

Davenport, Hingis in semis

CARLSBAD, California, Aug 7 (AFP): Lindsay Davenport's number one ranking is on the line this weekend, and Martina Hingis could take it away with a victory in the final of the \$20,000-dollar WTA TIG Classic here.

Top-seeded American Davenport outlasted German qualifier Anke Huber 7-5, 7-5 here Friday to set up a semifinal date with Venus Williams.

The all-American matchup here Saturday will be a repeat of last Sunday's Stanford final won by Davenport, who is trying to defend three California crowns as a prelude to defense of her US Open title.

Williams reached the semifinals with a 7-5, 6-1 victory over Sandrine Testud of France, while seventh seeded South African Amanda Coetzer beat Amy Frazier by the same score to set up a clash with second seed Hingis.

If Davenport loses in the semifinals and Hingis wins, or if Hingis beats Davenport in Sunday's final, Davenport surrenders the number one ranking to the Swiss teen.

But that is not something that concerns Davenport. In fact, she didn't realize her precarious position until it was pointed out to her.

"I really don't look at those things," Davenport said. "Eventually I'm going to lose it because I think starting in Stanford I got to the finals of about 11 tournaments in a row (last year), and I don't think Martina had the greatest summer and I'm sure she will pick up some points."

Where she is going to lose it, but to get to number one and stay there a number of weeks has been a huge honour. All I'm trying to do now is keep up my good play and try and repeat at the Open.

Davenport failed to take control against her feisty opponent, who ran down every ball and rallied strongly from the baseline. In fact, Huber had two break point opportunities to take a 3-3 lead in the second set, but she made errors to let Davenport off the hook.

Fourth seeded Williams staged a dramatic comeback against Testud, trailing 5-1 in the first set before finding her groove and claiming the next nine games. Williams sneaked the first set and then swept 12 of the first 14 points of the second set to build an intimidating 3-0 lead.

Although she was happy to go to the net to win many of her points, Williams has no plans to become a full-time serve and volleyer.

"I'm not sure if I want to be a serve and volleyer, probably because I'm lazy and don't like to run to the net like that after every serve. It seems like a lot of work. It's a good idea sometimes though," she said.

Coetzer reached her second semifinal in two weeks when she banished Frazier 7-5, 6-1. In a match played mostly from the baseline and consisting of long rallies -- one of which stretched to 28 hits -- Coetzer struggled to get the upper hand in the first set but then ran away with the second.

"It was difficult in the beginning, a little bit of blurriness and one side was really difficult to win games, but I settled in pretty well and got my rhythm," Coetzer said.

Perec still uncertain

BRUSSELS, Aug 7: France's reigning Olympic champion Marie-Josée Perec here on Thursday all but ruled out her chances of competing in the World Championships in Seville later this month, reports AFP.

"I want to compete in the World Championships but I'm running 23.50sec and that's no good," she said.

"My chances are one in ten. I'll make a decision on whether to go to Seville after the meeting in Cologne, even if I don't find a 400m event before August 10 to test myself," she said.

The 31-year-old Guadeloupe-born athlete, who has just made her comeback after being sidelined for two years with a debilitating virus, has failed to shine at recent meetings at Malmo in Sweden and Lahti in Finland.

Perec, nicknamed the "Gazelle", won her first Olympic title in the 400m in 1992 and followed up with the 200-400 double in 1996.

Johnson fit for Zurich, Seville

MONTE CARLO, Aug 7: World champion Michael Johnson has been given the all clear to compete in the IAAF Golden League meeting in Zurich on August 11 and defend his 400m title at the World Championships in Seville, Spain, later this month, it was announced here on Friday, reports AFP.

There had been fears that the 31-year-old American might miss the World Championships after he drew up with a hamstring pain halfway through the 400m during the Grand Prix meeting at Stockholm last week.

After receiving treatment in the United States, Johnson, nicknamed "Waco Express", was given the all clear to compete in Zurich and to bid to achieve his fourth consecutive 400m title in Seville.

Injury problems have prevented Johnson, 1996 Olympic 200m and 400m champion, from performing at his best in the lead-up to the World Championships.

He opted for the 200m at the IAAF Grand Prix II meeting at Linz, Austria, last month and almost suffered a shock defeat, scraping home by two-hundredths of a second.

Pressure part of cricket

MUMBAI, Aug 7 (Internet report): International cricket is all about pressure. And these guys are professionals.

Handling pressure situations is part of a captain's responsibility," said Allan Border to India's Mid-Day newspaper, at the Royal Palms and Country Club, Goregaon, Friday.

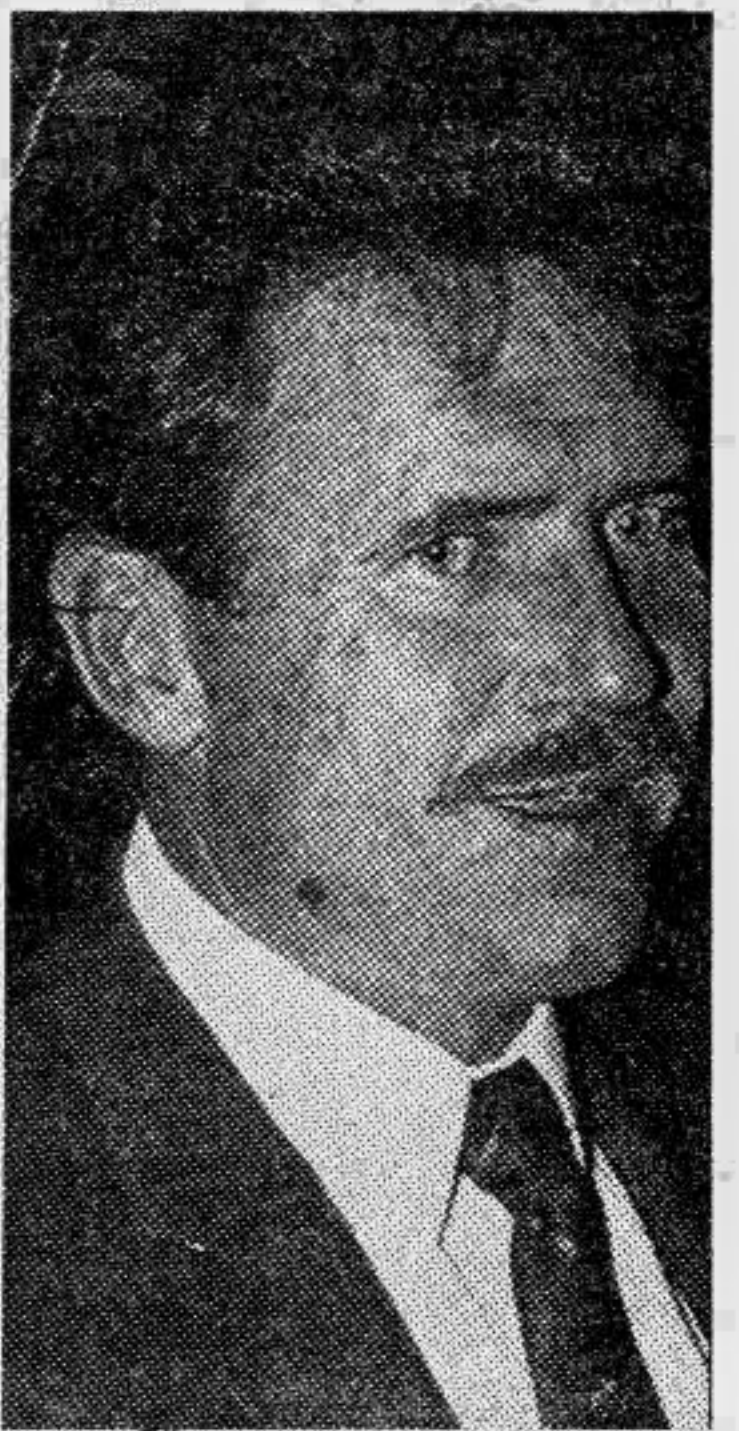
The former Australian skipper, in the city to take part in a celebrity golf event involving cricket luminaries (organised by Royal Palms and Country Inns) was reacting to a question about former West Indies skipper Richie Richardson's assertion that pressure on the job was leading to breakdown among contemporary captains.

Richardson had also requested experienced former Test skippers, like Australia's Mark Taylor to put their minds towards reducing the pressure on today's captains.

Border was of the opinion that Richardson's poser was "interesting", but felt appointing good managers and coaches was a more practical way of reducing the pressure of expectations on captains.

Pressure is something you have to live with. I struggled in the initial years to cope with demands on me, but Bob Simpson's presence at that point took a load off my shoulders. He helped me understand my job as Australia's skipper and at the same time gave me the freedom to take a step back and do what

was necessary to improve my batting," said Border who moulded Australia into a World Cup winning unit under Simpson's guidance.



ALLAN BORDER

The former Australian skipper, who calls himself "A social golfer" pointed out the difference between leading Australia and one of the sides in the Asian sub-continent.

"The pressure is there, but the fanaticism is missing," observed Border whose advice to Indian cricket fans, officials and the media is to leave Sachin Tendulkar alone.

"Sachin has had a stint as captain before so he knows what to expect. Don't put undue pressure on him, rather appoint a good manager or a coach to take some of the load off his shoulders," said Border, who in the company of former World Cup teammate Dean Jones walked away with the Clash of Champions '99 title.

Both the Aussies will now proceed to New Delhi to play in a similar celebrity golf event organised by Ajay Jadeja over the weekend.

Team Dean Jones clinched the Royal Palms and Country Inns and Suites Clash of Champions '99 title, played at the Royal Palms and Country Club Course, Goregaon yesterday. Jones's team, which comprised his colleague and former Australian skipper Border, Amir Nensey, Chairman and Managing Director, Royal Palms and Muhammed Nensey, Joint Managing Director, Royal Palms prevailed over Team Kapi Dev, which included, besides the former India skipper, Hanumant Singh, former selector and Mumbai Ranji coach Ashok Mankad.

Team Dean Jones also bagged all the individual awards on offer.

New Aussie strategy

SYDNEY, Aug 7 (Internet report): Cricket fans will be given more chances to see their Test heroes under plans to be unveiled next week.

Part of the focus of the Australian Cricket Board's first strategic plan, "putting runs on the board", is to provide Test cricketers with more chances to play Sheffield Shield cricket and the Mercantile Mutual Cup outside their Test commitments.

The move will necessitate a change in programming to also include more appearances on the cricket calendar for the Australia A team.

The plan will provide a bonus for cricket fans and help boost small attendance at domestic first-class games.

The 48-page document is a revised and distilled version of the ACB's strategic plan for 1999-2001, released in April.

It will be released on Monday among local cricket associations and numerous non-cricket sporting groups.

On last year's extensive consultations and surveys

among players and cricket administrators, the ACB plan stresses the need to maintain the health of the game.

As a result, the board has embarked on a national audit of school cricket. The results are expected next month.

The other aspect is ensuring Test cricketers are given two months' rest annually, plus support to prolong their appearances at the elite level. The document recommends establishing a national remuneration scheme that should be flexible enough to give state players the chance to combine cricket with another job or studying.

But it stresses the need to pay international players enough for them to be full-time professionals. ACB chief executive officer Malcolm Speed told the Herald Sun that international cricket in Australia had almost reached its limit.

"I don't think we can enlarge it much beyond the current format of six Test matches and then the triangular series with the three teams," he said.

"We know basically how many days of international cricket the market will bear in Australia. We now need to do

that better to maximise our returns from those days of international cricket."

The document sees growth in new forms of the game, such as the Super Max 8s competition, which it says should be introduced as an interstate competition.

It also advocates "exploring new rules designed to bring additional excitement to (Mercantile Mutual) matches".

The original strategy document suggested the introduction of a so-called "slog zone", the re-introduction of bouncers with greater restrictions on leg-side field positions, plus awarding more points for an easy win.

But the strategy is also about broadening the cricket community. It recommends established cricket make more formal links with Aboriginal cricketers, women's cricket, ethnic minorities and indoor cricket.

It also recommends developing a plan for the controversial virtual signs in cricket telecasts and stresses that all ground arrangements must deliver exclusive access to the ACB media rights holders.

Hanif inducted as member

Abbasi slams Majid

KARACHI, Aug 7 (Internet report): The future of Pakistan cricket could be bright provided the most influential decision-makers in this game recently work in the positive frame of mind, believes a former chief executive of Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB).

Positive results could be expected if Ehtesab (Accountability) Bureau or the PCB's ad hoc committee works with constructive intentions, said Arif Ali Khan Abbasi here on Friday.

"It should be the intentions of Ehtesab Bureau or the PCB's ad hoc committee which should be considered. If they really want to work for the betterment of the game and to clean the sport of any mess, they should carry on," Abbasi said in an interview with The News of Pakistan.

He felt as there are no less than four committees probing into the betting and match-fixing charges against Pakistani cricketers, it was the previous PCB management which dragged the players into the mess deliberately to save its skin.

Criticising the former CE of the Board, Majid Khan, Abbasi termed the predicament which the players were facing as the outcome of the plan by Majid Khan who did it to divert the attention from his own incompetence.

"The kind of turbulent period players are going through is the ramification of his (Majid's) sheer incompetence which could be gauged from his blemished track record as a PTN and PIA official. He intentionally added fuel to fire to hide his own misdeeds," he said.

According to Abbasi, the simmering match-fixing and betting issue should have been

buried once and for all in 1994-95 after the commission of Justice (Retd) Fakhrudin G Ebraheim not only exonerated Salim Malik of all charges levelled against him by three Australians -- Mark Waugh, Shane Warne and Tim May.

"The Fakhrudin Ebraheim commission had found the Aussies guilty of concoction and there statements were contradictory. The International Cricket Council (ICC) had also accepted and praised the report," he said. The Aussie trio had accused former Pakistan captain Malik of offering bribe to throw a match in 1994-95. The matter, Abbasi said, should have ended then and there but the previous PCB management ignited the extinguished issue once again.

He thought people at the helm of cricket affairs could and should have brought the strayed players, if there were any, to the right path instead of targeting them by opening enquiries against them. Abbasi, who had also been before the one man commission of Justice Malik Muhammad Qayyum in Lahore, predicted the result of findings which according to him were expected by August 18.

will be in favour of charged players including three suspended players -- skipper Wasim Akram, Malik and Ijaz Ahmed.

Asked as to why same players who according to reports could be seen involve in betting while playing for clubs could not gamble at international level, he replied, "They may gamble but fixing the matches is another matter for which involvement of all eleven players is required."

Meanwhile, another report says ad hoc committee has inducted celebrated Test cricketer Hanif Muhammad and Hafiz Manzoor Hussain members on Friday.

A PCB press release said that the ad hoc committee chairman Mujibur Rahman took the decision in pursuance of Government of Pakistan notification of dated July 17, 1999.

Critics however claimed that the credibility of the committee suffered a heavy dent as it inducted the sacked treasurer of the previous cricket regime, Hafiz Manzoor Hussain, as its member. Hafiz was the treasurer of the last PCB set-up, which was suspended by the President Rafique Tarar.



Brazilian superstriker Ronaldo leaving Hong Kong Airport yesterday. The Inter Milan player is the Chinese territory on a three-day promotional tour of a Swiss-made watch 'R9'. — AFP photo

Jubilo jolted

TOKYO, Aug 7: Asian club champions Jubilo Iwata slumped to a 3-0 defeat away to Yokohama F Marinos in the opening match of the J-League's second stage on Friday night, reports Reuters.

Jubilo, who clinched the first stage of the two-stage championship in May, saw their hopes of a winning start to the second half of the season dashed when Marinos' World Cup striker Shoji Jo scored twice in two first-half minutes.

Playing in front of a crowd of 42,798 at the stadium which will host the 2002 World Cup final, Marinos went in front after 36 minutes when Jo climbed well to head home a cross from the right.

In the next minute, Jo beat the offside trap under the right wing and finished clinically from an acute angle.

Marinos sealed victory with a third goal 10 minutes into the second half, scored by World Cup central defender Norio Omura with a flying near-post header.

The defeat marks an ominous start to the second stage for Jubilo, which has seen some of its marquis players leave the team over the past year.

Jubilo, which won the championship for the only time in 1997, lost Brazilian midfielder Dunga at the end of last season but still managed to win the first stage. Now they must play without World Cup midfielder Hiroshi Nanami, who has joined Venezia in Italy.

Marinos' Spanish manager, Antonio De La Cruz, said the victory over the first-stage champions should give his team a lot of confidence for the rest of the campaign.

"To beat a team as good as Jubilo 3-0 is very important in our first game," said De La Cruz. His opposite number, Jubilo's Asian coach of the year Takashi Kuwahara, added, "It was a rout ... but at least I know where our problems lie now."

Marinos' new signing, 25-year-old midfielder or forward Igor Jovicic, from NK Zagreb, was unable to play because his registration had not been cleared in time.

Jovicic, who began his career with Croatia Zagreb before moving to Real Madrid, has captained the Yugoslav under-18 team and the Croatian under-20s.

The J-League's other 14 teams are in action today. The league is played in two stages, with the winner of each stage meeting in a two-leg play-off in December to decide the champions.

Chelsea boss' advice

LONDON, Aug 7: Chelsea chairman Ken Bates has urged England to pull out of the 2002 World Cup in protest at plans to stage the competition a month earlier than normal, reports AFP.

FIFA want the start of the competition, which is being hosted by South Korea and Japan, to be brought forward to May 23 to avoid a clash with the rainy season.

But Bates, a Football Association councillor, said: "What a shambles. Didn't FIFA know four years ago when they made their choice that it rains like hell at that time of the year?"

"And what a good idea to start the World Cup earlier in May, just when we are still playing. What idiot thought of that?"

"What England and European countries should do is withdraw and see how FIFA like it? There would be no World Cup without us," Bates told The Sun newspaper.

Bates comments are likely to anger FIFA at a time when England is bidding to host the 2006 World Cup.

New World Cup envoy Tony Banks on Friday boasted that England's campaign is gathering momentum.

Former Sports Minister Banks told the British Broadcasting Corporation: "I think it is fair to say that England has the best-organised campaign. We have the best, modern, safe and secure stadium in the world. We have spent over 600 million pounds since 1990. We have more ready to come on stream."

England are competing against favourites South Africa, Germany, Brazil and Morocco for the 2006 tournament.



Lazio's Simone Inzaghi (L) and Spanish side Cadiz's Dani fight for the ball during their Ramon Carranza Trophy match in Cadiz on August 6. Lazio won 2-0. — AFP photo

Sir Alex's future plan

LONDON, Aug 7: Sir Alex Ferguson wants to become general manager of Manchester United when his current contract runs out in three years' time, reports AFP.

The treble-winners manager has set his heart on moving to an 'upstairs role' rather than leaving Old Trafford for good.

Ferguson, who will have been United manager for 16 years in 2002, said he would jump at the chance of becoming general manager.

"Of course I would, and that's the kind of active role I would enjoy with the trust of whoever replaces me," said Ferguson. "He will have his job to do, and I will be peripheral."

Ferguson, in an interview with the BBC on Saturday, insisted he would want the role to be a back-seat one.

"In three years' time I will have done 16 years as manager of Manchester United, 28 years in total in management. I think I deserve a rest first of all."

"It's a good time to say 'It's the end', but there may be a challenge of a different nature," he said.

"A lot of people get very frightened with that word 'general manager' because in Italy it is the dominant role and there is that great fear at Old Trafford about the Sir Matt Busby years and his influence on the players at Everton, the team United face."

"I hope the new manager when he comes along will understand if I am around in whatever capacity that I have had plenty of pressure and if he wants my advice, then fine; if not then he's got his own job to do."

Ferguson, meanwhile, says



SIR ALEX FERGUSON

sympathises with the plight of his fellow Scot Walter Smith at Everton, the team United face.

in their opening Premiership game of the season on Sunday.

The Everton boss has had a difficult summer since he steered the club away from the drop last May.

Mark Pembroke and Richard Gough look inferior replacements for the departed Olivier Dacourt and Marco Materazzi, while exciting prospect Francis Jeffers has stunned Smith by asking for a transfer on the eve of the new campaign.

Ferguson feels Smith, who assisted him when he was Scotland coach, has done well given all the problems he has had to contend with.

"I think Walter has had a difficult time," he said. "He has had to sell players because of the financial situation of the club and that's very unfortunate for a club of Everton's size."

"I think Walter has done very well in stabilising the club and preventing them from getting relegated knowing all his problems."

United have a defensive headache going into the game because of injuries. Missing are Ronny Johnsen (knee), David May (medial ligaments) and Gary Neville (hip).

Jaap Stam has an ankle problem and United are anxious that he recovers to partner Henning Berg in the heart of the backline.

Malaysia's hopes dashed

Indonesia, S'pore share points

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN, Aug 7: Indonesia and Singapore ground out a 1-1 draw here Friday to go through to the Southeast Asian Games football semifinals, killing Malaysia's hopes, reports AFP.

Malaysia beat hosts Brunei 2-0 but it was not enough to get one of the two qualifying places from Group A, which were taken by the Indonesians and Singapore.

The Malaysians scored a goal in each half through Bakri Asmawi and Kamaluddin Azizul. But the side, vilified as "traitors" by their press after two earlier defeats, finished the tournament on six points.

Malaysian defender Baharom Khalilul Anuar, who earlier issued a formal apology for having made an obscene gesture at the Malaysian press, finished a wretched tournament by earning a yellow card.

Group rivals Indonesia and Singapore both went through on seven points each after their draw. The ball is in Thailand's court now," said Singapore coach Vithilingam Subramaniam after the match. "They

can pick who they want to play in the semifinals."

Singapore substitute Indra Sathan Daud, who came in on the hour, controlled Tan Kim Leng's pinpoint pass on the edge of the box with one touch and lashed a magnificent rising shot after being allowed to turn by three defenders on the 89th minute.

Indonesian captain Bima Sakti put his side in front against the run of play when he crashed a penalty in off the underside of the crossbar after forward Rochi Melkiano Edffen Putray was pulled down in the first half.

Undefeated Thailand, who lead Group A on goal difference from Vietnam with seven points each, play their last group match against Myanmar on Sunday.

Vietnam, who face the winless Philippines, should need only show up to gain at least a point against the tournament whipping boys who have conceded 16 goals in three games.

Thailand's English coach Peter Withe warned his champions against over-confidence.

"We'll be going all out for a win," he said, adding that Myanmar "will want to leave the tournament on a high note."

Myanmar, on four points, are still in with a mathematical chance -- provided they defeat Thailand and the Filipinos score 11 goals without a Vietnamese reply.

"I'm not particularly bothered by who we play in the semifinals," Withe said. "We just want to get the win and first place if possible."

Spurs sign up Leonhardsen

LONDON, Aug 7: English Premiership club Tottenham Hotspur on Friday completed the signing of Norwegian midfielder Oyvind Leonhardsen from Liverpool for 3 million pounds (4.5 million dollars), reports AFP.

Leonhardsen, who will be 29 a week on Tuesday, joined Liverpool two years ago from Wimbledon for nearly 4 million pounds (6.5 million dollars).

He struggled to hold down a first team place after Gerard Houllier took over last season.

Hicham fixes his target

LONDON, Aug 7: Morocco's Hicham El Guerrouj is vowing to shatter his own world mile record at the British Grand Prix athletics meeting on Saturday, reports AFP.

Britain has long been regarded as the home of the mile ever since Roger Bannister dipped under the four-minute barrier 45 years ago.

Moring organisers have also piled on the pressure to break the three-minute 43.13 seconds mark he set in Rome last month and expect a capacity 16,500 crowd at Crystal Palace to cheer him on.

"If the conditions are good I believe I can take the record below 3:43 on Saturday," said El Guerrouj.

"In Rome I was lacking in competition experience but I feel I have my full fitness now. This race has been planned for a long time and I want to repay everybody's faith in me."

"I think another world record is well within my sights and I am just hoping the pace-makers allow me to do that."

"This is the home of mile running and I know the crowd here appreciate distance runners and that will be an added motivation."

El Guerrouj cites Steve Cram as his inspiration despite growing up in Morocco where Said Aouita dominated African athletics during the 1980s and early 90s.

"I followed Steve Cram's career from start to finish and he is my absolute idol. I have a video of all his world records which I watch all the time and I always dreamt of matching his achievements," he added.

In a week in which the sport's name has been further tarnished by drugs revelations El Guerrouj shows a refreshing attitude to those accused of breaking the rules.

Unlike many top athletes who use legal sports supplements and vitamins to gain an added advantage, the Moroccan prefers his mother's home cooking to propel him to success.

"I respect my regime and all I do is train, rest, pray and eat. My only supplements are the specialties my mother cooks for me at home."

Despite this, El Guerrouj has thrown his support behind Linford Christie as he attempts to clear his name after a positive drugs test.

"It doesn't make sense to me for someone like Christie to take drugs at the end of his career," he said.

Should the Moroccan better his world best on Saturday it is almost guaranteed this deeply religious and dedicated athlete will dedicate his latest in a long line of achievements to the late King of Morocco.

The Moroccan royal family

have been one of his greatest supporters, even flying a specialist doctor from France when stomach problems threatened to rule him out of the World Championships in Seville.

"I train every day but on his funeral I rested out of a mark of respect. Throughout my career his support was always very important to me."

Also bidding to join the record breakers at Crystal Palace will be Ethiopian Haile Gebrselassie, who broke the world indoor 2,000 and 5,000m record in Birmingham earlier this year.

Gebrselassie faces the 16th world record of a glittering career when he attempts to better his own world two-mile mark of 7:58.61.

He will be cheered on by an estimated 1,000 members of his London-based Ethiopian fan club, who are expected to transform Crystal Palace into a celebration of their country's most famous export.

Another highlight of the meeting will be the clash between jet-heeled American Maurice Greene and his predecessor as world record holder, Canada's Donovan Bailey as they continue their preparations for the world championships in Seville, Spain later this month.