

Lokomotiv deny selling stars

MOSCOW, Aug 3: Lokomotiv Moscow head coach Yuri Syomin has denied rumours in Russian media that the Premier Division side plans to sell its best players, reports Reuters.

"We're not selling our team with the European season just around the corner," Syomin told Reuters today.

"Of course, you can never guarantee anything these days, but, to my knowledge, none of our best players are for sale."

Lokomotiv, who reached the semifinals of the Cup Winners' Cup in each of the last two seasons, begin their European campaign next week in the UEFA Cup qualifying round.

Reports in Russian press said that Lokomotiv, in dire need of cash at the moment, tried to unload several of their top players to a number of European clubs.

They named goalkeeper Rustan Nigmatullin, Russian international midfielder Alexei Smertin and Georgian striker Zaza Dzhanashia as the ones likely to leave.

Lokomotiv, currently second in the premier division and trailing Spartak Moscow by 13 points, recently sold Belarus defender Sergei Gurenko to Italy's AS Roma for \$4 million.

"We have a verbal agreement with Lazio that Nigmatullin will stay with us at least until the end of this year," Syomin said.

"The same applies to the others as well."

Nevertheless, last week Syomin signed veteran keeper Yuri Okrosidze from first division side Rubin Kazan as a back-up just in case Nigmatullin does leave.

Hewitt hopeful

ADELAIDE, Australia, Aug 3: Rising Australian tennis star Lleyton Hewitt will undergo a scan on his injured left ankle here Wednesday but is confident of playing again within three weeks, reports AFP.

Hewitt, 18, turned the ankle while playing Andre Agassi in the semifinals of the Los Angeles Open on Saturday and flew home to Adelaide to recuperate Monday.

There were fears he would miss the US Open, which starts at the end of this month in New York, and Davis Cup semifinal against Russia in Brisbane in late September.

But Hewitt's mother, Cherylyn, and manager John McCurdy said Tuesday he was confident of playing in the Long Island ATP tournament in the lead-up week to the US Open.

Cherylyn Hewitt said X-rays had cleared him of any bone damage, but he would have a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan Wednesday to determine the extent of ligament damage.

"It is very swollen and very black and blue and he is going to have some doctors look at it tomorrow (Wednesday)," she said.

"He might be looking at getting a wildcard to Long Island or Boston, he wasn't originally going to play there, he was going to take a week off before the US Open."

Pearce going to West Ham

LONDON, Aug 3: Former England defender Stuart Pearce on Monday agreed to sign for West Ham on a free transfer from English Premiership rivals Newcastle, reports AFP.

The move is subject to Pearce passing a medical.

The tough-tackling full-back was taken to St James' Park, also on a free transfer, by former Magpies boss Kenny Dalglish at the start of the 1997-98 season.

The 37-year-old started his career with non-league Wealdstone, who sold him to Coventry City before he played 12 seasons at Nottingham Forest.

Comaneci has a dream

BUCHAREST, Aug 3: Nadia Comaneci said today she hoped her native Romania might soon boast a gymnastics academy like the one she runs with her husband in the United States.

"A gymnastics academy in Romania is a great project which would involve lots of funds, but it would be possible with foreign investment," the former Olympic triple gold medalist told Reuters.

"For the moment, there's nothing concrete," added the 38-year-old who married former US gymnast Bart Conner in Bucharest three years ago.

She said she wanted the future academy to be named after her.

This academy should be open not only to gymnasts from Romania, but to young talents from around the world," she added.

Comaneci is leading 13 girl gymnasts from her Oklahoma Academy on a two-week training session in Romania which will include a visit to her hometown of Oresti.

She plans to visit the town's gymnastics school, which was named after her, and where she trained as a schoolgirl for her historic performance at the 1976 Montreal Games.

Comaneci won three gold medals, a silver and a bronze as a 14-year-old at the Games.

Comaneci, who scored the first "perfect 10" in world gymnastics, fled to the US shortly before the 1989 fall and execution of Romania's dictator Nicolae Ceausescu.

She became honorary president of the Romanian Gymnastics Federation in 1996. The previous year she donated 100,000 dollars for the development of local gymnastics.

Golden Boot for Gunners



LONDON, Aug 3: Davor Suker will fill the void created by the departure of Nicolas Anelka.

The Croatian international striker will join the English Premiership side from Real Madrid in a 5 million dollar deal while French international Anelka goes in the opposite direction, reports AFP.

Suker, 31, will move to Highbury from Real Madrid after falling out with Bernabeu coach John Toshack.

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