a dry eye on centre court as she finally lifted the winner's trophy.

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