

Atletico's third loss on the trot

MADRID, Feb 14 (Reuters/ Internet): Atletico Madrid suffered their third successive Spanish league defeat on Saturday as another woeful defensive display gifted Espanyol a 2-1 win.

Arrigo Sacchi's expensively assembled side remain eight points behind leaders Barcelona -- who play Real Madrid in Sunday's showpiece game at the Nou Camp -- and have played a game more.

Atletico started brightly and took the lead on 21 minutes through Jose Mari Romero, who squeezed home a left-foot shot after beating two defenders, only to be pegged back before haltime as Moises Artega rose unchallenged at the near post to flick a header past Francisco Molina.

Another glaring defensive error six minutes from time gifted the three points to the visitors.

A tiring Atletico defence failed to clear a speculative cross from the left and Dario Silva, unmarked at the far post, headed precisely past the exposed keeper.

Mallorca, who like Atletico have been struggling of late after a bright start to the season, had earlier moved back up to second spot, two points off the pace, thanks to a 1-0 win at home to Real Sociedad.

A second-half penalty from Leonardo Biagini, after Jovan Stankovic had been bundled over in the penalty area, was enough to give Hector Cuper's side the points.

In Saturday's other game, Deportivo Coruna beat relegation candidates Salamanca 1-0 thanks to a second-half strike from Tuna Flores.

Sampras, Chang tumble

SAN JOSE, Feb 14: Top-seeded Pete Sampras withdrew from the tournament and qualifier Cedric Mamit advanced to his first career final by defeating No 4 seed Michael Chang 3-6, 6-3, 6-4 in the semifinals of the Sybase Open on Saturday afternoon, reports AP.

"I think who had never won a title in Tour matches before this season, will play No 3 seed Mark Philippoussis in the final title Sunday.

Philippoussis advanced to the finals when Sampras withdrew with a tendon strain above his left ankle sustained during a quarterfinal victory over Bernard Krbacher on Friday.

Mamit, who turned pro after winning the NCAA Championship in 1996 as a freshman at Southern California, said he grew up admiring Chang, who won his first tournament title when Mamit was 11 years old.

"I watched his game and followed his tactics," Mamit said. "I was pretty pumped up."

Sampras strained the tendon just above his left ankle during break point of the sixth game in the second set against Krbacher.

"I hit a forehand and was caught off balance," Sampras said, the world's top-ranked player. "I felt it in one sudden movement. I continued to play on it, but it was quite sore."

Sampras said he tried to practice on the injury Saturday morning, but he couldn't run on it.

"I couldn't put any weight on it," Sampras said. "I didn't feel like I could have played a proper match. It hurt on any movement. It didn't make any sense."

Mamit fell behind 5-0 in the first set before he said he was comfortable.

"I wasn't feeling all that great," Mamit said. "Getting the first service game was probably what got me going."

Mamit held serve the rest of the way, and began to take charge when he broke Chang's serve in game four of the second set.

"When I missed a few shots, I started to get a little nervous," Chang said. "I wasn't as aggressive as I should have been. Cecil is playing some good tennis right now."

Mamit, who became the first qualifier in tournament history to advance to the final, broke Chang's serve in the first game of the third set to gain momentum which led to his first professional semifinal victory.

Woodhall retains title

NEWCASTLE, Feb 14: England's Richie Woodhall held on to his WBC super-middleweight title Saturday, stopping Italy's Vincenzo Nardiello in the sixth round, reports AP.

Woodhall, in his second title defence, was in command winning the first four rounds with crisp body punches as the Italian looked out-classed.

But 40 seconds into the fifth round, Nardiello landed a left hook that floored Woodhall and stunned a partisan crowd of 10,000. But the Englishman came back, took control of the round and drooped Nardiello with a right to the mid-section in the final 30 seconds.

Nardiello complained it was a low blow and then drew loud jeers when he went down just after the bell, complaining Woodhall had thrown a late punch.

By that time the fight was all but over.

Woodhall caught Nardiello with a left-right combination exactly mid-way through the six. Woodhall got up by the 10 count only to have the referee stop the fight.

"We knew after five rounds he (Nardiello) would be looking for a way out to take his money," Woodhall said.

Nardiello, a former WBC super-middleweight champion, saw his record fall to 33 wins and 7 losses. Woodhall improved to 25 wins and 1 loss.



Salamaca's Brazilian defender Everton Giovanella (L) checks compatriot Flavio Canciciao of Deportivo la Coruna during their Spanish Primera Liga clash at La Coruna on February 13. — AFP photo

Wiltord takes Bordeaux atop



PARIS, Feb 14: Sylvain Wiltord shot Bordeaux to top spot in the French league on Saturday with both goals in their 2-0 win against Bastia, reports AFP.

The Paris Lescure victory puts Bordeaux a point ahead of Marseille, who play at Toulouse today and keeps Wiltord top of the scoring list with 17 goals.

It completes a memorable week for Wiltord, who made his first appearance for France on Wednesday as a substitute in the historic 2-0 victory over England at Wembley.

Wiltord, fed by strike partner Lilian Laslandes himself with 14 goals this term, scored his first in the 51st minute and added another following an error in the 73rd minute by Bastia defender Francois Modesto.

"Goals by Lilian, striker Alan Cavegila stopped Nantes nine-match unbeaten run with a 2-1 victory to remain third, the last qualifying spot for the

European Champions League. David Linares had a goal disallowed for offside midway through the first half before Cavegila made up for that with a penalty in the 37th minute after Sebastian Piocelle handled in the area.

Caeigila, thanks to an error by Yves Derroff, doubled his tally a minute after the break though substitute Patrick Sufio headed home from Nantes on an Olivier Monterrue free-kick with a quartet hour to go.

Monaco's Ludovic Giuly scored in the final minute to complete a 4-2 win at home to Reims, putting the principality club into fourth spot. Giuly, fed by Wagneau Eloi who did well to keep his balance in the area, killed the ball into the top right hand corner to put the match beyond any doubt.

Nigerian Victor Ikpeba, substituted with just over a quarter hour to go, had had a superb night, scoring twice for the home side.

Outgoing champions Lens

beat Paris Saint Germain 2-1 in a freezing cold Felix-Bollaert stadium with a capacity crowd of more than 39,000 fans.

Stephane Dalmat put Lens ahead from a Pascal Nounou cross after only 11 minutes, but Italian striker Marco Simone beat out Vladimir Smicer and Cyril Magnier to score the 66th minute, moments after coming on.

PSG keeper Bernard Lama failed to control a corner from Smicer and Laspalles was in the perfect spot to find the net.

Lorient drew 1-1 with Montpellier in the night's other match. Loic Druon scored the first for Brittany side Lorient with an impressive solo goal, getting past several Montpellier players before shooting past keeper Stephane Cassard three minutes after the interval.

Didier Thimothee equalized just three minutes later from a pass by Dos Santos in a move originating from a Laurent Robert freekick.

Szabo erases McClogan's mark

DORTMUND, Feb 14: Romanian Garbela Szabo set the first indoor world record of the year when she smashed Briton Liz McClogan's seven year-old 5,000 meters mark by clocking 14 minutes 47.36 second at an international meeting on Saturday, reports Reuters.

Szabo shaved nearly 16 seconds off McClogan's previous best of 15.03/17 set in February 1992 in Birmingham.

"I was certain that I could make it," said Szabo, who was cheered on by a capacity crowd of 4,500 in this Ruhr Valley town.

McClogan, who is pregnant with her second child, said this week she would miss April's London Marathon but planned to carry on until the 2000 Olympics.

The other highlight of the Dortmund meeting came in the women's 4x200 metres relay with the German quartet of Esther Moeller, Gabi and Brigit Rockneir and Andrea Philip clocking the second fastest indoor mark ever in 1:32.88.

O'Neill tipped for the top job

LONDON, Feb 14 (Reuters/ Internet): Northern Ireland's Martin O'Neill was added to the list of likely candidates for the job as England coach as the British media continued to speculate over Glenn Hoddle's successor.

A decision is due in the next few days and caretaker coach Howard Wilkinson and Fulham's Kevin Keegan have been tipped as front-runners.

But the Sunday Telegraph said that O'Neill, the former Northern Ireland international and current Leicester City manager, had been added to the short list by the FA after they decided against former incumbents Bobby Robson and Terry Venables.

Keegan, a popular choice among both fans and the media, has ruled himself out because of his commitment to Fulham, although the Sunday Mirror said the club's owner Mohamed Al Fayed had agreed the FA could at least talk to Keegan.

Golmard grounds Moya

DUBAI, Feb 14: The last seed in the Dubai Open fell Saturday when Frenchman Jerome Golmard defeated No 2 Carlos Moya to reach his first ATP Tour final ever, reports AP.

"It's like a dream. I have dreamt for a long time of a moment like this," said Golmard, who fought off a one-set deficit to clinch a 4-6, 7-5, 6-3 victory.

The Spaniard admitted that he relaxed a little after winning the first set and let Golmard back into the match.

"I was in a good position to win the match after the first set. He was hitting hard and didn't do many mistakes," said Moya.

Moya broke in the third game and maintained his pressure to win the first set without much difficulty.

The 25-year-old Golmard, who had earlier ousted fifth seed Karol Kucera and third seed Tim Henman, broke Moya in the fourth game of the second set and then held serve to take a 4-1 lead before Moya broke back to even it at 4-4.

The match appeared to be heading to a tie-break but Golmard, leading 6-5 and tending to an injured elbow with an ice pack in between games, broke Moya to take the set 7-5.

Moya's game fell apart in the third set with Golmard breaking in the first game. Moya immediately broke back, but the Frenchman, who was serving well throughout the two-hour match, broke to take a 4-1 lead and didn't look back.

Moya served 13 aces, the majority of which came in the second set and admitted that he was not very comfortable playing the left-handed Golmard.

"His serve is good and he is a lefty. I hate playing lefties," said Moya.

Golmard said that his main goal is to reach the top 30 in the world.

"I didn't have anything to lose, unlike Carlos, who has to think of ranking points," said the 61st-ranked player.

The other semifinal between Australia's Andrew Ilie and German Nicolas Kiefer was suspended due to rain. Kiefer was leading 6-3.

Rosset keeps cruising

ST PETERSBURG, Russia, Feb 14 (Reuters/ Internet): Marc Rosset maintained his record of not having dropped a set in the tournament to beat David Prinosil 6-3, 6-4 in the final of the St Petersburg Open on Sunday.

The Swiss second seed took the initiative against Prinosil from the start, breaking the unseeded German twice in the opening set.

The first break came in the fifth game after Prinosil had double-faulted twice. He was broken again in the ninth game.

Rosset appeared to lose his concentration at the start of the second set, losing his service to love.

"It was a bad service game," said the lanky Swiss. "I just lost my concentration for a moment. That's something I have to work at because when you play somebody stronger you lose your serve and the set is gone."

Rosset bounced back with a service break in the sixth game and broke again in the 10th. Prinosil saved one match point but, faced with another against him, he hit an easy forehand into the net.



Gabriela Szabo celebrates her 5000 metres world indoors record in front of the display board at Dortmund on February 13. — AFP photo

Wenger calls for a change



LONDON, Feb 14 (Reuters/ Internet): Arsene Wenger received backing on Sunday for his call for a change to the laws of the game following Arsenal's offer to replay a FA Cup match they had won through an "unsporting" goal.

Holders Arsenal beat Sheffield United 2-1 in their fifth round tie with a late goal that Wenger admitted was "sports-wise not right".

"There is a hole in the rule book, we would be better off to have a law rather than a convention," said the Arsenal manager.

David Davies, English Football Association (FA) acting chief executive, applauded Wenger's call.

An opportunity to discuss a rule change will come almost

immediately with the lawmakers of world soccer, the International Board, due to meet in Cardiff on Saturday.

"We would be delighted to discuss this at the International Board meeting because clearly while we have a convention for fair play in this country events at Arsenal did illustrate a loophole in the law," Davies said.

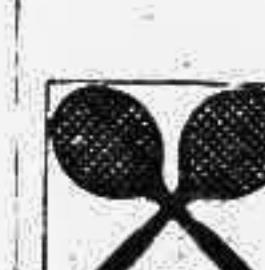
It was not going to be on the agenda next week but we have an unprecedented situation which we want to resolve as quickly as possible. In this country we pay more than just lip service to FIFA's motto of fair play," Davies said.

Responding to criticism that the FA had acted hastily, Davies said: "The reason we took a very quick decision to replay the match is that we think fair play matters."

Wenger's suggestion also found approval from one of Britain's most experienced managers, Ron Atkinson, recently installed at Nottingham Forest. Welcomed the proposal.

"These things now show up until they happen. I think it's a decent idea and it should save confusion," he said.

ATP to change code of conduct



SAN JOSE, California, Feb 14 (Reuters/ Internet): The default of Andre Agassi from the 350,000 US dollars Sybase Open on Wednesday for cursing near a linesman has led to calls that the ATP Tour's code of conduct be changed, and a tour official acknowledged that a change is likely in the near future.

"You can guarantee that when I meet with other tournament directors next month that I'm going to ask for a rule change and you can bet that most of them will be in favour of it," Sybase Open tournament director Barry MacKay said Thursday.

ATP Tour Director of Player Services Weller Evans told the news agency that the ATP Tour Player Council discussed making a change last month and said the ATP may soon join the WTA Tour and the International Tennis Federation in changing the code of conduct to allow tour supervisors discretion in the default of a player for minor code violations.

Currently, a player must be defaulted if he commits three violations in a row.

Agassi was thrown out of his second-round match against American Cecil Mamiit in San Jose for two audible obscenities and one case of verbal abuse of an official. He was fined a total of \$7,500 and lost \$5,500 in prize money, losing a total of \$13,000.

The proposed change would allow chair umpires to assess multiple game penalties on a player for minor code violations such as an audible obscenity and permit a tour supervisor flexibility in deciding whether a player committed an egregious enough offence to warrant a default.

"The ball is on the tee," Evans told Reuters. "We're almost

ready had a good indication from the players, coaches and board members that a change would be supported. We don't want to jump the gun on the WTA and ITF. We want to announce the change in cooperation with those organisations."

Agassi, who is a four-time winner of the Sybase Open, was believed to have been paid \$200,000 guarantee to appear in San Jose and is one of the event's biggest ticket sellers.

Evans said the tour is sympathetic to the tournaments' right.

There have been concerns expressed about the show being stopped too soon," he said. "Felix Mantilla's default in Munich in 1997 for kicking a bottle of water on a clay court is a perfect example of a minor code violation that should have resulted in a default."