

Lankan A go down fighting

LONDON, July 18 (Internet report): Sri Lanka A returned some pride with a gallant batting performance before finally succumbing to Northamptonshire by 156 runs with a full day to spare at Wantage Road.

Facing a daunting victory target of 542, the tourists were dismissed for 385 with the result inevitable once the county side managed to break a third-wicket stand of 142, in 42 overs, between Tuwan Dilshan and Shantha Kalawitigoda.

Dilshan stroked 20 fours in a superb 115 from 177 balls, and Kalawitigoda supported him well with 63 as the Sri Lankans made the county's makeshift attack work hard for their victory.

England Under-19 paceman Richard Logan picked up the vital wicket after 80 minutes play of the third morning, trapping Dilshan leg-before, and left-arm spinner Michael Davies celebrated his 23rd birthday by bowling Kalawitigoda around his legs, seven overs later.

Northants then eased their way through the rest, although further resistance came from Indika De Saram with a hard-hitting 61, from 89 deliveries, including 10 boundaries.

He fell to the second new ball, caught at first slip off Kevin Innes, whose figures of four for 85 from 25 overs certainly did not flatter him, so frequently did he beat the bat without reward.

There was also a maiden first-class wicket for Alec Swann, who had Prasanna Jayawardena lbw sweeping early in the afternoon session.

Indika Gallage hit boldly for an unbeaten 32 at the end, but ran out of partners when a straight one from David Sales proved too much for last man Ravi Pushpakumara just before tea.

It was a disappointing outcome for the Sri Lankans after victories in their first three tour matches against the ECB XI, New Zealand and Lancashire, but they could derive some satisfaction from a spirited rear guard action after crashing to 86 all out in their first innings on Thursday.

Heyns breaks world record

LOS ANGELES, July 18: South African swimmer Penny Heyns twice broke the world record in the 200-metre breaststroke during the Janet Evans Invitational at University of Southern California, reports AP.

Heyns, who already holds world records in the 50-and 100-metre breaststroke, set the record with a swim of 2 minutes, 24.69 seconds in preliminaries, breaking the mark of 2:24.76 set by Australia's Rebecca Brown in 1994.

In the finals Saturday, Heyns lowered the new mark to 2:24.51.

Heyns, who won Olympic gold medals in the 100 and 200-metre breaststroke in the 1996 Olympics, is currently training with the University of Calgary Swim Club.

"Every time I swim well like that, it blows me away," Heyns said. "It's like I'm blessed."

Tom Wilkens, a member of the 1998 US World Championships team, won the 200-metre breaststroke in 2:16.09 and the 400-metre individual medley in 4:23.79.

Joanne Malar also won twice, taking the 200-metre freestyle in 2:02.22 and the 400-metre IM in 4:42.63.

South African Ryk Neethling won his third of the meet, taking the 200-metre free in 1:50.71.

Olympic gold medalist Jenny Thompson won her second event, the 50-metre free, in a meet-record 25.75, Roland Schoeman won the men's 50 in 22.93.

The meet, named for the American woman who set and still holds records for 400, 800 and 1,500 freestyle a decade ago, concludes Sunday. The four-day event has drawn over 700 competitors.

Uta Pippig suspended

DARMSTADT, Germany, July 18: German marathon star Uta Pippig has been suspended for two years for doping by the judicial commission of the German Athletics Federation, commission president Wolfgang Schoppe said Friday, reports AFP.

Pippig was initially suspended by the federation in October last year after failing a drug test and had already written off her chances of competing at next year's Sydney Olympics.

The judicial commission's decision Friday confirmed the federation's initial decision.

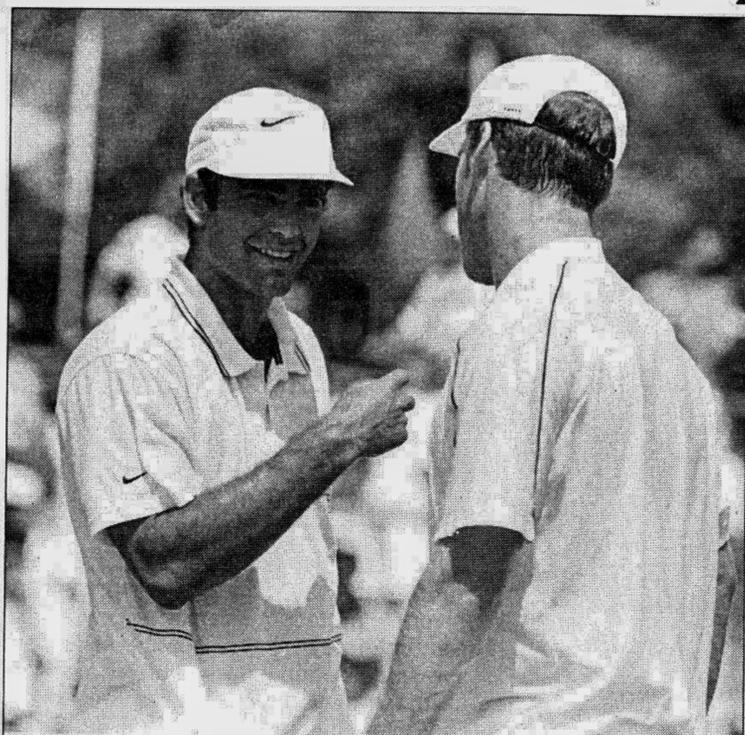
The three-time Boston Marathon winner returned a positive test in April last year.

Pippig recently blasted the world of athletics, telling Die Welt newspaper: "There is too much jealousy and mistrust." She also accused several members of the federation of not being impartial regarding testing and doping and questioned the validity of anti-doping controls, stating that the test flasks were changed and partially emptied.

Army aquatic on

The annual aquatic meet of Bangladesh Army got underway at the newly-built Army Swimming Pool at Banani in the capital yesterday afternoon, says a press release.

About three hundred swimmers from 11 teams of different formations of the defence force are taking part in swimming and water-polo events.



Pete Sampras discussing strategy with doubles partner Alex O'Brien during their Davis Cup quarter-final fixture against Australia on July 17 at Brookline. — AFP photo

American hopes alive

BROOKLINE, Massachusetts, July 18: Wimbledon champion Pete Sampras and Alex O'Brien snapped a 12-match Australia win streak in Davis Cup doubles Saturday in semifinal contention, reports AFP.

The Americans, paired for the first time, ousted Mark Woodforde and Sandon Stolle 6-4, 6-3, 3-6, 4-6, 6-3, cutting the Aussie edge to 2-1 in the best-of-five quarterfinal tie at Longwood Cricket Club.

World number two Pat Rafter will try to clinch a semifinal spot for Australia with Todd Martin in the scheduled foe. If Rafter fails, Jim Courier is scheduled to play Aussie teen Lleyton Hewitt in the decider.

But Gullikson, criticised for benching Sampras in singles for lower-ranked Courier and Martin, was asked about Sampras playing Sunday and said, "I wouldn't rule it out."

Only an injury or debilitating illness to Martin or Courier would be considered grounds for allowing Sampras to act as a substitute under Cup rules.

Neither appeared hurt or unable to play after losses Friday.

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Australia had not lost a Davis Cup doubles match since 1994. But the Aussies were missing Todd Woodbridge, out with an injured right arm and replaced by Stolle, whose lone prior Cup match was a dead rubber.

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Stolle needed four overhead smashes to save the first break point for the US duo. The US then needed a net cord and a

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Mercedes Cup Kuerten top seed

STUTTGART, Germany, July 18: Gustavo Kuerten returns to the clay after an unsuccessful Davis Cup weekend on indoor hardcourts and will be the top seed for the 1.05 million dollars Mercedes Cup, which starts here on Monday, reports AFP.

The Brazilian, the 1997 French Open champion, will try and put behind him Brazil's Cup quarter-final loss to France in Pau.

He heads a field containing winners of two of the last three French Opens, with Spaniard Carlos Moya joining him as second seed at the hullopt Weissenhof club.

Kuerten will have a first-round bye before going into action against the winner of a contest between Sweden Magnus Norman and Franco Squillari of Argentina.

Besides Kuerten and his teammate Fernando Meligeni, a French Open semi-finalist this year, Slovak pair Karol Kucera and Dominik Hrbaty also will be flying to Germany after Davis Cup duties.

Also entered is France's Sebastian Grosjean, who will play Chilean Marcelo Rios if he advances against qualifier.

Former world number one Rios is playing only his second event after five weeks out of the game.

The Chilean did not play for the quarterfinals of the French Open until Gstaad. He pulled out of Wimbledon with lower back pain.

Gstaad champion Albert Costa of Spain is seeded 11th, while beaten Swiss Open finalist Nicolas Pietrangeli of Ecuador is the tournament No. 10. The event was to have been the swansong of German Boris Becker. But the 31-year-old tennis icon trumped himself, calling it a career after Wimbledon and a thumping fourth-round loss to Pat Rafter.

Stolle double faulted to surrender the only break of the first set in its final game. The Aussies fell behind 0-40 in the 10th game and after a service winner, Stolle sent a second serve long.

A Sampras smash at the net broke Woodforde's serve to give the US duo a 4-2 lead in what would prove to be the second set's only break.

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Ngeny gives Coe a scare

NICE, France, July 18: Kenya's Noah Ngeny ran the second-fastest 1,000 metres ever on Saturday at the Nikaia athletics meeting as Sebastian Coe's world record narrowly withstood another challenge, reports Reuters.

In still, calm conditions, Ngeny roared round the track in the French Riviera twilight in two minutes 12.66 seconds, just short of Coe's time of 2:12.18 set 18 years ago in Oslo and the oldest individual record in the athletics record books.

The 20-year-old Kenyan, who has run the three fastest 1,500 metres times this season and pushed Morocco's Hicham El Guerrouj to the mile world record two weeks ago in Rome, was paced by compatriot David Kiptoo through much of the race, powering to the front with 200 metres to go.

But Ngeny timed his move a little late, falling just short of Coe's mark but moving ahead of another Briton, Steve Cram, in the all-time rankings.

Algeria's Noureddine Morcelli, Olympic 1,500 metres world record holder, and 2,000 metres world record holder, was also expected to challenge the mark but the former world record holder in the 1,500, mile and 3,000 failed to appear on the start line.

Olympic 800 and 1,500 gold medalist Svetlana Masterkova of Russia attempted to break her own record in the women's 1,000 metres but fell more than two seconds short, clocking 2:32.18 despite being pushed by Mozambique's Maria Mutola.

Ethiopia's Haile Gebrselassie, running one of last 3,000 metres of his remarkable career, easily won his race in 7:30.58.

But the 5,000 and 10,000 world record holder, competing for the first time in Nice, failed in his bid to reclaim the 3,000 metres record from Kenya's Daniel Komen, who ran 7:20.57 in 1996.

The meeting got off to a blistering start, with Ivelina Tica of Romania recording the second-best time this season in the 400 metres hurdles, clocking 53.44 to edge out world champion Nezha Bidouane of Morocco (53.48).

But the heavy, humid conditions on the French Riviera proved to be less than ideal for the sprinters.

Ghana's Leonard Myles Mills won the men's 100 metres in an ordinary 10.12, Britain's Mark Richardson the men's 400 in a pedestrian 44.98 and Savannah Fynes of Bahamas took the women's 200 in an unspectacular 22.32.

Watching Fynes from the stands was French double Olympic champion Marie-Jose Percec, who is expected to make her return to competition after a two-year absence on Wednesday at the Golden League meeting in Paris.

Organisers had left a lane open in the 200 on the chance that Percec, who has been battling chronic fatigue syndrome, might want to bring her comeback forward.

"I'd rather have been on the track than watching," Percec said. "One day things are going great and the next day it's a black hole. I just keep hoping and persevering."

The oppressive heat even affected the Kenyans who normally flourish in such conditions. Paul Kosgei winning the 3,000 metres steeplechase in a slow 8:09.46.

Romania's Violeta Szekely romped to a season's best time in the women's mile, pipping Olympic 1,500 champion Galina Sacramento of Portugal, but her time of 4:23.44 was still well off Masterkova's world record 4:12.56.

Davis Cup round-up

PARIS, July 18: France, Belgium and Russia all had 2-1 leads after Saturday's doubles matches to leave them just one win away from the Davis Cup semifinals, reports AFP.

Switzerland's Lorenzo Manta and Marc Rosset won their match in Brussels, Karol Kucera and Dominik Hrbaty gave Slovakia hope in Moscow, and France's Fabrice Santoro and Olivier Delaite gave the home crowd in Pau something to cheer against Brazil.

France's Santoro and Delaite scored a key doubles victory against Gustavo Kuerten and Jaime Oncins 7-6, 6-4, 6-4, in 2hr 10min.

The French pair combined well and won in straight sets after surviving some uncomfortable moments in the third set.

The Brazilian pair led 3-1 in the third before the Frenchmen rallied, immediately breaking Kuerten and regaining command.

Kuerten admitted: "Perhaps I was a bit tired but that had no influence on the match. They played very well and they should be congratulated for it. Now we can make no more mistakes and we will have to do the business on Sunday. We can surprise them and we will fight to the finish."

France's non-playing captain Guy Forget agreed that the tie was still in the balance.

Forget said: "We must stay concentrated because you do not beat Kuerten and (Fernando) Meligeni by being inattentive."

In Friday's singles, Kuerten beat Sebastian Grosjean 6-2, 6-7, 7-6, 6-7, 9-7 before Cedric Pioline lifted France level by beating Meligeni 6-3, 6-3, 6-3.

Manta and Rosset beat Filip Dewulf and Christophe Rochus 2-6, 6-1, 7-6, 7-5 in Brussels to lift Switzerland back into contention.

Xavier Malisse and Christophe Van Garse had won both of Friday's singles for Belgium.

The experience of the Swiss came through as they won on their first match point against a Belgian team playing together for the first time -- although a tiring Rosset was carried by Manta.

Following the match, Rosset confirmed he would be fit for his singles against Christophe Van Garse on Sunday.

"I hardly trained during the last week because of my painful back," Rosset said afterwards. "But I never felt in any bother."

"If you look at the score you could say the match was close but I think we were stronger than them. If I had played in the singles on Friday, I think we would be ahead now."

"It's the Belgians who have the pressure, particularly as they know that I'm playing tomorrow."

Kucera and Hrbaty won to keep alive Slovakia's hopes after easily downing the Russian pair of Yevgeny Kafelnikov and Andrei Olhovskiy 6-2, 6-2, 6-2.

In Friday's opening singles, Manta beat Kucera 2-6, 6-4, 6-2, 6-4 and former world number one Kafelnikov downed Hrbaty 2-6, 6-2, 6-7, 6-1, 7-5.