

Surrey stage recovery

LONDON, Aug 20: Runaway county championship leaders Surrey were reduced to 36 for five before Adam Hoolioake and Martin Bicknell forged a recovery to lead the side to 224 all out against Sussex at Hove on Thursday, reports Reuters.

The first day of the match had been washed out, but when play finally began, Surrey missed their test batsmen Alec Stewart and Graham Thorpe, who were on duty for England.

Half the side went cheaply before all-rounder Hoolioake led a revival. He made 61, paceman Bicknell chipped in with 67 and the leaders reached a respectable total.

Sussex were 99 for two at close, both wickets going to Saqlain Mushtaq.

Leicestershire, 41 points behind them and also frustrated by a lost day on Wednesday, managed only 228 against Middlesex, who were 16 for no wicket at close.

Fourth-placed Yorkshire had a bad day against their great rivals Lancashire, who bowled them out for 67, Richard Green taking four for 21.

Kent, in third place, fared better in piling up 504 against Somerset, with half-centuries from five players.

The bottom club Glamorgan built a big first innings lead with 416 for two against Nottinghamshire and centuries from South African Jacques Kallis (101), Steve James (172 not out) and Michael Powell (127 not out).

Glamorgan had let their visitors off the hook the previous day, allowing them to total 228 after losing six wickets for nine runs.

Bad weather keeps Bula waiting

LONDON, Aug 20: Bad weather has forced ace swimmer Bula Chowdhury to postpone her two-way swim of the English Channel scheduled today by at least a couple of days, reports PTI.

There is no chance of the swimming taking place today or tomorrow. If weather improves she will take the plunge on Sunday," her manager Nishith Ganguly told PTI here.

He said the Channel Swimming Association, pilot boat and coast guards would not allow a two way swim unless there is at least 24-hour good weather.

Twenty three year old Bula had successfully crossed the English Channel from Dover to France a decade ago.

Dutch sprinter tests positive

SEVILLE, Aug 20: Dutch sprinter Troy Douglas has been withdrawn from the World Championships starting in Seville on Saturday after testing positive for the banned anabolic steroid nandrolone, Dutch athletics sources said on Thursday, reports Reuters.

The sources said Douglas, who formerly competed for Bermuda, had failed a dope test recently. An International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) spokesman said the world governing body knew nothing about the case.

Douglas, 36, ran for the Netherlands in last year's European championships in Budapest. He was disqualified after finishing fourth in a photo-finish for using abusive language.

He is the latest in a spate of positive tests for nandrolone in a variety of sports.

On Wednesday, Jamaican sprinter Merlene Ottey, 39, withdrew from the championships after a positive test for nandrolone. Ottey, who had won a record 14 world championships medals, protested her innocence and said she would fight to clear her name.

Britain's 1992 Barcelona Olympic 100 metres gold medalist Linford Christie, 39, has also tested positive for nandrolone after finishing fourth in an indoor meeting in Dortmund, Germany, last Friday.

Another Briton, European 200 metres champion Doug Walker, has also tested positive for nandrolone this year. He was cleared by the British governing body but the IAAF has upheld the original suspension.

The positive tests have overshadowed the championships and embarrassed the governing body.

On Thursday IAAF president Primo Nebiolo asked supporters to ignore the drugs furore and concentrate on the high-class competition in prospect in Seville.

But his attempts to defuse the controversies looked doomed to failure with yet another positive test just two days before the championships start.

Sampras moves into qtrs

INDIANAPOLIS, Aug 20: World number one Pete Sampras received treatment for a sore arm during his third-round match against Belarusian Max Mirnyi on Thursday, but won a 7-6 (7-4), 6-3 decision to move into the RCA Championships quarterfinals, reports Reuters.

"It's dead, there's no question, my arm's a little tired," said Sampras, who will play fellow American Vince Spadea in the quarters. "The trainer just put a little hot cream on it and that's pretty much it."

A sore shoulder sidelined second-seeded Patrick Rafter of Australia, who won a 7-6 (7-5), 6-2 third-round victory over Canadian Daniel Nestor and then withdrew from the event, promising to return to Indianapolis next year.



The Olympic Stadium in Seville, Spain where the World Athletics Championships open today. — AFP photo

Athletes urged to stay focused

World C'ships open today



SEVILLE, Aug 20: World athletics chief Primo Nebiolo urged fans yesterday to forget about drugs and concentrate on the World Championships but despite his plea the doping debate dominated the run-up to Saturday's opening day, reports Reuters.

The International Amateur Athletic Federation (IAAF) has been rocked by a series of drugs scandals over the past month involving high-profile athletes such as former Olympic sprint champion Linford Christie and high jumper Javier Sotomayor.

On Wednesday Merlene Ottey, who has won a record 14 World Championships medals, withdrew from the Seville competition after a positive test for the steroid nandrolone.

At a news conference on the second and final day of the IAAF's congress, Nebiolo said the recent cases proved the federation had shown the courage of its convictions in its war against drugs.

But he said supporters should concentrate on sport and forget about drugs in the sport.

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here. "Now be happy. Think of our championships, these great champions and great competitions. Forget these cases."

"People forget we have 200,000,000 athletes in the world and we have two or three doping cases. It's ridiculous."

The Ottey case overshadowed Wednesday's first day of the congress and the controversial subject of drugs was a discussion point in and out of the congress hall on Thursday.

IAAF leaders believe it is impossible to keep positive drugs tests confidential for long because of media leaks and believe in announcing and suspending athletes early in the process. A proposal to delay suspensions was rejected.

But the fact that IAAF chiefs believe athletes are completely responsible for banned substances in their body, even if they may have got there by accident, worried British chief David Moorcroft who has faced two major drug cases in recent months.

The former world 10,000 metres record holder attacked the system.

"The new reality is that, rather than a system which is defending innocent athletes, it is defending an imperfect system," said Moorcroft who has seen European 200 metres champion Doug Walker endure a drug scandal recently in addition to Christie's positive test.

"The imperfections are in the science. Science is very accurate at discovering whether a prohibited substance is present but it is less than accurate in determining how it got there."

"At the moment the authorities' position is that it does not matter how it got there, it is there. If it got there from an innocent substance, or it got there from fruit and nut (chocolate),

then that's your problem. Moorcroft said the present uncertainty adversely affected athletes.

"The knock-on effect of that is that at that point the athlete is suspended. The impact of suspension is massive. The stigma attached to suspension is huge and it is very difficult to undo that."

"We rattle on about innocence until proven otherwise. But the reality is it is big, big news. It is almost bigger news than murder. And the athlete has to suffer the consequences of that, be they innocent or guilty."

Nebiolo said Ottey had been an elite performer for most of the last two decades. But he added: "We can emerge stronger. We showed we have the courage of our convictions. If they are guilty then they will be punished, no problem about that."

In a further echo of the doping problem, the congress rejected a proposal from Germany's Helmut Digel to start the world record book afresh in the new millennium.

Digel has been campaigning to erase records he believes are drug-tainted and wanted the congress to agree to scrub some current marks and start again next century with the best marks achieved this year.

The congress did turn its mind to other matters on Thursday and toughened the regulations applying to athletes who change countries.

In future athletes will need citizenship rather than residency to qualify for another country's team.

They will also have to endure a three-year wait before competing for their adopted country as a major championship. The gap can be reduced to a year if both federations involved agree.

World chess

Khalifman to meet Akopian in finals

LAS VEGAS, Aug 20: Midnight finally arrived for Romania's Liviu Nisipeanu on Thursday as the Cinderella of the World Chess Championship was eliminated by Alexander Khalifman, reports AP.

Khalifman of Russia advanced to the finals after winning both games of the semifinal round playoffs in the monthlong tournament being held at Caesars Palace here.

Nisipeanu, considered an underdog, forced this tie-break with a dramatic win Wednesday that evened the semifinals at two points each. Those games could each have lasted up to seven hours.

Thursday's tiebreaker contests were limited to one hour.

In the first game, the 33-year-old Khalifman dominated his opponent, who is 10 years his junior. The Russian forced a position where the Romanian could hardly move any of his pieces.

Nisipeanu decided to sacrifice a knight to gain some activity, but his position steadily deteriorated. After this loss, he was again faced with a must-win situation in the second game.

In this game, the underdog played a wonderful series of opening moves to gain a position where he could force a victory.

The Grand Masters commenting on the game were preparing for another set of playoff matches, but, for the first time in this event, Nisipeanu's nerves failed him. He made an inexact move and then a serious mistake. This was enough for the Russian to force a draw and move into the finals.

Khalifman will play Vladimir Akopian of Armenia in a six-game match, beginning Sunday, that will determine who will receive 660,000 dollars and the World Championship. The loser will receive 396,000 dollars while Nisipeanu will take home 172,800 dollars.

Ottey's B-test put on hold

SEVILLE, Spain, Aug 20: A backup doping test on Jamaican sprinter Merlene Ottey, who withdrew on the eve of the World Championships after reports of a positive result, has been postponed until after the event, the IAAF's top medical official said Friday, reports AP.

"There's been an agreement with the Ottey group that the B-test will be postponed until it is suitable for everyone to do it," Arne Ljungqvist said.

He said the test would be carried out most likely in early September, so as not to overshadow the championships, which open Saturday and run to Aug 29.

Organizers announced Wednesday that Ottey, 39, pulled out after the A-test of a sample from a meet in Lucerne, Switzerland, showed elevated amounts of the anabolic steroid Nandrolone.

Ottey has won 14 medals at the worlds, more than any man or woman in history.

Drug test results only become official after a backup check confirms the initial findings. On rare occasions the first test has contradicted the first test, clearing the athlete of any wrongdoing.

The result of Ottey's B-test had been expected this weekend.

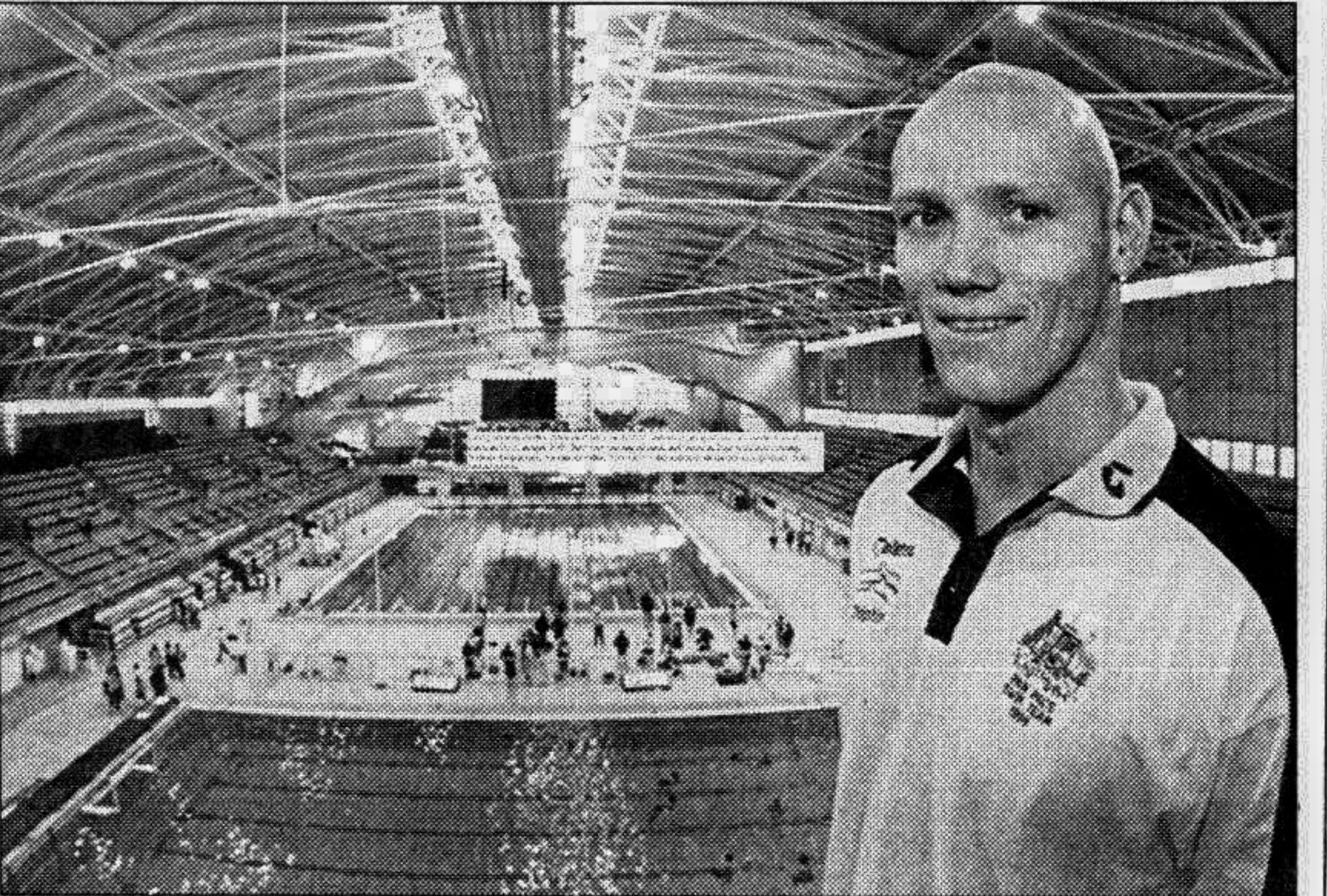
Seles, Hingis in last eight

TORONTO, Aug 20: American Monica Seles kept alive her hopes for a fifth consecutive Canadian open title by defeating Russian Elena Likhovtseva 7-6, 6-3 in third round play on Thursday, reports Reuters.

Top seed Martina Hingis of Switzerland recovered from a 0-3 first-set deficit to win 10 games in a row and record a comfortable 6-3, 6-1 win over 16th-seeded American Chanda Rubin.

France's Mary Pierce, seeded third, also reached the quarterfinals. She downed German Anke Huber to set up a meeting with her compatriot, 10th-seeded Sandrine Testud.

Spain's Arantxa Sanchez Vicario, the fifth seed, extended her career record over 12th-seeded countrywoman Conchita Martinez to 12-3 with a 7-6, 6-1 victory.



Michael Klim, Australia's reigning world record holder for the 100m butterfly, poses at the Sydney International Aquatic Centre on August 19. — AFP photo



Moroccan Hicham El Guerrouj (L) and American Maurice Greene gesture during a press conference in Seville ahead of the World Championships on August 19. — AFP photo

El Guerrouj an Aouita idolater

SEVILLE, Aug 20: (Reuters) Hicham El Guerrouj likes to joke his mother made him a runner.

Apparently, fed up with constantly washing his dirty soccer kit, his mother urged El Guerrouj to take up athletics.

The real influence on his life, though, was the great Moroccan runner Said Aouita.

El Guerrouj, who holds the world records for 1,500 metres and the mile, said at the age of nine he dreamed of representing his country at soccer, maybe even at the World Cup finals.

The 13 minutes 05.59 seconds Aouita took to win the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics 5,000 metres changed his life forever.

"I decided then that I wanted to be like Said," El Guerrouj said.

As a teenager he continued his dual career as a runner and goalkeeper for the local youth team until he came to the attention of Moroccan national coach Aziz Daouda, the man who had guided Aouita's career.

Daouda persuaded El Guerrouj to abandon his home town of Berkane for the Moroccan high altitude training centre at Ifrane, in the Atlas Mountains.

"El Guerrouj was a natural athlete. What we did is give him the opportunity to be even better," Daouda reflected.

Since then he has been on an almost unstoppable rise.

El Guerrouj first came to the attention of athletics pundits when he finished third in the 1992 world junior 5,000 metres.

At first he did not quite keep up with the prodigious progress of the two men in front of him, Ethiopia's Haile Gebrselassie

and Kenya's Ismael Kirui were to go on and win world titles in the senior ranks the following year in Stuttgart.

However, after being part of the Moroccan team who won the world road relay title in 1994, El Guerrouj started making his mark at 1,500.

The conversion to the shorter distance came after Aouita, by now retired, spotted that the youngster had outstanding leg speed and converted him into a middle distance runner.

Success was not immediate but by the 1996 Olympics El Guerrouj had matured into one of the favourites for a gold medal.

Sadly, in the steamy heat of Atlanta, his heels were clipped and he stumbled over the inner curb in the 1,500 final, allowing Algeria's Noureddine Morceli to grab the gold.

El Guerrouj was left sobbing at his misfortune after the race but a year later he shed tears of joy as he became only the section of Moroccan man, after his mentor Aouita, to win a World Championship title.

Last year he was unbeaten and he improved Morceli's 1,500 world record to 3:26.00.

In June, El Guerrouj deprived Morceli of his world mile record at the Rome Golden League meeting, clocking 3:43.12.

Now to extend his run of success, El Guerrouj is aiming to become the first Moroccan athlete to win consecutive titles on the track at a global gathering.

A feat neither Aouita, nor Olympic champions Brahim Boutayeb or Khalid Skah managed.

Although he is coached by Abdelkader Kada, a former Mo-

roccan 5,000 and 10,000 champion, El Guerrouj regularly pays tribute to the effect Aouita has had on his own career and that of many other Moroccan athletes.

"He is every runner's hero in Morocco," El Guerrouj said.

"With his victories and records Said Aouita truly fascinated youngsters in Morocco and created a movement that exploded at the end of the 80s. Aouita came up with the idea of creating schools of athletics in order to attract youngsters. What we are seeing now are the first results of that policy."

In 1997 El Guerrouj dedicated his victory to the late King Hassan II, who in turn gave him a house, 50,000 dollars and a solid gold pendant.

"He was the father of sport in Morocco. He supported the athletes," El Guerrouj commented.

This time around in Seville there is a new king on the throne in Morocco, King Mohammed VI, who could be receiving El Guerrouj's bequest.

It would be wrong to assume, though, that El Guerrouj will just have to turn up in Seville to claim the gold medal and \$60,000 first prize, followed by the inevitable shower of domestic accolades, for the blue ribbon event.

He has had to endure a painful bout of haemorrhoids this northern summer, which caused him to miss several planned grand prix outings although apparently only three days of training.

El Guerrouj will also have to fight off the attentions of Kenya's Noah Nguny, who has chased him to the line in several of his races this season, including the world mile record run in Rome.

Haile hunts history

SEVILLE, Aug 20 (Reuters): Six years ago Haile Gebrselassie arrived unheralded at the Stuttgart World Athletics Championship. Now, on the eve of the Seville Championships, he is an international celebrity and poised to become the first man to win four consecutive world track titles.

"When I won in Stuttgart, nobody knew Haile Gebrselassie," said the Olympic and world 10,000 metres champion. "Now, everybody knows Haile Gebrselassie."

The young Spanish volunteers working at the Seville airport were no exception, recognising the multiple world record-holder and queuing for his autograph as soon as he arrived on Wednesday.

Neither was a man who approached Gebrselassie in between television interviews. Speaking in halting English and gesturing with his hands, he asked for the sunglasses perched on Gebrselassie's head as a souvenir.

"I've heard the track here is really very good, and the weather is not so bad, there's no humidity," said Gebrselassie. "Of course it's hot, but I'm sure it will be fine."

With the primary challenge coming from Kenya's five times world cross country champion Paul Tergat, Gebrselassie mentioned as his notable competitors: "The Kenyans, Moroccans, and also, at this time, Pinto, who is very good."

Portugal's Antonio Pinto has the fourth fastest 10,000 metres time year.

There are also very good

Ethiopians," added Gebrselassie, mentioning Habte Jifar, who leads the 1999 world list and Girma Tolla, and Assefa Mezgebu, fifth and seventh fastest in the world this year.

Gebrselassie was a junior member of a team led by 1992 Olympic 5,000 metres bronze medalist Fita Bayissa when he

Bikila, dreamed as a youngster of emulating compatriot Miruts Yifter's 5,000-10,000 double gold at the 1980 Moscow Olympics.

"When I do a double in the Olympics, I will be satisfied," he said. "And when I run the marathon."

At the 1993 World Championships, Gebrselassie did attempt the double, earning gold in the 10,000 metres and silver in the 5,000.

The possibility of a repeat attempt has been raised at each championship and also at the Olympics since but Gebrselassie has chosen to forego it, in this case due partly to the heat anticipated in Seville.

"I expected more than this, but when I arrived, it's not so bad," said Gebrselassie, who has already decided to compete in the longer event only. "I like to defend my title."

Gebrselassie plans to run an international marathon after the 2000 Sydney Olympics and will probably have done so by the time the next world championships roll around.

"So it could be the marathon I compete in then," he said.

Gebrselassie has concentrated on shorter distances this season, posting the fastest 1999 times over 3,000 and 5,000 metres and winning all his races, but not beating the world marks he has made a habit of knocking off each season.

He will probably attempt his own 10,000 mark in Brussels on September 3, before concluding his season at the All Africa Games in Johannesburg.

"It was all right," said Gebrselassie of his season so far. "But the most important is this what we have all come for here."

Low turn-out worries FSA

LONDON, Aug 20: The Football Supporters' Association on Thursday expressed "grave concern" over falling attendances in the English Premiership this season, reports AP.

Crowds have taken a big tumble so far this year with Tottenham's opening home game against Newcastle last week bringing 8,000 less people than the corresponding fixture last season through the turnstiles.

The FSA insisted that both clubs and fans were now paying the price for increases in ticket prices during the summer.

"We have been going on about price increases for five years," FSA National Committee member Shiela Spiers said.

"It is an average of 11 percent increase every year since 1990 and we are up to 100 percent now. And some clubs are over it."

"People are now saying 'We cannot afford it'."

"I know people who haven't bought season tickets and are sharing season tickets and are not going to away games. I am one of them. Liverpool are playing Leeds on Monday night and I cannot afford the 22 pound (35 dollar) asking price for a ticket."

There is a deep concern there, but clubs think only of money and don't plan long-term. Most of the Premier League clubs are not encouraging youngsters to attend."

"Television is partly to do with it but the price rises are our main concern."

But Derby, who saw an 8,681 drop in attendance for Satur-

day's defeat by Middlesbrough - the crowd of 24,045 was the lowest league gate at Pride Park - compared to the corresponding fixture last year, are unperturbed by the fall in attendance.

Derby believe that the season will "kick in" during September as the campaign begins to swing into action.

"Looking at 26,000 at Aston Villa (v West Ham) on Monday night puts our 24,500 against Middlesbrough into context," Derby spokesman Jim Fearn said.

"We are not concerned. It is a bad time of the year as far as holidays are concerned and we are very much on a par with what we were last season."

"We expect to build on this as the games continue. I think it will pick up as people begin to feel it is like a real season."