

Bid to make tennis more entertaining

LONDON, Oct 19: Tennis chiefs here Monday unveiled a new lighter way to treat volatile players in an attempt to make the game more entertaining, reports AFP.

Following discussions with the ATP Tour, WTA Tour and Grand Slam organisers, the International Tennis Federation (ITF) has abolished its "three strikes and out" policy whereby players could be disqualified from a match for three indiscretions such as racket-throwing or swearing.

The ITF will now experiment with a system where a third minor offence will now see the offending player forfeit a game with the first offence bringing a verbal warning and the second a point penalty.

We want to avoid a player being disqualified from a Wimbledon semi-final for just a quick "one-two-three" series of offences," said ITF executive director Bill Babcock.

"In my experience, player behaviour has improved over the past 10 years. However players may now feel more free to express themselves in the future under our new rules. Of course we don't want players going out on court and shouting obscenities but maybe they feel a little restricted in what they say at present."

However, following three warnings - and in the case of a "flagrant Code Violation" - the official reserves the right to disqualify.

A further change to be made will be the introduction of a two minute break at the end of every set.

This replaces the 90 second break which is currently taken at the change-over after the first game of each set.

"It will help commercially and it will also give a shape to the match. Spectators normally like to let off some steam and talk between sets and this change will allow them to do so."

The change also means three consecutive games will be played at the start of a set if only one game was played following the final rest period in the previous set.

The experimental rule changes will apply to Grand Slam tournaments, Davis Cup and Federation Cup matches, as well as in all ATP and WTA tournaments beginning on January 1 2000.

The ITF Annual General Meeting in June 2000 will decide if the rule changes are to become permanent.

18-month ban on Dodson

LONDON, Oct 19: British boxer Adrian Dodson was banned for 18 months Monday for biting his opponent during a Commonwealth middleweight title fight, reports AFP.

The British Boxing Board of Control cited Dodson for "bringing the sport into disrepute." In addition to the ban, he was fined 1,000 pounds (\$1,600).

The board ruled that Dodson was guilty of biting Canada's Alain Bonnamie in the 12th and last round of their Oct 5 bout in London.

Dodson said he would consider an appeal.

"We had a fair hearing but the sentence is very harsh," the 29-year-old Dodson said. "Mike Tyson served only one year after chewing Evander Holyfield's ear. We will think about an appeal."

Dodson was five rounds ahead on referee John Keane's scorecard with just 50 seconds of the fight remaining at London's Royal National Hotel, when the fighters tangled on the ropes and Bonnamie emerged with bite marks to his midriff. Dodson was immediately disqualified.

At a news conference last week, Dodson apologized but denied biting his opponent. He said his mouthpiece remained in place and that he "pinched" Bonnamie with his mouth.

Elber to stay upto 2004

COLOGNE, Germany, Oct 19: Brazilian international Giovane Elber signed on for another three years with Bundesliga champions Bayern Munich Monday, reports AFP.

Elber, who is still finding his form after a knee operation in March which kept him out of last season's European Cup and German Cup finals, has scored 26 goals in 57 appearances for Bayern.

His new contract keeps him at Bayern until the end of June, 2004.

"I had offers from Spain but Bayern were quicker, and besides my wife didn't want to go to Spain," Elber, who currently earns around 4.5 million marks (2.5m dollars) a year, said.

"After Bayern all that will be left is Brazil. I will be 32 or 33 then, play two more years in Brazil, and then enjoy life after that."

Bayern wanted to break the news on Saturday when they beat Hertha Berlin but the announcement was delayed by the sacking of controversial winger Mario Basler.

Basler has declared war on Bayern and says he will only move to another club if Bayern agree to waive their right for a transfer fee. Basler has a contract until the end of the season and feels so unjustly treated by Bayern he wants to avoid the club getting a single penny by selling him.

In a worst case scenario, Basler has said he will suit his contract on the sidelines - costing the club millions - and leave the club in June as a free agent.

Courtois' neutral stance

AMSTERDAM, Oct 19: The chief of Euro 2000 is pleased four of the five big soccer nations have qualified for next year's finals but will not be drawn on whether he wants number five - England.

"I'm very happy. There was a meeting at UEFA two weeks ago, and the people said there are five big countries in Europe in terms of clubs and, look, we've got four of them," tournament director Alain Courtois told Reuters in an interview.

France, Germany, Italy and Spain are certain to be playing in Belgium and the Netherlands next June. The participation of number five, England, will depend on a two-legged play-off against Scotland next month.

The interior and justice ministries of the host nations, and much of the local population, may breathe a sigh of relief if Scotland win. If England do not qualify, some of Europe's worst behaved fans will stay at home.

Courtois adopts a neutral stance, insisting the organisers do not want anyone except the hooligans, to feel excluded.

"Everyone is welcome. We are not going to bar anyone... although people who come must know of course that we are going to be very strict. They must know what the security measures are," he said.

The authorities believe they can identify previous trouble-makers at the borders and deport them.

The local police will also be given special powers to seize fans who are causing trouble and hold them for eight hours.

"Take for example the people in Lens during the World Cup who were provoking trouble the whole day. We want to give the police the possibility to hold these people to protect the rest," Courtois said.

The organisers also believe their ticketing policy will help fight the hooligan threat.

Tickets are being made available to fans, two per applicant, and not to tour operators. Recipients also need to provide their names, which are printed on the ticket. The principle is only "real" fans will come and their names will be known.

"We have taken into account what happened in France, US (1994 World Cup), England (Euro 96). We specifically decided not to involve tour operators," Courtois said.

He said the application process had involved checks. Only those named will be allowed in, although Courtois did not say whether there would be identity checks outside each game.

The respective ministries are currently trying to produce a coordinated "mobility plan."

"We are looking into the possibility of special reductions for transport fares... It's a question of using public transport and of getting people to the stadiums in time," Courtois said.

Courtois hopes that, in cities such as Amsterdam, fans will be persuaded to rely on public transport. Euro 2000 is a big event, he says, but he does not want to be remembered for bothering millions of local residents.

"I always say a European tournament must not get in the way of the normal business of the locals," he said.

The virtually unknown club then only has one small stand and no showers - players had to wash at a nearby water pump.

Outside Auxerre that year Soviet Union cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first man in space, John Kennedy was the American president while it was a year before the Beatles had their first hit.

Auxerre finally reached the first division in 1980 and - despite their scare last season - have stayed there ever since.

Roux is a national celebrity in France and is a regular pundit on French television. He is also Auxerre's general manager and helps the groundsman out with the pitch when required.

He is also President of the French Football Coaches.

Roux has one remaining ambition to beat the French record, held by Kader Siroud, of 700 first division matches as a coach. That would mean Roux would have to complete two more seasons plus two games, ensuring that he would still be at the helm in 2001 - his fifth decade in charge of the club.

He is well aware that he is the last of his generation still on the touchline and says: "There is a great sense of emptiness surrounding me."

Roux knows he has a lot of work to do to keep Auxerre on top as some of his rivals - Lyon, Paris St Germain, Marseille and Monaco spring to mind - have spent fortunes on players that Auxerre can only dream of.

He said: "We are a lucky leader. We have a lot of work still to do to put together the best team possible. But at the moment we are succeeding and we are not going to complain about it."

A really happy birthday for Roux

AUXERRE, France, Oct 19: Auxerre's legendary coach Guy Roux celebrated his 61st birthday.

Monday with his team on top of the French First Division, reports AFP.

Consecutive victories last week over Strasbourg and Bastia saw Auxerre leapfrog their wealthy rivals and Roux said: "I thank them (the players) for this present. I have rarely lost on my birthday week."

Unbelievably it is Roux's 39th year in charge of Auxerre, who were in the French equivalent of the sixth division when he took the reins in 1961.

Believed to be the world's longest serving coach with the same club Roux has transformed the team into regular contenders for honours despite the Burgundy side being run on a shoestring budget.

But he turned the team into a genuine force in French football with one of the most famous youth policies in the world.

He won the French Cup in 1994 and in 1996 they doubled the French League and Cup double. They have played 58 matches in European competition including one Champions League quarter-final.

However, last season it looked as though Auxerre's long love affair with Roux was coming to a close. The club only escaped relegation on the last day of the season with Roux threatening to quit in the summer.

He had been forced to sell French World Cup stars Stephane Guivarch and Lionel Charbonnier as well as playmaker Sabri Lamouchi in summer 1998 and was also miffed when his club chairman

But Roux decided to stay on and has transformed the fortunes of the team. He only made one major buy over the summer, bringing Guivarch back to the club after a dismal year with Newcastle and Glasgow Rangers for the same fee he commanded when he left.

Guivarch has found his goal-scoring touch again with eight goals so far this term, second only to Monaco's David Trezeguet in the French first division.

Guivarch forms a four-pronged offensive unit with fellow French World Cup winner Bernard Diomede, Steve Marlet and Stephane Carnot. Diomede, however, is out of contract with the club and Roux admits he could move at any time.

But Roux's famed youth policy is always likely to produce replacements. Former Manchester United hero Eric Cantona, former Marseille defender Basile Boli and Bordeaux's current French international striker Lilian Laslandes are among the most famous products.

Roux hails from Colmar in Alsace and was born into a military family and exerts a military-style discipline over his players. He is known to frequent nightclubs on the hunt for players who may be breaking curfew.

He had a brief stint as a Limoges player but, realising he was not going to make the grade, came to Auxerre in 1961

that managers defend their players to the hilt but I am disappointed that all of this has come out in the press.

"If they have a grievance to settle, then they should do it in private with a telephone call or come through the LMA. They should put this matter to bed now."

Wenger did not back down from his stated views about Di Canio when Redknapp's latest comments were put to him, but he was in a jocular mood as he responded to them.

The Frenchman said: "I can only say what I see, maybe I should change my glasses. I'm sorry if he thinks it's my fault that Di Canio was booked but what more can I say?"

ELMA boss wants a cease-fire

LONDON, Oct 19: English premier-ship managers Harry Redknapp and Arsene Wenger were Monday urged to call a truce to their public war of words over West Ham striker Paolo Di Canio, reports AFP.

John Barnwell, the head of the English League Managers' Association (ELMA), called upon Di Canio's coach Redknapp and Arsenal's Wenger to sort out their differences in private or bring the matter to a close.

The controversy began when Arsenal midfielder Patrick Vieira was sent off at Upton Park two weeks ago and Wenger accused Di Canio of diving to get

the Frenchman dismissed. Redknapp, who defended his striker on that occasion, was further angered when Di Canio was booked at Middlesbrough yesterday for diving when TV replays appeared to show he had been fouled in the penalty area by Gary Pallister.

The West Ham boss declared: "I knew the next time he was fouled that he would get booked. Arsene Wenger opening his big mouth has got him booked."

However, Barnwell believes both managers have overstepped the mark, just as Wenger and Charlton boss Alan Curbishley did last season after Vieira had become involved in a clash with Neil Redfern.

Barnwell insisted: "I know

that managers defend their players to the hilt but I am disappointed that all of this has come out in the press.

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Likhovtseva tumbles

MOSCOW, Oct 19: Elena Likhovtseva of Russia became the first seeded casualty at the 10th annual Kremlin Cup yesterday, losing to Romanian Ruxandra Dragomir 6-3, 7-5 in the first round, reports Reuters.

After saving one match point in the 12th game of the second set, eighth-seeded Likhovtseva double faulted on the second point and headed for the locker room after one hour and 23 minutes.

Dragomir avenged her loss to Likhovtseva at the same stage here last year. "I wasn't very happy that I would play her again," said the 26-year-old Romanian. "We have played many times and every time we have had tough matches."

Dragomir broke Likhovtseva in the opening game and went on to claim the first set in 35 minutes.

"She started pretty tight and didn't play well in the beginning, so she gave me confidence right away," said Dragomir.

The Russian battled back in the second set to get even at 5-5 but a lapse of concentration in the 12th game have cost her the match.

This is one of the last tournaments in our calendar and I felt very tired during the whole match," she said.

In the day's other match, Japan's Ai Sugiyama, who reached the final here two years ago, beat Anne Kremer of Luxembourg 6-1 3-6 6-2 in one hour and 30 minutes.

Only two matches were played in the first day after tournament was hit by withdrawals of several top players. Top seed Monica Seles, Anna Kournikova, Amanda Coetzer and Amelie Mauresmo all pulled out.

week has caused some worry at the Badminton Association of Indonesia (PBSI), the Jakarta Post reported today, reports Reuters.

The PBSI official in charge of athlete development Christian Hadinata said that due to the poor results in Denmark, the association would have difficulty setting its targets for the Olympics in Sydney next year.

"We expected them to reach the finals and improve their world rankings. We'll have difficulty predicting their future performances due to their inconsistent play in tournaments. Their up-and-down form is really shocking. Although we have some time, it's difficult to set a target with their inconsistent form," he said.

In the men's singles, Indonesia failed to send one of its shuttlers to the semifinals.

"On paper, one of our men's singles should have reached the semifinals or even the final. (Third seeded Taufik) Hidayat cannot lose to Hoyer-Larsen, who is about twice as old as him. And (seventh seeded Mar-

lev) Mainaky could not show that his victory over Gade Christensen in the Indonesia Open was not a fluke," he said.

In the men's doubles, only newcomers Ade Lukas and Santoso Sugiharjo showed good form by eliminating sixth seeded Zhang Wei and Zhang Jun of China.

Unfortunately, their veteran teammates were disappointing. Flandy and Eng Hian, top seeded, should not have lost to unseeded Martin Lundgaard and Lars Paaske, while second seeded Antonius and Denny Kantono must not lose to Jim Laugesen and Michael Søgaard.

The top and second seeded teams losing in the semifinals to less powerful doubles teams is pathetic. They did not show their world-class technical skills. But I'm somewhat happy because Lukas and Santoso managed to reach the quarters. It showed that they have the potential to replace the veteran players in the future," Christian said.

The venue's seating capacity has been increased markedly to 69,500 in the last few years thanks to some 60 million dollars worth of renovation.

The next phase will see four glass and steel towers in each corner of the ground, linked by walkways and housing Dortmund's business headquarters, restaurants, a state of the art media centre and perhaps a live-in training camp for prospective young talents.

Meier's project is also a challenge to Bayern Munich, Germany's richest club which is housed in one of the country's most outdated stadiums.

Bayern have located a site on Munich's outskirts and drawn up extensive plans for a new football-only stadium but the city council has blocked the move and is refusing to provide financial assistance on the grounds a new structure would render the city's Olympic stadium obsolete.

At Dortmund, the revolutionary flying pitch concept will only be included in the new plans if Germany wins the right to host the 2006 World Cup.

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Japanese Ai Sugiyama in action against Anna Kremer in the Kremlin Cup on October 18. —AFP photo

PBSI gets into trouble

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The women's doubles team of Elysa Nathanael and Deyana Lomban were the only Indonesians to reach the semifinals of the four-star tournament.

Christian focused on the poor form of Indonesia Open champion Lidya Djaelawidjaja, who crashed out in the first round in Denmark to qualifier Sun Jian of China.

"We expected her to gain more self-confidence by winning the Indonesia Open. Lidya has speed and good technical skills which can trouble her opponents. I'm not sure if her poor form was caused by a lack of confidence or something else," he said.