

Sino shuttlers to fight for it

TOKYO, Apr 10: Gong Zhichao secured at least one title for China by beating Kim Ji-Hyun today to make the women's singles final...

The defending champion, who knocked the same opponent out of the prestigious all-England quarterfinals last month...

With the win, Gong set up a re-match of last Japan Open final against world champion Ye Zhaoying...

Gong, ranked 12th against Kim's 41st, stormed into the lead to chalk 13 straight points to lead 2-0 in the second game...

"In the past, I struggled to beat her, but it was rather easy today. I think it is because I changed my tactics a little bit...

"When I beat her last year, I was very surprised, but I've never beaten her in big events. It is very difficult to beat her again...

Ye defeated Gong in two games in the quarterfinals on her way to winning her third straight all-England title last month...

"I played each other so many times I don't think of any particular tactics against her. I think the one who plays her usual game will win tomorrow..."

Gong Ruina, 18, who moved up to third in the world rankings after winning the Swedish Open last month...

World number one Peter Gade Christensen lives up to his pre-tournament promise when he quashed the challenge from Wong Choong Hann of Malaysia...

In the men's singles final Sunday, he will take on the Grand Prix final winner, Sun Jun...

Sun has beaten Grade Christensen in their last two encounters, with the last one winning the final of the Grand Prix final in February...

Sydney assures visitors

SYDNEY, Apr 10: Sydney Airport officials promised today Olympic visitors would spend only half an hour collecting their luggage...

October 2, the day after the closing ceremony, is forecast to be the busiest, with 134,000 passengers on 1,117 flights...

That works out to one plane taking off or landing about every 50 seconds in the 17 hours the runways are open...

"These are the figures now and we believe they are achievable for the Olympics," Phillip Cash, the airport's Olympics manager, said...

"We are in training. We can deliver on the day," said Varina Nissen, director of corporate affairs...

A new rail link is being built but cash admitted the snag could be how many taxis and buses would be available...

"Taxis and buses will be a key issue during the Olympics," he said...

The airport is lobbying taxi firms and the licensing bodies to get as many cabs as possible at the arrivals terminal during the Games...

All of Sydney Airport's Olympic projections were formulated under the assumption that the current 11 pm-6 am curfew remained in place during the Games...

Cash said they would be helped by the fact so many Olympic teams would be setting up camps in other parts of Australia and would fly into Sydney on domestic non-peak flights...

He said the airport, which is undergoing a two-billion-dollar (1.26 billion US) redevelopment, would handle 720,000 passengers, one million bags and 250 Olympic horses during the fortnight of the Games...

Double blow for Spanish Fed Cup team

MADRID, Apr 10: (Reuters/Internet): Fed Cup champions Spain will be without their match-winning duo of Arantxa Sanchez-Vicario and Conchita Martinez when they begin the defence of their title in Italy on April 17...

Spain's top two, who between them contested every point in last season's thrilling semifinal win over the United States and the final victory in Switzerland, have both ruled themselves out of the first round...

Sanchez-Vicario said in February she was unlikely to play any Fed Cup tennis this season while Martinez announced this week she would not be available for the opening tie...

Spanish captain Miguel Margets has named a second-string team, led by Magui Serna and Virginia Ruano, both non-playing members of last year's Cup-winning squad...

Serna, ranked number 26 in the world, and the 31st-ranked Ruano are joined by Maria Antonia Sanchez Lorenzo (37) and Gala Leon Garcia (44)...



Defending champion Chinese Gong Zhichao is about to serve against Kim Ji-Hyun of South Korea during their women's singles semifinal engagement at the Yonex Japan Open badminton championships in Tokyo yesterday...

Pierce stoops to Martinez

AMELIS ISLAND, Florida, Apr 10: Spaniard Conchita Martinez seeded seventh, upset fourth seed and defending champion Mary Pierce 3-6, 7-6 (7-4), 6-2 on Friday to reach the semifinal of the Bausch and Lomb championships, reports Reuters...

Martinez the 1994 Wimbledon champion, has yet to advance past the round of 16 in five tournaments this year and is ranked only 17th after spending nearly the entire decade in the top 10...

"I play great here," said Martinez, who won the 1995 Bausch and Lomb and reached last year's final before losing to Pierce in three-sets...

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South Africa 6-3, 6-0. Pierce had a chance to close out Martinez during a second-set tiebreaker but could not hold a 4-3 lead and lost the last four points...

Pierce never recovered from losing the tiebreaker and had her serve broken twice in the deciding set. She committed 55 unforced errors in the two-hour 43-minute match compared to only 29 for Martinez...

It was a premature ending for Pierce who had reached the Bausch and Lomb final the past three years. Her legs cramped up in the third set and may have resulted from getting pushed to three sets the night before against Nathalie Dechy...

Kournikova, who later withdrew from doubles competition when she aggravated a muscle in her left hip, is now two wins away from her first WTA tour title. Dragomir who has not dropped more than four games in any of her matches this week, needed just 49 minutes to eliminate the unseeded Zuluaga. Dragomir won 33 of 42 points on her serve and never allowed the 20-year-old Colombian a break point opportunity...

The 26-year-old Romanian had not gotten past the round of 16 in eight tournaments this year. In their only previous meeting Kournikova beat Dragomir in three sets at the 1998 Canadian Open. Seles only took 55 minutes to eliminate Coetzee who had beaten her two months ago in the semifinals of the Pan-Pacific Open...

Seles has failed to reach the quarter finals in her last three events, hopes to use this last-clay-court tournament in the United States to get ready for next month's French Open. Earlier Friday Michael Boogerd of the Netherlands and Rabobank won the first part of the final stage, crossing the finishing line of the 118-kilometer (73-mile) course three seconds ahead of the pack led by Mario Aerts of Belgium and the Lotto team...

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Becker to face Agassi in final

HONG KONG, Apr 10 (Reuters/Internet): Andre Agassi and Boris Becker set up their first meeting for almost four years when they won their semifinals in the Hong Kong Open on Saturday...

Agassi crushed Hendrik Dreekman 6-3, 6-0 to reach his first ATP Tour final of the year while Becker beat compatriot Bernd Karbacher 6-4, 6-4...

Agassi continued the excellent form he has shown all week with a fourth consecutive straight sets victory. The third seed needed only 48 minutes to brush aside Dreekman who dropped his serve three times each set...

"I'm feeling really good. I'm hitting the ball well and moving well," said Agassi. Karbacher, who claimed the scalp of Australian second seed Patrick Rafter in the first round, had no answer to Becker's serve-and-volley game...

My rhythm and timing is very good," said Becker. His last tournament win was in 1996 when he won the Grand Slam Cup in Munich. Agassi holds a 9-4 advantage over Becker in their personal duels. The last time the two met was in the semifinals of the 1995 U.S. Open. Agassi winning in four sets...

"It will be great meeting him again," said Agassi. Jalabert wins Tour of Basque AIA, Spain, Apr 10: Frenchman Laurent Jalabert won the Tour of the Basque Country cycling race Friday with a blistering time-trial victory in the fifth and final stage to crown his week in the lead, reports AP...

Jalabert of the ONCE team covered the 8.7-kilometre (5.4-mile) course in 14 minutes and 12 seconds. He was 19 seconds faster than his nearest rival, Italian Vladimir Belli of Festina, and 31 seconds ahead of third-placed Spaniard David Etxebarria...

"I was nervous because I could have had a bad day and lost everything," Jalabert told reporters after the time trial. Jalabert took the lead Monday after winning the first leg, and remained at the top of the overall standings throughout the race by never letting the stage-winner open up too much of a gap and keeping his main rivals constantly in check...

The Frenchman's overall race time was 21 hours, 36 minutes and 11 seconds. Belli took second place, 51 seconds behind while fellow Italian Davide Rebellin of the Polti team slipped from the second place he had held throughout the week to No 3, one minute and one second behind the leader...

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