

Courier looks for mental boost

ADELAIDE, Jan 6 (Reuters/Internet): Former world number one Jim Courier says thinking is bad for your tennis.

"Tennis unfortunately doesn't encourage any kind of intellectual development. It actually discourages that," Courier said on Wednesday after he had been beaten in the first round of the Australian men's hardcourt championships.

"The dumber you are on court, the better you're going to play," Courier, winner of four grand slam tournaments, told reporters. "I think that's a kind of truism of sports."

"When you're playing the best tennis, for example, you're in the zone where you're not thinking about anything. It's all instinct."

Courier, 28, was world number one in 1992 and won the French Open in 1991 and 1992 and the Australian Open in 1992 and 1993.

He has earned \$13.6 million in prize money in his 12-year professional career but last year dropped out of the top 50 for the first time since 1987. He is currently ranked 77th.

But despite his misgivings about the game's intellectual possibilities -- and his very quick exit from the championships in a 7-5, 6-3 defeat by Czech player Slava Dosedel -- Courier is not yet ready to give up tennis.

Rusedski's early exit

DOHA, Jan 6: British number two Greg Rusedski crashed out in the first round of the Qatar Open late Tuesday to ditch hopes of an all British final in the Doha tournament, reports AFP.

Rusedski, seeded behind British number one Tim Henman, failed to capitalise on two match points and paid the price dearly in a 4-6, 7-6, 6-3 defeat by German Bernd Karcher, ranked well below him at 117 in the world.

The left-hander and big server fluffed his two match points from a position of 5-4 and 40-15 up in the second set against an opponent ranked well below him at 117 in the world.

In November Canadian Born Rusedski won a chance to play in the ATP championships following the withdrawal of Andre Agassi with a back injury.

Rusedski qualified as the reserve for the championships with a barnstorming end to an injury-marred season by winning the Paris Indoor Open and by reaching the semifinals of the Stockholm Open.

Van Roost in last eight

AUCKLAND, Jan 6: American Tara Snyder and Maria Alejandro Vento of Venezuela were the only seeded players to miss out on Thursday's quarterfinals after the second round of the Auckland Women's Classic tennis tournament, reports AP.

Sixth seed Snyder lost to Spain's Maria Sanchez Lorenzo 6-0, 6-4 Wednesday, while eighth seed Vento fell to American Kristina Brandi in a tough match 4-6, 6-3, 6-4.

Top seed Dominique Van Roost, ranked 12th in the world, survived a bout of nerves stemming more from not knowing her New Zealand opponent Leanne Baker to win 6-2, 6-2 at Stanley Street.

"I went into the game a bit nervous because I didn't know exactly how she plays," Van Roost said of 553rd-ranked Baker.

"I watched her by accident yesterday because I never thought she would beat Miriam Oremans. I was watching but not really watching while waiting for my match."

While Van Roost set up a quarterfinal clash against Brandi, second seed Silvia Farina of Italy takes on seventh seed Chanda Rubin after both won their matches Wednesday.



Steffi Graf obliging an autograph hunter at Hong Kong yesterday. The German tennis superstar is here to take part in an exhibition tournament. — AP/UNB photo

Thoughts of tennis' eyes

HONG KONG, Jan 6 (AP/Internet): Steffi Graf says a tennis exhibition also featuring the Russian star Anna Kournikova and sisters Venus and Serena Williams will be the perfect warmup for the Australian Open.

"It should be a very tough competition," Graf said after a practice session Wednesday, a day before the start of Hong Kong's three-day Super-Power Challenger Cup. The players stopped off en route to first Grand Slam tournament of the year, which opens January 18 in Melbourne.

Graf overcame knee and wrist injuries in the past year and a half and went on to win tournaments in Philadelphia and Leipzig, in her native Germany.

She said she enjoyed her recovery time off from the game, saying it gave her more time to spend with friends. But she found herself dogged by more

questions about rumours she might consider retiring.

"I didn't realise until I started playing again that I missed it so much," Graf said.

Meanwhile, Venus and Serena are adamant 1999 is going to be their year as they start their season here on Thursday.

The talented Florida-based American duo believe they are ready to make their mark in the four major tournaments, starting with this month's Australian Open.

I think last year I did more losing than I did winning," said world number five Venus who holds the world record for the fastest women's serve at 125mph.

That's a trend that I have to change this year if I want to have a chance in the majors. I feel I'm ready to be competitive," the 18-year-old big-servant said.

I'm not going to just be playing tournaments for the sake of it. I'm going to there to compete hard," she added.

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COC okays Beijing's bid

BEIJING, Jan 6: Brushing off a stinging defeat six years ago, Chinese sports officials on Wednesday approved a new bid by Beijing to host the Olympics, saying that as a rising power China deserved to hold the 2008 Games, reports AP.

A Chinese return to Olympic bidding has been the subject of intense speculation in international sports and among China's sports-crazy citizens ever since Beijing lost by two votes in 1993 to Sydney in the fight to host the 2000 Olympics.

Its human rights record criticised and its ability to organise the world's biggest sports event doubted, China did not bid for the 2004 Games.

But the Chinese capital now joins Toronto, Canada, as the frontrunner in an already crowded race for 2008.

The city's bid, submitted in November, was unanimously approved Wednesday by 75 members of the Chinese Olympic Committee (COC). The committee and the city will formally apply to the International Olympic Committee in early February. The IOC will choose a host city in 2001.

China's "international influence is increasing by the day and is playing an increasingly important role in international affairs and in popularizing the Olympic movement," Chinese Olympic Committee chairman Wu Shaozhu said. "We already possess the conditions for hosting the Olympic Games."

"Holding the Olympic Games in China will benefit cultural exchange and blending between East and West and benefit the global development of the Olympic movement," Wu said in a statement.

While some Chinese privately express reservations about the cost of an Olympics, reaction on the street was overwhelmingly positive. People said hosting the Games would boost the economy and sports and China's reputation.

"We should have got the Games a long time ago," said Song Jinling, an army officer. "China used to be called 'the sick man of Asia.' This shows that is absolutely no longer the case."

Yu Wende, a pedicab driver, looked forward to the money Olympic visitors would bring.

"Lots of foreigners will come to China. But if they are held overseas, not many of us can go," he said.

China's human rights abuses and its spotty record on doping in sports could again become factors in Beijing's bid. Communist Party leaders are in the midst of a broad crackdown on dissent that has seen at least nine dissidents sentenced in recent weeks to lengthy jail terms or spells in labour and detention camps.

Chinese Olympic officials said human rights should not be an issue.

"All countries have human rights problems," said Shao Shiwai, committee official.

Shao said Beijing would make "major repairs" to its

sporting facilities and build new ones and was working to clean up its air -- an issue he identified as a potential problem in its bid.

The air pollution is quite terrible," he said.

Aside from Beijing and Toronto, other cities bidding for the games are Osaka, Japan; Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia; Buenos Aires, Argentina; Istanbul, Turkey; Paris, France; and Seville, Spain. Cairo is also weighing a possible bid. Olympic committees have until February 2000 to officially bid for the 2008 Games.

If Beijing beats Toronto, it could have a major impact on the race for 2012. The United States is planning a bid for 2012, but it would have little chance of winning if the 2008 Games go to Toronto because the IOC is unlikely to award the Games to North America twice running.

Bassett was dismissed in the wake of Saturday's 1-0 home defeat in the FA Cup by first division Portsmouth. In the league Forest remain anchored to the bottom following a record run of 17 games without a win.

British television reported that Atkinson, an experienced coach known affectionately as "Big Ron", had confirmed he had been approached by Forest to take up the post and would make a decision in the next week.

Atkinson, who has managed an array of clubs in his career including Manchester United, Aston Villa, Sheffield Wednesday and Coventry City, is taking a holiday abroad for the next few days.

He also said the city, the 1990 host of the Asian Games, the regional equivalent of the Olympics, "has accumulated valuable experience" in holding major sports events.

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