

Russian tennis boss' claim

STOCKHOLM, July 16: Shamil Tarpishev, captain of the Russian Tennis Federation, claimed on Thursday that the surface of the courts to be used for this weekend's Davis Cup matches in Moscow contain radioactive clay. The Swedish news agency TT has reported here, reports AFP.

Tarpishev is accusing the Swedish firm Lawit Sport AB of importing clay containing a dangerous level of uranium for the surface of Moscow's Olympic Stadium tennis courts which will be used in the centennial Davis Cup quarter-finals between Russia and the Slovak Republic.

"The Swedish clay is seven times over the radioactive limit," claimed Tarpishev. "Playing on such a surface not only destroys our chances of winning, but also threatens the players' health."

However, the Swedish Nuclear Protection Institute (SSI), which examined the disputed clay, dismissed the Russian tennis chief's claims and said that it did not pose any health risk.

The Russian captain's accusations on the health risks caused by our surface are baseless," said SSI expert Gustav Aakerblom.

Aakerblom said that the same clay was used to build houses where over 800,000 Swedish people lived without any adverse health effects.

He added that Russian customs officials were overzealous in the examination of materials which contained uranium after years of neglect.

Career-best by Atherton

LONDON, May 16 (Internet report): Lancashire chairman Jack Simmons paid tribute to Mike Atherton after his record-breaking performance of 268 not out at Blackpool.

"He was absolutely magnificent. I don't think I have ever seen him play better for us," said Simmons.

"He has sent out a message to certain people. When he was asked about his back problem and whether he would play again for Lancashire or England he said quite simply 'Both' - and I think that says it all about him."

Lancashire physio Lawrie Brown revealed that Atherton's recent back condition was different to the long-term affliction which has plagued him for several years.

"Over the last six months he has been restricted by osteoarthritis of the lower spine," said Brown.

"But we have worked hard on it, he had a couple of injections which seem to have helped, and he is also doing his exercises. This has been his biggest test, but he appears to have come through it. I'm delighted for him, but I'm always a little wary."

Atherton batted for nine hours for his unbeaten 268, a career best, and was back on the field for the start of Glamorgan's reply, apparently suffering no ill-effect from his marathon.

Lancashire's 558 for six declared left Glamorgan shell-shocked and Muttiah Muralitharan sent back their first five batsmen to send them sliding to 188.

And Glamorgan are in danger of succumbing to their fourth innings defeat in the last five matches. Murali, who has bowled in four championship games, now has 42 wickets.

The sack in return!

JOHANNESBURG, July 16: Frenchman Didier Notheaux has been fired by Burkina Faso after becoming the first coach to successfully steer the West African country through an African Nations Cup qualifying programme, reports AFP.

National football federation president Honore Traore announced the sacking just one month after the Burkina Faso Stallions drew 2-2 with Senegal to top Group 5 and reach the 2000 finals in Ghana and Nigeria.

"Didier Notheaux achieved the objective he was given, that is qualification for the final phase of the 2000 Nations Cup," Traore told reporters in Ouagadougou.

"But the preparation of the team still leaves much doubt as to its ability to establish itself among the elite of African soccer. We need a coach who will inject new blood and a combative and cohesive spirit."

Burkina Faso played in the 1978 Nations' Cup as replacements for disqualified Cote d'Ivoire and reached the 1998 semifinals after qualifying automatically as hosts.

Spartak well on course

MOSCOW, July 16: Russian champions Spartak Moscow continued their march toward yet another league title with an impressive 3-0 home win over Uralan Elista on Wednesday, reports Reuters.

A trio of Russian internationals, Viktor Bulatov, Yuri Kovtun and Yegor Titov, scored on a scorching afternoon for the hosts, whose title push seems back on track following their 4-1 win over Rotor Volgograd last Sunday.

Those two wins followed a 3-1 defeat at lowly Samara a week ago and have lifted Spartak on to 46 points from 20 matches - 11 clear of second placed Lokomotiv Moscow who won 4-2 at Torpedo Moscow - but Lokomotiv have four matches in hand over Spartak.



Pakistani cricket legend Imran Khan speaking at a conference of the Sri Lankan Foreign Correspondents' Association at Colombo on July 15. —AFP photo

Imran prefers waiting



COLOMBO, July 16 (Reuters/Internet): Former Pakistani cricket captain Imran Khan said on Friday his country should avoid facing India on the cricket field until the standoff between the two countries over Kashmir eased.

"I think there should be a cooling-off period. The Kashmir conflict is an added pressure," Khan, who is on a three-day visit to Sri Lanka, said.

A one-day series between Pakistan and India in Toronto in September was scrapped earlier this month because of the border fighting between the two countries.

Organisers cancelled the se-

ries after several Indian players said cricketing links between the two countries should be severed.

Khalid Mahmood, chairman of the Pakistan Cricket Board, said on Wednesday his country was still prepared to play against India despite the Kashmir conflict.

Imran, who is scheduled to meet President Chandrika Kumaratunga and opposition leader Ranil Wickremesinghe and donate some money to a cancer hospital, said pressure had played a big part in Pakistan's loss to Australia by eight wickets in the World Cup final in England.

"It was just that pressure took its toll on a very talented team. Match-fixing played absolutely no part in it," Khan added.

told Reuters television in an interview.

The lopsided World Cup final led to allegations that Pakistani cricketers had been involved in match-fixing.

A judge conducting an inquiry into alleged match-fixing in Pakistani cricket is due to finalise his report within the next two months.

Khan said the inquiry should have been resolved before the World Cup.

"Whatever evidence was there, a decision should have been taken and whoever should have been sentenced and the matter would have ended."

By delaying the verdict it put so much pressure on the team at the World Cup," he added.

Cairns gets into his stride



LONDON, July 16 (Internet report): Chris Cairns chose the perfect time to announce his return to form at Canterbury after doubts arose over the fitness of Simon Doull for next week's Lord's Test.

The day after Doull underwent micro-surgery on his right knee, Cairns collected seven for 46 against Kent, bowling with the kind of rhythm and consistency New Zealand coach Steve Rixon has been seeking since the World Cup began in mid-May.

Cairns delivered only four overs in the second innings of the Edgbaston Test defeat, a small workload which disappointed the all-rounder as England romped home by seven wickets.

But it was timely for the Kiwis that Cairns managed to get everything right in their last match before Lord's.

Rixon said: "Chris did what we've been asking him to do for a long time. He bowled one side of the wicket, and he bowled at a fair pace and stuck to a very simple plan. He's found it difficult to control the new ball at times but he got it on track this time and we saw how good a bowler he can be."

He just hung in there, and he's quick enough to get the outside edge, and create problems. If he did that day in and day out, he'd have the new ball day in and day out.

"It's the most consistent he's bowled on tour. He got good rhythm, and when he's got rhythm, he's as good as most running around."

Cairns seven-wicket haul followed the seven for 39 of Dion Nash against Hampshire in the last match, but Nash has a side strain and the plan was not to bowl him in the first innings at Canterbury, only in the second.

Kiwi physiotherapist Mark

Harrison also revealed that Doull has had surgery on his knee.

"Some cartilage was removed from Doull's right knee, which was injured in the match against Hampshire. They also removed some loose tissue which was making his knee lock. It's still a bit swollen," he said.



CHRIS CAIRNS

NZ SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard on the opening day of the four-day match between Kent and New Zealand on Thursday.

KENT: First innings	
Smith c Parore b Vettori	72
Key c Twose b Cairns	4
Fulton c Nash b Cairns	43
Banes lbw b Cairns	0
Symonds c Parore b Cairns	0
Ealham b Cairns	0
Fleming c Twose b Vettori	37
Willis b Astle	9
McCague c Fleming b Cairns	4
Scott c Parore b Cairns	0
Extras: (b-7, lb-4, nb-12)	23
Total	201
Fall of wickets: 1-36; 2-110; 3-111; 4-121; 5-121; 6-155; 7-196; 8-196; 9-201	

Bowling	O	M	R	W
Allott	12	1	46	0
Cairns	15.3	4	46	7
Vettori	25	12	48	2
Astle	19	6	50	1

NEW ZEALAND: First innings	
Horne not out	57
Bell c Willis b Ealham	20
Fleming not out	16
Extras: (b-2, lb-6, nb-2)	10
Total: (for one wicket)	103
Fall of wickets: 1-58	
To bat: N Astle, R Twose, C McMillan, C Cairns, A Parore, D Nash, D Vettori, G Allott	

Bowling (to date)	O	M	R	W
McCague	8	3	20	0
Golding	5	2	12	0
Scott	8	3	20	0
Ealham	8	2	26	1
Fleming	5	2	17	0

The Strongest's stern move

LA PAZ, July 16 (Reuters): Popular Bolivian soccer club The Strongest Thursday announced it had laid-off its whole team after players staged a week-long strike to demand three months worth of back wages.

In announcing the decision, The Strongest's President Jorge Steir told reporters players had shown "lack of respect" when they did not attend a conciliatory meeting.

Vidal Gonzalez, a representative for the more than 20 players fired, said the only solution to the conflict was for them to quickly get their salaries "cash in hand."

Former Argentine soccer star Mario Kempes was hired last month as a coach in a bid to bail out The Strongest, which ended next to last in the local Apertura tournament disputed in the first half of the year.



Mexican striker Luis Hernandez watching his teammates play tennis-soccer at Foz de Iguaçu, Brazil during a training session on July 14. Mexico take on Chile in the third place decider of the Copa America tonight. —AFP photo

Davis Cup

Russia take 2-0 lead

UNDATED, July 16: Marat Safin and Yevgeny Kafelnikov scored victories Thursday that gave Russia a commanding 2-0 lead over Slovakia in the Davis Cup World Group quarter-final, reports AFP.

Safin opened with a 2-6, 6-4, 6-2, 6-4 victory over Karol Kucera -- his first win in three meetings with the Slovak -- and former world number one Kafelnikov then beat Dominik Hrbaty 2-6, 6-2, 6-7, 6-1, 7-5 in the second singles on the clay courts of the Moscow Olympic stadium.

Safin, 19 years' old and ranked 37th, sealed his victory over 13th world-ranked Kucera by rattling off five games in a row after trailing 1-4 in the fourth set.

Safin had twice lost his service earlier in the set but broke back for the second and third times for 3-4 and 5-4 before serving out for the match in the 10th game.

Kafelnikov had to fight every inch of the way in downing 19th-ranked Hrbaty in a tough five-setter.

Kafelnikov finally broke Hrbaty's serve in the 11th game of the decisive set and then served out to beat the French Open semifinalist, finishing the match with a pair of aces.

Russia can seal a place in the semis if Kafelnikov and Andrei Olhovskiy beat Kucera and Hrbaty in Saturday's doubles. The reverse singles are scheduled for Sunday.

BELGIUM AHEAD

In Brussels, Belgian teenager Xavier Malisse beat Lorenzo Manta 6-4, 6-0, 7-6 in the opening singles of their quarter-final with Switzerland on Friday.

The 18-year-old had little trouble defeating Manta, who looked uncomfortable on the slow clay surface.

Manta, who beat 1997 Wimbledon champion Richard Krajicek of Holland in this year's British showpiece, reached 4-4 in the first set but then lost nine consecutive games in under an hour to trail 6-4, 6-0, 1-0.

The Swiss player, however, taking advantage of a dip in form by his opponent, reached a tie-break in the third set before Malisse -- ranked 111 in the world, one spot ahead of his opponent, reasserted his authority.

He won on the first of five match points after one hour and 52 minutes.

Trying to cash in on women's success

SAN DIEGO, July 16 (AP): American soccer's next big thing, the MLS All-Star game, will kick off in the aftermath of the US women's dramatic World Cup victory.

The men don't have much choice but to ride along on the women's shirttails. Jealous? No. Grateful? Yes.

"I say that definitely people might be more aware of the game because of the women, and we're all pretty thankful for that," said Matt Jordan of the Dallas Burn, the backup goalie for the Eastern Conference in Saturday's game. "We're all sort of jumping on their boat, their bandwagon, so to speak. So it's a very positive situation for all of us."

Roll a soccer ball on a field these days and it's impossible not to talk about the women, who won the final over China on Brandi Chastain's penalty kick Saturday.

"Especially in the current climate with the wonderful performance by the women, soccer's on everyone's mind," Alex Lalas, the goateed star of the Kansas City Wizards, said before a MLS-sponsored celebrity game Wednesday night. "I think that it's a wonderful time to celebrate not just the MLS, but soccer in general."

Lalas attended two women's games and watched the final on TV. He has fielded as many questions about the women as the MLS, but hasn't tired of it.

"It's all soccer and it's all good," he said. "They deserve everything they're getting. Now let's see what they do with it."

There's the catch. After the All-Star game, the men return to their league. There's no such thing for women.

Then there's New England Revolution goalie Walter Zenga, who can't figure out all the talk about the women's team.

"In Europe, they don't care about the women's soccer," said Zenga, an Italian. "Everywhere it is a different mentality, no? I think it is just a little strange for one team to be on top of the world and they don't have a league."

It remains to be seen if the women's success will help boost ticket sales for Saturday's game, which for the second straight year is being played in a non-MLS city. League officials would be happy to sell 30,000 tickets at 70,000-seat Qualcomm Stadium.

A game between Chivas of Mexico and Chile's Universidad Catolica will follow, and officials hope for strong same-day ticket sales to fans from Tijuana.

Thomas, the 1998 European, Commonwealth and World Cup champion, underwent surgery last week on an ankle injury picked up while training in South Africa earlier this season.

Crooked Thomas eyes end of year return

LONDON, July 16: British 400 metre runner Iwan Thomas on Monday shrugged aside his disappointment at missing next month's World Championships and looked ahead to making his return towards the end of the year, reports AFP.

Thomas, the 1998 European, Commonwealth and World Cup champion, underwent surgery last week on an ankle injury picked up while training in South Africa earlier this season.

Butcher shines for Surrey



LONDON, July 16 (Internet report): Mark Butcher's 94 was the centrepiece of the Surrey lightbulb after second-placed Hampshire had put the championship leaders under real pressure at Guildford.

Facing a first innings deficit of 151, Surrey were 239 for two at the close - a lead of 88. Graham Thorpe was 60 not out and nightwatchman Ian Salisbury 12 not out.

The England opener was in fine form, his straight driving and cutting particularly impressive.

He seemed on course for a third championship century of the season, but fell six short when he was brilliantly caught by a diving John Stephenson catch at first slip off the bowling of veteran seamer Peter Hartley.

Butcher faced 175 balls and struck 14 fours, sharing a stand of 118 with fellow England batsman Thorpe.

Surrey's other left-hander, opener Ian Ward, was also in good form, sharing a stand of 107 with Butcher and getting to his 50 off 106 balls with eight fours.

But not for the first time this season he got out when well set, chipping a full toss from occasional off-spinner Jason Lawley to mid-off where Matthew

Keach took a fine catch. Ward was out for 55 and Surrey had lost their first wicket for 107. It was Lawney's first wicket in first-class cricket, his previous career figures being an elusive.

Earlier Hampshire were indebted to a career-best 70 from West Indian fast bowler Nixon McLean. The number 10 produced a power-packed innings, smashing England leg-spinner Ian Salisbury for a huge six over mid-wicket and handing out the same treatment to Pakistan off-spinner Saqlain Mushtaq.

In one over he and number 11 Peter Hartley smashed the spin wizard for 19. McLean followed his six with two ugly fours to mid-wicket and Hartley added a text book on-driven boundary off the last ball.

But McLean also played some genuine shots and his 50 came off 38 balls with two sixes and seven fours.

Hampshire had a worrying moment when Surrey's England fast bowler Alex Tudor hit their off-spinner Shaun Udal on the left elbow.

Udal, on 30, had to retire hurt and was later taken to the Royal Surrey Hospital where X-rays confirmed severe bruising and not the break Hampshire feared.

Udal returned at the fall of the ninth wicket with his arm in a sling, but there was no need for any one-handed heroics on his part. McLean the last man out, caught in the gully by Butcher off the bowling of Ben Hollis.

MARK BUTCHER

unimpressive nought for 123 off 28 overs.

Ward now has six championship fifties this season but his maiden century remains

Real, Barca at odds early



MADRID, July 16: (Reuters/Internet): Real Madrid and Barcelona may not be scheduled to clash on the field for another three months but they have wasted no time in squaring up off it.

After a quiet period, with Barcelona concentrating on their centenary celebrations and Real trying to salvage something from a disappointing season, sparks have been flying once again this week.

Trouble flared with the decision to grant Real a bye into the last 16 of the Spanish Cup, a move that will ease the side's fixture congestion caused by their participation in the world club championship in Brazil.

Barcelona appeared happy to go along with that decision on Tuesday, raising no objections to the proposal at a meeting of the Spanish League.

But when it came to ratifying the decision at a Spanish FA meeting, Barca vice-president Joan Gaspart could not resist a dig at "Royal" Madrid.

"Football matches should be won on the field, not in an office, not by royal decree," Gaspart thundered. "The new season has already started badly with this botched job."

Real president Lorenzo Sanz, bolstered by the unanimous vote in his club's favour at the original meeting, revealed a missing from his team last season.

"That's lamentable," said Sanz, "especially as it comes after we've received the support of all the clubs - including his."

"We're giving Spain the honour of having a representative in the world club cup."

International reaction to the decision to allow Real to miss out a round of the cup was largely positive. Much better, it was thought, than being forced to opt out of the competition altogether, like Manchester United.

Gaspart, given the final word on the subject, thought differently, however.

"The gentlemanly thing to do would be to follow the example of Manchester United and not play in the cup," said Gaspart.

"We're starting the league with a rift. Mark my words."

His words duly noted, the rest of Spain's clubs promptly played down the importance of the spat.

Valencia boss Pedro Cortes was equally unconcerned, treating the incident as a little light relief. "We've got used to these little fights," he said. "Real and Barca will always be the same."

Real and Barca players will have to wait until October 13 at the Nou Camp before they get stuck into one another.

Their club bosses clearly could not wait that long.

His words duly noted, the rest of Spain's clubs promptly played down the importance of the spat.

Valencia boss Pedro Cortes was equally unconcerned, treating the incident as a little light relief. "We've got used to these little fights," he said. "Real and Barca will always be the same."

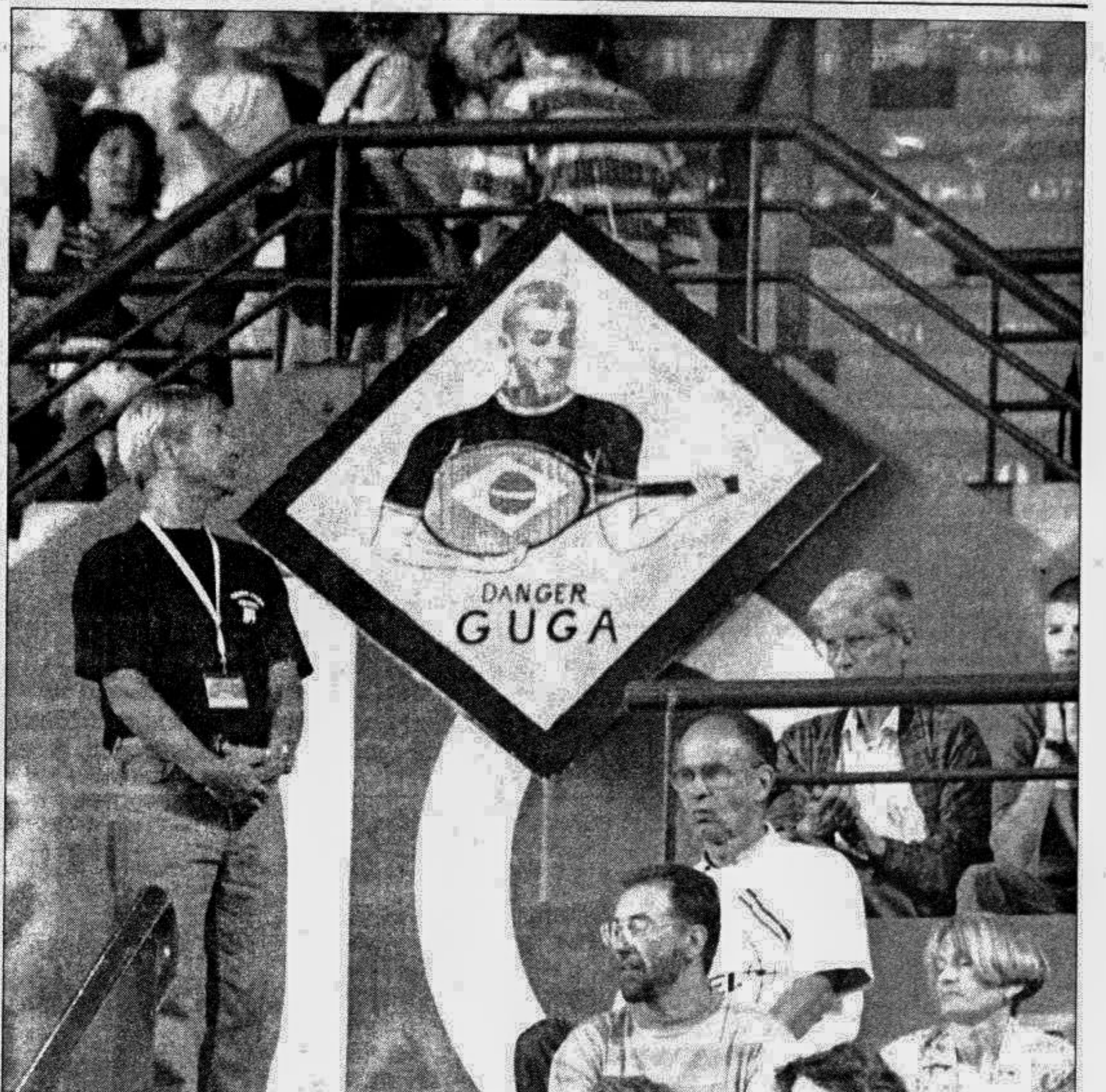
Real and Barca players will have to wait until October 13 at the Nou Camp before they get stuck into one another.

Their club bosses clearly could not wait that long.

Sydney unsure of blood tests

SYDNEY, July 16: Sports minister Jackie Kelly said she expects the International Olympic Committee to honour its promise to introduce blood testing for the Sydney Olympics if a reliable test is found in time, reports AP.

The IOC said last month that blood tests will not be introduced for Sydney because scientific analysis requires further work and the required legal framework is not in place.



Fans hang a picture of Brazilian tennis star Gustavo Kuerten—affectionately called 'Guga'—in the stands of the Pau stadium during a Davis Cup tie against France yesterday. —AFP photo

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 40 Round 4 Dodged nate
1 Yawn Table 5 One of the Brady 20 Exemplar of patience
5 Rev the address 6 Bunch 21 Eager, plus
8 Blubber 41 Autumnal stone 22 Seven
12 Macro-cosm 42 Pasta org. 23 Richards or Moon
14 Spindle 47 "Pretty Woman" star 24 Hobbies
15 1990s fad 48 Smitten 49 Choppers 25 Exhibition
16 Unrivaled 50 Perch 9 O.T. book 27 Patriot
17 Follow relentlessly 51 Bleachers 10 Model Mac-pherson 29 Laugh-a-minute
18 Merchant DOWN 1 Chewy 11 Juror, in theory 31 Clamptt patriarch
20 One of the 2 Literary 13 Cupid's alias 32 "Candid Camera" reactions
23 Handle 3 Snapshot 19 Peregrin-33 Wes Craven's specialty
24 "Metamorphoses" poet 36 Thailand, once 37 Frat-party outfit
25 Cross 38 Pinnacle 39 Aesopian also-ran 40 "Go away!"
26 Crib 39 Aesopian also-ran 40 "Go away!" 43 Blackbird
28 Poker 40 "Go away!" 43 Blackbird 44 Acapulco gold
29 Play 41 Juror, in theory 44 Acapulco gold 45 Fresh
30 Ur's "The—" 42 Pasta org. 45 Fresh 46 Picks out of a police lineup
31 Closest invader 43 Blackbird 46 Picks out of a police lineup

Solution time: 25 min.

YESTERDAY'S ANSWER
1 LOGY 2 PACK 3 TAG 4 ESIAU 5 ACHE 6 OWL 7 LUG 8 TIG 9 FIO 10 SOLID 11 HEM 12 YULE

31 RIFLES 32 SOUTER 33 OCEAN 34 AGILE 35 DENVER 36 STOCKY 37 JAW 38 TWO 39 UH 40 HOLE 41 AIR 42 HURT 43 RAGE 44 AIR 45 STAN 46 SANG 47 NAY 48 STAN 49 TREV