

New bidding rules for 2006 Winte Olympics

LAUSANNE, Switzerland, Mar 19 (AP) The bidding for the 2006 Winter Games now comes down to 60 minutes in Seoul.

With the potential sites called off-limits for IOC members, the six cities vying for the Olympics are centering much of their efforts on a do-or-die, hour-long presentation June 18 at the IOC congress in South Korea, on the eve of the decision.

"In Seoul, those 60 minutes will be vital," said Dr Dieter Kahl, the general manager of the Klagenfurt, Austria, bid, a rank outsider compared to heavy favourite Sion, Switzerland, and Turin, Italy.

"We'll do that little extra for the Seoul presentation, make the quality of the film better," said Lance Kelly, the international coordinator for Sion's bid.

The ban on visits broke with years of persistent wooing of members with winning and dining, lavish gift-giving and other pampering practices which are at the heart of the worst scandal in Olympic history.

Now the onus is on the little things, and a mass of paperwork mailed to every member, to make a difference. The old rules have gone.

"The race can start all over again," Kelly said.

Apart from Sion, Turin; Helsinki; Finland; Zakopane, Poland; Poprad-Tatry, Slovakia; and Klagenfurt are bidding.

Klagenfurt is sending its goodwill ambassador, skiing great Franz Klammer, to the United Nations in New York to promote the tri-nation bid from Austria, Italy and Slovenia as a symbol of international peace. It also wants to court the European Union with its symbolic bid for European unity.

But for many, Sion already has an unfair edge, since it bid twice before, receiving many of the IOC members for personalised visits now barred to the others.

"It's clear that if you bid three times, you have a psychological advantage," admitted Kelly.

In Seoul, a 15-member panel will trim the six hopefuls for 2006 down to a final pair, then immediately send that race to the general assembly for a ballot.

The bidding war between the cities had basically been suspended since December when the Salt Lake bribery scandal broke.

One thing that will surely rise now is paper consumption. Every city is making plans to let every member know the smallest in and out of the bid project. "Will they have time to read and look at it all," asked Martin Sarakangas, chairman of Helsinki's bidding committee.



Chelsea player-manager Gianluca Vialli places the ball into the Valerenga net to score his team's first goal in their European Cup Winners' Cup quarterfinal second leg encounter at Oslo on March 18.

Cup Winners' Cup

Big four sail into semis



LONDON, Mar 19 (Reuters/Internet) In the European Cup Winners' Cup, holders Chelsea and Arsenal are favourites to reach the final.

The Spaniards are on course to meet in the final. Chelsea were drawn to play Real Mallorca while Lazio will face Lokomotiv Moscow. The semifinals are on April 8 and 22 with the final at Villa Park, Birmingham, on May 19.

The four favourites advanced to the semifinals with little difficulty on Thursday as Mallorca continued their dream first European season.

The Spaniards beat Varteks Varazdin 3-1 after a goalless first leg in Croatia to join Chelsea, Lazio and Lokomotiv Moscow in a predictable last four.

Holders Chelsea beat Valerenga 3-2 in Norway for a 6-2 aggregate. Lazio cruised past Panionios 3-0 in Rome for a 7-0 aggregate and Moscow won 1-0 at Israel's Maccabi Haifa for a 4-0 overall.

While those three had laid their foundations with big victories in the first leg two weeks ago, Mallorca still had

work to do.

The surprise package of the Spanish season -- they are fourth in the league and in the semifinals of the cup -- were in control from the start but could not find the net.

But two goals in two minutes early in the second half ensured victory for a team who have never won any sort of trophy.

Ariel Ibagaza got the first after 53 minutes and Veljko Paunovic doubled the lead as the Varteks defence fell apart.

Dani Garcia got the third after 75 minutes and Andrija Baijic's consolation header two minutes from time came too late to spoil the islanders' celebrations.

Greek outsiders Panionios said they were going to Rome purely for the experience and did not care about the result but Lazio, who rested almost all their first-choice players, seemed similarly uninterested in a dull first half.

But last year's UEFA Cup runners-up came to life after the break and went ahead through Czech Pavel Nedved in the 70th minute.

Yugoslav Dejan Stankovic got another seven minutes later

and Spain's Ivan De la Pena tapped in the third after good work by Nedved.

Defending champions Chelsea looked on course for a hatful of goals as Gianluca Vialli and Bernard Lambourde had them 2-0 up after 15 minutes for a 5-0 aggregate lead.

But some sloppy defending by a makeshift back four allowed the Norwegians to hit back with goals by Fredrik Kjolner and John Carew, albeit either side of a thumping headed goal by Tore Andre Flo.

Chelsea, who had lost two successive domestic matches in the previous week, tightened up after the break and there were no further goals although Tom Henning Hovi almost put away a spectacular 35-metre effort that Ed De Goeij just managed to tip over.

Lokomotiv Moscow comfortably reached the last four for the second successive season. The Russians, who held a 3-0 first leg cushion, defended from the off and completed the win with a 72nd minute penalty by Igor Chuganinov after he had been brought down by Alon Harazi.

Real aim to start afresh



MADRID, Mar 19 (Reuters/Internet) At first glance there are several more important fixtures to be contested in the Spanish Primera Liga this weekend than Sunday's match between Real Madrid and Extremadura.

Barcelona's visit to Real Sociedad could see the reigning Spanish champions extend their lead at the top of the first division.

The clash between fourth and fifth-placed Mallorca and Deportivo will also have a crucial bearing on how close the chasing pack can stay to the Catalan club.

However all of Spain is keen to know how big is Real Madrid's hangover from their 2-0 defeat in the Ukraine by Dynamo Kiev on Wednesday which saw the reigning European champions knocked out of this season's European Cup.

Real Madrid coach John Toshack has received rare praise in the Spanish media for reviving team spirit in the Santiago Bernabeu dressing room but he knows that a good display is required against lowly Extremadura if the knives in the club's boardroom and Spanish newspaper offices are not to start being sharpened.

"The season did not start and finish with the game on Wednesday. We are still playing in the league and we have to face Extremadura. After that we have got Alaves [another relegation-threatened club]," Toshack said.

The results in these games will decide whether we can still carry on fighting for the league title this season.

What I want is for us to carry on playing at the level we did in Kiev but without losing any more games.

Toshack has told his team in no uncertain terms not to take it easy against Extremadura. "I hope Sunday will be an interesting test of the players' character."

He is looking for a repeat of the 5-1 victory earlier this season when Real Madrid visited Extremadura and will also want to preserve his unbeaten record in the Bernabeu, across both his stints as coach.

Toshack also has the specific problem of trying to raise the flagging morale and form of Fernando Hierro.

This season the central defender, who celebrates his 31st birthday next Tuesday, has been blamed for a fair proportion of the 42 goals that Real Madrid have conceded.

On top of his indifferent form, Hierro has been involved in various incidents which have seen him clash with team mates and opponents and pick up a flurry of yellow cards along the way. His problems were analysed in depth by the noted Spanish soccer magazine Don Balon this week under the headline: "The cross that Hierro

bears -- a great player but a difficult and controversial person."

However if anything motivates Hierro and the rest of the Real Madrid squad it will be the sight of Extremadura taking to the field in their jerseys of claret and blue.

The fact that the colours bear a close similarity to those of their bitter rivals Barcelona, who have a four point lead at the top of the Spanish first division with 50 points from 26 games, is no coincidence.

The club, from the small regional town of Almeria, was formed in 1928 by a group of Barcelona supporters.

They have retained the familiar colours of the Catalan club to this day despite having progressed from being an amateur outfit a decade ago to becoming a first division side, albeit one striving to avoid relegation.

Other Primera Liga matches this weekend (league positions in parentheses):

Playing on Saturday

ESPANYOL (15) v ATHLETIC BILBAO (7)

Quique Martin, who has not played a game this year, and Cameroon international Samuel Eto'o are both in Espanyol's squad of 20 but coach Miguel Angel Brindisi is expected to stick with the same starting eleven that went down 3-0 at Barcelona last Saturday apart from Sergio Gonzalez replacing Nan Ribiero on the right wing.

Athletic coach Luis Fernandez has suggested that midfielder Jorge Perez will start instead of Julien Guerrero.

Playing on Sunday

ALAVES (17) v ATLETICO MADRID (12)

Former Tottenham player Nicola Bertini is a doubt for the home side with a leg abduction strain and Spanish under-20 international Gerard Lopez is expected to retain his spot in the Alaves midfield. Atletico

are expected to have the same team that started against Mallorca last Saturday although David Tenenat may come into the attack in place of Juan Valeron.

CELTA VIGO (3) v RACING SANTANDER (14)

Celta lose Bulgarian sharpshooter Lubo Penev through suspension and Racing are missing defender Washington Tals for similar reasons. Yugoslav international Viado Gudelj will deputise for Penev while Racing bring Jesus Merino into their back four.

Racing coach Gustavo Benitez will also have to find a replacement for midfielder Geli Garcia, who has a sprained ankle.

MALLORCA (4) v DEPORTIVO CORUNA (5)

Boosted by their midweek European Cup Winners' Cup triumph, Mallorca still have a tough task against high flying Deportivo but the island side are expected to name the same side that started in their 3-1 win against Varteks Varazdin on Thursday. Czech international goalkeeper Petr Kouba could play his first league game for Deportivo for more than a year after Jacques Songo'o suffered a foot injury in training during the week.

OVIEDO (10) v VALLADOLID (13)

Oviedo could have two changes in midfield with Peter Moller likely to lose his place to Yugoslav international Albert Nadj and Jaime Fernandez unlikely to have recovered sufficiently from recent injury problems.

Valladolid make two changes, Jesus Turis coming into their midfield in place of the suspended Jose Luis Caminero while Juan Pena returns to the centre of the defence in place of Jose Garcia Calvo.

REAL SOCIEDAD (8) v BARCELONA (1)

Barcelona have not lost at the Anoeta stadium for more than a decade but they could have trouble maintaining their streak with the suspension of club captain Luis Figo.

The San Sebastian hosts have reshaped their attack and Darko Kovacevic will be partnered by Igor Cvitanovic up front while Spanish international Francisco De Pedro is also expected to return in midfield.

SALAMANCA (20) v REAL BETIS (11)

Despite their position at the foot of the first division and last weekend's 1-0 loss at Athletic Bilbao, Salamanca coach Josu Ortuondo is expected to retain his faith in the same side. Betis have striker Oli Alvarez suspended and, with Alonso Perez still on the sidelines, coach Javier Clemente is in a quandary over who to pick as his main target man.

TENERIFE (19) v VILLARREAL (16)

Tenerife have a lamentable home record this season but may be buoyed by the fact that flu has swept through the Villarreal squad with first team regulars Gica Craioveanu, Roberto Fernandez and David Albelda all in bed this week. The only bright spot for the visitors is that Manuel Alfaro can play following a Spanish football federation decision not to suspend him immediately after nothing up his fifth yellow card last weekend.

VALENCIA (2) v REAL ZARAGOZA (9)

Luis Milla will be missing for Valencia after getting sent off last week so a recall is expected for Swedish international midfielder Stefan Schwarz.

Argentine international midfielder Kily Gonzalez may be left out of the Zaragoza side following intense speculation about his immediate departure from the club.

Petit has had enough

LONDON, Mar 19 (Reuters/Internet) French World Cup winner Emmanuel Petit told The Mirror newspaper on Friday he would be leaving Arsenal at the end of the season after being sent off four times in his 17 months in England.

"I've just had enough and I won't change my mind," he told the newspaper.

"I'm totally fed up with what has been happening. If I am going to be shown the yellow card every time I open my mouth or make a mistake on the pitch -- while others are getting away with much worse -- I'm wasting my time here."

"I'm not even sure that winning the double again can make me change my mind about leaving."

Petit, whose outstanding form last season and again this has been a major factor in Arsenal's success, was sent off for the fourth time since October 1997 against Everton on Saturday.

His earlier dismissals were against Aston Villa in October 1997, Charlton in August 1998 and Wolverhampton Wanderers in the F.A. Cup in January.

He has now served three suspensions this season and stresses that he has not fallen out with Arsenal's French coach Arsene Wenger or any of his team mates.

"Some of the Arsenal team have been trying to talk me round this week and I appreciate their concern. I've also had lots of letters from supporters -- even."

Tottenham fans -- begging me to stay. But I'm finding it difficult to go out and do my job."

Petit had a golden spell last season winning the League title and F.A. Cup with Arsenal -- as well as scoring the final goal in France's 3-0 win over Brazil in the World Cup Final in Paris.

Moya's tough time ahead

KEY BISCAINE, Florida, Mar 19 (AP) Carlos Moya's first tournament as the No 1 player in the world could be his last.

The Spaniard is just one of five men with a chance to emerge from the Lipton Championships ranked No. 1. Moya leads US star Pete Sampras by just 37 computer points, and Australia's Patrick Rafter, Russia's Yevgeny Kafelnikov and Spain's Alex Corretja also are in the chase.

Moya, who plays Italy's Davide Sanguineti in his opening match Friday or Saturday, knows it won't be easy to stay No. 1.

"I'm going to have to fight a lot if I want to win, because now all the players want to beat me," he said Thursday. "It will be difficult to win every match, because they're going to be extra motivated."

Moya, the defending French Open champion, is the 15th player and the first Spaniard to earn the No 1 ranking. He overtook Sampras by winning his semifinal match last week in Indian Wells, California, prompting a memorable celebration on the court by Moya, his coach and trainer. They formed a circle, held hands and began pumping up and down.

Winning Grand Slams is great, but I think being No 1 is the greatest thing that can happen to you," Moya said. "There have only been 15 players. That shows you how difficult it is to get up there."

Moya, who lost a five-set final to Australia's Mark Philippoussis in Indian Wells, will try to improve on a modest 2-2 career record on Lipton's hard courts. His ascent to No. 1 shows that Spaniards can succeed on surfaces other than clay.

"Clay was my natural surface, where I move better," he said. "I don't have to think at all to hit the ball. But it was always in my mind that I wanted to be a good player on hard courts."

Moya's reign begins a year after Chile's Marcelo Rios became the first No 1 player from South America. Rios rose to No 1 by winning Lipton and held the spot for six weeks in 1998.

"I'm going to try to end the French Open as No 1," Moya said. "That will be difficult, but that's my next goal."

Kosecki banned

NEW YORK, Mar 19: Chicago Fire forward Roman Kosecki was suspended three games, including Saturday's Major League Soccer season-opener and fined an undisclosed amount for his "abusive" behaviour toward a referee in last week's exhibition game against Tampa Bay, the league announced Thursday, reports AP.

The 33-year-old Pole the Fire's second-leading scorer last year with nine goals during their championship season, was ejected in the 68th minute of the match in Fort Myers, Florida, that Tampa Bay won 1-4.

The abuse came after Kosecki was ejected by American referee Noel Kenny, but neither club nor league officials would specify the reason for the ejection or suspension and fine.

However, witnesses said Kosecki spit in Kenny's face. It is the second confrontation Kosecki has had with referees in less than a year. On Aug. 4, Kosecki shoved referee Rich Grady in the US Open Cup semifinal against Dallas in New Orleans, earning him a ban from this year's tournament.

Chicago beat the Burn 3-2 and went on to defeat the Columbus Crew in the Cup final.

The Fire are set to open their new season Saturday against the Clash in San Jose, California.

Chang, Korda falter



KEY BISCAINE, Florida, Mar 19 (AP) Boris Becker played his first match in the United States in three years, and he'll have at least one more.

The six-time Grand Slam champion, who has been flirting with retirement since 1997, beat Gianluca Pozzi 6-4, 1-6, 6-4 in the opening round of the Lipton Championships on Thursday.

Playing in his final US tournament, Becker plans to

enter Wimbledon this summer and then retire. His wife is expecting their second child in August.

"I felt I had one more Wimbledon in me to finish my career where it really started for me," said Becker, 31, who has won Wimbledon three times.

"Obviously I'm a few notches down, but it's still not easy to play me on a good day. The more matches I have, the more dangerous I become. Hopefully I can have another good match in a couple of days."

The victory was Becker's



German Boris Becker is delighted after recording his first round victory in the Lipton Championships in Florida on March 18.

first in the United States since the 1995 US Open.

Only unseeded players were in action on the first day of the Lipton. Among the winners were Jennifer Capriati, who beat Silvija Talaja 6-4, 6-3, and Vince Spadea, who swept Franco Squillari 6-3, 6-2.

Michael Chang, losing his fourth match in a row, was eliminated by Juan Antonio Marin 7-6, 7-6, and Petr Korda lost to Christian Ruud 6-2, 7-6.

Becker looked a step slow at times against Pozzi but played aggressively, winning 41 points at the net. The small late-night crowd was subdued until the third set, when chants of "let's go, Boris" broke out.

Becker became angered by several line calls, and he screamed at a linesman after losing a crucial point in the final set. Two points later, he broke Pozzi's serve for a 5-4 lead, then closed out the victory with a winning backhand volley, followed by a satisfied fist pump.

"I'm surprised, actually, to be able to win," Becker said. "Pozzi plays every week, but I was able to play well on the big points."

Becker, ranked 78th despite his recent inactivity, was playing just his second match of the year and his first in the Lipton since 1994. He lives part of the year near Key Biscayne but has withdrawn from the tournament at least four times because of ailments. The repeated no-shows raised speculation that he was more interested in spending time on the beach than on the court.

"I owe something to the tournament," Becker said. "They've been having a hard time with me the last couple of years. It was hard to believe I was here, and at the last minute something would happen. I wanted to give it one more shot, and I'm happy to be able to pull it off."

Becker's second-round opponent will be Marat Safin, ranked 26th. Becker is also scheduled to play doubles with Jan Michael Gambill.

Becker said his schedule after the Lipton will include Hong Kong, Tokyo, Munich, perhaps Rome and Queens. He won't play the French Open, a tournament he's never won.

Furore rages after fight



NEW YORK, Mar 19 (AP) As a new investigation began Thursday into the controversial draw be-

tween Evander Holyfield and Lennox Lewis, the British heavyweight demanded that "Everything should be looked into."

A still furious Lewis returned home to London and urged Holyfield to hand over the WBA and IBF titles.

"If Evander's a man, he should admit that he got beat and give me my belts," the WBC champion said. "But he's not that kind of character."

Holyfield is holding his belts right now for me. They're actually my belts, but he's holding them."

Manhattan District Attorney Robert Morgenthau has convened a grand jury to issue subpoenas and gather testimony about Saturday's unification bout at Madison Square Garden -- one of three investigations into the fight.

A New York state Senate hearing into the fight opened Thursday to focus on the judging and the relationships between the sanctioning bodies and the boxing industry.

The New York state Athletic Commission also is investigating.

One judge, South Africa's Stan Christodoulou, scored the fight 116-113 for Lewis; Eugenia Williams of Atlantic City, New Jersey, scored it 115-113 for Holyfield; and Britain's Larry O'Connell scored it 115-115. Most who watched the fight thought Lewis had clearly won.

With Williams' judgment in question, court officials confirmed Thursday she filed for protection from creditors under the US Bankruptcy Code on Jan 25.

Asked about it, she told the New York Post, without elaborating: "I don't know what you're talking about. They told me not to answer any more questions."

Williams has judged boxing

for 10 years and works as a 39,200 dollars-a-year accounts clerk for the city.

IBF president Bob Lee, whose organisation selected Williams, defended her work.

"I am sure they aren't going to find anything irregular at all," he said. "It is a subjective viewing of a fight and you can't tell these judges what to see or what not to see. All I tell them is, 'Do the best you can.'"

Lewis' manager Frank Maloney said he didn't believe bribes had been paid, but he

questioned Williams' competence.

"I don't believe there was any illegal payment, they wouldn't have been that stupid," Maloney said. "They may not find money in her bank account, but there was definitely something wrong with her judging."

Soon after touching down at London's Heathrow Airport, Lewis maintained he had been the victim of a "conspiracy" and that the judges had been "incompetent."

"I think everything should be looked into," Lewis said. "There was definitely something going on, some kind of conspiracy we don't know about."

"In this particular fight the public got hurt as well... I say Don King should apologize and definitely the judges."

"Next time I'm going to definitely bring my two judges, my own two judges," Lewis added.

Lewis, criticised for not being more aggressive -- particularly in the fifth when he had Holyfield on the ropes -- said going for the knockout would have been risky.

"In the fifth he wasn't as hurt as I thought. I wasn't satisfied I could go in there and feel safe," Lewis said. "He was definitely playing possum and he admitted it on TV."

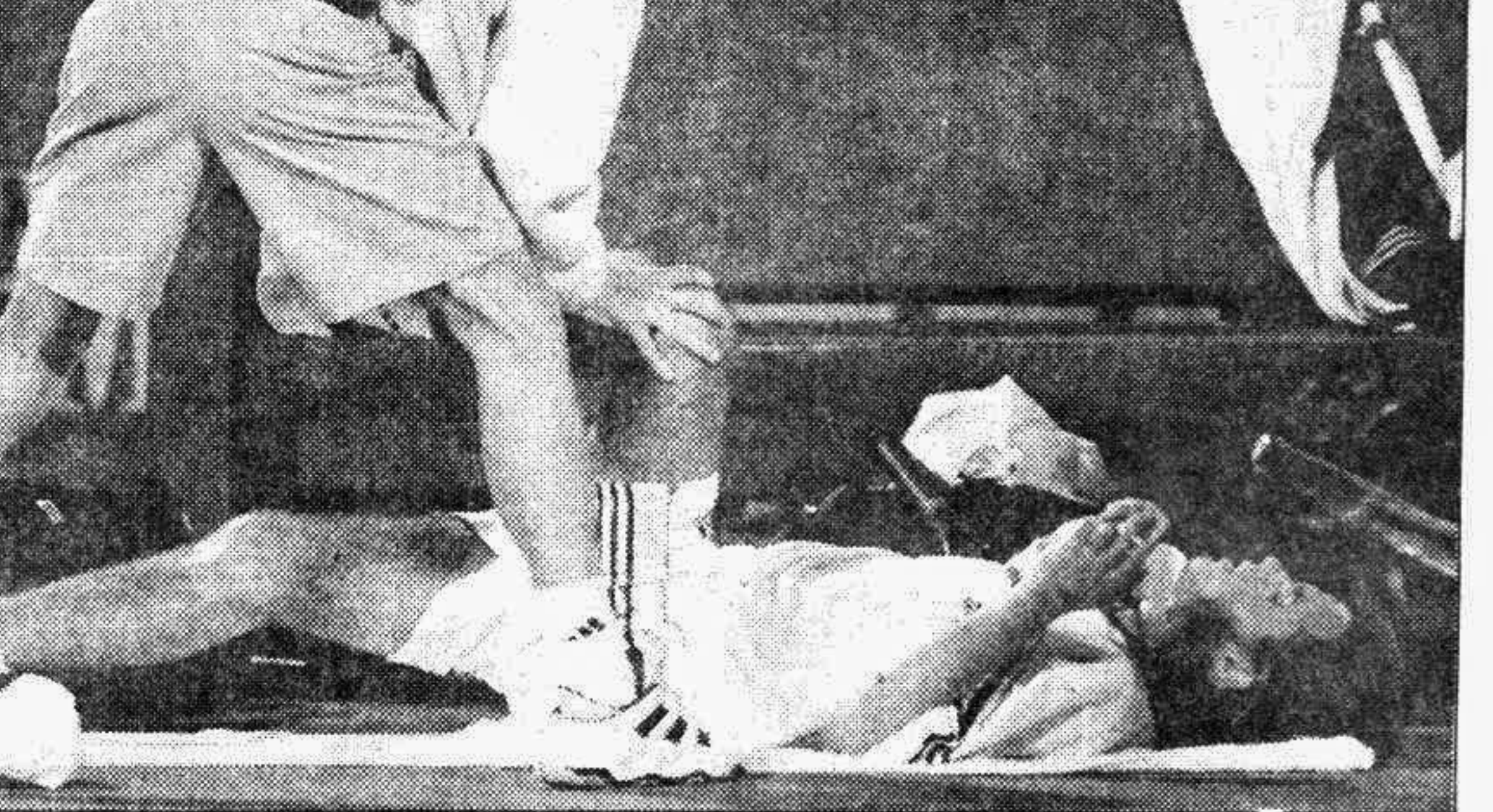
"But if I had realized it was going to be like that, I would have went out there... and realized my only hope was a knockout and go after it."

In Atlanta, Holyfield was quoted as saying he understood the judges' decision perfectly.

"The judges said it was a draw. Realistically, he didn't knock me out, and I didn't knock him out. It's all based on a decision," Holyfield told the Atlanta Journal -- Constitution.

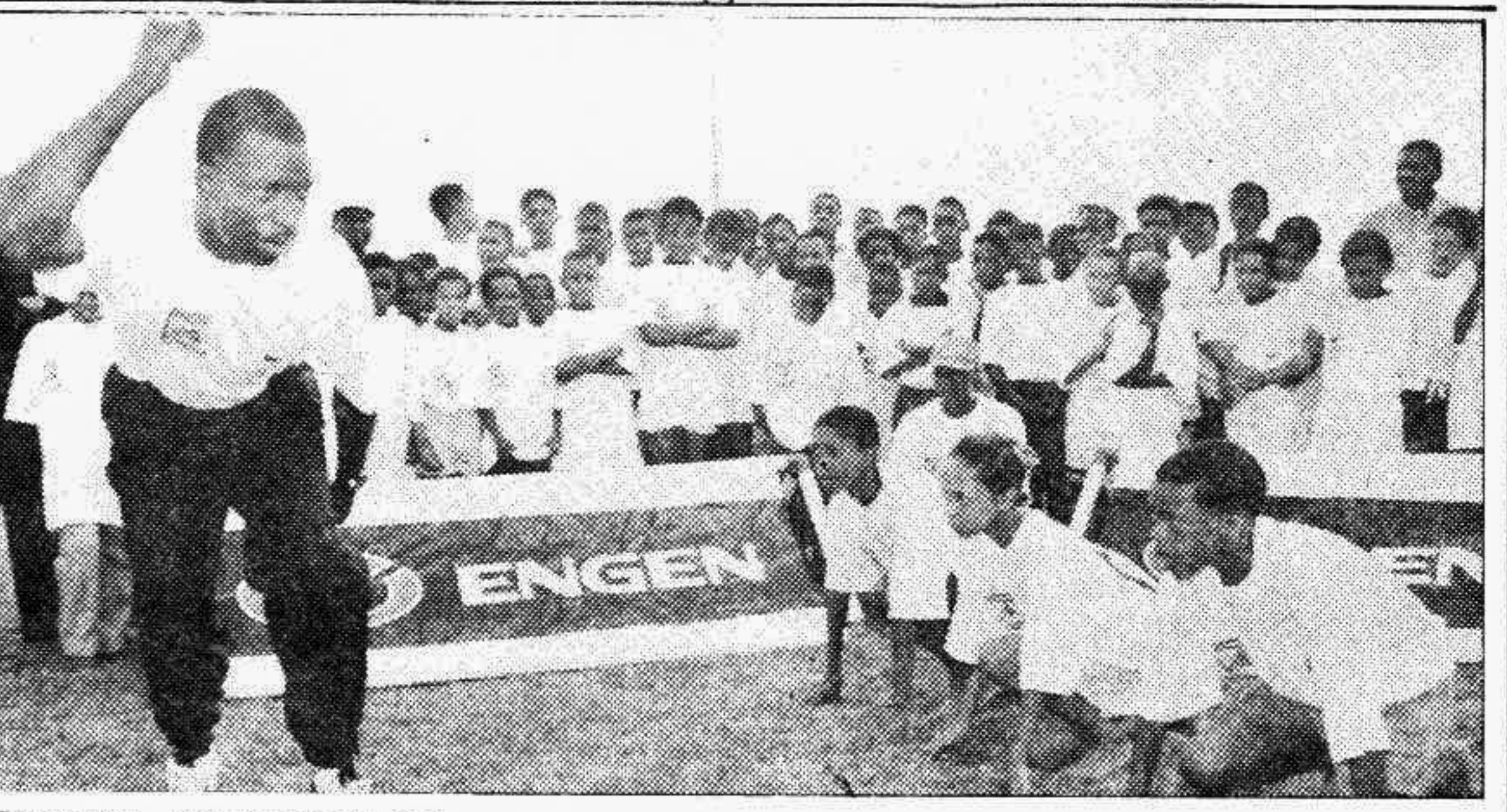
Holyfield said Lewis didn't do as well as some people said.

"Even with the punch stats, people say, 'Well, this man hit you 600 times.' But if he hit me that much, why didn't I fall? How come I was never staggered or hurt? Obviously, because a lot of times he was tapping me," Holyfield said.



Xavier Malisse of Belgium receives medical attention during his first round match against Jan-Michael Gambill of the United States at the Lipton Championships on March 18.

— AFP photo



FUTURE JOHNSONS! US sprint legend Michael Johnson showing school children of Soweto how to start off the blocks during a visit to the township on March 17.

— AFP photo