

Nilis powers PSV

AMSTERDAM, April 8: A hat-trick by Luc Nilis in PSV's 4-0 victory over Fortuna Sittard on Friday left his side on the verge of winning their 15th league title, reports Reuters.

With five games to go PSV need only six points to secure the championship. They have 69 points from 29 games, 13 more than second-placed Twente Enschede, who have a game in hand.

PSV took an early lead when Arnold Bruggink lobbed the ball over goalkeeper Arno van der Zwam and into the net in the seventh minute.

Eight minutes later Nilis, who will move to Aston Villa at the end of the season, doubled the score when he lifted the ball over Van der Zwam.

PSV did not let hosts Fortuna into the match and in the 63rd minute Nilis made it 3-0 after Bruggink had missed a penalty two minutes earlier.

In the 74th minute the Belgian international collected his third goal of the match and 16th of the season when he took advantage of a defensive error.

PSV now need only two victories to win the championship but could clinch it next week if Twente, Heerenveen and Feyenoord fail to earn points.

Twente host MVV Maastricht today while on Sunday Heerenveen visit RKC Waalwijk and Feyenoord play Utrecht.

Peru take 2-1 lead

LIMA, Apr 8: Luis Horna and Americo Venero battled for three hours and 40 minutes to beat Ecuador's Nicolas Lapentti and Andres Gomez and give Peru a 2-1 advantage on the second day of Davis Cup tennis finals in Group One of the American Zone, reports AP.

The Peruvian doubles team defeated their Ecuadorian rivals Friday 6-2, 6-2, 6-7 (3), 7-5.

Horna and Venero easily took the first two sets, but faltered against a powerful comeback by their Ecuadorian rivals.

They focused their attack on the veteran, Gomez, who won the Roland Garros tournament in 1990. But the 40-year-old Ecuadorian maintained his stamina, holding his own until the ultimate set.

The series is scheduled to conclude Saturday at the Peruvian capital's Buse Brothers Stadium of Lawn Tennis with singles play pitting Horna against Nicolas Lapentti and Peru's Ivan Miranda against Giovanni Lapentti.

Karembou quitting real

MADRID, Apr 8: Real Madrid's French international midfielder Christian Karembou confirmed on Thursday that he would leave the club at the end of the season, reports Reuters.

Karembou was part of France's World Cup-winning squad two years ago and played in the France 98 final but has had to settle for a subsidiary role at Real since his arrival in the summer of 1997.

"I am not playing and so it's normal that I look for another place. I'm a realist and I only have a few years left to play and it's important to do as well as you can," Karembou said.

His lack of playing time this season at Real Madrid is widely accepted to have hit his international career.

Karembou, 29, has 38 caps to his name but last played for his country in their European championship qualifier against Armenia in September.

"My best season at Real Madrid was my first, when we won the European Cup. But before I go I would like to win it again. I will always have a white heart. I'll always be a 'Madrista,'" he added.

Karembou said his best memory at Real Madrid was his first game, in the Spanish Cup against Alaves.

He did not say where he would go next — he has previously played in France for Nantes and Italy for Sampdoria — but England or Italy have been suggested by the Spanish media as likely destinations.

Davis Cup Australia reach semis

ADELAIDE, Apr 8: Pat Rafter and Mark Woodforde won the doubles Saturday as Australia clinched the best of five Davis Cup quarterfinal 3-0 against Germany and secured a berth in the semifinals, reports AP.

The Aussie doubles combination seemed to be coasting as they won the first two sets before German pair David Prinosil and Marc-Kevin Goellner fought back to level the critical match at two sets apiece.

The last two sets went 29 games without a service break until Prinosil, who lost a marathon, five-setter against Wayne Arthurs on Friday, dropped serve giving Australia a 6-3, 6-2, 2-6, 6-7 (4), 10-8 victory.

Australia, the defending Davis Cup titlist, had a 2-0 lead Lleyton Hewitt and Arthurs won the opening singles matches Friday.

The reverse singles will be played Sunday.

Australia will play the winner of the quarterfinal between Brazil and Slovakia in a semifinal at Brisbane in July. Brazil and Slovakia were level 1-1 after the opening singles matches.

Marseille overcome Monaco

MARSEILLE, France, Apr 8: Olympique Marseille took a big stride towards French First Division survival with their 4-2 home victory over nine-man leaders Monaco, reports Reuters.

Monaco, who would have been crowned champions had they won the Friday night match, had two men sent off and Marseille one in a rough spell at the end of the first half.

Both lost their main creative forces with Marseille's Ivan de la Pena shown the red card in the 37th minute and Marcelo Gallardo of Monaco being dismissed after a fight in the tunnel at halftime. Philippe Leonard of Monaco was also sent off.

"It's a great relief. We managed to fight to the end to snatch a deserved victory," Marseille coach Bernard Casoni said.

But Casoni said he was worried by his team's inability to control the match with their 10 men against Monaco's nine.

Monaco came back from 2-0 down to pull level at 2-2 with two goals in 10 minutes from France's David Trezeguet.

"Our fear of mistakes made us try to pace the game when we led 2-0. There's also a lack of experience not knowing when to stop the ball and allowing Monaco to monopolise it," Casoni said.

A mistake in the tiring Monaco defence, however, allowed Ivory Coast striker Ibrahim Bakayoko to put Marseille ahead again 11 minutes from time with his second goal.

"This match reflected our season," Marseille's club's sporting manager Eric Di Meo said.

"We lost our sense of team play and tactics when we were leading 2-0 and with an extra man. This shows the team is still fragile and we're going to suffer to the end. We're not cured and all we can take from this evening are the three points," he said.

Marseille climbed four points clear of the relegation zone but there are still four games to go and half the first division involved in the survival dogfight.

"This is just a breath of fresh air that we must confirm rapidly with a good result at Nantes (next weekend)," striker Cyrille Pouget, who scored Marseille's opening goal, said.

"Our job isn't over and won't be until the club have definitively assured their survival," he said.

Marseille have managed to lift themselves for the big matches such as their 4-1 home win over Paris St Germain in February.

But they struggle against those teams more accustomed to the threat of relegation, going down 3-1 at Racing Strasbourg two weeks ago.

A good omen, however, is that Monaco had not won at the Stade Velodrome for 20 years and the last time they did Marseille were relegated.

"When we went up two goals, we relaxed a little bit and let them back into the game," Withe said. "After they got two goals, their confidence was going up and ours was down. In that situation, you have to keep attacking."

The North Korea-Taiwan match was scoreless at the half. The only goal came from Ri Man Chol in the 55th minute, firing a stiff, long-range shot that deflected off Taiwan's Chang Kuo Chen and bobbed slowly past the Taiwanese keeper in the 55th minute.

Being behind brought the Taiwanese out of a defensive shell, sending more men forward. Their best chances to equalize came in injury time, with a header by Hus Te Ming going just wide of the left post and Tsai Hui Kai shooting hard but just over the bar.

The play was made difficult in both matches by a tropical storm two hours before play began, which left puddles of water on the pitch that killed the ball and undermined footing on several occasions.

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FA spokesman Steve Double said, "We back Peter Riddsdale 100 per cent. We totally endorse Peter's advice to their fans to stay away."

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Malaysia out of Davis Cup

KUALA LUMPUR, Apr 8: Malaysia ended their challenge of the Davis Cup Asia/Oceania Zone Group Two second round after losing the men's doubles match to Indonesia Saturday, reports AP.

National doubles pair, V Selvam and rookie Mohd Nazreen Fuzi Mazaruddin were outclassed by better and experienced Indonesian pair Bonit Wiryanawan and Sulistyio Wibowo 6-4, 6-2, 6-1 at the National Tennis Center here.

The Indonesian pair, ranked 410 in the world, displayed superb control and decent volley games to dispose of the Malaysian pair in 90 minutes.

Indonesia's captain Tintus Arianto Wibowo is happy with his team's performance in the tournament.

"As predicted, we managed to beat Malaysia 3-0 on the second day itself and this means that my players are in their top form to go further," he said.

Indonesia will meet the winner between Pakistan and Taiwan in the final match of Group Two. The winner will be promoted to Group One next year.

About Sunday's reverse singles matches, Tintus said although they have won the match they would still field their best player.

The doubles victory gave Indonesia their third point after winning the first two singles matches Friday. With that the visitors confirmed their win with a 3-0 lead despite having two reverse singles matches Sunday.

In the first set, the national pair started well to equal the Indonesians' rhythm until they were tied 3-3, but a break by the Indonesians in the seventh game, through Nazreen's service, had opened, the chance to Indonesia to claim the 6-4 victory.

Bonit and Sulistyio geared up their pace in the second set and made two service-breaks in the third and seventh games to clinch a 6-2 win before they sealing the match with a 6-1 in the third set.

Despite losing to Indonesia, Malaysia still maintains its position in the Group Two for next year's Davis Cup challenge.

National coach Adam Malik admitted that Indonesia was a better side with a number of quality players with international exposure.

"They have good serves and returns, while we have no choice but to field in a rookie player like Nazreen, his first in the Davis Cup here," said Adam.

To make it worse, Selvam, the national No 1, failed to display his best form for the last two days, he said.

"But we cannot put all the blame on him. He had done a great job so far. What we need is more international exposures and tournaments," said Adam.

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Hamburg beat Rostock

BERLIN, Apr 8: Hamburg SV moved closer to a place in Europe with a 1-0 win over a 10-man Hansa Rostock in the German Bundesliga on Friday, reports Reuters.

Midfielder and captain Martin Groth struck in the 18th minute for the northerners who stay third and are now a comfortable 13 points ahead of third-placed TSV 1860 Munich with six games remaining.

Rostock goalkeeper Martin Pleckenhagen received his marching orders for handling the ball outside the penalty area in the 65th minute.

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The home side had then already lost Oliver Straube for a second bookable offence in the 38th minute. Dennis Grassow followed him off for the same reason in the 72nd minute.

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Brazilian star Gustavo Kuerten is ecstatic after beating Slovak Karol Kucera during their Davis Cup quarterfinal in Rio de Janeiro on April 7. —AFP photo

Davis Cup

Honours even in Rio



RIO DE JANEIRO, Apr 8 (AP): The heat, the noise, the pressure of Brazil's rabid fans — none of it seemed to impress Slovakia's Dominik Hrbaty and Karol Kucera.

Hrbaty demolished Brazil's Fernando Meligeni in straight sets, while Kucera forced local idol Gustavo Kuerten to a four-hour, five-set marathon before succumbing for a 1-1 split Friday in the opening singles matches of the Davis Cup quarterfinals.

"It was harder than we thought," said Kuerten, after surviving a 2-6, 6-3, 4-6, 7-5, 6-1 epic. "I'm very tired, but I'll have to find the strength for tomorrow."

The 10,000 fans who packed Marapendi Racket Center cheered and shouted in unison-like fashion, anticipating a rout by No. 8-ranked Kuerten. Instead, they saw Kucera take their hero to the brink of defeat before exhaustion overcame him in the final set.

Kuerten failed to hold service even once in the first set. Kucera broke him four times and coasted to a 6-2 win.

The Brazilian came alive in the second set, putting his first serve in and keeping Kucera off balance with an unnerving drop shot to even the match at a set apiece.

But Kuerten's play got sloppy again in the third set, and Kucera, playing with a brace on his right ankle, took a 2-0 lead and never trailed. He broke Kuerten's serve three times, the last to go up 5-4 and hang on for a 6-4 win.

After nearly three hours of play in the mid-80s Fahrenheit (30 Celsius) heat, Kucera appeared to fade in the fourth set and made numerous unforced errors.

Kuerten, serving with the set tied at 4-4, got a big break when the line judge reversed a call that gave him a 30-15 advantage. The Brazilian held service and went on to break Kucera in the 12th game to win 7-5. The win brought out the green-and-yellow Brazilian flags in the grandstands and the fans got noisier — too noisy for the officials. The crowd was warned that shouting between serves would cost Brazil a point, and they settled down.

The fifth set was all Kuerten. He broke an exhausted Kucera twice and fired an ace to close the match.

The victory salvaged a day that started disastrously for Brazil.

Hrbaty overwhelmed Meligeni with a booming serve and strong baseline game for a 6-1, 7-5, 6-2 win.

The 22-year-old Slovak took command from the start, breaking Meligeni's serve twice to open a 5-0 lead and close the first set at 6-1.

When Hrbaty wasn't running him ragged, Meligeni hurt himself. Serving at 2-2 with a 40-15 lead, he double-faulted twice and lost the game. Hrbaty held on for a 7-5 win.

The third set was a stroll for Hrbaty, who had 10 break points in the first three games and won two of them. He finished with a 6-2 win after two hours and 13 minutes.

Meligeni, nicknamed "Skinny" because of his slight build, said he was simply over-matched.

"He's a machine gun," the Argentine-born Meligeni said. "He's a lot stronger than I am. I didn't play great tennis, but he dominated the match. He was possessed."

Kuerten and veteran Jaime Oncins face Hrbaty and Kucera in Saturday's doubles match. On Sunday, Kuerten plays Hrbaty and Meligeni faces Kucera.

McEnroe had only accolades for Agassi, who put the squad on the scoreboard Friday and also had travelled to Zimbabwe after winning the Australian Open to lead the United States to a first round Davis Cup victory in February.

"I appreciate this guy because so much is being asked of him," McEnroe said. "People have to realize this is the type of situation that brings out the best in Andre."

McEnroe laughingly added: "You know, he's saying himself for me and Davis Cup. The hell with those other tournaments. I'll let him win the other majors, that's okay."

Sampras struggled with his serve, posted far too many unforced errors, and was obviously confused when his attempts to change strategy kept failing.

He would try to come in and Novak would pass him with exquisite passing shots. He would attempt to rally from the baseline, and find himself hitting balls into the net or beyond the baseline.

In contrast, Agassi arrived eager to take charge and never opened the door to Dosedel. Agassi never allowed Dosedel a break point opportunity and converted on four of five break point chances in a one-hour, 30-minute match.

The loss left Dosedel with an unimpressive 3-7 overall record in Davis Cup.

Thailand in Asian Cup finals



BANGKOK, Apr 8: A pair of theatrical sneak free kicks by Therdsak Chaichan and his assist on another goal spearheaded Thailand to a 3-2 victory Saturday over Malaysia and won the Group B qualifiers, earning a berth to the Asian Cup finals in Lebanon in October, reports AP.

In the Asian Cup you're playing the best," said Peter Withe, Thailand's English coach. "It's equivalent to the European Championship. There's not going to be any team that we're afraid to play. If you don't win with the ambition to win, you shouldn't be there."

The home side needed at least a draw to finish first in the group after North Korea edged a point ahead in the table with a 1-0 defeat of Taiwan in the day's first match before a capacity crowd of about 25,000 in Thailand's National Stadium.

Both Thailand and Southeast Asian arch-rivals Malaysia came out attacking hard and fast, with the Thais looking to top the group and avenge a 3-2 loss to Malaysia in the first leg last month in Kuala Lumpur.

Despite the Thais' myriad of shots from all angles, it was a pair of free kicks from about 20 meters (yards) on the left side that put them ahead. In the 17th minute, Dusit Chalernsan took his time slowly lining up the shot as the Malaysians went about slowly setting up their wall.

Then Therdsak, who had been hanging about near the ball, suddenly rushed a shot over the heads of the Malaysians and high into the back of the net, setting a partisan crowd roaring with delight over the 1-0 lead.

It worked once, and it worked again 12 minutes later, though much more sloppily — the shot went low and deflected off a couple of Malaysian defenders, then appeared to be tapped in by Thailand's Tananchai Boribon. But Thailand was ahead, 2-0.

"He's very good at these free kicks," Withe said later. "It's something he's been working very hard at and we've been practicing. We caught the goalkeeper napping."

Malaysia's Rusdhi Suparnan narrowed the margin to 2-1 from a tight angle at about 8 meters (yards) a minute later. He was stretched off near the end of the half after being brought down, but quickly returned to play.

In the 60th minute, Rosdi Talib crossed to Mohammad Nizaruddin, who drove in the equalizer from about 10 meters (yards). The score seemed to en-

ergize the Malaysians, who got several more chances down the weakening Thai right wing.

But midway through the half, a long cross from Therdsak found Tananchai just before the goal mouth and his diving header put Thailand back ahead, 3-2.

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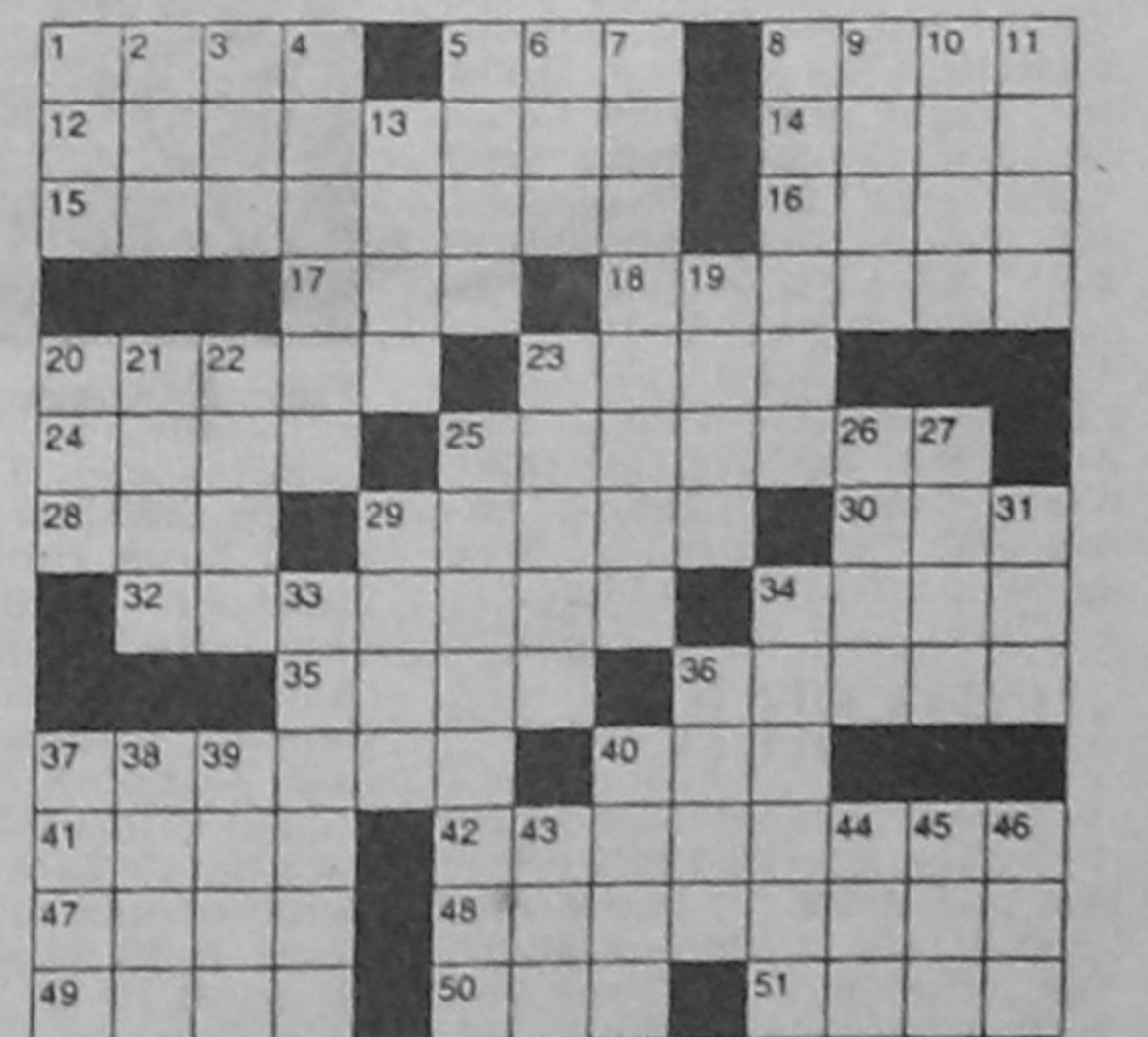
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Hamburg's Soner Uysal (L) is under pressure from Sven Benken of Hansa Rostock during their Bundesliga clash on April 7. —AFP photo

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS 35 Residents (Suffix) band not on speaking terms; 4 Billfold; 5 Puzzle; 6 too well; 7 people; 8 Pinocchio; 9 Uncullivated; 10 La-la; 11 rock; 12 African desert; 13 lead-in; 14 Jai —; 15 Cats; 16 Wrong; 17 Golden; 18 Girls' role; 19 Tongue; 20 twister; 21 Greedy; 22 one's cry; 23 Caustic; 24 substance; 25 Building; 26 wing; 27 51 Oil org.; 28 Star's bit; 29 Onello; 30 was one; 31 Theater sign; 32 Karaoke's inverse?; 33 Shade; 34 provider; 35 Staffers; 36 Listening device; 37 Fancy; 38 material for; 39 4-Down; 40 Aesopian loser.



CRYPTOQUIP B M F P L U X F B M P D N X C Y B D T M X L Q L F K M M P T U K F M K Y X A F P: "A D T P F X Y A N Y F C Q M!" Saturday's Cryptogram: WHEN PIGS ATTACKED HIS DOCKED SHIP, THE ANGRY CAPTAIN CRIED, "OINKERS, AWAY!" Today's Cryptogram Clue: B equals S The Cryptogram is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.