

Pele still backing South Africa

BRUSSELS, Dec 12: Pele reiterated his support for South Africa's bid for the 2006 World Cup here Sunday even though Brazil are still in the race - and despite fierce lobbying from his friends.

Pele revealed that, although he has publicly debunked Brazil's bid, he believed South Africa winning the right to stage the world's biggest sports event would also be to his homeland's benefit.

He said: "Africa has never staged the World Cup. If the fight between England and Germany continues maybe we can support South Africa and they can support Brazil for 2010."

South Africa, Brazil, England, Germany and Morocco are the five contenders to stage the 2006 tournament.

Pele also revealed his support for South Africa was causing a tug-of-war for his services between German legend Franz Beckenbauer and English football great Sir Bobby Charlton, both friends of the Brazilian.

Pele said: "Beckenbauer he says to me 'Why are you saying no to Germany?' and then Bobby says: 'Stop saying South Africa'."

Matthaeus Bayern's until March

BERLIN, Dec 12: Veteran German midfielder Lothar Matthaeus is set to stay with his German club Bayern Munich until March 10 before joining the New York/New Jersey MetroStars, German newspaper Bild reported on Saturday, reports AFP.

Matthaeus, 38, was originally due to join the MLS side in January but was then reported to be staying with the German champions until the end of the 1999-2000 season after they suffered defensive problems.

Bild reported that Bayern manager Uli Hoeneß had reached an agreement with New York/New Jersey manager Charly Stillitano over Matthaeus' date of departure.

Matthaeus is expected to make his farewell appearances for Bayern in European Championships League matches against Real Madrid on February 29 and March 8.

French First Division Lyon back on track

PARIS, Dec 12: Brazilian striker Sonny Anderson headed Lyon back into the French title race on Saturday with his 13th goal of the campaign securing a 2-1 win at Rennes to end a three-match losing streak, reports AFP.

Anderson headed home following a corner to end stubborn resistance from Rennes, who have been hovering around the top five in recent weeks following a bad start to the season.

The win puts Lyon back into second spot above Paris Saint Germain, who play at Metz on Sunday.

Leaders Monaco, still five points clear of Lyon, travel to Corsica for a difficult fixture at Bastia, who recently sent Lyon packing 3-0 at their Stade Furianni.

Monaco currently have 39 points from 18 matches while Lyon now have 34 from 19 with PSG on 33 from 18.

Bordeaux, clearly feeling the effects of their midweek battling Champions League draw with Fiorentina, find themselves 12 points behind Monaco after the reigning champions went down 2-0 at promoted Troyes, who cemented their position in mid-table with goals from Stjepan Djukic and Farid Ghazi.

Bordeaux are still sixth but could fall to ninth by Sunday night if results go against them.

Highly-rated midfield teen Steed Malbranque put Lyon ahead after 18 minutes after a through ball from Bassila but within six minutes Rennes were level through Cedric Bardon and it needed Anderson's brave lunge to nod the winner in a game spoilt by a rain-soaked pitch.

Rennes had most of the play in the second half but failed to make their greater industry count against side who were reeling from ten goals conceded in three matches, including a midweek 4-0 thrashing at Werder Bremen which brought Lyon a premature UEFA Cup exit.

Scottish Premiership Celtic demolish Aberdeen

GLASGOW, Dec 12: Aberdeen manager Ebbe Skovdahl said he will relieve the horror of his side's 6-0 trouncing at the hands of Celtic at Pittodrie on Saturday on video, reports AFP.

John Barnes' side handed out another humiliating defeat to the bottom club, who collapsed after being outplayed throughout a one-sided contest.

Celtic have now scored 18 goals without reply in just three league games against Aberdeen this season as Celtic turned on the style without mercy today with six different scorers.

Skovdahl said: "I will torture myself looking at the game on video to analyse the details of the game. You can never imagine losing so many goals to one team."

"For me it looks like Mark Viduka is causing us a lot of problems. Every time the ball went forward he held it up and allowed other players to support him which is a great quality for Celtic."



Pele talking at a press conference yesterday ahead of the Euro 2000 draw at Brussels. — AFP photo

Euro soccer c'ships 1960-96

BRUSSELS, Dec 12 (AFP): Brief history of the European Championships: The European Championships was the brainchild of UEFA's French general secretary Henri Delaunay, who died in 1957 before the inaugural event in 1960.

1960: Only four teams took part in the final stages of the inaugural 1960 tournament — then called the European Nations Cup — 17 had entered in all.

The four to qualify were the Soviet Union, France, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.

The final between the Soviets and Yugoslavia was a tight affair with Viktor Ponedelnik scoring 113th-minute winner for the Soviets who prevailed 2-1.

1964: Spain's only victory in a major senior football tournament took place on home soil.

The individual star of the tournament was Denmark's Ole Madsen, however, who finished top scorer with 11 goals.

The Danes lost to the Soviet Union in the semi-finals. In the final in Madrid, Spain beat the Soviets in another close encounter.

Jesus Maria Pereda gave his team a sixth-minute lead only for Galimians Khusainov to square the match two minutes later. In the 83rd minute Marcelino scored with a diving header to win the match for the Spaniards.

1968: Rechristened the European Championships it was the only time Italy, a three-times World Cup winners — have prevailed in the continental tournament.

In goal for the Italians was Dino Zoff, now coach to the Azurri and a member of the 1982 World Cup-winning side.

But after a semi-final 0-0 draw with the Soviets, Italy won through to the final with the toss of a coin. Skipper Giacinto Facchetti correctly called heads.

The final was a close affair, too. Dragan Dragic gave Yugoslavia the lead only for a late free-kick from Angelo Domenghini to give the Italians a replay.

Luigi Riva and Pietro Anastasi gave Italy a 2-0 win in that final.

1984: France's first success in a big tournament came on home soil.

Michel Platini, with nine goals, was the undisputed star of the show but he featured in a magnificent midfield alongside Jean Tigana, Alain Gresse and Luis Fernandez.

Spain's nerves proved costly. In the final, a bungle from Spanish goalkeeper Luis Araneda allowed Platini's free-kick to creep over the line.

Bruno Bellone wrapped up the 2-0 victory for the host nation with a delightful chip in stoppage time.

1988: Holland came into the tournament with Rudi Gullit being touted as the player who would win all the accolades.

In fact, Gullit was upstaged by compatriot Marco Van Basten, his teammate at AC Milan.

Van Basten destroyed England with a brilliant hat-trick and also scored against West Germany.

In the final against the Soviets, Holland were leading with a Gullit header when Van Basten produced his masterpiece.

1992: Jean-Pierre Papin (France) 11 goals.

1996: Davor Suker (Croatia) 15 goals.

LEADING SCORERS

BRUSSELS, Dec 12 (AFP): Leading scorers in previous European Championships (qualifying and final phase matches):

1960: Just Fontaine (France), Jean Vincent (France), Titus Bubernik (Czechoslovakia) 5 goals.

1964: Ole Madsen (Denmark) 11 goals.

1968: Luigi Riva (Italy) 7 goals.

1972: Gerd Muller (West Germany) 11 goals.

1976: Don Givens (Republic of Ireland) 8 goals.

1980: Kevin Keegan (England) 7 goals.

1984: Michel Platini (France) 9 goals.

1988: Marco van Basten (Holland), Alessandro Altobelli (Italy), Neco Clasen (Belgium) all 7 goals.

1992: Jean-Pierre Papin (France) 11 goals.

1996: Davor Suker (Croatia) 15 goals.

British Open goes to Joyce

ABERDEEN, Scotland, Dec 12: Leilani Joyce became the first Maori to win the women's British Open squash title with an upset 5-9, 9-6, 9-3, 10-8 win over World Open champion Cassie Campion on Saturday.

Joyce was also the first New Zealander to land the crown since the great Susan Devoy seven years ago — reversing the result of her semifinal against the British player at the World Open two months ago.

Exceptional speed about the court was the chief reason for Joyce's triumph over the top seed in the final. It enabled her to retrieve several seemingly lost causes and pressured Campion into going for tighter and tighter margins, eventually forcing mistakes.

Campion started well, taking seven points in one service sequence to recover from 5-2 down to win the first game.

But she started to hit trouble halfway through the third. A brilliant retrieve won second seed Joyce a point from what seemed an impossible position to take her to 4-3 and for a while Campion appeared rattled, failing to win another point in the game.

The English player fought back in the fourth and led 5-1, only to miss an open court with a drop volley drop at 5-4 and that seemed to unsettle her again.

Joyce wasted her first match point but the Hamilton player made no mistake second time, bringing another volleying error from her tense and surprised opponent.

"I have achieved a lifetime goal," said Joyce. "My father sat me down in front of a video of Susan Devoy when I was 10 and said 'now we are going to work to become British Open champion' and now 15 years later it has happened."

Holder and world champion Peter Nicol of Britain will play arch-rival and world number one Jonathon Power of Canada for the men's title today.

Scot Nicol avenged a recent defeat by England number one Simon Parke in winning their semifinal 15-13, 15-10, 15-8.

Power beat Egyptian third seed Ahmed Barada 15-11, 15-13, 15-7 but the success was not straightforward.

Barada led 7-4 and 13-12 in the crucial second game, before the top seed's creative front court game squeezed him home.

Power protested to the referee about Barada's language. He's saying the worst swear words possible but he's speaking in another language. (so) it's okay," he complained.

Henman's bachelor days over

LONDON, Dec 12: Britain's number one tennis player Tim Henman married his sweetheart Lucy Heald on Saturday, just a week after the country's number two player Greg Rusedski tied the knot, reports Reuters.

Unlike Rusedski's lavish, celebrity-studded wedding, the world number 12 and his bride opted for a low-key ceremony at a village church in Hampshire, southern England.

Nevertheless, after the private service they were greeted outside the 12th-century church by hundreds of journalists and fans lined up to watch their car drive by.

Henman and his television-producer bride, both 25, met in 1996 when Heald was involved in a sports documentary about the tennis player.

Henman insisted the wedding ceremony be kept intimate. The pair even turned down large cash offers from British magazines who wanted to feature the ceremony in upcoming issues.

Henman earlier said that he and on-court rival Rusedski — who married childhood sweetheart Lucy Connor last week — had few options when they could marry because they both come next July, reports AFP.

Rinus Michels coached Holland to their only major title in football — the 1988 European title — when the Dutch beat the Soviet Union 2-0 in the final.

Michels, speaking ahead of Sunday's Euro 2000 draw for which Holland are one of the four top seeds, was adamant that the Dutch will benefit from home advantage — they are co-hosting the Millennium tournament with Belgium.

Certainly Michels is better qualified than most to give an opinion. He not only coached a European championship-winning team, but also invented a whole footballing philosophy.

Prior to the 1988 triumph he was already a legend in the minds of football historians having pioneered the "total football" movement which saw a Johan Cruyff-inspired Holland dominate the European scene in the 1970s.

Holland lost the 1974 World Cup Final 2-1 to host nation West Germany and the Dutch also had to settle for runners-up spot in 1978, again against the hosts — this time Argentina.

Marseille eying Dumas

MARSEILLE, France, Dec 12: English Premiership side Newcastle's French sweeper Franck Dumas is being targeted by French first division side Marseille, the French club confirmed on Saturday, reports AFP.

Dumas, injured during Newcastle's UEFA Cup match against AS Roma, was first contacted by Marseille earlier this season, it was revealed.

"He's a player that could interest us," said Marseille's sporting director Marcel Dib.

Marseille's new coach Bernard Casoni has made reinforcing the side's defence a priority this season, particularly since Argentine Eduardo Berizzo, who was brought in last June to replace Laurent Blanc, has failed to make an impression.

Dumas, 31, a veteran of 346 first division matches, won the 1997 French championship with Monaco. He left the Riviera side last June.

Meanwhile, Marseille have denied receiving an offer for French international Christophe Dugarry from English Premiership side Tottenham.

While Spanish first division outfit Celta Vigo are reported to have renewed their interest in signing Marseille's top scorer this season Florian Maurice.

Alshammar's double delight

LISBON, Dec 12: Sweden's Therese Alshammar broke her second world record in as many days on Saturday, shattering another long-standing Chinese mark at the European short-course championships.

Alshammar, who had broken the 100 metres freestyle short-course record on Friday, eclipsed a second formidable time belonging to China's former world champion Le Jingyi in Saturday's 50 freestyle.

The 22-year-old Swede, who had been removed from the starting-block on lane one there was no more holding Alshammar, who has made staggering progress since winning a 50 freestyle silver medal at the European long-course championships in Turkey in August.

"That was a bit annoying but I pulled through and I'm really happy now. I wouldn't like to change anything," Alshammar said.

"Perhaps my first start was a bit better. I was more focused and I had more adrenaline pumping. But I wasn't nervous for the second start. I was just warmed up and ready to swim."

Having shaved 0.01 seconds from the European record of absent Dutchwoman Inge de Brujin with a time of 24.27 in the semifinals, she raised the tempo in the final to touch in

blithely on in that race and the organisers did not stop them.

Swedish head coach Hans Chriskin said he had sorted out the problem before the start of the 50 freestyle. "It's very difficult to concentrate and really tough mentally," he said. "All eight girls were in the same position but she (Alshammar) was the only one who could beat the world record."

The backstroke was won by Germany's Sandra Voelker, Alshammar's training partner at her new Hamburg base, in 27.31 seconds, just outside the 27.27 world mark she set at last December's edition of these championships in Sheffield.

Alshammar said the technical confusion might have cost Voelker a new world mark. Nonetheless, nothing could stop the German, who beat second-placed Russian-born Spaniard Nina Zhivanevskaya by nearly a second, winning the event for the third time in a row.

Ukraine's Jana Klochkova achieved a remarkable Lisbon treble, adding Saturday's 400 metres freestyle gold to the 400 individual medley and 800 freestyle titles she had already won.

Britain's James Hickman had a day of ups and downs. He was unexpectedly left without a medal in the 100 metres individual medley final, which was won by Germany's Jens Kruppa in 53.93, with the Briton trailing more than a second adrift in fourth place.

But Hickman, who lost his 100 metres butterfly title to Sweden's Lars Frolander on Friday, rallied in the last event of the day to retain his 200 butterfly crown,