

McEnroe looks to biggies

COPENHAGEN, Nov 19: US Davis Cup captain John McEnroe said on Thursday he expected both Andre Agassi and Pete Sampras to play in his team's first-round tie against Zimbabwe, reports Reuters.

"I know I can count on Agassi, I hope Pete is going to play," McEnroe told a news conference.

"(Sampras) wants to see a little bit better about his back," he said, referring to an injury which has seen Sampras, the former world number one, slide to fifth in the rankings.

The United States are to play Zimbabwe away on February 4-6.

"It is great that he has come back so strong," McEnroe said about Agassi, currently world number one after a comeback from 140th in the rankings a few years ago.

He helps Pete, the two of them together make it more interesting," he added.

McEnroe, 40, winner of seven Grand-Slam titles during his active career, spoke after beating former archrival Bjorn Borg, 43, of Sweden, the five-time Wimbledon champion, 7-5, 7-6 in an exhibition match.

A full house in Copenhagen was treated to occasional glimpses of both players' legendary magic — a high top-spin lob by the American landing back on the baseline, a handful of blistering two-flasted cross-court backhand shots by the Swede.

But Borg also hit many baseline shots way out of bounds and McEnroe's on-court theatrics looked forced and stale.

Courier caught drink driving

ATHENS, Georgia, Nov 19: Tennis star Jim Courier was arrested on a drunken driving charge early Thursday, reports AP.

Courier, 29, who lives in Orlando, Florida, was stopped early in the morning for running a red light in his sport utility vehicle. The police officer then found evidence to charge him with driving under the influence, said Jimmy Williamson, assistant chief of the University of Georgia's police department.

He declined to say what the evidence was or whether Couriers was subjected to a breath test.

Courier was booked into the Clarke County jail, then released on bond.

Courier's Cleveland-based agent, Gavin Forbes, did not immediately return a phone call seeking comment on Thursday.

Shield cricket

ADELAIDE, Nov 19 (AFP): Western Australia squeezed past South Australia to take first innings points on the second day of their Pura Milk Cup (Sheffield Shield) match in Adelaide.

The battle for innings honours went down to the wire with WA needing to reach SA's 309 with just one wicket to spare.

Brad Hogg hit the runs with a four off Brad Young to pass the target and he remained unbeaten on 61 and WA immediately declared at 314 for nine.

In Sydney, New South Wales had an encouraging first day against Queensland and were 22 without loss at stumps in reply to Queensland's first innings 291, with Gavin Robertson, Brett Lee and Stuart MacGill picking up three wickets each.

Queensland opener Matt Hayden made 101, his first score above 50 at the SCG.

In Melbourne, Matthew Elliott and Jason Arnbeger went agonisingly close to breaking Bill Woodfull and Bill Ponsford's all-time record opening stand of 375 as Victoria applied the blowtorch to Tasmania.

After battling through the entire first day, Elliott and Arnbeger continued their run feast before falling 22 runs short of the mark set 73 years ago by arguably Victoria's greatest ever opening combination.

By stumps Tasmania were facing the prospect of following on, ending the day at 195 for seven, still 83 runs short of making Victoria bat again after the Victorians had earlier declared their first innings closed at 427 for two.

Arnbeger was run out for 214 when attempting a third run and former Test opener Elliott remained 183 not out.

Thompson betters her mark

COLLEGE PARK, Maryland, Nov 19: Jennifer Thompson of the United States set a world record in the 50 metres butterfly by swimming a time of 26.00 seconds at the FINA World Cup short course meet on Thursday, reports Reuters.

Thompson, 26, bettered the old record of 26.05 seconds she set on February 12, 1998, and took her third gold of the meet.

The 26-year-old Stanford University student, the current world record-holder and defending short course world champion for the 50 metres butterfly, was spurred on by fellow American Lenny Krayzelburg's world record in the 200 metres backstroke at the meet.

"The excitement really pumped me up and I really wanted a world record, too," said Thompson, who earlier had won the 100 metres freestyle and 100 metres individual medley.

"I try to find different challenges and the challenge today was trying to win the 100 IM (individual medley) and I did more than that," said Thompson, who reaped five gold medals in the 1992 and 1996 Olympics.

Martina, Venus cruise

NEW YORK, Nov 19: World number one Martina Hingis and third seed Venus Williams advanced to the semifinals of the Chase Championship with straight set victories here Thursday, reports AFP.

Top-seeded Swiss teen Hingis ousted fifth seed Mary Pierce of France 6-1, 6-2 while American Williams beat Austria's Barbara Schett, the seventh seed, 6-4, 7-6.

The winners booked a Saturday rematch of their US Open semifinal, won by Hingis in three sets before she lost the final to Venus' younger sister Serena.

But since then, Venus has beaten Hingis twice.

"It's fun playing her because she is one of the best players on the tour," Hingis said. "It's always motivation and challenging to go out there and try to beat her. It's another semifinal. At the US Open, I won (over Venus) the last two times. I won here last year so I don't want to go out of here as a loser."

Hingis needed only 58 minutes to dispatch erratic Pierce. Hingis was in control throughout, confidently hitting winners off both wings and venturing to the net to knock off sharp-angle volleys.

"I guess I feel pretty good. I think it was a pretty good match," said Hingis, who faced only three break points in the match. "I always had a better answer to what she tried to do. I just served very well."

Pierce was wild off both sides with 12 unforced errors compared to six for Hingis. Typical of her wildness was the sixth game of the first set, when she was broken on shots she easily could have put into play.

"I made a lot of errors. I didn't give myself a chance in the match," Pierce said. "I was going for my shots like I usually do, but I was missing everything."

Hingis leads the WTA Tour with seven titles in 1999 but has come up short in the last two finals in which she has appeared. She lost to Venus Williams in her homeland tournament in Zurich last month and fell to Lindsay Davenport in Sunday's final in Philadelphia.

Williams, at the season-ending top-16 event for the first time in her career, never lost

her serve on the way to an 80-minute victory. She broke Schett in the seventh game of the first set, closing it out in the 10th game when Schett hit a service return long.

"My goal was to play better than yesterday. As long as that happened, that was okay," Williams said. "I didn't lose serves. I didn't take opportunities from myself by losing a serve."

Williams lost only three points (34-of-37) when she got her first serve in, and lost a total of 16 points on 66 serves overall.

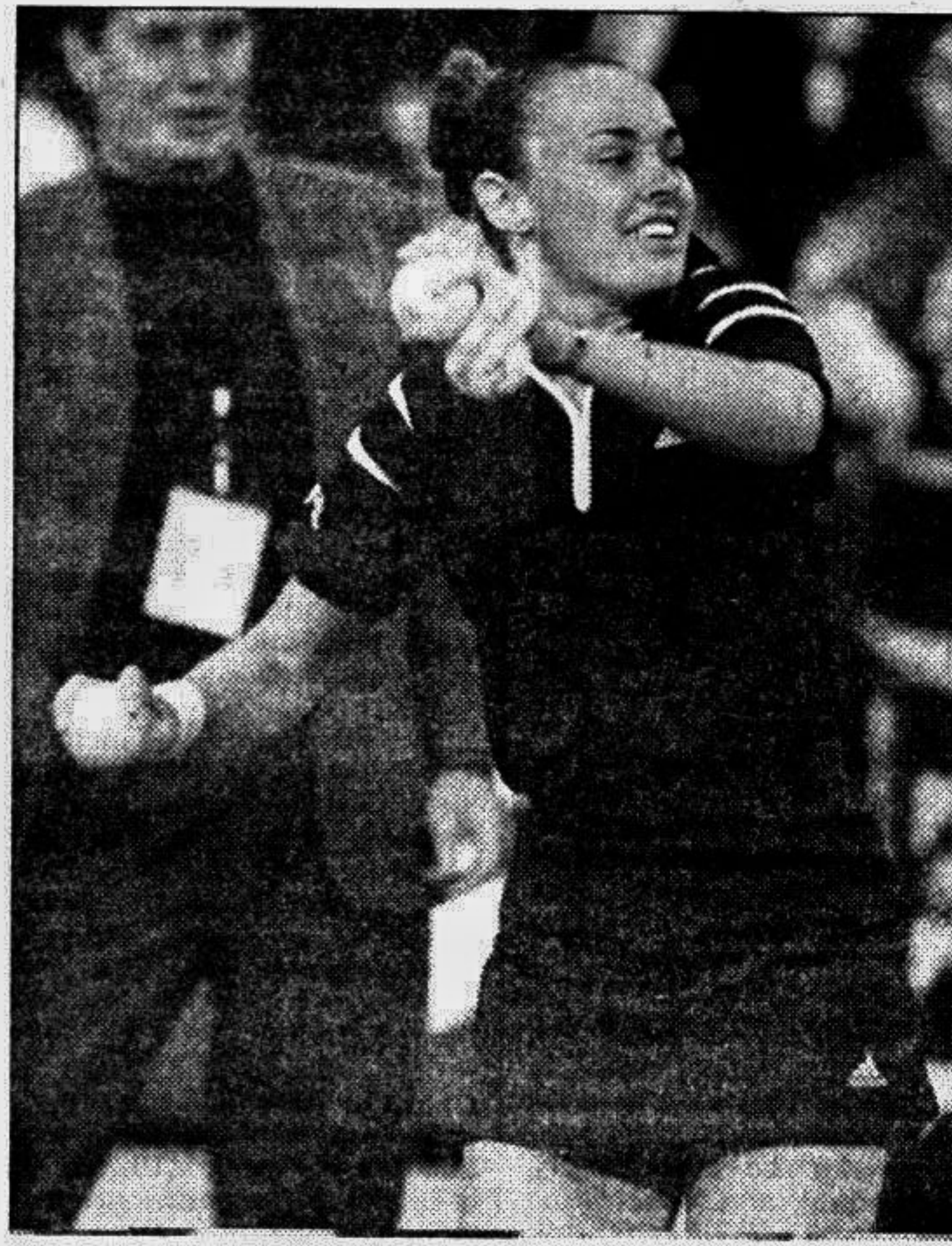
The second set was a battle throughout as neither player lost serve. Williams appeared sharper in the tie-breaker and showed her confidence on the changeover after the sixth point

by jumping over the net instead of walking around it.

"I haven't jumped the net since I was so little," she said. "See, I was going around. It seemed like such a long ways. She was going to beat me around the net, so I was going to jump it."

Williams dispatched Schett on her first match point when the Austrian was barely able to get her racket on a serve.

"It's very fast and I can't really read it," Schett said. "I'm trying to read it, but I can't. Even her second serve, which I tried to take early, didn't work at all. In the second set, I tried to stay back a little more and just hit it in the court, which was working a little better. But I had big troubles with her first serve."



World number one Martina Hingis is jubilant after victory over fifth seeded Mary Pierce on November 18. — AFP photo

World Youth Cup

Ghana looking great

AUCKLAND, Nov 19: Ghana look on track for a unique third title at the world under-17 soccer championship in New Zealand as the quarterfinals get underway this weekend, reports AFP.

Shock upsets so far have been the early elimination of Spain and Germany who were ranked as favourites with Ghana and Brazil.

Also beating odds-makers, Australia have won the first round in convincing form after an uncertain start, playing more impressively than a yet-to-fire Brazil.

"There's a lot of toughness, and no shortage of ability in this Australian side," said former New Zealand coach Ian Marshall, noting that the tournament had been a wake-up call for Europe, whose top teams have shown plenty of skills and preparation but still somehow lacked what was needed to win.

The teams through to the quarterfinals are, USA, Mexico, Ghana, Uruguay, Australia, Qatar, Paraguay and Brazil.

After Spain's surprise loss to Mexico in Napier on Tuesday the team sat up into the night concluding they had played below potential.

By contrast Ghana, who won the championship in 1991 and 1995 — have never stopped sparkling.

Delayed on the way to New Zealand, Ghana had to do their first practice without boots, but have found an x-factor and an almost casual brilliance in their play with Ibrahim Attiku, who scored against Spain, shaping up as one of the tournament's stars.

Other stars have been the USA's Brandon Donovan, Uruguay's Haracio Peralta, and Australia's Joseph Di Iorio and captain Mark Byrnes.

Possibly still adjusting to cold conditions in Christchurch, Brazil have seen their status as number one favourites wilt, with Paraguay, Australia and Ghana all favoured to beat them.

Australia arguably have the easiest run of the next round, facing Qatar at Christchurch venue on Saturday.

Qatar leads the official FIFA Fair Play award, followed by Spain, Mexico, Poland, and Ghana.

In this award, Australia are so far placed last. QUARTERFINAL MATCHES Saturday, at Auckland, USA-Mexico, at Napier, Ghana-Uruguay.

Sunday, at Christchurch, Australia-Qatar, at Dunedin, Paraguay-Brazil.

Traveling from Napier to Auckland to play the USA, Mexican coach Jose Luis Real said he was worried that after playing all three of their pool games in fine conditions in Napier they were facing forecasts of rain on Saturday.

The Americans handled terrible conditions easily in their opening match against New Zealand to win 2-1.

"It is to their advantage that they have played on a wet pitch and we haven't yet," Real said. "But we can't worry about what the Americans are going to do because they are going to try and do what they want. We have enough to worry about our own team."

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Americans Mark O'Meara (L) and Tiger Woods talk during the second round of the Golf World Cup in Kuala Lumpur yesterday. — AFP photo

2002 World Cup DPRK showing interest

SEOUL, Nov 19: North Korea has agreed in principle to host some matches of the 2002 World Cup and to launch football exchanges with Seoul, South Korea's football chief said Friday, reports AFP.

"Pyongyang said although it will be difficult to achieve (the sharing of the 2002 World Cup event) because of the time limit, it will seek ways to do so when FIFA president Sepp Blatter visits Pyongyang early next year," Chung Mung-Joon, head of the Korean Football Association (KFA), said.

Chung, who is also vice president of football's governing body FIFA, and his team returned home from a four-day visit to Pyongyang on the latest in a string of similar visits by him and his family.

He also said that Pyongyang expressed strong support for the South's proposal to form a unified Korean team for the World Cup and other international events.

The North Korean side said when time is ripe, it will take working-level measures for the formation of a unified Korean football team, Chung said.

North Korea also said it would positively consider taking part in a proposed football tournament involving the two Koreas, Japan and China.

For this purpose, Pyongyang is expected to send its delegation to a meeting of football officials slated for early next year to discuss the four-nation tournament, Chung said.

North Korea has the largest stadium in the world, which can seat 200,000 people, in its capital, Pyongyang.

South Korea and Japan will jointly host the 2002 World Cup and FIFA officials have said the body would "positively consider allowing North Korea to host two of the 32 games given to South Korea."

North and South Korea remain technically at war following the 1950-53 Korean War.

Scots walking tall

EDINBURGH, Nov 19 (Reuters/Internet): For Scotland, it was another case of so near, yet so far.

Scotland's first victory over the "auld enemy" England at Wembley in 18 years on Wednesday night was not enough to put them through to next year's Euro 2000 championships as the Scots fell 2-1 in the two-way playoff.

"So close. They've died with their boots on," blared the Daily Record, Scotland's largest-selling tabloid.

"It's enough to break our bravado," lamented the Glasgow-based Herald newspaper.

The win allowed Scotland to return home with their dignity intact after last weekend's humiliating 2-0 defeat at Hampden, and looked likely to allow the embattled Craig Brown to extend his tenure as one of Europe's longest serving coaches.

Newspapers which only a few days earlier were calling for Brown's head were full of praise for the team. The Record said Brown's side were superb.

But the thrill of winning at Wembley was tempered by the knowledge that Scotland's hopes of soccer glory ended once again in disappointment.

Another win for Bhupathi, Paes

HARTFORD, Connecticut, Nov 19: Mahesh Bhupathi and Leander Paes of India, the world's top-ranked doubles team, won their second match in round-robin play, defeating Ellis Ferreira of South Africa and American Rick Leach, 6-4, 6-4 Thursday at the Phoenix ATP Tour World Doubles Championship, reports AP.

Bhupathi and Paes lead their bracket with a 2-0 mark and are virtually assured of a berth in Saturday's semifinals.

Ferreira and Leach, the No. 3 seeds, are 1-1 and still hope to make the semifinals. The top two teams from the two-bracket tournament advance to the semifinals on Saturday.

Australians Todd Woodbridge and Mark Woodford, the No. 2 seeds, assured themselves of a berth in the semifinals with a 7-6, 6-4 victory over Canadian Sebastian Lareau and American Alex O'Brien, the No. 4 seeds.

England not a good bet



LONDON, Nov 19 (Reuters/Internet): England have qualified for the European championship finals but if they play next summer like they did on Wednesday their participation will be restricted to three first round matches and a quick trip back to the airport.

England reached the finals by beating Scotland 2-1 on aggregate in the two-leg play-off, with Scotland's 1-0 win at Wembley on Wednesday the most hollow of their 41 victories in the 127-year history of the world's oldest international fixture.

At the end of the final international of the century under Wembley's Twin Towers both sets of fans were celebrating victories of sorts but while in a way both teams were winners on the night, both were also losers.

Scotland manager Craig Brown certainly thought so and did not mention his team's victory once during his after-match news conference.

"The bottom line is that we are out of the European championship finals and I feel really gutted by that," he said.

"The hype was that we were just here to beat England but, as I kept telling our players, our job was to qualify for Euro

2000. We have failed and that is a major disappointment."

Scotland won the skirmish — but not the battle — thanks to a 39th-minute header from Don Hutchison and were denied the second goal that would have taken the tie into extra time when David Seaman pulled off a reflex point-blank save from Christian Dailly's diving header 10 minutes from time.

Seaman was also one of England's heroes when he saved a penalty against Scotland in their last meeting at Wembley during Euro 96 which England won 2-0.

Although Seaman no longer has his old aura of invincibility England coach Kevin Keegan has already said that if the Arsenal player stays clear of injury he will be England's number one choice for the finals in Belgium and the Netherlands.

But Keegan has plenty of other problems to solve before next summer.

Although injuries deprived him of Graeme Le Saux, Gary Neville, Steve McManaman, Darren Anderson and Robbie Fowler and David Batty was missing through suspension, his team lacks a midfield creator and there appears to be little understanding between Alan Shearer and Michael Owen in attack.

More worryingly, there does not seem to be anyone on the fringes of the team who has the quality to improve the side and take it to the level needed to win a major honour.

The defence appears to be sound enough but the midfield looks too lightweight and the shortcomings in attack were

obvious as Shearer and Owen did not have a worthwhile goal attempt on Wednesday.

The nearest England came to scoring was when Paul Scholes, two-goal hero of the first leg at Hampden Park, shot narrowly wide after nine minutes and a David Beckham free-kick curled inches wide late in the game.

Keegan's view of the future is curious. On one hand he says he believes England can win Euro 2000 and on the other he says they have a lot to learn and put right before the competition starts, beginning with their next match — a friendly against Argentina at Wembley on February 23.

But Keegan was honest enough on Wednesday to acknowledge his team had been beaten on the night by a better team.

"I've lost my unbeaten record as England boss to a team whose performance on the night was exceptional," he said.

"But at least we are in Euro 2000 and I've got a bit of leeway to experiment before next summer. That's the only consolation for me. At least we have a chance to do well on the big stage next year. I know some people will laugh at that but at least we've got the chance."

That much is true. England may have been marginally better than Scotland over two legs but the feeling remains that an ordinary team got the decision over a relatively poor one in terms of international soccer.

Keegan has plenty of work to do to turn his team into real winners by next June.

UEFA reveals seeds



GENEVA, Nov 19: Spain, Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands will be the four top seeded teams when next month's draw for the Euro 2000 finals is made, UEFA said on Thursday, reports Reuters.

The exact format of the draw, which will take place on December 12 in Brussels, will not be decided until meetings two days before the event.

But it has already been determined the Germany, as defending European champions, Belgium and the Netherlands as co-hosts, and Spain as the top

team in the UEFA co-efficient rankings, will be the top seeds whichever system is used.

The co-efficient rankings are based on results in the qualifying competitions for Euro 2000 and the 1998 World Cup.

European soccer's governing body has drawn up three possible scenarios on how the draw, which will allocate the 16 qualifiers into four groups of four teams each, could work.

The first option would have one pot with the four seeded teams and another with the 12 remaining unseeded finalists.

The four seeds would be drawn into four separate groups and the 12 others would be picked at random to fill the other places.

Option two would again have the four seeded teams in one pot with a second pot containing the next four highest teams in the co-efficient rankings and a third pot with the eight remain-

ing countries.

Under this system, each group would comprise one team from each of the two seeded pots and two from the unseeded pot.

Option three would have four different pots, each determined by the co-efficient rankings. One team from each of the four pots would then be drawn into each group.

Despite being world champions, France would be placed in only the third-strongest pot and England, the final qualifier on Wednesday, would go into the lowest ranked pot.

The following shows which pots teams would start in under the three possible options being considered by UEFA:

Option 1 Pot A: Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Spain Pot B: Romania, Norway, Sweden, Czech Republic, Yugoslavia, Portugal, France, Italy, England, Turkey, Denmark, Slovenia.

Option 2 Pot A: Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Spain Pot B: Romania, Norway, Sweden, Czech Republic Pot C: Yugoslavia, Portugal, France, Italy, England, Turkey, Denmark, Slovenia.

Option 3 Pot A: Belgium, Netherlands, Germany, Spain Pot B: Romania, Norway, Sweden, Czech Republic Pot C: Yugoslavia, Portugal, France, Italy Pot D: England, Turkey, Denmark, Slovenia.



French pair of Marina Anissina and Gwendal Peizerat performing in the dance programme of the Lalique Trophy figure skating competition in Paris on November 18. — AFP photo

Irish bookmaker to refund lost stakes

DUBLIN, Nov 18 (Reuters/Internet): Leading bookmaker Paddy Power provided a small ray of light on Thursday for Irish soccer fans sunk in gloom over their team's exit from Euro 2000 after Wednesday's play-off against Turkey.

The bookmaker said it would refund all stakes placed on Ireland to win the match, including all first goalscorer and correct score bets. The gesture will cost the company about 35,000 Irish pounds (\$46,000).

Ireland drew 0-0 for a 1-1 aggregate but went out on the away goals rule.

The result may have been foul but Paddy Power aren't chicken," the company said in a statement.

The run-up to the match was marked by a row over television broadcast rights which meant the game was not seen in Ireland.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

Crossword puzzle grid with clues for Across and Down words. Includes a solution time of 24 mins and a list of answers at the bottom.

Cryptoquip puzzle grid with a key and a list of words to be placed in the grid. Includes a solution time of 24 mins and a list of answers at the bottom.