

Not everyone in favour

SEATTLE, Oct 8: In the long and checkered history of professional boxing there has never been a match quite like the battle of the sexes on the card at Seattle's Mercer Arena Saturday — a chance for a man and a woman to slug it out legally, reports Reuters.

The fight pitting Margaret "Tiger" MacGregor, 36, against Lai Chow, 33, the first officially sanctioned male-female bout, has attracted international media attention along with howls of outrage from professional boxing circles.

The Association of Boxing Commissions, citing "very real health and safety concerns," is recognising the fight only as an exhibition. One well-known trainer offered 5,000 dollars to call off the match, and a state representative wants to make mixed-sex boxing illegal.

"We really think it's a dangerous precedent, and it's something that women's boxing is not embracing in any form," said Rick Kull, a longtime sports promoter and founder of the International Female Boxers Association.

The outpouring of antagonism has made MacGregor more determined than ever to show she can take a pounding, one on one.

"I'm not trying to be a freak," MacGregor said in a television interview. "I'm not trying to be in a circus. I want to box, and it doesn't matter who it is."

Both fighters are expected to weigh in at about 125 pounds (57 kg), although MacGregor, at five-foot-five (1.65 metres), is three inches (8 cm) taller than her opponent.

"This is a professional athlete," said her trainer Vern Miller. "She spars guys every day — middleweights, welterweights. This isn't little Red Riding Hood. This is the big bad wolf."

Chow has fought just two professional matches and lost them both in 1996. He agreed to the match after the original opponent, his sparring partner Hector Morales, failed to come up with a valid passport for the fight.

Loroupe hopeful

NEWCASTLE, England, Oct 8: World marathon record holder Tegla Loroupe of Kenya settled into the northeast of England on Thursday confident that she can repeat her success here six years ago by winning Sunday's Great North Run, reports AFP.

Loroupe sliced four seconds off her world mark when winning the Berlin marathon in 2hr 20min 43sec just under a fortnight ago and captured her third successive world half marathon title in Palermo, Italy last Sunday.

"It's a very strong field and should be very competitive providing the weather is good," said Loroupe, who faces fellow Kenyan and reigning London Marathon champion Joyce Chepkumba, last year's winner Sonia O'Sullivan of Ireland and Portugal's European marathon gold medalist Manuela Machado over the 13-mile (20.8km) course.

But Loroupe reserved a special word for British debutant Paula Radcliffe, who won the world 10,000m silver medal ahead of her in Seville just over a month ago.

"Paula is a very strong and brave runner who isn't frightened to take on the pace," she said. "I know it is her first half marathon but I'm sure she'll not hesitate to do that on Sunday."

Recalling their clash in Seville, Loroupe praised the Briton while criticising Ethiopia's gold medalist, Gete Wami.

The Germany-based star said: "Obviously the distance was a little bit short for me but I played my part in taking the share of the pacemaking. The conditions were very hot and Paula also took her turn."

"But Wami did nothing. She just sat in on the pace and offered no help whatsoever even when I asked her if she would play a part. In such weather everyone should contribute and I was disappointed she didn't. But then she always does that."

"Hopefully on Sunday everyone will play a part in making it a great race. My aim is to win but if I can help Paula I will."

Brisk business

MOSCOW, Oct 8: Scalpers are demanding up to 150 dollars for the match between the former Soviet republics of Russia and Ukraine after all 83,000 of them sold out in a matter of hours, local newspapers reported Thursday, reports AFP.

The regular ticket price for the European Championship Group Four clash was established at 100-200 rubles (four to eight dollars) and nobody was allowed to buy more than 10 tickets for Saturday's match, said deputy general manager of Moscow's Luzhniki stadium, Viktor Gruzdev.

Ukrainian newspapers reported that the country's national squad supporters were furious after receiving just 7,000 tickets instead of the 10,000 they had asked for.

Dozens of Russian fans spent the night outside the stadium this week in the forlorn hope of obtaining the treasured tickets, but to no avail as all were sold out last Saturday.

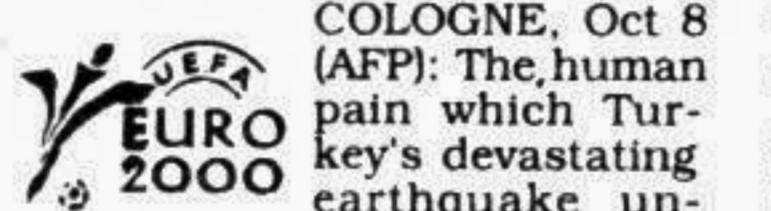
Russia's squad members were also issued with 10 tickets each, even though Spartak striker Alexander Shirko had asked for 60 passes.

Dozens of Russian journalists' accreditation demands were also rejected by the Russian Football Union (RFU) because the press box of the Luzhniki stadium only has 366 seats. The RFU's press service received more than 600 requests from reporters.



MOCK FIGHTING! Laila Ali (L), daughter of boxing legend Muhammad Ali, and her opponent April Fowler pretending to box during the weigh-in at the Turning Stone Casino Resort in New York on October 7. Laila makes her professional debut today. — AFP photo

Putting the pain behind



COLOGNE, Oct 8 (AFP): The human pain, which Turkey's devastating earthquake unleashed will be

forgotten for 90 minutes Saturday as the country's best footballers travel to Munich for a vital qualifier against Germany which they must win if they are to qualify directly for next year's Euro 2000 tournament.

It will be years before Turkey repairs the physical damage left by the killer quake, but they will now finally have an occasion to shelve their grief and celebrate a national event.

That is the case in Germany, a country to which Turkey has close ties because of the tens of thousands of Turkish guest workers who moved there in the 1960s and 1970s and who today form Germany's largest ethnic minority.

Normally the Turkish media hype things up in the four weeks before such a game but this time the response has been muted because of the human suffering caused by the quake.

"Football" has become a side issue even for the most passionate of fans, the pain is just too great, no one feels like celebrating," Turkey's coach Mustafa Denizli said.

That will mean strikers in the form of Oliver Bierhoff and Ulf Kirsten will be in the middle, while wing-forwards Christian Ziege and Oliver Neuville play the wings.

The back line will be marshalled by Bayern Munich veteran Lothar Matthaeus while team-mate Oliver Kahn returns to goal at the expense of disgruntled Dortmund keeper Jens Lehmann.

The German Football Federation (DFB), which has played

its part in providing aid for Turkish earthquake victims, wants to play up the symbolic nature of this game and take some of the heat out of the two countries' rivalry. DFB president Egidius Braun expects a win but not at any cost.

"The game is sure to be loaded with passion and emotion but for me, after the terrible earthquake, it's more the aspect of friendship with the Turks which is in the foreground," Braun said.

"Defeat wouldn't mean the end of everything and certainly not a catastrophe. Catastrophes are what the people of Turkey and more recently in Japan (nuclear accident) have gone through."

A draw would be enough for Germany to book their passage to Euro 2000 — Germany are top of Group Three with 18 points while Turkey are second with 16.

Regardless of the outcome, Braun is hoping that an improved performance will finally take some of the heat off of Erich Ribbeck and co. and, to illustrate his point, has a salutary tale.

"I just wish everyone would move a little closer and work as one regarding the national team because there's often just a fine line between success and failure."

"My players are just as emotionally affected as everyone else who lives in the earthquake area. Just about every player has someone in his family who has suffered."

Football in Turkey is a matter of national pride and that was boosted in the first leg match when the home side scored a 1-0 win in Bursa over

Denizli, who learned his trade in Germany as coach of the now second division side Alemannia Aachen, doesn't want to stir up emotions for this game more than they already are.

Around half of the 64,500 fans in Munich's Olympic stadium Saturday are expected to be Turkish and special measures will be taken to secure the playing area because of fears that Kurdish radicals may try to use the game as a platform for their armed struggle.

That was the case in Helsinki when Turkey's qualifier against Finland had to be stopped for 10 minutes to clear a group of Kurdish demonstrators who stormed the pitch.

The former world No 1, due to face Germany's Anke Huber in Friday's quarterfinals, has not recovered from a left wrist injury suffered during her second round victory over Silvia Farina.

Davenport has also been forced to pull out of next week's tournament in Zurich, where she was the two-time defending champion. She will return home to California to undergo treatment and hopes to be fit for the season-ending Chase Championships.

Nathalie Dechy of France set

up a quarterfinal meeting with world No 1 Martina Hingis after upsetting eighth seed Dominique Van Roost of Belgium 6-3, 6-2.

Germany's Anke Huber defeated Russian Elena Likhovtseva 6-4, 6-3, while Austria's Barbara Schett eased past another Russian, qualifier Elena Dementieva, 6-3, 6-1.

Belgian qualifier Sabine Appelmans will face defending champion Sandrine Testud of France after a 6-2, 7-6 victory over American Amy Frazier.

Serena Williams, beaten by Testud in the second round, was again at the centre of controversy in Filderstadt despite flying home to the US.

The 18-year-old American had reportedly asked for a wild card into this month's ATP event in Stuttgart.

Williams first spoke to tournament director Markus Gunhardt at the French Open, and when the pair bumped into each other in Filderstadt, Williams quipped: "What about my wild card?"

Gunhardt confirmed that he had told Williams to apply by fax, if she was serious and had considered the implications of what might happen if she played.

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The organisers claimed that urine samples of Xavier along with Sri Lanka's 85 KG weightlifting bronze medalist Ranjith Kumarasinha and the 400 M hurdles winner, Ashok Kumar Jayasuriya, had returned positive.

The Indian, as well as the Sri Lankan hurdler had tested positive for the banned drug Nandrolone while the lifter's sample had shown traces of the stimulant Ephedrine.

A positive test for drugs entails an automatic two year ban while the punishment for taking a stimulant is far lighter, and the culprit can even be let off with a warning.

Pradhan had announced in Kathmandu that the A samples had tested positive and action would be formalised only after the B sample was analysed.

Drug testing, which was introduced only from this edition of the SA Games, was done at the International Olympic Committee (IOC) approved Laboratory in Kuala Lumpur.

The Shanghai tournament is the first of a two-week run in

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Chang, the crowd-pleasing sixth seed, came through against powerful Belarus youngster Maxim Mirnyi 6-4, 7-5 in the night session.

Rios improved to 3-1 over Woodbridge in their career series. The top seed has won only two titles this year after suffering at the start of 1999 with a back injury and battling with other physical ailments this season.

His latest has been a leg, which he still occasionally feels. "I'm much better now," said the 23-year-old. "It still bothers me occasionally but it's better than in the previous weeks."

"Maybe I can't run quite as fast as before when I was fully fit, but I'm doing my best."

Rios' quarterfinal showing here was his first since May.

The South American next faces fifth seed Jonas Bjorkman Saturday.

Bjorkman won an all-

Swedish clash, ousting compatriot Andreas Vinciguerra that still has a lot to learn on the pro tour.

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the former world number five, now trying to improve upon a ranking which has sunk into the 60s.

Vinciguerra reached the finals on home clay at Bastad in July, while Bjorkman's best success has been in Asia this year. He reached the quarterfinals in Hong Kong and the Tokyo semifinals six months ago.

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