top 20.

2. (2) France

4. (3=) Italy

3. (3=) Croatia

5. (5) Germany 6. (6) Argentina

7. (7) Czech Republic 8. (8) Netherlands

9. (9) Spain 10. (10) Romania

11. (11) England

12. (12) Mexico

13. (13) Norway 14. (14) Sweden

15. (15) Denmark

17. (17) Portugal 18. (18) Austria

19. (19) Morocco

20. (22) Paraguay

22. (21) Belgium

25. (24) Slovakia

26. (26) Scotland

28. (27) Colombia

27. (28) Poland

29. (28) Tunisia

30. (30) Bulgaria

24. (25) South Africa

21. (20) Chile

23. (23) US

16. (16) Yugoslavia

FIFA rankings

ZURICH, Mar 24 (Reuters/
Internet): Brazil top the FIFA
world rankings released on
Wednesday while Croatia

relegate Italy to fourth position.
Paraguay made the biggest

move among the top 30 nations,

moving up two places to 20, the first time they have been in the

FIFA rankings (ranking,

738

721

704

610 604 603

last month's ranking, points)
1. (1) Brazil 824 points

## Leverkusen's Meijer to sign for Liverpool

LIVERPOOL, England, Mar 24(Reuters/Internet): Bayer Leverkusen's Dutch striker Erik Meijer will sign a pre-con-tract agreement with Liverpool

by the end of this week. The 29-year-old is expected to sign for the premier league club within the next two days but he will not train with Liverpool until the summer when his contract with the German club expires, a Liverpool spokesman

His transfer will be completed without a fee under the Bosman ruling. Meijer is keen to move to the club he supported as a child even though Stuttgart expressed an interest in signing

His arrival could see the end of Sean Dundee and Karlheinz Riedle's Liverpool careers.

## Lockett's quest

MELBOURNE, Mar 24: Tony Lockett will begin his quest to break one or the most revered records in Australian sport when the 1999 Australian Rules season kicks off this week, reports Reuters.

The Sydney Swans full-forward is on the verge of becoming the greatest goalkicker in AFL history and is almost certain to achieve his ambition in the upcoming season.

The current mark of 1,299 career goals was set by legendary Collingwood star Gordon Coventry during the 1920s and 30s. It is a record which has stood

the test of time and is as symbolic to Australians as baseballer Roger Maris' home-run record is to Americans. But just as Mark McGwire shattered Maris' record, Lockett

seems certain to break Coventry's mark, barring injury or suspension. He will start the new season with 1,275 goals already to his credit, just 24 shy of Coventry's mark, and with an average of 4.92 goals-per-game over his

16-year career, he is sure to break the record sooner rather than later. Lockett's push towards the record has overshadowed the build-up to the new season even though he has tried to keep a lid on the enormous hype that his

bid has generated. Lockett, who plans to retire at the and of the season, insists he would rather finish his career with an elusive premiership victory than the goalkicking record.

The Swans, though, are among the outsiders for the 1999 tittle. The early favourites for the tittle this year are Adelaide. North Melbourne and the Western Bulldogs.

## Dubai WC Silver gets ready for

DUBAI, Mar 24: Silver Charm, defending his crown at the 5 million dollars Dubai World Cup horse race, had an easy morning Wednesday after a grueling workout the day before, reports AP.

Silver Charm, winner of the Kentucky Derby and the Preakness Stakes in 1997, stayed off the track and walked the shed row at the quarantine center where all horses are kept for the duration of their stay in Dubai.

On Tuesday, Silver Charm jogged with his pony, Tyson, to the wire before turning and cantering to the backstretch. With Pepe Aragon in the saddle, Silver Charm worked from the 5/8 pole to the wire, finishing the work in 57.69 seconds.

Fourteen horses, ten of them local entries from the worldfamous Godolphin stables owned by Dubai's ruling Al-Maktoum family, will run the 1 1/4-mile (2,000-metre) race on the Nad Al Sheba dirt track Sunday.

Malek, another US contender making his second consecutive bid for the Dubai cup. also worked out under lights on Tuesday and took it easy Wednesday.

On Tuesday, Malek cantered from the 7/8 pole to the 3/4 pole, where he worked to the wire, covering the trip in 11 minutes 1:09 seconds.

"He worked like he was going so easy, and the time surprised me," Richard Mandella, Malek's trainer, said after the workout.

Malek finished fourth in Dubai last year, but he has his admirers. Al Adiyat, a magazine published by the Emirates horse racing authority, reported that an unknown punter had placed 50,000 dollars on Malek at odds of 5-1, setting himself for a 250,000 dollar return if lady luck smiles on Malek.

Silver Charm, Malek and Victory Gallop, trained by Elliot Walden, bring a strong US challenge to the Dubai race.

Victory Gallop, winner of the 1998 Belmont Stakes and runner-up in the Kentucky Derby and the Preakness Stakes, has never run in Dubai, but the jockey who will ride him for the 3 million dollar first prize knows what it takes to win the

Jerry Bailey won the inaugural Dubai World Cup in 1996 aboard Cigar and then with Singspiel 12 months later.

Victory Gallop was the lone US horse on the track on Wednesday, where he jogged for one lap.

Besides the three US challengers, the only other overseas contender is Britain's Running Stag, trained by Philip Mitchell.

The top-ranked horse for the race, Intikhab, has an international classified rating of 130. and is owned by the Al Maktoums. Silver Charm, at 128, is the next highest-rated horse in the race.

## Kwan shines through dismal session

HELSINKI, Mar 24(Reuters/-Internet): Titleholder Michelle Kwan, skating with a cold and well below her best, was still a class above her qualifying group rivals at the world figure

skating championships on Wednesday. The 18-year-old American was the one bright spark in a dismal session of skating even though she knows she will have to improve in the short and free programmes.

Her biggest challengers will come from the second group, with European champion Maria Butyrskaya of Russia and the Four Continents and Grand Prix winner Tatiana Malinina of Uzbekistan. They were in action later on Wednes-

Vanessa Gusmeroli of France showed signs of regaining her 1997 bronze medal form by finishing second behind Kwan, with rising

Russian teenager Viktoria Volchkova and 13-year-old American Sarah Hughes third and fourth.

The qualifying section is worth 20 per cent of the total Kwan did six triples but did

not include her new triple toetriple toe jump combination after doubling the second jump. The landing of a triple salchow was scratchy and the Olympic silver medallist was not happy. "I could have done better and been a little tougher out there today," she said, welcoming the day off before Friday's short programme, worth 30 per cent. Kwan had only one 5.9 for artistry from the seven judges. one awarding her just 5.6 out of the maximum 6.0. She had one 5.5 for technique and four of

5.6, low by her standards. Gusmeroli, 20, was pleased with her performance although she did some lesser elements poorly after mastering the tougher jumps early in her routine.

She called it her best free programme so far this season. It confirmed what I have been doing in practice this week," she

Volchkova, third in the European championships and

safety record by World Cup 2006

bid rival South Africa are

"grotesque" and "simply

South Africa's bid chief Danny

Jordaan that people were

stabbed and killed and cars

burned after Manchester Unit-

ed's FA Cup win over Liverpool

Banks said Tuesday he sent a

in January, Banks said the al-

letter to his South Africa coun-

terpart Steve Tshwete express-

ing his concern at Jordaan's

tween the bidding countries to

become more intense but we

can't allow statements like this

to go unchallenged," Banks

round the world will believe it's

tions. Bending the truth a little

may be one thing, but a down-

right lie is simply unaccept-

sponse to comments attributed

to Jordaan in The Pretoria

News about his concerns over

matches where is one more se-

cure, when Manchester United

play Liverpool or when the

Kaiser Chiefs play the Orlando

Pirates?" Jordaan was quoted

saying in the Pretoria News.

security at the 2006 World Cup.

Banks' remarks were in re-

"When it comes to security at

"If we leave this alone people

"We can't accept gross distor-

"I expected the rivalry be-

Responding to comments by

unacceptable."

legations were lies.

comments.

said.

LONDON, Mar 23

Sports Minister

Tony Banks says

"slurs" over Eng-

British

competing in her first worlds, opened with a single loop where she intended a triple but improved after that. "I struggled at the start but pulled myself together. I was really nervous," said the 16-year-old.

fourth in her group, despite some youthful mistakes in a surprisingly mature presenta-"I had to push through every-thing but it was a lot of fun," the



World champion American Michelle Kwan performing during the women's qualifying free skating event at the World Figure Skating Championships in Helsinki on March - Internet photo

days ago, were taken out of con-

text and Banks' reaction was

part of an England campaign to

fracture African solidarity for

campaign is surprised and dis-

appointed that Tony Banks

should have suggested SA 2006

is involved in a 'dirty tricks'

campaign," Jordaan said in the

was that countries such as Eng-

land should not suggest crime is

a reason why they World Cup

should not come to African

when it is clear that violence

inside football grounds has al-

ways been, and continues to be,

"I stand by this view," he

"Crime is not a uniquely

South African problem and

current levels of crime have no

impact at all on our ability to

host a secure World Cup for the

first time ever on African soil.

just as we hosted a secure Rugby

are two of eight nations, includ-

ing five African nations, vying

England and South Africa

Sepp Blatter, president of

soccer's world governing body

FIFA, has indicated that if a ro-

tation system were being used.

it would be logical for an

African venue to host the World

Cup.

However, Blatter has said

strict FIFA guidelines on safety,

transport, accommodation and

telecommunications would

have to be met by any potential

(Union) World Cup in 1995.

to host the 2006 event.

mainly an English problem.

"The essence of what I said

statement.

"The South Africa 2006 bid

Banks blasts comments

"The English are overlook-

ing what happened just the

other day in their own back-

yard," he reportedly said about

the January 24 FA Cup clash at

ester, police mobilised and

clashing with fans as cars were

burnt, three people were stabbed?

violence at their own matches

is such a concern that I seri-

ously doubt they could host the

Football Association says Jor-

daan's comments come on top

of his previous "spurious" alle-

gations, which are a ploy to de-

flect attention from problems

facing the South African bid-

lice also refuted Jordaan's

reports of killings and cars be-

ing burned were "completely in-

no cars were burned," she said.

stabbing incident on January

24 on a street within a one mile

(1.6 km) radius of Old Trafford.

sources on hand for a United

game and didn't encounter any

unusual problems," the

ester know (Jordaan's) claims

statement Tuesday which said

his comments, published 10

"The media here in Manch-

But Jordaan responded in a

spokeswoman added.

The Greater Manchester Po-

A police spokeswoman said

"We had no killings that day,

Police attended one minor

"We had normal police re-

"If you read the British press,

Meanwhile, the English

"All bars closed in Manch-

Old Trafford

World Cup.

comments.

accurate.

she said.

are wrong.

and people killed.

#### BIRMINGHAM, Mar 24 (Reuters/ India): Troubled England striker Stan Collymore may have played his last game for Aston Villa.

Collymore may have played last

game for Villa

The controversial former Liverpool and Nottingham For-

est centre-forward has been told to forget football for the rest of the season to concentrate on recovering from clinical depres-

He has been receiving stress counselling at a private clinic in London since walking out on the club on the eve of their FA Cup fourth round tie with Fulham in January.

Villa manager John Gregory confirmed on Wednesday he made the decision to do without the club's record \$11.5 million signing for the rest of the season alter talks with Collymore on Monday.

"He won't be training with us at all because we have decided to send him back full-time to the clinic," said Gregory.

"The decision was reached after discussions with everyone concerned. Stan should concentrate on one thing and that quite clearly can't be football.

"He should have full time treatment to overcome what is a particularly difficult problem. There is no set date for his return, but I do not expect to see him back until the season is finished."

That, however, leaves a major question mark hanging over whether Collymore will ever play for Villa again.

Gregory has previously made it clear he would rather sell the player than risk further unsettling his dressing room.

But he insists the decision to dispense with his services for the rest of the season was not prompted by Collymore's reported criticism of the team's defence following Sunday's 3-0 home defeat against Chelsea.

"People can think what they like and I can't stop them." said Gregory. "But I've explained the reasons why this decision has been taken and that's the end of

## Polish probables WARSAW, Mar 24: Armed

with a cavalry hat from the prime minister and support from a nation yearning for soccer success, Poland travel to England for Saturday's crucial European 2000 qualifier missing a key striker, reports AP. Sylwester Czereszewski of

Warsaw's Legia club underwent minor knee surgery Monday and is out of the England clash and another important test the March 31 encounter against group co-leaders Sweden. Poland and Sweden each have the maximum six points

from two games to top the Group 5 standings, while England have four points from three matches. The top two teams qualify from the group that includes Bulgaria and Luxembourg.

Despite the injury to Czereszewski, who scored two goals against Bulgaria in September, and facing England at Wembley, hopes were high for a victory.

Poland have yet to lose in the nine matches since Janusz Wojcik took over as coach last year. On Tuesday night, more than 10,000 fans, including Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek. came to a training session that included an exhibition game against fourth-division Warsaw team Olimpia.

The national side won 3-0 on goals from Andrzej Juskowiak and Wojciech Kowalczyk, and an Olimpia own goal. "All in Poland count on a

good result at Wembley," Buzek told the players. He also gave Wojcik a Polish cavalry hat, wishing him luck in the team's charges against England.
Poland, a third-place fin-

isher at the 1974 and 1982 World Cup, have never played in the European Championship finals. Their programme has suffered in the past 15 years, due to decreased government financial support when communist rule ended in 1989 and disarray in the local soccer federation.

SQUAD Adam Matysek; Tomasz Waldoch, Jacek Zielinski, Tomasz Lapinski, Krzysztof Ratajczyk; Tomasz Iwan, Jerzy Brzeczek, Piotr Swierczewski, Dariusz Adamczuk; Andrzej Juskowiak, Wojciech Kowalczyk (or Miroslaw Trzeciak).



American Serena Williams executes a forehand during her Lipton Championships match against Monica Seles in Florida on March 23. Williams won 6-2, 6-3. -AFP photo

# Sibling showdown nears

Florida, Mar 24 (AP): At the moment. Serena Williams might be the best player in women's tennis. On the other hand, she might not even be the best player in her family.

Perhaps we'll find out Sun-With fourth-round victories Tuesday, Serena and sister Venus moved a step closer to a sibling showdown in the final in the Lipton Championships.

Serena won her 14th match in a row, beating Monica Seles 6-2, 6-3. Venus edged Anke Huber 6-3, 5-7, 7-6.

The Williams sisters are best friends, doubles partners and even business associates - they recently started a tennis newsletter. So which of them would win a family-feud final? "If we both get there, you'll have to see," said Serena, 17.

"Venus is playing awesome. I'm playing good." "It will be super if it could happen," said Venus, 18. "We're

looking forward to it. Their dad prefers to avoid such showdowns, so the sisters have rarely entered the same tournament in recent months. They last met in the Italian Open in May 1998, and their

Australian Open last year. Venus won each time in straight But Serena is much improved lately, earning her first tournament title in the Gaz de France Open at Paris on Feb 28.

Hours later, Venus won the Ok-

only other matchup came in the

lahoma City final, making the Williamses the first sisters to win WTA Tour events on the same day.

Serena also won the Indian Wells title March 13. At Key Biscayne, she has lost just 16 games in four matches and has yet to lose her serve.

VENUS WILLIAMS

"I was young last year. This year I guess you could say I'm old," Serena said with a grin, "Right now I'm feeling pretty confident. Who wouldn't? I'm playing tough opponents and having solid wins over them."

The path to the final won't be easy for either sister. Also advancing Tuesday were topranked Martina Hingis. No 2 Lindsay Davenport, No 4 Jana Novotna and five-time, Lipton champion Steffi Graf.

Hingis halted 19-year-old qualifier Marlene Weingartner's surprising run with a 6-0, 6-2 victory. Graf extended her

winning streak in the Lipton to 21 consecutive matches by beating Natasha Zvereva 6-2, 6-4. Anna Kournikova and Mary

Pierce were eliminated. Kournikova lost to Barbara Schett 6-1, 1-6, 6-1 and Pierce retired with a sprained ankle while trailing Amanda Coetzer 6-1, 4-2.

Serena plays Coetzer in the quarterfinals tonight, and Venus faces Novotna on Thurs-

The Williams sisters need a few more titles to take over No 1 Venus is ranked sixth and Serena 16th. But both expect to get there eventually. Serena is shorter than her

sister, but more muscular and athletic. Venus has a longer reach, a bigger serve and an edge in experience, winning Lipton last year and reaching the final of the US Open in 1997.

"I have great power," Venus said. "It's hard to handle my

"We're both powerful, but we're also consistent," Serena said. "We both can run fast and also have a lot of touch. We're setting the standard for the future generation. Tennis is always going to take a step up now that we've come along. That's good for the game."

So, to repeat the original question, who will win if they play each other? Serena arched her eyebrows at the suggestion that the older sibling always has an edge.

"Oh really?" she said. "I never was aware of that. That's just something in a book. You can't always trust that."

# Sampras Krajicked



Flordia, Mar 24: One day following the return to his familiar role as number one in

tennis. Pete Sampras spent another frustrating afternoon getting outplayed by Dutchman Richard Krajicek on Tuesday, reports Reuters. The seventh-seeded Krajicek

showed again that he knows how to back Sampras into an uncomfortable corner, taking his sixth career victory in eight matches against the American with a 6-2, 7-6 quarterfinal win at the Litpon Championships. "For me, he's got my number for the time being," said Sam-

pras. who has lost his last four matches with Krajicek. "The guys that give me problems over the years are the guys that service big. He moves as well as anyone, for as big as he is. "When his serve comes

down, it's coming down from a crane," Sampras said. Of the tournament's top 13 seeds, only Krajicek remains.

But 14th seed Thomas Enqvist of Sweden joined the Dutchman in the final four with a 6-3, 7-5 victory over Frenchman Jerome Golmard.

Enqvist, the Australian Open runner-up who is enjoying the hottest start of his career, takes his 1999 match record of 17-4

ACROSS

5 Staff

1 Without

for short

12 Cabalists'

13 Supple-

15 Turkish

bigwig

18 Loving

20 Word

touch

16 Evaluated

before job

or track

21 Furry "Star

23 Groove on

selling LP

shoulder

31 DDE's rival

32 Olympian's

34 Grounded

Aussie

plateau

37 Domed

halls

39 - glance

41 Command

to Fido

35 Mini-

Wars"

critter

24 Million-

28 Cold-

14 Largest of

the seven

conception

into the semifinals against Kra-

Sampras secured his return to world number one with a fourth-round win over Spaniard Albert Costa on the same day briefly top-ranked Carlos Mova fell to Frenchman Sebastien Grosjear.

Krajicek's hard-serving, big shot-making game seems to be-



RICHARD KRAJICEK fuddle Sampras, who last

posted a win against the

Dutchman back in 1994.

"That puts extra pressure on his game.

The Dutchman who had left knee surgery at the end of last year, is looking to regain the form that made him fifthranked in 1997.

Sampras, a two-time former Lipton winner is having a tough time getting back into the tennis groove this season after taking a 10-week hiatus from the Tour, which included skipping the Australian Open in January.

Prior to arriving at the Lipton, Sampras withdrew from the semifinals of the San Jose tournament with a left ankle injury in February, lost in the second round at Scottsdale early in March, and was upset by Spaniard Felix Mantilla in an opening round match at the Champions' Cup.

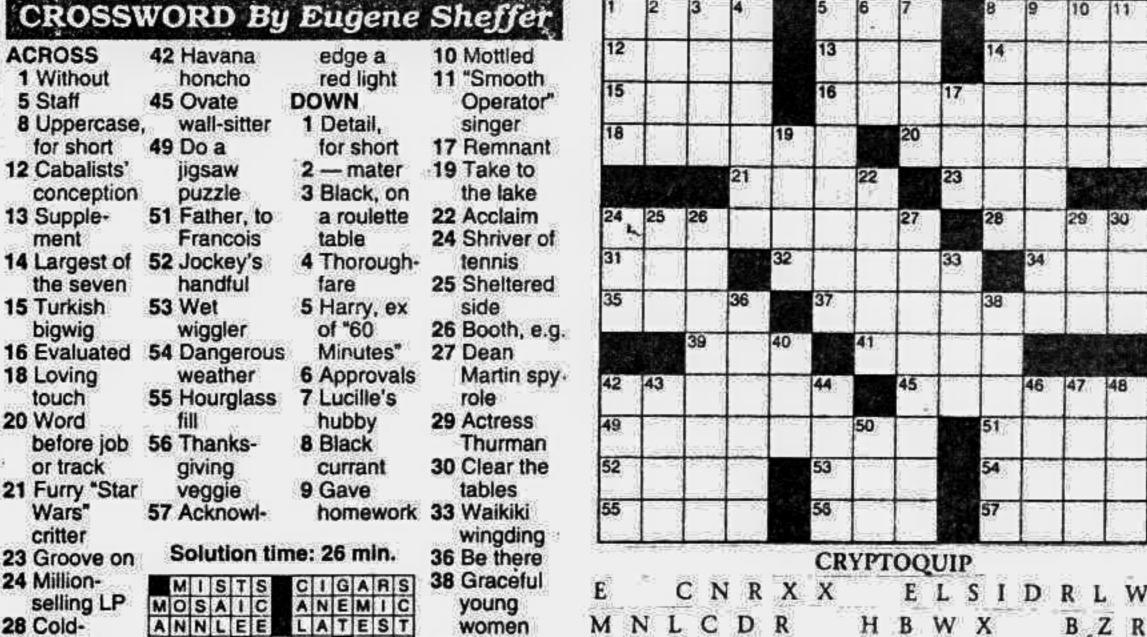
Krajicek dominated the first set, but Sampras settled into the match in the second set. forcing the Dutchman to a tiebreaker.

It appeared as if Sampras would push the match into a third set, taking a 4-1 lead in the tiebreaker.

But Krajicek held serve on the next two points, and Sampras fumbled with one of his eight double faults of the day on the next point, to even the score at 4-4.



Susie O'Neil of Australia acknowledges the crowd's applause after breaking the Commonwealth 200-metre freestyle record at the Australian Swimming Championships in Brisbane on March 23. -AFP photo



MNLCDR NOTE NELL REV 40 Get ready HILWRLW BZINLS.

to rumble

42 Ford and

Lincoln

43 On the

briny

46 Fertilizer

source

47 The Bee

50 Meadow

44 Comply

CATELODIEAVID

Yesterday's answer

LOBS

Saturday's Cryptoquip: ASKED IF HE LIKED HIS WORK, A CHEESEMAKER SOFTLY COMMENTED, "IN A WHEY."

MNXW

DEIL

Today's Cryptoquip clue: I. equals N

The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short Gees, e.g. 48 Kennel cry words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.

