

2002 WC could be a 76-match meet

TOKYO, Mar 14: Japan and South Korea will present FIFA with a new format for the 2002 World Cup this week aimed at increasing revenue by holding more matches, reports Reuters. The organising committee for the first World Cup in Asia will meet at FIFA headquarters in Zurich on Thursday and one of the items on the agenda is a possible change in the schedule for the 32 teams, producing a total of 76 games as opposed to 64 in France last summer. With both countries intending to use 10 stadiums each for the month-long tournament, they need more cash to help offset the costs — and FIFA has already decided that the co-hosts can keep all revenue from ticket sales. The new format would involve replacing the second round and quarterfinal knockout stages with a second phase of group matches. The first round would be the same as in France, with eight groups of four teams (48 games), but the top two from each group would then go into four new four-team groups, producing 24 games in the second round. Only the winner of each group would progress to the semifinals. The English language daily Yomiuri quoted a source as saying, "One concern is that we wouldn't want an excessive burden on the players, but a team reaching the final would play only one more game than in France, eight instead of seven. At the moment it's just one idea, one option, that is being put forward to FIFA, but both countries have asked for it to be on the agenda this week. On a visit to the far east last November and December, FIFA president Sepp Blatter assured the co-hosts there would be no financial shortfall. Despite the fact there will be expenses for two World Cups but income only for one. Korea and Japan wanted to stage the World Cup in their own right but accepted a joint-hosting arrangement in 1996. The dates for the 2002 World Cup have also to be fixed, and the two co-hosts are keen to complete the tournament by the end of June to avoid the rainy season. They felt they could stage the 48-first-round group games within 10 days, some six days quicker than in France. The system used in France has been operating since the 1986 World Cup in Mexico. The last time there were two groups or phases was in 1982 in Spain.

Vargas retains IBF crown

NEW YORK, Mar 14 (AP): Fernando Vargas figured his debut at Madison Square Garden would be a smashing success. It was, but almost no one noticed. Vargas defended his IBF junior middleweight crown for the first time Saturday night, knocking England's Howard Clarke down four times before referee Wayne Keefe finally stopped the fight at 2:29 of the fourth round. Only a few British fans arriving early for the Evander Holyfield-Lennox Lewis heavyweight unification fight paid much attention to the bout, which took place 3 1/2 hours before the main event. They cheered Clarke on, then applauded for Vargas after he gestured to them in the upper balcony following his easy win. "I couldn't get into it because there was no one here," Vargas said after improving to 16-0. "It was like fighting in a gym." Vargas had the misfortune of fighting early on the card, which has long been sold out. And his fight didn't last long enough to attract the attention of the fans who came to Madison Square Garden to see Holyfield and Lewis fight for the unified heavyweight title.

By contrast, WBA welterweight champion James Page fought before a packed house of 21,284 as he successfully defended his title with a 12-round unanimous decision over Sam Garr in the final fight before the main event. Page (24-3), making the second defence of the title he won Oct 10 by stopping Andrei Pestriev, started slowly but gradually wore Garr down. By the sixth round he was landing heavily to the head with both hands and the outcome of the bout was no longer in doubt. Even as Page and Garr fought, however, the loudest cheer came from the estimated 7,000 British fans among the crowd who cheered loudly whenever an image of Lewis appeared on the giant television screens above the ring and booed just as loudly when Holyfield was shown. Page, 147, of Pittsburg, California, was favoured by 11 points on one card, six on another and three on a third. Garr, 146 1/2, of Santa Ana, fell to 25-3. In the other heavyweight bout on the card, James Ruiz kept his position as the No 1 WBC contender by knocking Mario Cawley down four times before the fight was finally stopped at 1:09 of the fourth round. Ruiz, 234 (106 kilos), of Methuen, Massachusetts, improved to 34-3 with his 25th knockout, while Cawley, 212 (96 kilos), fell to 21-2. IBF, was a game challenger to Vargas, but it was clear from the opening round that the 21-year-old from Oxnard, Calif, was in a different class inside the ring. Vargas, who won the 154-pound (70-kilo) title by stopping Yory Boy Campas on Dec 12 — five days after his 21st birthday — fought patiently early and won the first three rounds. Early in the fourth round, though, he opened with a combination that put Clarke on one knee in the centre of the ring.

Moya numero uno now



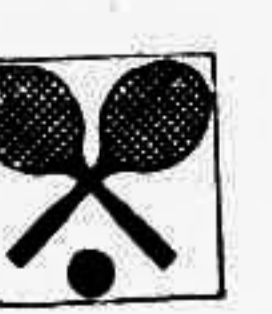
INDIAN WELLS, California, Mar 14: Carlos Moya celebrated the greatest moment of his life after a victory in Saturday's semifinals of the Champions' Cup enabled him to replace Pete Sampras as world number one, reports Reuters. Reigning French Open champion Moya, who began the week ranked fourth, beat former French Open winner Gustavo Kuerten of Brazil 6-3, 1-6, 6-1 to take advantage of stumbles this week by Sampras (1), Yevgeny Kafelnikov (2) and Alex Corretja (3). "I didn't win the tournament yet, but you have to understand this is the greatest moment of my life," Moya said to the crowd, which gave him a standing ovation. "I thought winning a Grand Slam title was the greatest thing, but being number one is." Moya will try to win his first tournament of the year today against unseeded Australian Mark Philippoussis, who crushed American qualifier Chris Woodruff 6-1, 6-2 in his semifinal. Philippoussis, who is 13-2 for the year, won his sixth career title at San Jose this past February. Moya, 22, will become the first Spaniard ever to ascend to number one status in men's tennis when the new rankings are issued Monday. Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario occupied the number one position on the women's WTA Tour for 12 weeks in 1995. "I've been saying I wanted to be the number one and I think nobody believed it," said Moya. "But when I set a goal, I try to realise it." With the final point over, Moya raced to the side of the court and wrapped his arms around coach Jose Perlas and fitness trainer Luis Miguel Morales, the three of them just kept jumping up and down with joy. Australian John Newcombe, a former world number one himself, presented Moya with a trophy to commemorate his accomplishment in an on-court ceremony. "Congratulations, wear the crown with honour and remember it's good to be king," Newcombe told Moya. The Spaniard becomes the 15th player to reach number one as he ended Pete Sampras' current streak of 29 consecutive weeks in the top spot. Sampras was just eight weeks shy of Ivan Lendl's career record of 270 weeks total as world number one.

When Moya arrived at the Champions' Cup, he was one of four players with a chance to take over the top ranking. The three others — 1999 Australian Open champion Kafelnikov, reigning two-time US Open champion Patrick Rafter and Corretja — all lost their opening-round matches to pave the way for Moya's rise. Sampras lost to Spain's Felix Mantilla in his second-round match. Moya picked the right spot to beat 1997 French Open champion Kuerten for the first time after losing in three previous encounters. The Spaniard dominated the first set, but his nerves got the better of him in the second set allowing Kuerten to level the match. Amazingly, Moya seemed remarkably calm in the third set, methodically picking apart Kuerten's game, particularly taking advantage of his friend's crumbling forehand. On Kuerten's first service game in the third set, Moya broke serve at love when the Brazilian smacked an inside out forehand approach into the net. "I played, maybe, the worst game in the match when I served in the third set," Kuerten said. "I think this was the difference between him to win. We knew the semifinal was the race to number one and it was very exciting. Maybe, I got a little bit more nervous than him."



Carlos Moya proudly holds aloft the Spanish colours and the trophy he was presented with after becoming the top ranked tennis player in the world at the Champions' Cup in California on March 13.

Steffi stoops to Serena



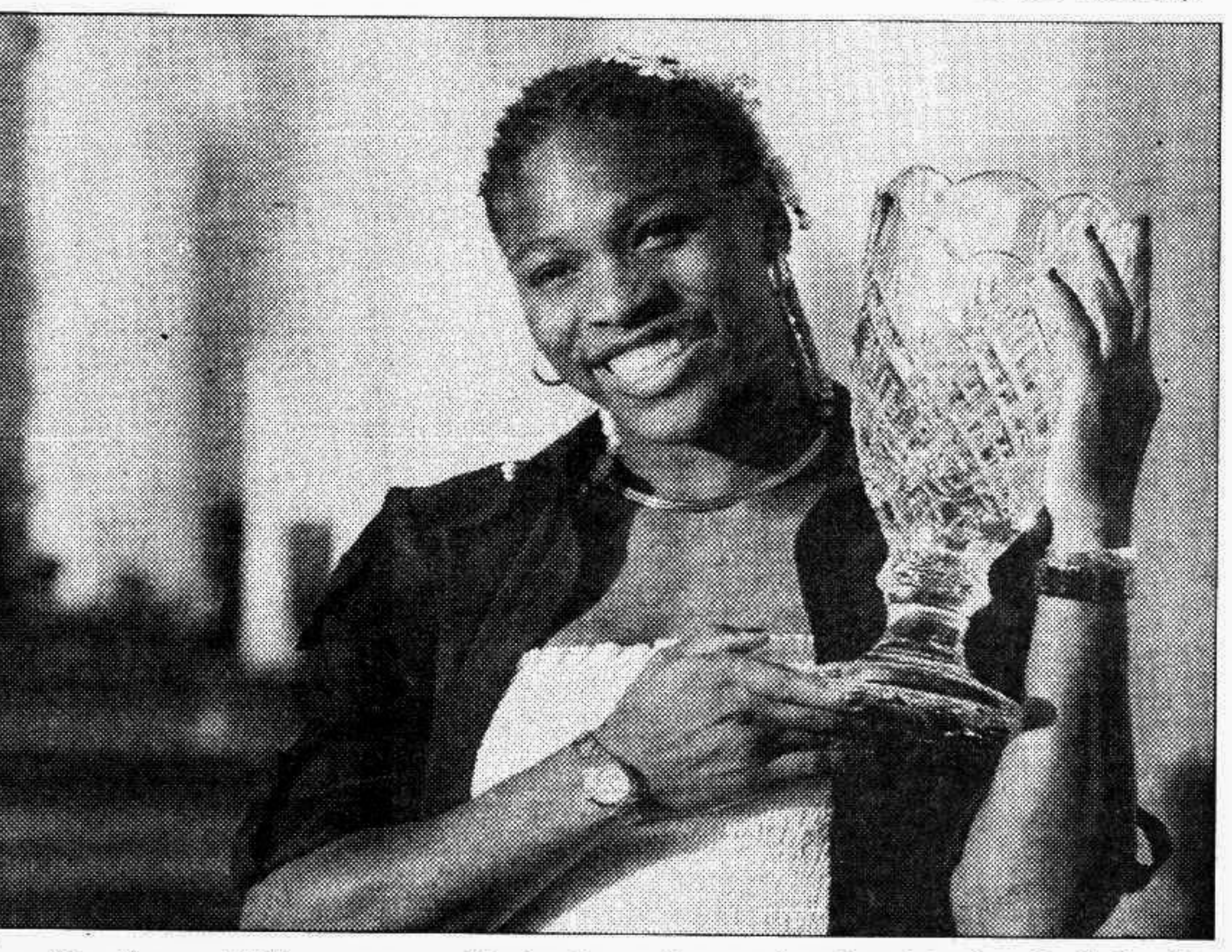
INDIAN WELLS, California, Mar 14: After staging a coming out party by winning in Paris two weeks ago, Serena Williams was fully crowned as an elite player Saturday by overcoming a sore knee to beat Steffi Graf in the first round of the \$3 million dollars Evert Cup, reports Reuters. The unseeded Williams, 17, toppled fifth-seeded former world number one Graf 6-3, 3-6, 7-5 in one hour, 45 minutes. "I'm so excited," said Williams, who bounced up and down like a popo stick after winning a 12-ball rally to claim her second career title. My knee was really bothering me but I decided to be a champion. I'd have to play through it or quit, and I played through it." Williams played an ethereal first set, moving with the speed of a puma and smacking winners all over the court from a low crouch position. With Graf serving at break point at 3-4, the aggressive Williams forced the 30-year-old legend into a backhand error. The American teenager — who served with remarkable variety and effectiveness throughout the match — closed out the set with a slice service winner and a down-the-middle blast. But in the second set, the steady Graf hung tough and began to confuse her younger foe by mixing sharply angled crosscourt forays with down the line blasts. Graf broke Williams to go ahead 3-1 in the second set on the fifth break point of the game. Williams began pressing the rest of the set, and Graf, the owner of 21 Grand Slam titles, easily held serve to close it out 6-3. Williams, who beat France's Amelie Mauresmo to win the Open de Gaz two weeks ago, appeared to tire early in third set. Graf broke her to open the set by crushing a return of serve down the middle that the serve-and-volleying Williams couldn't pick off the cement. With Graf ahead 2-1, Williams took a medical time-out during the changeover to have her right knee wrapped, after a spotty game where she fell behind 1-3. Williams bore down and began playing with the same enthusiasm she had in the first set. With Graf serving at 4-3, the muscular free-swinging Williams began to creep inside the court and dominate, break-

ing Graf to tie it 4-4 when she forced her into a backhand error. Graf, who has yet to win a title this year, couldn't do anything with Williams' serve after that and collapsed under the pressure of the American's bullet returns. With Graf serving at 5-6, Williams broke the German to win the match, until the Evert Cup. Graf had not lost a final she has completed since the 1994 US Open. Williams, who will move up to a career-high number 16 in the rankings, smacked 35 winners in the match including nine aces. The usually powerful Graf could only manage 11 winners against her quick foe.

Inter-varsity cricket Bangladesh inter-university cricket competition began yesterday with three matches deciding on the day, reports UNB. Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University Prof A K Azad Chowdhury inaugurated the meet at Jagannath Hall ground. Nine teams — Dhaka University, Jahangirnagar University, Chittagong University, Rajshahi University, Khulna University, Islamic University, Agricultural University, Shahjalal Science and Technology University and BUET — are taking part in the meet. On the opening day, Dhaka University beat Agricultural University at the Jagannath Hall ground, while at BUET ground Jahangirnagar University defeated Chittagong University in the first match and BUET beat Khulna University.

Nagoya Marathon Morounova's

NAGOYA, Japan, Mar 14: Lyubov Morounova came back from behind and made a long solo run after the 25-kilometre mark to win the Nagoya international women's marathon in a personal best time today, reports AFP. The 28-year-old Russian held on to her lead to deny any hopes of a late challenge from Japan's Mayumi Ichikawa. Morounova, seventh here last year, clocked two hours 27 minutes 43 seconds of break her previous best time of 2:28:51 set at the Great Wall marathon in Beijing last season. Ichikawa, who closed the gap slowly but steadily in the second half of the race. Also came back from behind to take second place in 2:27:57, ahead of fellow Japanese Hiromi Omimami third in 2:30:19.



A smiling Serena Williams poses with the Evert Cup trophy after defeating Steffi Graf in the final in Indian Wells, California on March 13.

Honours shared in Milan derby

ROME Mar 14: Ronaldo started his first match in two months but Inter Milan needed a late equaliser by Javier Zanetti to draw 2-2 in a hard-fought derby with city rivals AC Milan on Saturday reports Reuter. The draw lifted AC Milan level with second-placed Fiorentina and Parma on 47 points. Fiorentina play today and Parma beat Bari 2-1. Leaders, Lazio, on 51 points, face bottom club Empoli today. Ronaldo, back from a knee injury, played just the first half but touched few balls and was overshadowed by his Brazil teammate Leonardo, who scored well-taken goals either side of the interval to give AC Milan a 2-1 lead. Inter had been lucky to take the lead in the seventh minute with an own goal by France's Bruno N'Gotty. "Hats off to Leonardo," said Ronaldo, who is expected to play all 90 minutes when Inter and Manchester United clash in a European Cup second leg quarterfinal on Wednesday. Midfielder Leonardo equalised in the 15th minute with a brilliant left-footed volley from a Thomas Helveg cross. He made it 2-1 seven minutes after the half with a free kick from just outside the middle of the area that caught goalkeeper Gianluca Pagliuca napping. Just when Inter looked like losing for the seventh time in their last eight matches, they drew level on the counter-attack. Nigeria's Taribo West found Zanetti unmarked in the right side of the area and the Argentine midfielder slotted home past an on-rushing Christian Abbiati. Parma overcame a tough Bari with late goals from Argentines Hernan Crespo and Juan Veron. Bari had taken the lead after three minutes with a goal by South African Phil Masinga from a corner kick. Earlier, Italy's Filippo Inzaghi scored late to give 10-man Juventus a 2-1 win over Udinese and fifth place in Serie A. Inzaghi's opportunistic close-range strike shocked Udinese who looked like scoring after Juve goalkeeper Michelangelo Rampulla was sent off in the 63rd minute for handling outside his area. Uruguayan Daniel Fonseca had headed home an Angelo Di Livio cross to make it 1-0 on the half-hour for Juve. Argentine striker Roberto Sosa equalised just after the interval for Udinese, who dropped to sixth. As Roma, inspired by Francesco Totti, beat Bologna 3-1 with headers by Marco Delvecchio after 10 and 38 minutes.

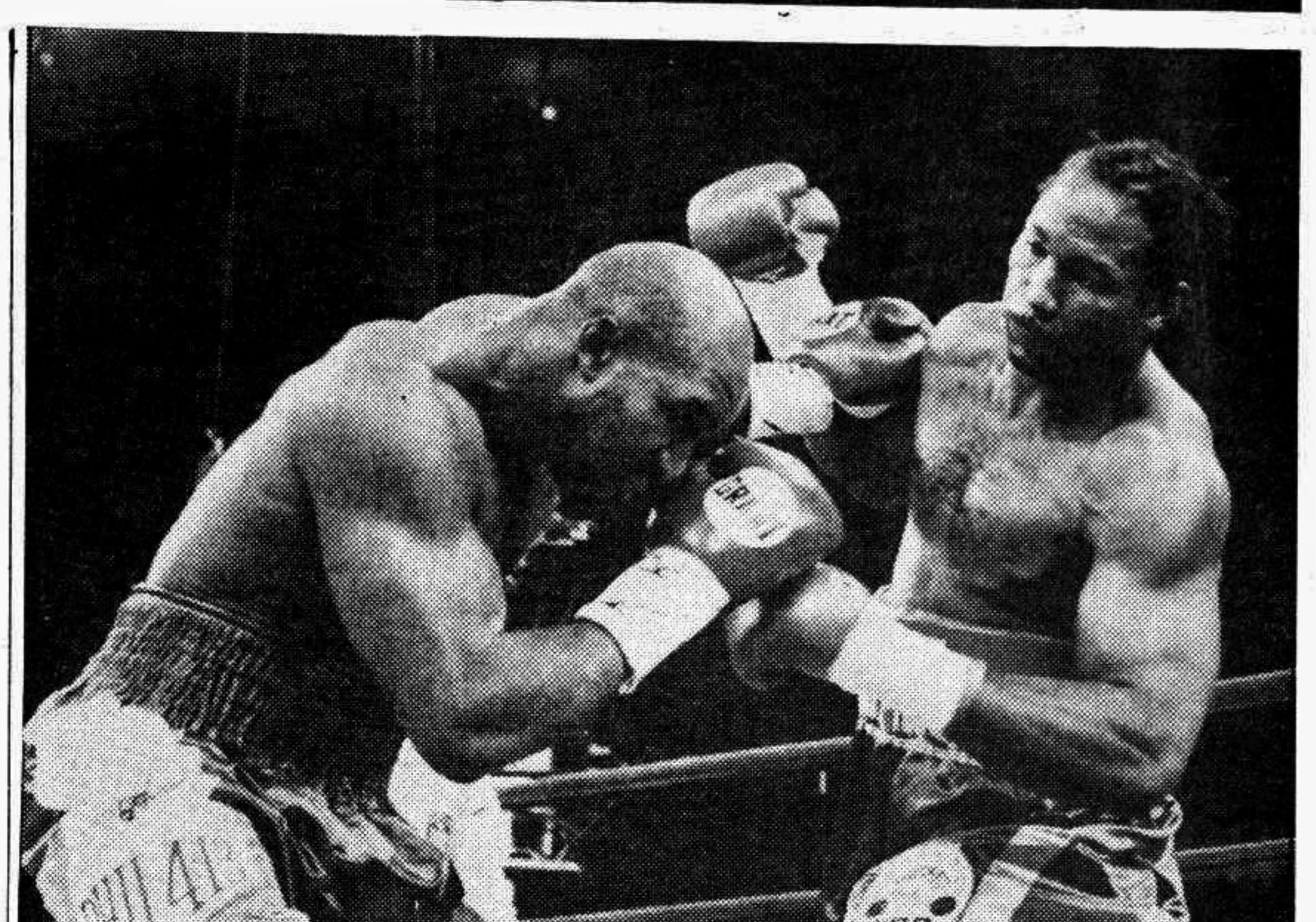
Carmine Gautieri made it 3-0 shortly after Bologna goalkeeper Francesco Antonioli was sent off for elbowing Delvecchio in the head in the 52nd minute. Swede Kennet Andersson pulled one back in the 68th for Bologna. The official judges' scoring was: Larry O'Connell of Britain 115-115, Larry Christodoulou of South Africa favored Lewis 116-113, and Jean Williams of the United States had it 115-113 for Holyfield. The AP card favored Lewis 117-111. When the decision was announced, it was roundly booed by the sellout crowd of 21,284, which paid a gate of more than 11 million dollars. Holyfield never came close to having Lewis in serious trouble while Holyfield was staggered on several occasions. His left eye appeared almost closed and the left side of his face was badly swollen. Much had been made of Holyfield's prediction that Lewis would fall in the third

Scene in the Garden

NEW YORK, Mar 14: Nothing quickens the pulse of Madison Square Garden quite like a heavyweight championship fight, and there was a rare air of extra electricity Saturday night for the Evander Holyfield-Lennox Lewis bout, reports AP. A celebrity-studded sellout crowd of 21,284, paying prices from 100 dollars to 1,500 dollars, turned the Garden into the centre of the boxing universe for the first time in a long time. It was the first undisputed heavyweight title fight at the arena since Muhammad Ali-Joe Frazier in 1971, and the first sellout for a fight of any type in the big arena since Roberto Duran fought Davey Moore in 1983. "Four hundred bucks will get you upstairs. Anything good downstairs, that's at least 1,500 dollars," a scalper said outside the "World's Most Famous Arena." There were plenty of takers, too, as would-be customers appeared to outnumber loose tickets by a wide margin. Mr Jagged and Keith Richards of the Rolling Stones, John F Kennedy Jr., Jack Nicholson, Jerry Seinfeld, Donald Trump, Sean "Puffy" Combs, Bill Parcells, Patrick Ewing, Spike Lee and Michael Douglas were among the celebrities. For each of them, there were legions of wannabes. Hipsters in thousand-dollar suits, glamorous women who turned dozens of heads at a time, actors and models complimenting each other on their looks. This was not the cell phone and business suit crowd that frequents Knicks and Rangers games. This was more of a cash crowd, the type of people that pull out diamond-studded money clips of 100 dollar bills when buying their hot dogs and popcorn. A large and vocal contingent of Brits were in attendance, too, having made the trip overseas to cheer on Lewis, a Jamaican who grew up in Canada and fights out of England. Even the scalper ranks were speckled with a few fellows whose roots were closer to York than New York. "Any spares?" a man with a cockney accents asked, which earned him little but quizzical stares.

Valencia close in on Barca

MADRID, Mar 14: A glaring error from Real Betis keeper Toni Prats handed Valencia a 1-0 victory on Saturday that takes them to within a point of Spanish league leaders Barcelona, reports Reuters. European hopefuls Celta Vigo and Mallorca also managed to keep up the pressure on Barcelona, who take on local rivals Espanyol today. And Real Madrid gave themselves a boost ahead of their European Cup quarterfinal return against Dynamo Kiev on Wednesday as they came from behind to beat Racing Santander 3-1. Valencia's victory gives Claudio Ranieri's side 46 points from 26 games, one behind Barcelona and one clear of Celta Vigo and Mallorca, who beat Atletico Madrid 2-1. Celta's 1-0 win at Real Zaragoza came courtesy of a Haim Revivo strike in the 20th minutes. Zaragoza had more of the possession thereafter but only really managed to stretch their visitors after Lubo Penev's 74th minute sending off. Real Madrid, whose Welsh coach John Toshack admitted this week that anything less than victory in Santander would spell the end for their title hopes, started nervously but improved markedly in the second half as they moved up to fifth, four points behind Barcelona. Ismael Ruiz had capitalised on a flat-footed Real Defence to head the home side into the lead on the half hour. But Real Gonzalez, Roberto Carlos and Davor Suker struck in the second period to keep Real's faint hopes of a European and domestic double alive. Valencia's win in Seville came from an unlikely source as Prats, one of the most highly rated keepers in the country, made an uncharacteristic error. With an insipid first half drawing to a close, Gaizka Mendietia tried his luck from just outside the area with a weakly struck free kick. He was as surprised as anyone when Prats, reacting slowly as he got down to his left, allowed the ball to slip through his hands and into the net. Valencia were lucky to hold



Evander Holyfield (L) hides himself from a Lennox Lewis punch during their heavyweight unification title bout in New York on March 13. — AFP photo

Farcical finish to the unification bout



NEW YORK, Mar 14 (AP): It turned out Evander Holyfield wasn't telling the truth. Instead of a third-round knockout, the 36-year-old IBF-WBA heavyweight champion escaped with a loudly booed draw against Lennox Lewis on Saturday night at Madison Square Garden. Holyfield never came close to knocking Lewis down, let alone out. The 33-year-old Briton seemed to dominate the 12-round bout for the undisputed heavyweight championship. According to a punch count, Lewis landed 348 of 613 punches for a connection rate of 57 per cent. Holyfield connected on 130 of 385 punches, or 34 per cent. Lewis landed more jabs than Holyfield did punches. Yet on a judge favoured Holyfield and another called it a draw.

The official judges' scoring was: Larry O'Connell of Britain 115-115, Larry Christodoulou of South Africa favored Lewis 116-113, and Jean Williams of the United States had it 115-113 for Holyfield. The AP card favored Lewis 117-111. When the decision was announced, it was roundly booed by the sellout crowd of 21,284, which paid a gate of more than 11 million dollars. Holyfield never came close to having Lewis in serious trouble while Holyfield was staggered on several occasions. His left eye appeared almost closed and the left side of his face was badly swollen. Much had been made of Holyfield's prediction that Lewis would fall in the third

round and, while Holyfield appeared to have the best of that round when he landed several hard rights to the head, Lewis was never in danger of going down. "He controlled the fight. It wasn't even close," said Emanuel Steward, who trains Lewis and used to train Holyfield. "This is what is killing boxing." Not only was the scoring roundly booed, but Lewis had to win the last round on O'Connell's card just to get a draw. The 33-year-old Lewis appeared to be just too big for Holyfield, who never dominated the action as he had in twice beating Mike Tyson. "It's real simple. People around the ring are not the judges. Things happen sometimes like that," Holyfield said. "That's the way it goes. I feel like the heavyweight champion of the world." "The whole thing is, I'm not the judges. I was fighting."

Lewis' size seemed to be too much for Holyfield. Every time the American tried to get inside, he was either hit or tied up. In each of six rounds, Holyfield was credited with landing fewer than 10 punches. Yet O'Connell, who scored it a draw, gave Holyfield five of the last seven rounds and called another even. Lewis was bidding to become the first Brit to win the undisputed heavyweight championship in this century. Of the 12 previous British challengers who had failed only two had gone the distance. Lewis seemed to control the action with left jabs and numerous right-hand leads to the head while the 6-2 1/2 (1.68-metre) Holyfield had trouble getting inside the 6-5 (1.93-metre)

Lewis' reach. Swelling started around Holyfield's left eye early in the fight and Lewis seemed to have the best of the middle rounds. Lewis, 246 (112 kilos), rattled Holyfield, 215 (98 kilos), on several occasions but never came close to putting him down. As the fight drew to a close, Lewis raised his hands in triumph and 7,000 British fans gave him a rousing cheer. Those cheers became a chorus of boos that rained down on the Garden ring. One person who did not agree with the decision was TVKO fight analyst Larry Merchant, who gave Lewis nine of the 12 rounds. While the decision was roundly booed, there were no disturbances in the arena. It was an interesting fight although it certainly didn't carry the drama or action that occurred in this building on March 6, 1971. That was The Fight between Joe Frazier and Muhammad Ali, in which Frazier knocked down Ali in the 15th round and won a unanimous decision to prove he was the undisputed heavyweight champion. "I felt I won the fight," Lewis said. "It was my time to shine and they ripped me off. I'm the undisputed heavyweight champion of the world and the whole world knows it. He should give me those two belts because he knows they're mine. Holyfield earned 20 million dollars for the first draw on his record but, in the eyes of many ring-siders, it was one of the most important decisions of his career because it kept him a champion. He is now 36-3-1 with 25 knockouts. The bitterly disappointed Lewis, who earned 10 million dollars, now is 34-1-1.

Valencia close in on Barca



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on to their lead as Denilson and Finidi George both went close but after Betis had two players sent off in quick succession the match was all but settled, although Valencia themselves had Luis Milla ordered off with three minutes to go. Mallorca's win at Atletico also owed something to a bizarre error. Defender Jose Antonio Chamot, attempting to clear an optimistic centre from the left, succeeded only in slicing the ball over his goalkeeper and into the net. Jose Mari Romero levelled the scores with a sharp finish 10 minutes later but poor defending allowed Veljko Paunovic a free header for the winner on the half-hour. Defeat for Atletico, who will attempt to defend a 2-1 lead in Italy on Wednesday in the second leg of their UEFA Cup quarter-final against AS Roma, means they have now picked up just one point in their last seven league games and stay down in 12th place in the table. Club president Jesus Gil conceded: "We need a centre forward like we need to eat. We're clearly in a difficult situation.



Inter Milan's Brazilian superstriker Ronaldo (L) tries to dodge Bruno N'Gotty of AC Milan during their Serie A encounter in Milan on March 13. — AFP photo