

Armstrong's lead cut

PIAU-ENGALY, France, July 21: A slightly tired Lance Armstrong might have seen his lead at the Tour de France cut by more than a minute. But his closest rivals still expect him to win the world's premier cycling event, reports AP.

"I really don't have much luck," Switzerland's Alex Zülle said Tuesday. "I finished second behind a great (Miguel) Indurain and now I'm going to finish second behind a great Armstrong."

Zülle, referring to the Spanish champion who won the Tour an incredible five times in a row between 1991 and 1995, finished second in Tuesday's climbing stage in the Pyrenees.

He remains in third place behind Armstrong and the day's stage winner, Fernando Escartin of Spain, who jumped up from fifth place.

Escartin had never won a major stage before, and was relishing the feeling.

But he, too, thinks Armstrong is too strong to reel in.

"Armstrong is a very tough rival because he has such a strong lead," Escartin said after crossing the finish line.

He added that Wednesday's second and final day in the mountains might not suit him, because it ends with a long, flat run.

Armstrong finished fourth Tuesday, and saw his lead cut to 6 minutes, 19 seconds. He said he found the course, featuring six punishing climbs, "very, very tough."

"I tried to control things, but in the last 2-3 kilometres (miles) I felt a little tired," he said. "Tomorrow will be another tough and long day ... but I'm always optimistic."

The course featured winding mountain passes with beautiful views of the Pyrenees valleys, and ended at a snowcapped ski resort.

Zülle also suffered.

"It was one of the hardest days I've ever had on a bike. I was really scared of cracking altogether," he said.

If Armstrong can protect his lead Wednesday, he will have taken another huge step toward winning the Tour. He then faces two flat stages, a time trial, and the arrival in Paris on Sunday.

He continues to be annoyed by allegations in the French press that his success might be a result of drug use.

Ngeny's time to prove

PARIS, July 21 (AFP): Kenyan middle-distance star Noah Ngeny has had enough of being number two to dual world record holder Hicham El-Guerrouj and at Wednesday's third IAAF Golden League meeting here, he is determined to take the 1500m world mark from the Moroccan.

The 20-year-old, who set the pace for El-Guerrouj when he broke the 1500m mark last year in Rome and then came in second behind the Moroccan when he broke the mile record earlier this month again in Rome, headlines a meeting that lost some of its lustre with the withdrawal of Ato Boldon from the 200 metres.

Ngeny, part of the English-based stable managed by Kim Macdonald, said that he wasn't in the least bit surprised by his improvement this year and that it was all part of a plan he had hatched last year after his successful pacemaking for El-Guerrouj.

"We decided that it was time to step out of the shadows and we have come to the point where I am going to go for El-Guerrouj's 1500 metres record," he said.

"I feel hopeful about it because I don't feel the pressure of being the favourite."

Macdonald, who also manages Kenya's world 5,000m champion Daniel Komen, said that while records were welcome it wasn't what athletes were ultimately judged on.

"When an athlete's career is over his achievements are judged on the titles he won and not the records he broke," Macdonald said.

The possibility of Ngeny breaking the 24-year-old Moroccan's record have been boosted by the illness that has sidelined El-Guerrouj. In Paris, he will face Algeria's former record holder, Noureddine Morceli, who lost his mile mark to El-Guerrouj in Rome.

Boldon, the world 200m champion and Commonwealth 100m titleholder, had been hoping to take on stablemate Maurice Greene, the world 100m recordholder, but injured himself in training.

"I came round the bend and felt a sharp pain in my right hamstring," the 25-year-old Trinidadian said.

"It's not worth taking any risks with the world championships in Seville coming up next month."

"It's sad because its only the second meeting that I will have missed in four years but with the John Smith stable around me I have all the support I need, and hopefully I will be at Stockholm in 10 days time."

Greene, who says he is aiming to break the 100m mark again in Seville, is left with just one real challenger in Barbadian Obadele Thompson in Paris. He felt confident enough to suggest he would become the first athlete to break 20 seconds at the Chazy track.

"I feel that I have it within me to break 20 seconds here ... run 19.82 even," said the man nicknamed the "Kansas Comet."

"I even think that I can go on to break Michael Johnson's record of 19.32, but little by little my best is 19.86 at the moment."

Larry Wade, another of the John Smith camp, normally based in Los Angeles but currently training in Monaco, will be confident of winning the 110m hurdles in the absence of world and Olympic champion Allen Johnson.

Frustration builds for Gough



LONDON, July 21 (Internet report): England's premier strike bowler Darren Gough could miss the entire four-Test series against New Zealand with injury.

England are not ruling out the Yorkshire fast bowler from the matches at Old Trafford and The Oval yet.

But a recurrence of the injury which eliminated him from the first Test must place a big question mark against his future participation in the remainder of the summer's international programme.

A disgruntled Gough fan tore up his Lord's Test tickets and sent them back with a complaining letter to England manager David Graveney.

Graveney returned them with his own reply explaining that England's number one strike bowler was injured and not dropped for the match.

But since Graveney posted his return correspondence, Gough's fitness situation has worsened, and he will see a specialist on Thursday.

It is now looking more likely that Gough could miss the third Test, and perhaps the fourth.

Gough's shin-calf problem flared up again and he was omitted from Yorkshire's championship match against Northamptonshire at Scarborough.

He has the NatWest quarter-final, a National League and the Super Cup final before the side is selected for Old Trafford.

And Yorkshire have only one championship match before the team is chosen for The Oval.

If Gough's injury problems clear up, it will come down to match fitness, and the Yorkshireman has few opportunities in which to prove it.

He returned from injury too early in 1997 and missed the winter tour to the West Indies, and earlier a stress fracture in a foot shortened his trip to Australia in 1994/95, part of an injury list which has decreased Gough's list of international appearances.

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DARREN GOUGH

England simply will not want to take any chances with the tough tour coming up to South Africa and Zimbabwe.

Graveney said: "Darren didn't play on Sunday. He's basically back to square one with regard to his shin. So he's off to see a specialist on Thursday and we'll see what happens then."

"It's an increasing concern to me that it has great similarity to a couple of years ago, a short term injury developing into something longer."

It will be disappointing for him because it reduces his chances of being fit enough for Test cricket in this country and there's also the Super Cup final coming up. He hasn't played in a domestic final for Yorkshire.

"We needed him to prove to us he can bowl longer and longer spells, and there is no first class cricket he can play between the second and third Tests, he's limited to the NatWest quarter-final, the National League and the Super Cup final."

"It's disappointing but I wouldn't go as far as to say that I think he's out of the entire series."

"He was happy that he was fit to play in Yorkshire's championship match at Edgbaston. I went to see him bowl and you could never detect bowling-wise that there was a problem; it is when he wakes up in the morning."

"He's stiff because he hasn't bowled but he did notice the more he was bowling, the more the pain was coming from his shin-calf area."

"I wasn't confident about his stamina to take his place in a four-man attack, and, having spoken to him over the weekend, the reaction wasn't getting any better."

"He's been doing a lot of upper body training - swimming, cardio-vascular work - but the rigours of bowling over a number of days seem to set off the same reaction to the tendon injury attached to his shin bone."

The pitch to be used for the Lord's Test was relayed in 1996, and Graveney is pleased with the surface.

The adjoining wicket, also relayed three years ago, was used for the high-scoring Australia-Zimbabwe World Cup match.

Hillsborough policemen go on trial

LEEDS, England, July 21: Two former senior British police officers were sent for trial on Tuesday on charges of manslaughter at the 1989 Hillsborough stadium disaster, reports AP.

The private prosecution against former Chief Superintendent David Duckenfield and former Superintendent Bernard Murray is the first criminal case arising from the tragedy at which 96 football fans were crushed to death.

Members of the Hillsborough Family Support Group, which brought the prosecution to Leeds Magistrates Court to hear stipendiary magistrate Nigel Cadbury rule after a nine-day hearing that both men should stand trial at Leeds Crown Court on August 24.

Duckenfield and Murray are accused of the manslaughter of John Alfred Anderson and James Gary Aspinall on April 15, 1989.

They are also accused of wilfully neglecting to carry out a public duty.

Anderson, 62, and Aspinall, 18, were among those who died at the Sheffield Wednesday ground during an FA Cup semi-final between Liverpool and Nottingham Forest.

The Liverpool fans were crushed to death on terracing at the Leppings Lane end of the stadium.

EU fines France '98 organisers

BRUSSELS, July 21: A 1000 Euros fine (about 1,050 dollars) was imposed on the 1998 World Cup organising committee by the European Union (EU) on Tuesday for poor ticketing arrangements, reports AP.

The EU spokesman described the arrangements, which saw 60 per cent of tickets go on sale to the French public, as discriminatory.

The EU believed the organisers had abused their powerful position in ticketing sales by not giving an equal footing for fans across Europe.

A fine of up to 10 per cent of the revenue generated by the World Cup was a possibility, which would have resulted in million of dollars.

The low fine will disappoint fans particularly in England, Holland, Belgium, Germany, Italy and Spain, who were the main critics.

Kosgei again Kenya coach

NAIROBI, July 21: Former Kenya national athletics head coach Mike Kosgei was re-appointed on Wednesday to the job he was fired from five years ago by the country's sports governing body, reports AP.

"Kosgei is back with us and will assist in the coaching of the team for the All Africa Games in South Africa," Kenya Amateur Athletic Association (KAAA) secretary David Okeyo said.

Kosgei, who remains the country's most successful athletics coach, is regarded here as the mastermind of Kenya's success in World Cross Country Championships, having led the team to 10 successive victories from 1986.

But he ran into trouble when he criticised the country's athletic administrators in 1995.

After being fired, Kosgei went to Finland to help coach athletes in the Scandinavian country, once a power in middle and long-distance running, where during his tenure, he coached Anne-Marie Sandell to win the women's world cross-country title in Durham, England, in 1996.

He returned to Kenya early last year and joined the Kipchoke Keino High altitude training centre, established by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for training middle and long-distance runners in Africa, as one of the coaches.

But in the face of growing competition from other leading athletic nations, the KAAA sought Kosgei's return, as the country's top athletes warned that their track domination would suffer in the absence of an aggressive coach.

The 32-year-old West Indian remained in Adelaide when his son was ill during the West Indies home four-Test series against Australia in March-April this year.

He played the final two Tests against Australia before announcing his retirement from international cricket at the end of the series.

Hooper played 75 Tests for the West Indies, scoring 3916 runs at an average of about 33. He also took 85 Test wickets with his off-spinners.

years ago but after a poor 1998 season asked for his release.

The signing of Richard Harden seemed a further blow to his chances of gaining a regular place this season, but McGrath got his chance much earlier than expected when the Somerset player broke a finger in the opening match.

Since then McGrath has rediscovered his form and hit a career best 142 not out against Middlesex earlier this season.

Sales and Warren took advantage of some in-demand bowling to put on 190 in 58 overs for the fourth wicket, and the former had hit 17 fours from 166 balls in his 101 when he edged Hamilton to wicket-keeper Richard Blakey.

The glovemen then took a fine leg-side catch off Craig White's bowling to remove Warren 13 runs short of his first century since August 1997. In a more substantial innings he had struck 11 fours from 35 balls.

Yorkshire's hopes of a major breakthrough were dashed by left-hander Tony Penberthy and Graeme Swann, the latter hooking White for six in compiling an attractive 37 before he was bowled by off-spinner Michael Vaughan in the last over of the day.

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Manchester United's England international Phil Neville (C) keeping a close eye on a Shanghai Senhua move during their exhibition encounter at Shanghai yesterday. United won 2-0.

Shanghai not satisfied

SHANGHAI, July 21: Football fans here voiced disappointment Wednesday as a Manchester United team missing nearly all its biggest stars put away Chinese league leaders Shanghai Senhua 2-0 in an unspectacular fashion, reports AP.

"We've been cheated out of our money," a teenage boy sporting a United jersey with star midfielder David Beckham's name and number said after the hotly anticipated match, which sold out in unprecedented five weeks in advance.

"I came to see the team that won the treble, not this," he said referring to United's stunning performance in winning the English Premier League title, the FA Cup and European Cup in succession.

Beckham stayed at home for rehabilitation after returning from his honeymoon with pop diva Victoria Posh Spice Adams with an unhealed hamstring injury.

Team manager Alex Ferguson was to be knighted by Queen Elizabeth II Wednesday and could not make the trip.

Regular captain Roy Keane, Norwegian defender Ronny Johnsen, England midfielder Paul Scholes and defender Gary Neville also stayed at home to recuperate from off-season injuries.

But Shanghai fans, who paid 60 to 500 yuan (seven to 60 dollars) a ticket for Wednesday's match, were outraged to discover that Welsh wizard Ryan Giggs did not play although he travelled to Shanghai.

Star strikers Andy Cole and Teddy Sheringham played only one half each, and Dwight Yorke was only inserted in injury time.

Shenhua drew repeated roars from the strongly partisan crowd of 80,000 in the scoreless first half, engineering more scoring opportunities and keeping pace with the English squad.

But they could not convert any of their chances, and United went ahead in the 57th minute after a series of misses. Ole Gunnar Solskjaer beat goalkeeper Chuliang in a one-on-one charge with a deft tap at close range that rolled just inside the right post.

Sloppy defensive play in the area 12 minutes later saw an unmarked Sheringham collect

a deflected ball directly in front of the goal mouth and slam it into the back of the net. The goals drew lukewarm applause from the crowd.

Before the game a number of fans said they were keen to see how their league-leading Shenhua side would compare with United but most left dissatisfied.

"Shenhua played as well as they did and could have easily won or tied, but it didn't mean so much to me, because it wasn't the real Manchester United ... the team we see on television," said a man who brought his seven-year-old son.

Reports and rumours about Beckham's presence or absence for the match had in recent weeks caused blackmarket prices for tickets to rise and fall wildly.

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