

Venus, Anna in quarters

PAULO ALTO, California, July 30: Teen tennis Venus Williams and Anna Kournikova locked up their much anticipated quarterfinal showdown at the 500,000 dollars Bank of the West Classic by posting impressive second round victories on Thursday, reports Reuters.

The second-seeded Williams scored a 6-1, 7-6 (7-3) victory over promising 18-year-old Katarina Srebotnik of Slovenia, bearing down and ripping winners in the tiebreaker. Williams, who took an 11-hour flight on Monday after leading the US Fed Cup team to victory, is still fighting a bit of jet lag. "I'm sleepy," she said. "I don't think I'm still in the coma stage, but I'm really enjoying my sleep."

Kournikova dispatched American veteran Mary Joe Fernandez 6-4, 6-4. In overcoming the 27-year-old Fernandez, the 18-year-old Kournikova controlled the centre of the court with blistering groundstrokes.

Williams and Kournikova last played at Wimbledon in the fourth round, with the American playing a more aggressive and gutsy match in winning 3-6, 6-3, 6-2. The super-athletic Williams is 3-0 against her glamorous foe.

"It's a new match," Kournikova said. "I'm looking forward to it. I'm going to focus on my game and not think about anything else. I'm going to have to be patient."

Williams said her weapons have proved too much for Kournikova in the past.

Eighth seed Sandrine Testud of France also moved into the quarterfinals with a 6-4, 6-1 win over Switzerland's Patty Schnyder. Testud will face fourth seed Amanda Coetzer of South Africa.

American Corina Morariu, ranked 42nd, also advanced to the quarterfinals, whipping forehands past compatriot Jennifer Capriati 7-5, 6-2.

Milan's defence starts with Lecce

ROME, July 30: AC Milan will begin the defence of their Italian Serie A title away to Lecce on August 29, the draw for the new season showed yesterday, reports Reuters.

The five-times European champions, who clinched their 16th Serie A crown in May, will then face Perugia on the second weekend of the season.

Milan's first big test of their championship credentials comes on October 3 when they face Lazio, whom they beat to the title by a single point on the last day of last season.

Lazio start their campaign at home against unfancied Cagliari.

Juventus, champions in 1998, face newly-promoted Reggina at home on the opening day, the first ever match in Serie A for the southern Italian club.

Inter Milan are at home to Verona; UEFA Cup holders Parma are away at Perugia; Fiorentina play Bari at home and AS Roma start away against Piacenza.

The pace picks up in the second week of the season when Roma are at home to Inter.

Milan and Inter clash in the first Milan derby of the season on October 24 while Lazio first meet Roma at the Olympic stadium on November 21.

Banks wasn't fired?

LONDON, July 30: Former British sports minister Tony Banks on Friday insisted he was not sacked from the post but quit the job in order to strengthen England's bid to stage the 2006 World Cup, reports AFP.

Banks, who had been embroiled in the row over Manchester United's decision not to play in FA Cup, has been appointed Prime Minister Tony Blair's special envoy for 2006.

"We're going to have the World Cup in England in 2006 and I'm going to do my best to make it happen," he said.

"That's why I suggested to Prime Minister Tony Blair that for the next 12 months I should concentrate on that goal, even though it means having to give up the job of Sports Minister."

"We are up against Brazil, Germany, Morocco and South Africa and they are no mugs," he said. "And it's going to get tougher over the next 12 months."

Diego will be welcomed in Falklands

BUENOS AIRES, July 30: Diego Maradona would be welcome in the Falkland Islands if he is among the first group of Argentine travelers to the South Atlantic archipelago next month, an official said Thursday, reports AFP.

Russ Jervis, a Falkland Islands government secretary, denied Argentine reports that the former soccer star would be barred from visiting the British territory because of his involvement with drugs.

"There is no problem," Jervis told local news agency Diario y Noticias. "He can enter the Falklands like any other tourist."

Maradona, 39, has reportedly made several reservations on a flight from Chile to the Falklands next month. The flights, the only originating in South America, are set to resume after being suspended in April following Britain's refusal to free former Chilean dictator Gen Augusto Pinochet.



Russia's Yevgeny Kafelnikov stretches to make a return during his match against Alberto Martin of Spain at the Generali Open in Kitzbuhel on July 29. — AFP photo

Andre thru', Goran tumbles

LOS ANGELES, July 30: Top-seeded and defending champion Andre Agassi thrived but Goran Ivanisevic failed to survive in the second round of the 350,000 dollars Mercedes Benz Cup on Thursday, reports Reuters.

Agassi steamrolled past qualifier Eric Taino 6-2, 6-3 while Australian Andrew Ilie surprised sixth-seeded Ivanisevic 6-4, 6-4 to reach the quarterfinals.

Ilie joined two other Australians who advanced earlier: seventh-seeded Lleyton Hewitt, who beat German qualifier Axel Pretsch 6-3, 6-1, and qualifier James Sekulov, who had upset fifth-seeded Swede Thomas Enqvist some 24 hours earlier.

French qualifier Anthony Dupuis also advanced when Magnus Larsson of Sweden withdrew due to tendinitis in both forearms.

"I played good today," said Ilie, who notched his first win over Ivanisevic after dropping two career three-setters.

"Once Goran gets going it's easy for him to hold serve. But today, I was trying to concentrate, to keep moving, and not let him run away with the first set. I wanted to win the first set and get a good start. It worked."

Agassi blended his unrelenting ground game with eight aces to get by Taino, a left-hander ranked 644th on the ATP Tour computer.

"It feels good," said Agassi, who dropped from world number one to three this week despite winning 15 of the last 16 matches.

"What a great time of the year to do it because there's been so many transitions with the surfaces. If you can somehow maintain the high level, it feels you're getting a jump on the field going into each season."

Though Agassi has lost the top ranking this week to Patrick Rafter, he looks near invincible.

"I always feel senses of where I can improve but I can't complain about any part of my game right now," he said. "But I'm getting better, stronger by the week, can assure you of that. I'm motivated, that's for sure."

Though many are expecting Agassi to face second-seeded Pete Sampras in the final, he must first get by the pesky Hewitt, who beat him in the semifinals in Adelaide in 1998.

"I'm looking forward to playing him. This guy has been playing well this year and underestimating him would be a really dumb thing to do," Agassi said.

"I can't think about Pete until it's time. I expect to go out there and win and continue to be playing well. But I also have a lot of appreciation of his standard of play and what he's accomplished this year, and his prospects for the future."

The 22-year-old Ilie was excited after knocking off the three-time Wimbledon runner-up.

"Being so close to winning a match against someone you always wanted to win against, especially a high-quality player like Goran, you put a little pressure on yourself," said Ilie, who

next faces Dupuis. "But I said, Gee whiz, history is being made here, so I might as well go for it. I ended up well. I can keep it going. I've got a great chance."

Ilie lost the battle of aces 10-3 to the hard-serving Ivanisevic but the world's 61st-ranked player electrified the UCLA Centre-Court crowd with an Arsenal of booming groundstrokes that kept his opponent off-balance.

"All the way through I stayed solid, stayed calm, played well-calculated, didn't get too emotional or burn out," Ilie added. "I tried really hard to make him play and succeeded a little bit."

"I played bad and he played his game, hitting every ball as hard as he can," said Ivanisevic. "I tried to make him play but couldn't put any balls on the court to put pressure on him. Sometimes you have good days, sometimes bad, it was just a bad day for me."

Dupuis moved into his first career ATP Tour quarterfinal at the expense of Larsson.

"It's unfortunate since I was hitting the ball well," said Larsson, who will undergo a magnetic resonance imaging test.

"I've had this problem since Monday and it was getting more and more painful. Today, when I practiced, I had no energy in my arms and no power in my muscles."

"It's bad for him but I'm lucky today," Dupuis said. "It's the first time something like this has happened to me. I'll do my best to try to reach the semifinals."

Scottish league kicks off today

GLASGOW, July 30: With Treble winners Rangers prioritising a place in the European Champions

League the spotlight on day one of the new Scottish season shifts firmly on their eternal rivals Celtic and the so-called 'dream' management team of Kenny Dalglish and John Barnes, reports AFP.

Celtic have invested heavily in the hope of ending Rangers' domination of the Scottish scene.

Goalkeeper Dmitri Kharine, defender Olivier Tebily and utility player Bobby Petta have all arrived at Parkhead.

But more significantly, so has Israeli playmaker Eyal Berkovic from West Ham for a Scottish record transfer fee of 5.75 million pounds (8.75 million dollars).

His partnership with Lubomir Moravcik and Henrik Larsson will certainly prove crucial in Celtic's bid to regain the title they won just over a year ago under Wim Jansen.

They visit Aberdeen on Sunday encouraged by a fine 2-0 friendly win over English Premiership side Newcastle this week.

New Aberdeen manager Ebbe Skovdahl has introduced some startling training methods at Pittodrie, including bringing in mattresses, so players can sleep if they want to between sessions.

Skovdahl is highly experienced but Dons fans are already sceptical of his methods and alarmed at the lack of signings.

Meanwhile, Rangers defeated FC Haka 4-1 in Finland on Wednesday and with the second leg seemingly a formality a tough third qualifying round clash against Italian side Parma, who knocked them out of last season's UEFA Cup, is occupying their minds rather than their league opener with Kilmarnock on Saturday.

"The Italian season will not have started and they might lack the match sharpness, which is very important," said their Dutch manager Dick Advocaat.

The Dutchman will have been delighted by the performance of new signing Michael Mols in Finland. He scored twice before suffering a dead leg but is raring to go against Kilmarnock.

"The goals gave me a good feeling because they make it easier in the next game," Mols said.

"I could have had a hat-trick but it is unrealistic to expect me to score all the time."

"I came off just as a precaution and the injury is not too bad."

"It certainly won't stop me playing on Saturday - if selected."

St Johnstone and Kilmarnock were the only two teams to hint at breaking up the Old Firm dominance last season, but neither have significantly strengthened their squads over the summer.

While Killie visit Rangers, St Johnstone, who like Kilmarnock are in the UEFA Cup, play host to Hearts in their opener.

Hearts had a difficult campaign last season after winning the Scottish Cup the year before and lost Neil McCann to

Rangers and David Weir to Everton.

Promoted Hibernian start at home to Motherwell.

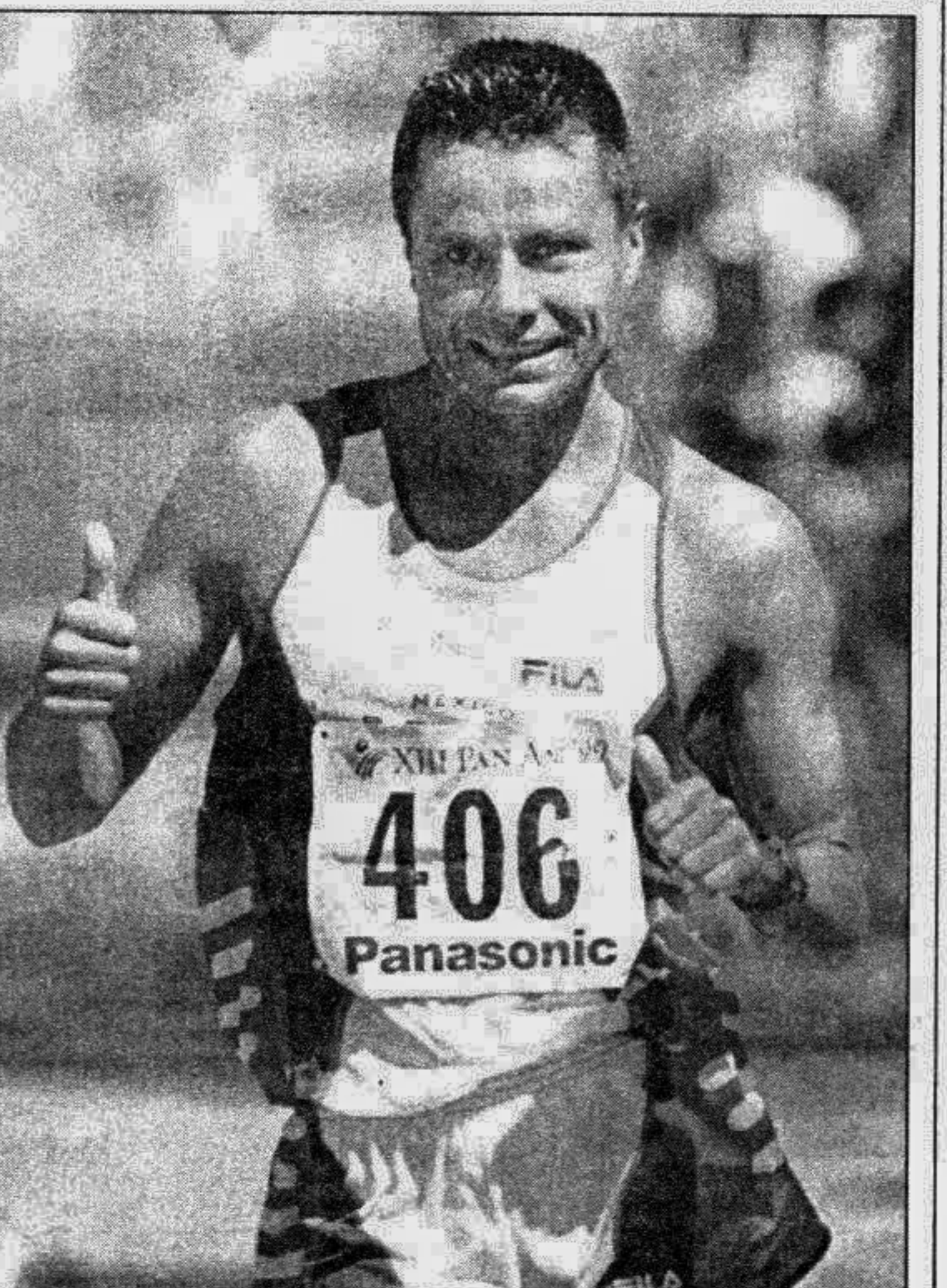
The Edinburgh side won the first division by a street in front of bumper crowds at Easter Road last season but manager Alec McLeish knows the Premier League will be a different ball game altogether.

McLeish has drafted in German striker Dirk Lehmann from Fulham while Fabrice Henry has been recruited from Basel.

Pixtures (kick-offs 1400 GMT unless stated):

Saturday: Dundee Utd v Dundee, Hibernian v Motherwell, Rangers v Kilmarnock, St Johnstone v Hearts

Sunday: Aberdeen v Celtic (1705 GMT)



Mexico's Joel Sanchez celebrates as he crosses the line to win the 50 km race in the Pan Am Games on July 29. — AFP photo

WC 2006

Bid presentation on Aug 9-10

ZURICH, Switzerland, July 30: South Africa will be the first of the five remaining countries bidding to host the 2006 World Cup finals to present their bid documentation to international governing body FIFA, reports AFP.

South Africa, Morocco and England will make their bid presentations at FIFA headquarters on August 9 with Brazil and Germany making their presentations on August 10.

Each presentation will last a maximum of 30 minutes.

The presentation of the complete bid documentation at FIFA headquarters is always a milestone in the process of selection," FIFA president Sepp Blatter said Friday.

A delegation from FIFA will visit each of the five bidding countries over the next few months to inspect the facilities and existing stadia and to hold discussions with organisers on topics including transport, security and telecommunications.

The FIFA executive committee will make its decision on the 2006 host in July 2000.

South Africa are considered the favourites, ahead of Germany, England and Brazil with Morocco complete outsiders.

Kafelnikov struggles

KITZBUHEL, Austria, July 30: A weary number one seed Yevgeny Kafelnikov again struggled at the Generali Open yesterday but did enough to keep alive his hopes of regaining the world number one spot by the end of the year, reports Reuters.

The Russian world number four, who topped the rankings for six weeks earlier this year, recovered from a disastrous first set to beat 16th seeded Spaniard Alberto Martin 1-6, 6-4, 6-3 in the third round.

But second seeded Slovak Karol Kucera did go out, 7-6, 6-4 to Austrian Stefan Koubek, who is expected by many to follow in the footsteps of compatriot and former number one Thomas Muster.

Meligeni eliminated French Open finalist Andrei Medvedev 6-1, 6-3 while the clay tournament's third-seeded Alex Corretja bowed out 6-4, 6-4 to fellow Spaniard Fernando Vicente.

Ince joins Boro

LONDON, July 30: Middlesbrough have signed former England midfielder Paul Ince from Liverpool for 1 million pounds (1.62 million dollars), the north-east club said on Friday, reports Reuters.

Middlesbrough manager Bryan Robson has been in negotiations since Liverpool boss Gerard Houllier made it clear Ince had no future at Anfield earlier this month and was delighted to have completed the deal.

"People say Ince is old at 31 yet in my view the peak years of a player are between 27 and 33," said Robson.

Juninho up for sale

MADRID, July 30: Brazilian midfielder Juninho has been told Thursday his services are no longer required by Spanish Primera Liga side Atletico Madrid's new Italian coach Claudio Ranieri, reports AFP.

The decision clears the way for the sale of the diminutive playmaker who has been coveted by two English Premiership sides, Middlesbrough and Aston Villa.

Ranieri said: "It's not that Juninho does not fit into my system it's just that I have other ideas."

"Those that I do not keep, it does not mean to say they are not good but I have very important priorities."

Atletico are believed to have agreed a 12.62 million dollars fee with Atletico Vil for Juninho, who joined Atletico from Middlesbrough in 1997.

Matthaeus turns down DFB offer

GUADALAJARA, Mexico, July 30: Germany veteran Lothar Matthaeus has revealed Thursday he has refused a job with the German Football Federation (DFB), reports AFP.

Thirty-eight-year-old Matthaeus, competing for his country here in the Confederations Cup, revealed he did not believe he could combine the proposed new management role with his playing career.

The Bayern Munich star scored and made one in the 2-0 Confederations Cup win over New Zealand Wednesday night and clearly believes he still has a lot to offer as a player.

Matthaeus, who with Mexico's Antonio Carbajal holds the achievement of having played in five World Cups, said: "It is always good to keep your distance from players. If I were to accept a job with the Federation now there would not have been enough distance between my playing role and my direction role."

"Today I see players as friends and it will be difficult afterwards to have to socialise with them. For example at this time I drink a beer with them and then the next day I would have to tell them not to drink. It's comical."

"Once I have retired I think I will be busy in the United States. Perhaps I will one day work for the German federation but it will be after 2004."

United's last old Wembley visit



LONDON, July 30: As a pointer to the season ahead it has little relevance but Sunday's Charity Shield clash between Manchester United and Arsenal has plenty of symbolic significance, reports AFP.

First, it will be last pre-season curtain raiser at the old Wembley before the stadium and its famous Twin Towers are torn down and replaced by a new 475 million-pound (720 million dollar) complex.

Second, it could be all-conquering United's only appearance after their withdrawal from the FA Cup to take part in the inaugural World Club championship in Brazil.

Both sides will read little into the result. Last season then double holders Arsenal beat United 3-0 in this fixture only for Sir Alex Ferguson's side to go on and capture an unprecedented treble of the Premiership, FA Cup and European Cup.

Manchester United striker Teddy Sheringham is one man relishing another Wembley outing who used to taunt him about his lack of medals.

Now, of course, he has three and the Manchester United star scored on his last appearance at the venue of legends when his goal against Newcastle paved the way for FA Cup victory.

"The next season is always the hardest," said Sheringham. "We did something last season which will be hard to match but

we will carry on winning games and see what happens from there."

"It's going to be a hectic season, especially after the extension to the Champions' League, but these are the games people want to be involved in and it's again with big games coming up thicker and faster than they have ever done."

Despite his sudden medal haul, Sheringham expects another rough ride from Arsenal fans but says: "I'm sure they will have a song for me somewhere along the line but I have got my medals and I am happy."

Sheringham looks certain to feature in the game after playing a leading role during the pre-season tour to Australia and China but United have doubts about Ryan Giggs, Gary Neville and Roy Keane.

Norwegian striker Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, whose 'super sub' goal clinched the European Cup and tied up the Treble for United last season, is set to make a surprise comeback after recovering from a knee injury.

Arsenal have a number of selection headaches. They will definitely be without contract rebel Nicolas Anelka, who has remained in France against the club's orders following the breakdown of his move to Italian club Lazio.

Dutch winger Marc Overmars is definitely out with a groin injury and compatriot Dennis Bergkamp is also unlikely to be risked.

In defence they must make do without hernia victim Tony

Adams and Steve Bould, who has been sold to Sunderland, and goalkeeper David Seaman, who has a damaged calf.

Austrian Alex Manninger will take over in goal, while promising 20-year-old Matthew Upson seems sure to join veterans Martin Keown, Nigel Winterburn and Lee Dixon in defence.

Portugal's Luis Boa Morte and Liberian Christophe Wreh may get their chance alongside Nigerian Nwankwo Kanu in attack.

Dixon says French manager Arsene Wenger's ideas have been so popular they have given him and his fellow veterans a new lease of life.

"It would be nice if I could have met Arsene a few years ago," said Dixon. "I think all the players who have been here a few years feel the same."

"I wouldn't swap anything I have done up to now, because I learnt an awful lot under George Graham and I have got a lot to be thankful to him for. But it would be nice to have all that and still have five or six years under Arsene."

"He has taught me so much about the physical side of things. I have been doing things differently for all these years and with the changes he has made to our lifestyle he is a breath of fresh air for everybody."

United start their Premiership campaign against Everton at Goodison Park next Sunday.

Arsenal play host to Leicester City on Saturday.



Brazilian Fernando Meligeni makes a forehand return against Ukrainian Andrei Medvedev at the Generali Open on July 29. — AFP photo

MU's no to Hoey's appeal

MANCHESTER, England, July 30: English soccer giants Manchester United play in the FA Cup, Hoey said.

"I would not have felt it is the role of the Minister for Sport to be asking Manchester United to

for England's bid to host the 2006 World Cup.

"I think it is absolutely imperative that Manchester United play in the FA Cup," Hoey said.

"I would not have felt it is the role of the Minister for Sport to be asking Manchester United to

United withdrew from the competition to take part in the FIFA-organised World Cup Championship in Brazil in January.

But Hoey, who succeeded Tony Banks as sports minister this week, insisted that it was "imperative" that United defend the trophy they won as part of the Treble last season.

Old Trafford chief executive Martin Edwards said, however, that the decision would not be changed.

"We won't be having a rethink. We made the decision weeks ago and that decision stands," Edwards said.

Hoey nailed her colours to the mast in her first comments as new sports minister by slamming United's decision.

Banks and the English Football Association (FA) had said United's withdrawal was vital

to the solution, FA spokesman Steve Double said.

"However what is important, above all, is that somebody must present a viable solution."

"We appreciate that there has been a national debate about the subject but what is required to move things on is the offer of effective solutions. That is what we need."

"Our stance has always been that we are open-minded on it. United have stated publicly that they do not want to enter a weakened team in the Cup."

"We are looking forward to having an early meeting with Kate Hoey to explain all the various complexities which surround the issue."

Injury to keep Brown out

LONDON, July 30: Manchester United's 19-year-old defender Wes Brown could be out for several months after damaging a cruciate knee ligament in a training accident, manager Alex Ferguson said yesterday, reports Reuters.

Brown, who made his debut for United last October and was called up for the England squad at the end of the season, will not undergo surgery immediately.

But Ferguson said: "He has got a bad knee injury and could be out for a long time - several weeks at least and probably a lot longer than that. There are no plans to operate at this stage."

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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