

Venus, Anna in quarters

PALO ALTO, California, July 30: Tennis stars 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; Florentina 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 AP.

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.

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.

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 in front of the Arsenal fans 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

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 at Wembley this season after their withdrawal from the FA Cup to take part in the inaugural World Club championship in Brazil.

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"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 going to be a massive season 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 Solskjær, 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 Weah 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.

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 Andre 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 Pretzsch 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.

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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.

"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 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," he said.

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

"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 like you're getting a jump on the field going into each season."

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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.

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.

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