

Akram doesn't know anything

KARACHI, July 5: Pakistani captain Wasim Akram reportedly said Monday that he had no intention of retiring following last month's World Cup defeat, reports AFP.

Wasim expressed 'surprise' over recent reports that he and seven other senior players intended to quit amid allegations that the World Cup final was rigged. The News daily quoted him as saying:

"Pakistan was trounced by Australia in the World Cup final, triggering protests and allegations of match-fixing back home."

"It is baseless," Wasim said of the accusations, speaking from Manchester, England.

"I have no (retirement) plans at all and I will be returning to Pakistan by end of August after completing my commitments... to start preparations for the next international season," he said.

Wasim said he preferred to stay in England after the team's defeat. He is currently playing league cricket in England.

A judicial commission probing match-fixing allegations in Pakistani cricket is expected to finalise its findings this month.

Wasim and batsmen Ijaz Ahmed and Salim Malik were implicated in an interim report by a Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) committee last year.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's Ehtesab (accountability) Bureau has initiated a probe into match-fixing charges over the World Cup defeat.

Glamorgan to probe slump

GLAMORGAN, July 5 (Internet Report): Glamorgan will today hold an inquest into an alarming drop in form which has taken them into the bottom three of the championship - and out of promotion contention in the National League.

Saturday's innings defeat by Hampshire in Swansea was their fifth championship match without a win and yesterday they were hammered by Sussex in the National League.

Skinner Matthew Maynard is demanding an immediate recovery for Glamorgan to make next season's championship first division and admits South African all-rounder Jacques Kallis cannot arrive quickly enough.

Kallis is expected to join up with Glamorgan on Friday after suffering an abdominal strain during the World Cup, but is unlikely to make his debut until the championship match against Lancashire next week.

"One man does not make a team, but we have struggled in the last couple of years when we haven't had an overseas player," said Maynard.

Wasim only played a couple of games last year because of injury and we've missed Jaes. Players of their quality lift a dressing room."

Maynard will demand honesty from his players at today's crisis meeting.

He said: "Players have to stand up and be counted. Our position is not a reflection of our ability, but batsmen are showing too much anxiety."

"It is not time yet to press the panic button, but if we don't get a victory in our next couple of championship matches, it will be a long road back."

Glamorgan coach Duncan Fletcher, who takes over the England job in October, has told the players to stop treating championship games like one-day thrashers.

"Our batting is brittle because players are going for their shots in a hurry," said Fletcher. "They need to occupy the crease more."

Three an over is a good run-rate in the four-day game. We've lost experienced players in Hugh Morris and Tony Cottee in the last couple of years and you know youngsters will be inconsistent initially."

Glamorgan's woe continued yesterday when they were thrashed at St Helen's by new National League leaders Sussex.

The visitors piled up 201-8 despite losing four overs to rain with half-centuries from Michael Di Venuto and Chris Adams against a bowling attack which lacked control. Adrian Dale excepted.

Glamorgan's batting has been brittle in recent weeks, but let the players obeyed her's order to occupy the crease.

The problem was it was a one-day game and they fell desperately behind the rate.

Only Dale got on top of the bowling but he lasted just 34 balls. The innings deteriorated into a shambles, Robert Croft hitting six and then being bowled by a long hop.

Darren Thomas was run out next ball in a mix-up worthy of the Keystone Kops and spectators left in droves as Sussex read the last rites to the innings to win by 89 runs.

Quinton will join Partick

GLASGOW, July 5: Namibian international Quinton Jacobs says he will keep his word to join lowly Partick Thistle, despite interest in the midfielder from Dutch giants Ajax and Belgian outfit Anderlecht, reports AFP.

Jacobs, 20, is set for a debut in the Scottish League Cup tie against Alloa after refusing to go back on a verbal agreement he made to join Second Division Partick.

The two European giants were impressed by Jacobs in a recent international against Congo but the lure of top class soccer has not been enough to sway him.

Sticking with Stewart



LONDON, July 5: England are set to stand by former skipper Alec Stewart despite his disappointing showings in the first Test victory over New Zealand, reports AFP.

Nasser Hussain's appointment as captain just over a week ago in the aftermath of England's dismal World Cup campaign has seen Stewart slip out of the limelight having been a key all-rounder for the past few years.

Since losing the captaincy and wicketkeeping duties, opener Stewart is now as dependent on his performance to retain a place as any other player.

And after scoring just one run in two innings and missing two crucial slip catches at Edgbaston he is under pressure to find a swift return to form.

He is unlikely to be jettisoned just yet from England's plans, though, with both Hussain and chairman of selectors David Graveney insistent his record alone merits his inclusion for the second Test at Lord's on July 22.

Stewart still enjoys a Test average in the mid-40s just as an opener, while his record at Lord's includes two of his 11 Test centuries and seven scores above 50 in his 11 appearances for England.

More pertinently, England believe they owe Stewart some loyalty, having sacked him as captain less than a year after he led them to a famous Test series triumph over South Africa and for the number of times he agreed to sacrifice his own needs for that of the team by combining wicketkeeping duties with his role as opener.

"It was a difficult game for him coming back after what he went through, but he never let his head drop and was always supportive of the team," said Graveney.

In return, we should be supporting him -- he needs to know that people are standing by him at this time and we are more than prepared to do that."

Hussain has also demonstrated similar loyalty by hinting: "With the side winning I don't see too many changes happening for the next Test."

It wasn't easy opening the

innings late on the second day because the light was not good, and Alec got a very good ball to get him out and I will be supporting him," confirmed Hussain.

"I'm sure Alec will fight back; I know that for a fact -- I know the bloke. It's been a difficult couple of weeks for Alec, and opening the batting at Edgbaston is hard work."

"It was just one of those weeks. I've had one of those weeks -- nearly everyone in that dressing room has had one of those weeks."

"Alec is strong enough. He's a model professional. He was first in the dressing room, talking to every batsman, throwing balls to them, working hard with everyone. At no stage did he get down, or anything like that."

Stewart's cause is also helped by the lack of any outstanding candidate as his replacement. Darren Maddy and Michael Vaughan are the favourites, while England have already dismissed the idea of Hussain opening because of his success in the problem number three position.

Nasser stands by Alec

UNDATED, JULY 5 (Internet Report): New England captain Nasser Hussain is determined to keep faith with his under-fire predecessor Alec Stewart.

Despite Stewart's shocking Test against New Zealand at Edgbaston -- being dismissed twice in a day for one run and dropping two catches -- Hussain wants him in the side for the second Test at Lord's.

"I'm firmly behind Alec," said Hussain yesterday. "He's had a hard couple of weeks, physically and mentally. It wasn't the easiest of wickets on which to open the batting."

"With his Test record behind him and being leading run scorer in international cricket for two years, it's going to take more than just one bad Test to axe Alec Stewart."

He's been a great professional these last three or four days. His head never went down."

"People know, too, just how much he likes batting at Lord's." Stewart made his first Test hundred there and also took 119 off the Kiwis on their last tour here in 1994.

Hussain believes he would be doing the New Zealanders a favour if he left Stewart out at this stage.

He added: "Alec has been very supportive from the moment he knew he'd lost the captaincy."

"The most important thing is seeing him back there getting runs."

Chairman of selectors David Graveney also believes Stewart deserves another chance, and there are no

openers on the county circuit whose form automatically demands a chance at Test level.

Brown Surrey Lions' hero

LONDON, July 5: Ally Brown starred in English cricket on Sunday after notching up a century for Surrey Lions in their 64-run win over Derbyshire Scorpions in the National League, reports AFP.

Brown (105) passed his hundred from 87 balls, with nine fours and three sixes along the way, as he and captain Adam Hollis (45) put together a 114-run fifth-wicket stand to recover from left-arm seamer Kevin Dean's (four for 35) early burst.

It was enough to help the Londoners to 238 for nine and a timely victory that saw them leapfrog their opponents in Division Two.

Derbyshire fell foul of a three-wicket salvo from strike bowler Martin Bicknell at the top of the order and were all out in 41.4 overs, with in-form Robin Weston making 39 and Paul Aldred reaching the same score and finishing unbeaten.

In Division One, meanwhile, England paceman Dean Headley saw off five Warwickshire Bears for 43 runs and set the Kent Spitfires on the way to a thrilling one-wicket victory at Headstone.

Headley's captain Matthew Flenley also took three for 41, but opener Anurag Singh (76) and Graeme Welch (71) ensured the visitors put 219 for eight on the board.

The Spitfires profited from handy contributions from opener Will House (46), Trevor Ward (38), Andrew Symonds (35) and Mark Ealham (32) before last-wicket pair Headley and Julian Thompson got them home with two balls to spare.

Schools h'ball begins today

The 10th Bata schools boys handball tournament, organised by Bangladesh Handball Federation, begins today at the Outer Stadium, reports UNB.

Rajabagh Police Lines High will take on BCIC College (School section) in the lone inaugural match at 4 pm.

State Minister for Youth and Sports Obaidul Quader will open the eight-day meet.

Fifteen teams split into four groups will compete in the meet.

GROUPINGS
Group A — Rajabagh Police Lines High School, Kurmitola BAF Shaheen School & College, BCIC College (School section) and Ahmed Bawany Academy.

Group B — Shaheed Nabi High School, Ansar and VDP High School, Kamalapur Sher-e-Bangla Railway High School and Blue Birds Academy.

Group C — Teigaon BAF Shaheen School, Bangladesh Rifles School and College, Wari High School and Armanitola Govt High School.

Group D — Rajdhani High School, Motijheel Model High School and Dhaka Residential Model School and College.

Ferdinand not for sale

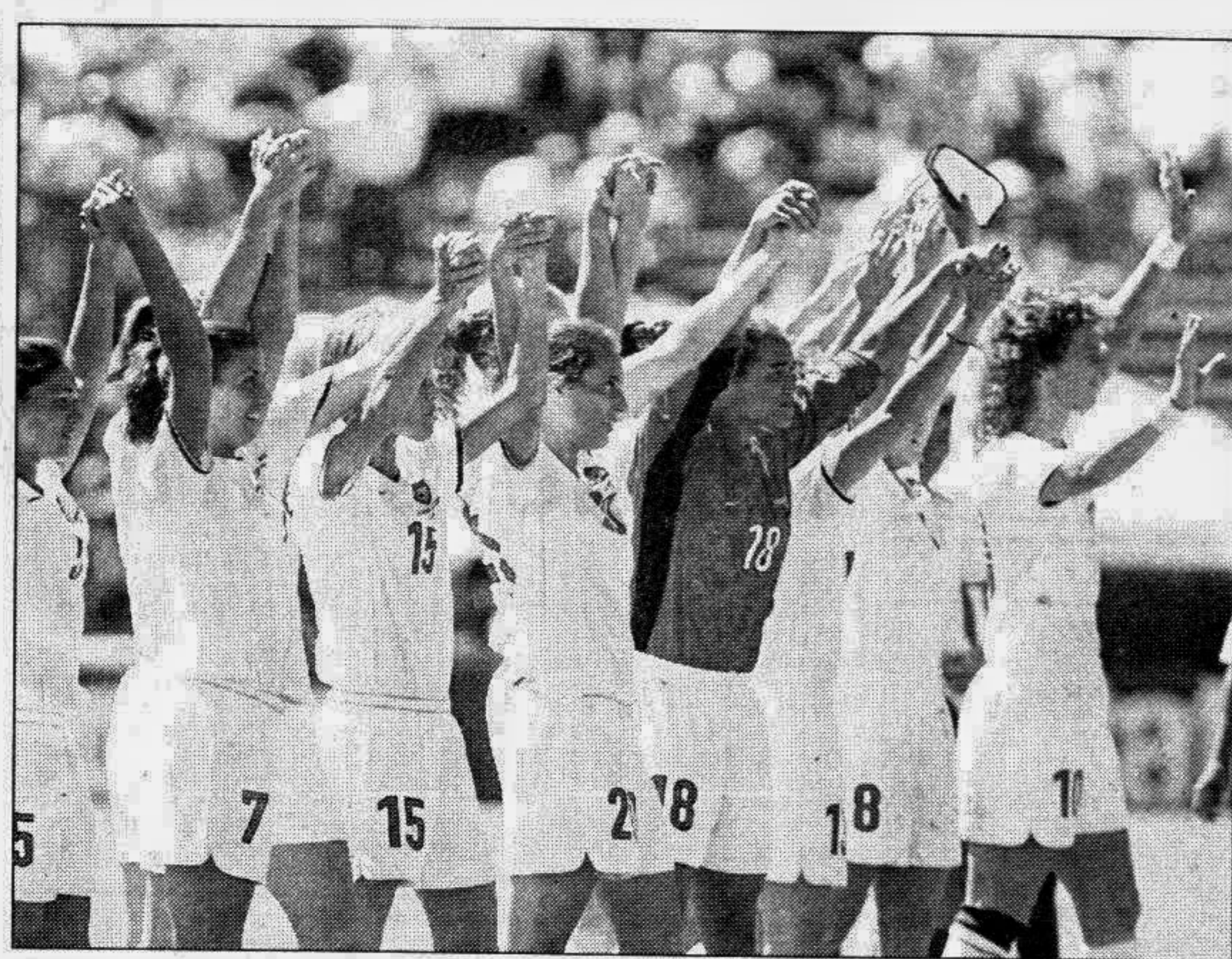
LONDON, July 5: West Ham on Monday issued a firm hands-off warning to Italy's AS Roma by telling the Serie A outfit England defender Rio Ferdinand is not for sale, reports AFP.

Franco Sensi, president of the Italian club, claimed Sunday his club were hopeful of tying up a deal for the 20-year-old centre-back by Wednesday.

But Hammers secretary Graham Mackrell insisted: "It's just nonsense. We haven't been in negotiations with Roma. We have no intentions of selling the player."

Sensi said Roma had switched their attention to 18 million dollar-rated Ferdinand after missing out on Spurs' Sol Campbell.

"I hope to seal it with West Ham by Wednesday for Rio Ferdinand, who they tell me is even better than Campbell," said Sensi.



American women's soccer team members wave to the crowd after their victory over Brazil in the semifinals of the World Cup in Palo Alto, California on July 4. — AFP photo

Hosts create history



PALO ALTO, California, July 5: Cindy Parlow scored an early goal, Brianna Scurry preserved the lead with a couple of key saves and Michelle Akers buried a penalty kick in the 80th minute as the United States reached the final of the women's World Cup with a 2-0 win over Brazil on Sunday, reports Reuters.

The United States, who won the inaugural women's World Cup in 1991, became the first host country to reach the final. Next Saturday at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California, the Americans will face China, who crushed defending champion Norway 5-0 later on Sunday.

Parlow scored an opportunistic goal in the fifth minute. Midfielder Julie Foudy sent a cross to the left side that Brazilian goalkeeper Maravilha touched but could not hold, and Parlow headed it in from close range for her second goal of the tournament.

Scurry, coming off a shaky performance in a 3-2 quarterfinal victory over Germany, made a tough punch save over the crossbar on a shot by defender Nene in the 46th minute. Scurry denied her again 10 minutes later, diving to her right to knock away a 12-yard

blast heading for the left corner.

"We really had a tough game today," Scurry said. "Any game where I can do my part and get my team to the final of the women's World Cup is my best game. They have a lot of offensive power, and I'm just glad I was able to hold the fort."

As Brazil grew desperate to get the equaliser, the United States took advantage in the 80th minute. Akers headed a ball ahead to Mia Hamm, who raced down the left side of the pitch. She was fouled in the penalty area by Elene, prompting Finnish referee Katriona Elvirts to award a 12-yard spot.

Akers waited patiently before burying a shot into the right corner of the net past Maravilha, who guessed correctly but could not stop it.

Scurry made her last great save three minutes later, knocking away a shot by Pretinha from 12 yards. She finished with six saves.

Akers also played a stellar game defensively, shadowing Brazil's superstar midfielder Sissi and preventing her from adding to her women's World Cup-leading seven goals. Sissi, who took all of Brazil's eight corner kicks, never had the opportunity to take a freekick on goal.

"We knew we had to play a lot of defence, we really worked on

trying to eliminate space for Sissi and not try to create any fouls around the penalty area," said US coach Tony DiCiccio.

Unlike the previous three matches, where the Americans appeared nervous, they pressed the attack early and held possession for most of the first half. Parlow was fouled just above the penalty area in the 12th minute, but midfielder Brandi Chastain's free kick was absorbed by the wall.

The "Samba Queens" finally found their rhythm in the latter stages of the first half. Pretinha had a shot blocked by defender Joy Fawcett in the 29th minute and had another shot stopped by Scurry in the next minute.

"We felt we played really well and we are in a situation where we were not so much unlucky, but there was no necessity for the referring to being so that bad, because the United States is a great team," said Brazil coach Wilson Oliveira Rica.

Parlow put a header on target in the 42nd minute, and Scurry stopped a shot by Cidinha in the fourth minute of injury time.

The North Americans received their first yellow card of the tournament when Akers was issued a caution right before injury time in the second half.

Brazil will play the Norway for third place before Saturday's championship game.

China storm into final



FOXBORO, Massachusetts, July 5: Sun Wen and Liu Ailing each scored twice as China overwhelmed defending champions Norway 5-0 on Sunday in the semifinals of the 1999 women's soccer World Cup, reports Reuters.

Attacking at will and utilising overlapping runs down the wings to exploit an overtaxed Norwegian defence, China dominated the entire match.

In the third minute, Wen scored her first goal, which was greeted by a roar from the heavily partisan crowd of 28,986 at Foxboro Stadium.

The loss snapped a 10-match unbeaten run for the defending champions who did not get a shot on goal until 15 minutes into the second half when Heger Riise shot high from 17 metres.

Riise is probably the best team we've had in a few years," said China coach Ma Yuanan. "In the first half there were two opportunities the players didn't maximise which would have put the game away for us: I'm pleased with the result, but we could have possibly played better."

The match could have well been considered over when Ailing put a cross into the Norway box to Jin Yan whose shot from 12 metres was blocked by goalkeeper Bente Nordby. The rebound came out to Wen who

slotted home from nine metres for the 1-0 lead.

At 14 minutes, Monica Knudsen failed to clear a corner kick by Liu Ying giving Ailing an opportunity to finish from 13 metres at the interval.

Norway, which failed to muster a concentrated attack until late in the game, was forced to chase during most of the first half while China effortlessly controlled the proceedings.

"We're not happy with this match today," said Norway coach Per-Mathias Hogmo. "But China played a fabulous match. It's the best team we have met in the tournament and the way they (China) beat the United States twice this year, we saw why tonight."

The loss mirrored two of Norway's previous worst performances a 5-0 defeat to Sweden in 1986 and a 6-1 loss to Denmark in 1994.

They (China) were strong in defence and strong in the attack, but they also have some very good individual skills," said Hogmo.

Wen demonstrated some of those individual skills, making a number of penetrating runs into the Norway area, and could have scored three times in the first half.

At 41 minutes Wen's shot from eight metres was blocked by Nordby only to have Pei Wei put the rebound wide. A minute later, Wen was stopped by Nordby from eight metres.

At 51 minutes, Ailing hit her

second of the night. A corner kick into the Norway area by Ying came out to Ailing who hit a brilliant left-footed volley through a clot of players from 15 metres for the 3-0 margin.

China went up 4-0 in the 65th minute when Fan Yunjie hammered home a cross from a Wen in the middle of the Norway area.

Norway had two good opportunities, but goalkeeper Gao Hong was up to task on both occasions. At 72 minutes, Riise shot directly at Hong from 12 metres. Two minutes later, a sliding Hong thwarted an unmarked Marianne Pettersen who broke into the China area only to have Hong tackle the ball away.

Wen became co-holder of the tournament's scoring lead with a 72nd minute penalty after defender Goril Kringen handled the ball in the area. Wen sent Nordby the wrong way, putting the spot kick down the middle.

Wen and Sissi of Brazil each have seven goals.

China has won two of three matches against the United States this year while drawing once.

"In soccer games, until you play, you don't know who is going to win," said Ma. "The Chinese team has the confidence to play a good game against a very good American team. Right now, I hope we play with the performance level of April 25."

On that date, China defeated the United States 2-1 in a friendly in New Jersey.

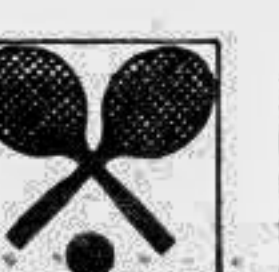


Norway's Goril Kringen (R) takes the ball away from Sun Wen of China during their Women's World Cup soccer semifinal at the Foxboro Stadium in Massachusetts on July 4. — AFP photo



Four of the many Stars and Stripes supporters during the USA-Brazil match at the Stanford Stadium in Palo Alto on Sunday. — AFP photo

Old guard stands tall



LONDON, July 5 (AFP): The teenagers had their day in the sun, in fact they had several, but in the end the last Wimbledon of the Millennium belonged to some very familiar names -- Sampras, Agassi, Davenport, Graf, Becker and even McEnroe.

Sampras established himself as the greatest grass court player of all time by winning his sixth Wimbledon title, more than anyone else this century.

The 27-year-old's clinical slaughter of in-form Andre Agassi in an all-American final on Independence Day confirmed that he has no equal on this surface.

It also lifted him onto a par with Australian legend Roy Emerson, the only other man to have won 12 men's Grand Slams.

No wonder Sampras said his head was spinning afterwards. Davenport, in a women's final held over until the second Sunday after rain wiped out almost two complete days in the second week, was equally ruthless in brushing aside seven-time winner Steffi Graf.

Little did she know the German had already decided to steal her thunder by rushing off the court and announcing she had played her last game at Wimbledon.

Despite seven titles from nine singles finals, Graf cannot claim quite the same stature as Sampras, Martina Navratilova having won nine times at the All England Club.

The 30-year-old German now seems unlikely to compete at the US Open next month, though she has refused to confirm her retirement from the sport for now.

Victory over Davenport would have given her the chance to match Margaret Court's record of 24 Grand Slam wins by winning at Flushing Meadow, but Davenport ensured that will not happen by breaking serve with her only two break points of the match in a superlative display of power-hitting.

If her compatriot Boris Becker's example is anything to go by, Graf may yet find herself tempted back to say a proper

goodbye to Centre Court.

Becker, who with Graf was the singles winner the last time the two finals were played on the second Sunday in 1989, had bid an emotional farewell in 1997.

But despite no real preparation, the 31-year-old was back for one final fling and romped to the fourth round before Australian Pat Rafter caught him on an off day. Becker promptly quit, this time, he promised, for good.

There was yet more frustration for the home fans as sixth seed Tim Henman once again pulled up short, losing in the semis to Sampras for the second year in a row.

Rafter, thrashed by Agassi in the last four, and his big-serving compatriot Mark Philippoussis will also wonder what might have been.

Philippoussis in particular was desperately unfortunate when he snapped some knee cartilage while leading Sampras in the quarterfinals, and at 22 his time will surely come.

But while qualifiers Wayne Arthurs of Australia and Switzerland's Lorenzo Manta -- who created the biggest shock by beating fifth-seeded Dutchman Richard Krajicek -- made their mark, the real drama was in the women's draw.

Another Australian, a 16-year-old blonde with a mole on her chin called Jelena Dokic, created the biggest sensation of any Wimbledon when she hammered world number one Martina Hingis 6-0, 6-2 in the first round.

The Belgrade-born teenager, who arrived at the All England Club together with her Brit-hating dad Damir, was eventually beaten by another qualifier,

American Alexandra Stevenson, in the quarterfinals.

Stevenson, revealed during the tournament as the love-child of American basketball legend Julius Dr J'Erving, thus emulated John McEnroe's achievement of reaching the Wimbledon semifinals as a qualifier.

With her booming serve and power-hitting she promises to be a force in future years too, though she could have done without a spate of adverse publicity when her mother alleged racism and lesbianism on the women's tour.

Another teenager, 19-year-old American Venus Williams gave Graf the fright of her life in probably the best women's match of the tournament, going down in three sets in the last eight in a clash the rain did it's best to ruin.

And then, there was Anna Kournikova -- the 18-year-old Russian pin-up whose stunning looks remain unmatched by her tennis. As she admits, she lacks the mental strength to match the likes of Davenport, Graf and Williams, who beat her in the last 16.

Almost as a big a draw was American three-time former winner John McEnroe, who entered the mixed doubles with Graf at the age of 40.

McEnroe, who is eying a place in the American Davis Cup doubles team, showed he has lost none of his skill they delighted the crowds by reaching the semifinals until Graf pulled out with a thigh injury.

According to Graf, McEnroe was gutted when he discovered they would have to withdraw. The American is sure to be one of many nagging the German to return next year.

ATP TOUR'S TOP THIRTY

PARIS, July 5 (AFP): Despite losing to his fellow American Pete Sampras in Sunday's final at Wimbledon, Andre Agassi, who less than two years ago was ranked 141 in the world, recaptured the number one spot today.

Agassi was last number one three years ago but his performances in recent months -- winning Roland Garros before reaching the Wimbledon final, are enough to see him leapfrog his compatriot and rival.

Sampras slips to third behind Pat Rafter, whom Agassi beat in the Wimbledon semifinals.

Brazil's Gustavo Kuerten moves into the top five after reaching the last eight at the All-England club.

PLAYER	POINTS
1. Andre Agassi (USA)	3684
2. Patrick Rafter (AUS)	3673
3. Pete Sampras (USA)	3594
4. Yevgeny Kafelnikov (RUS)	3212
5. Gustavo Kuerten (BRA)	2810
6. Tim Henman (GBR)	2690
7. Richard Krajicek (NED)	2431
8. Alex Corretja (SPA)	2408
9. Marcelo Rios (CHI)	2370
10. Todd Martin (USA)	2332
11. Carlos Moya (SPA)	2313