

Rain keeps McGrath at bay

LONDON, Apr 26: Australian fast bowler Glenn McGrath was forced to delay his long-awaited County Championship debut for Worcestershire on Wednesday as rain made its traditional mark by wrecking the opening day of the competition, reports AP.

Although English cricket had decided to change a century of tradition by introducing a league of two divisions, there was nothing new about the weather. The Division Two game between McGrath's Worcestershire and Glamorgan was one of five washed out by rain on the opening day while there was little hope of play at the other match.

There was no play Wednesday at Somerset against defending titlists Surrey at Taunton or Kent vs. Lancashire at Canterbury.

Likewise the Division Two games between Nottinghamshire and Northamptonshire at Trent Bridge and Gloucestershire vs. Sussex at Bristol were washed out for the day and they also will be restricted to three days play at most instead of four.

There was no play before lunch in the Division One match between Derbyshire and Leicestershire at Derby although the umpires were hoping to inspect the wicket later in the day to see if a start were possible.

With no play on Wednesday between Oxford University vs. Warwickshire at Oxford and a delayed start between Cambridge University and Essex, there was a strong chance that not a ball would be bowled anywhere in the country.

McGrath, hoping to get his first experience of English county cricket, has been in the country for nine days and the bad weather has meant that his only action has been two expensive overs in a Benson and Hedges Cup match against Warwickshire.

Three Ms take on the rest



PHILADELPHIA, Pennsylvania, Apr 26: Michael Johnson, Maurice Greene and Marion Jones will face top global rivals here Saturday at the Penn Relays in a "United States versus the World" athletics match-up, reports AFP.

Top rivals from Asia, Africa and the Caribbean will test the American stars in men's and women's 4x100m and 4x400m races. A planned 4x1,500m event failed when a British team withdrew and top Kenyans could not obtain visas.

Greene, the 100m world-record holder, and training partner Jon Drummond will run the 4x100m relay against teams from Jamaica, Bahamas, Thailand, Sierra Leone and a Caribbean All-Star squad.

The 4x400m US relay that faces Jamaica, Bahamas and Trinidad could feature the world-record lineup of Johnson, Jerome Young Antonio Pettigrew and Tyree Washington.

"I'm very excited about the event," Pettigrew said. "Every time you put the US letters on your chest, it's a very important feeling. We want to show we are the best."

Pettigrew, 33, was the 1991 400m world champion and his 4x1-second relay split was the second-fastest ever clocked. It came as part of the 1998 Goodwill Games winners who set the world record of 2 minutes, 54.20 seconds.

Johnson, whose wife is nearly ready to give birth to their first child, looks to defend his 1995 Olympic 200m and 400m titles at Sydney in September. The Australian Games are five months away but Pettigrew expects excitement.

"I look for great things," Pettigrew said. "Michael has run well this year. Michael is an outstanding runner. Once the third person gets it to him, it's over. I can think about taking a victory lap and signing autographs."

It helps us to have had us run together before. We all tell each other how high to hold it and where to put our hands. That makes a difference."

Before the Americans can look their sights on Sydney, they must handle the US Olympic trials in July at Sacramento, California. For many, that meet has as many top rivals as the Olympics will offer.

"I tell people if you get through our Olympic trials, you will do well at the Olympics," Pettigrew said.

Jones, who seeks five gold medals at Sydney, plans to join Gail Devers, Inger Miller and Carlette Guidry on a 4x100m relay against world champion Bahamas, Jamaica and Thailand.

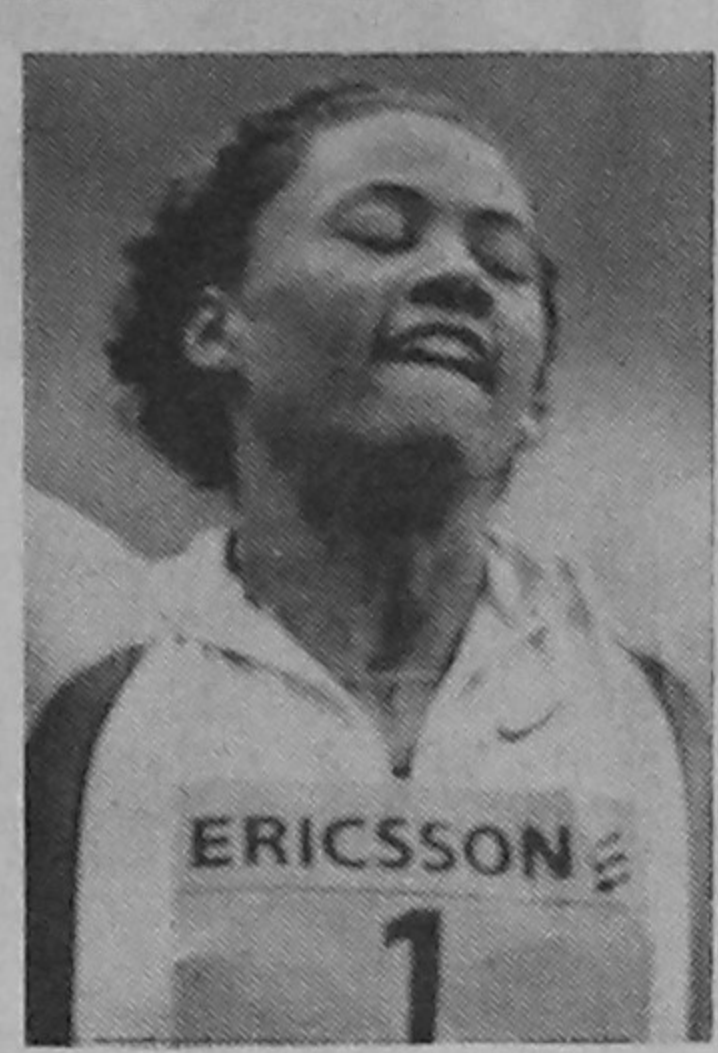
Her Sydney Olympic golden dream includes 100m, 200m and long jump titles plus 4x100m and 4x400m relay crowns. The latter means taking a spot from a runner who devotes more time and effort to the 400m.

But Jearl Miles-Clark, a member of US Olympic 4x400m champions in 1996 and runners-up in 1992, welcomes Jones and her record bid, but

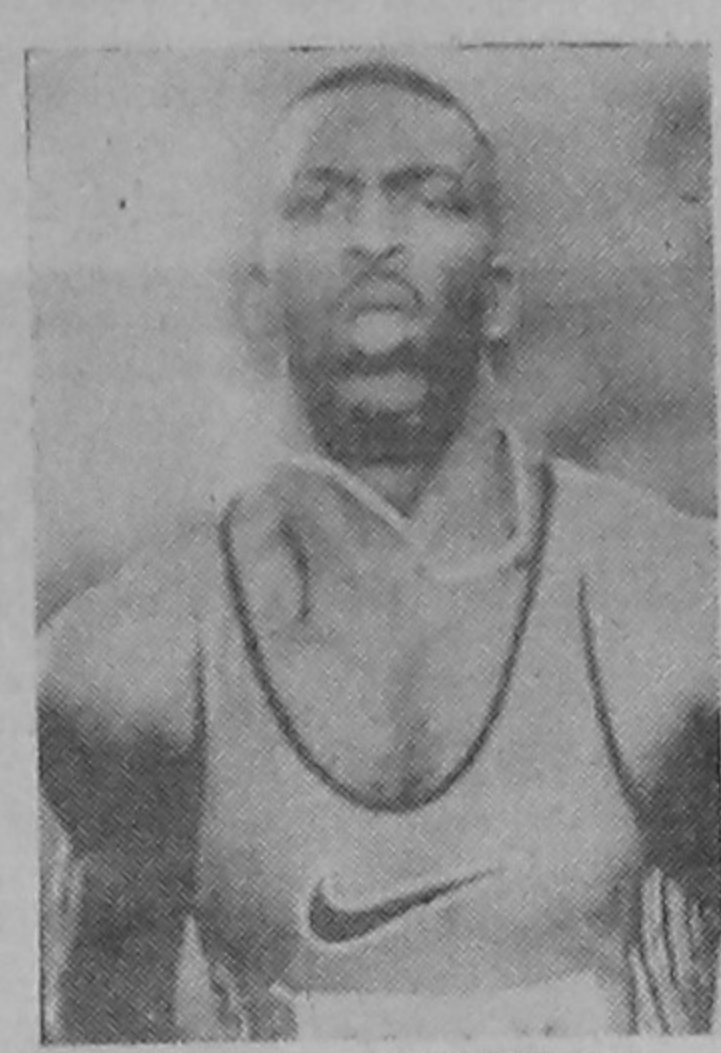
pointed out that Jones must reach the 400m finals at the US Olympic trials to qualify.

"If you make the finals in the trials, the coach can choose you for the relay," Miles-Clark said. "Marion is a great athlete. I would love to have her on the relay with me. I've told her, Marion, if you train for this event, you could break the world record. But she doesn't like to run it."

Nigeria and Jamaica will challenge Miles-Clark and the US 4x400m relay here. The Africans were narrow losers in a memorable 1996 Olympic final.



MARION JONES



MICHAEL JOHNSON

and the same nations could duel again for Sydney gold. The Jamaicans will get the crowd excited and Nigeria, they were right on our heels in 1996," Miles-Clark said. "Putting them in there, it's going to be really good. It was hot in '96 and it will be hot this weekend."

Miles-Clark lamented that even people who recognize her in US cities have no idea she races in years that do not have an Olympics.

"They don't seem to grasp the concept you are running every year, not just an Olympic year," she said.

USA Track and Field boss Craig Masback hopes more US versus the World events will raise awareness of his sport to allow some sort of meaningful US series, even if it lacks the money of the European circuit.

"The strategy is to have the national team appear more. This is just a toe in the water," he said. "We want to capture the feeling and excitement of a World Championship or Olympics, to have a team compete in different settings."

Match-fixing High officials meet in India today

NEW DELHI, Apr 26: Cricket's top executive will hold a meeting Thursday with administrators, the sports minister, some politicians and past and current captains to discuss the recent match-fixing scandal involving former South African captain Hansie Cronje, reports AP.

Cricketer was jailed this month when Indian police charged Cronje and three teammates with fraud, conspiracy, and deceiving and defrauding spectators. An Indian bookie and a film actor were arrested for involvement in match-fixing and betting which, though illegal in India, involves money running into millions of dollars.

Cronje admitted receiving about 10,000 dollars and said he had "forecast" some matches, but denied fixing them.

Though there is no specific charge against any Indian cricketer, sports journalists and bookies have said some Indian players are involved in match-fixing and betting.

Thursday's meeting in New Delhi will discuss the menace of betting and match-fixing and ways to deal with the problem. The United News of India reported.

The meeting will be attended by Jagmohan Dalmyia, president of the International Cricket Council, Sports Minister Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa, cricket administrators, former captains and managers of the Indian cricket team. Skipper Saurav Ganguly will not attend the meeting because of his pre-occupation with county cricket in England, UNI said.

Though demands that federal investigators probe the involvement of Indian cricketers in match fixing is not on the agenda, the issue could be discussed, the Press Trust of India reported.

Lennox bored

LONDON, Apr 26: World heavyweight champion Lennox Lewis of Britain is so fed up with boxing's rulers that he is considering giving up his WBC and IBF heavyweight titles, he told British daily The Sun on Tuesday, reports AFP.

Lewis, whose victory over American Evander Holyfield last November unified the heavyweight division and made him the undisputed king of world boxing, has already had his WBA title taken away by the courts after a contract row with promoter Don King.

Now, though, he claims he is so disenchanted at being told by the world governing bodies whom he can and cannot fight he is contemplating throwing his titles back into the ring and taking on whoever the boxing public want him to.

"I have seriously thought about giving up my titles — why should I fight who the organizations tell me to when some decisions are clearly influenced by fight promoters and managers?"

"I might as well give back the belts and just get into the ring with whoever the public want me to face. They are the people who matter; they pay the price of a big ticket on a big fight night or phone the TV company to watch on pay-per-view."

"Let the public choose. Their voices should be heard. They want real fights, not fights that have been engineered."

Fed Cup wash-out

OSAKA, Japan, Apr 26: The second-day matches of the Fed Cup Tennis Asia Oceania Group One and Two were postponed due to steady rain at the Utsubo Tennis Centre outdoor hard courts here Wednesday, reports AFP.

Top seeds Japan, led by Ai Sugiyama, were to play India and then Hong Kong Thursday, while Thailand were to play Kazakhstan, followed by India-Kazakhstan matches in Group One Pool A.

Second seeds were to face Singapore and then Indonesia, while third seeds Taiwan were to take on New Zealand and South Korea in Pool B. Indonesia were to meet South Korea, followed by Singapore and New Zealand.

Bayern may quit German Cup

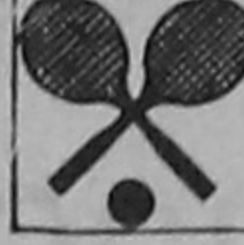
MUNICH, Apr 26: Manager Uli Hoeness of reigning German champions Bayern Munich told football weekly Kicker Tuesday his club were ready to sacrifice the German Cup final as he finds the date inappropriate, reports AFP.

The final is scheduled for May 6 in Berlin against Werder Bremen, three days after the Champions League semifinal, first-leg against Real Madrid in Spain.

"We are playing for European supremacy, image and a lot of money," added Hoeness. "We cannot trust players like machines. The German Cup final risks being devalued. The May 6 date is a joke," he added.

The German football Federation (DFB) have said that the date was unanimously agreed upon at the beginning of the season by all clubs including Bayern Munich.

Rios survives a scare



BARCELONA, Apr 26: Chile's Marcelo Rios survived two match points against Romanian Andrei Pavel to reach the third round of the Barcelona Open on Tuesday with a 6-3, 4-6, 7-6 win, reports Reuters.

Rios, the number four seed playing his first match in the tournament, appeared to be cruising as he dominated the first set.

But as the Chilean's forehead deserted him in the second set Pavel took control win

some relentless hitting from the back of the court.

The Romanian won the second set, broke for 6-5 in the third and looked to be heading for victory as his opponent sliced yet another forehand wide of the line at 30-all.

But when it really mattered Rios pulled out a clattering forehand to save his skin and when the second match point came along Pavel put it long.

Rios eventually broke after the fourth deuce and the tie-break was something of a procession as he broke the first Pavel serve and went on to win it 7-1.

The key second round match today will feature world number three Yevgeny Kafelnikov against the unseeded Carlos Moya after the Spaniard won an error-strewn contest against Frenchman Arnaud Clement 6-4, 4-6, 6-4.

Moya, who recovered from recurring back injuries to win at Estoril earlier this month, had early breaks in the second and third sets only to let his opponent back in each time with some careless tennis.

Clement then had two break points as Moya served at 4-4 in the final set but missed them both and was then broken himself for the fifth time, serving a double fault on match point.

"I'm capable of the best and worst tennis," admitted Moya after his first outing.

"Kafelnikov has done well on clay before, winning Roland Garros (French Open) in 1996 so it should be a good game."

"I'm concerned about my own game rather than his, though. If it was Pete Sampras on a hard court then I'd be worrying about the opposition."

Moya's victory was matched by another Spanish success over French opposition in the first round as Juan Carlos Ferrero continued his good run with a 6-4, 7-5 victory over 11th seed Nicolas Escude.

Compartiot Sergi Bruguera, twice former French Open champion but now ranked outside the top 100, was a surprise 6-1, 6-1 winner over Roger Federer of Switzerland, while Alberto Berasategui won his all-Spanish clash with Tommy Robredo by the same score.

Fabrice Santoro regained some pride for France as he beat Spain's Galo Blanco 6-4, 3-6, 6-3.

Hicham Arazi of Morocco, seeded 15, came through with few problems against Australian Richard Fromberg, winning 6-3, 6-4.

Last year's losing finalist Karim Alami of Morocco battled his way through to the second round with a 6-3, 6-7, 6-2 win over Max Mirnyi of Belarus.

Slovakia's Dominik Hrbaty, who lost the final in Monte Carlo to Cedric Pioline on Sunday, drew on reserves of strength to beat Sweden's Nicklas Kulti 7-6, 4-6, 7-5.



Chilean Marcelo Rios makes a backhand return against Andrei Pavel of Romania during their engagement in Barcelona on April 25. —AFP photo

Rajshahi cricket

From Our Correspondent RAJSHAHI, Apr 26: Firoj Smriti Sangha and Brothers Union won their respective matches of the second Siraj Memorial Under-14 Kishore Cricket tournament played at Rajshahi Medical College main hostel playground yesterday.

In the first match of the day, Firoj Smriti Sangha defeated FC Club by 42 runs.

Winning the toss, Firoj Smriti collected 12.9 runs for eight wickets in the stipulated 25 overs.

In reply the losers were all out collecting 87 runs in 20.5 overs.

Brothers Union defeated Halim Smriti Sangha by 14 runs in the second match of the day at the same venue.

Brothers won the toss and batted first to score 120 runs for eight wickets in the stipulated 25 overs.

In reply, Halim Smriti made 106 runs for nine wickets in the stipulated 25 overs.

VOLLEYBALL

The two-day long volleyball competition concluded here yesterday at Katakhal Adarsha Degree College playground.

Rajshahi District Handball Association organised the competition.

P N Govt Girls High School emerged champions and Adarsha Degree College became runners-up.

KFF dissolves nat'l squad

NAIROBI, Apr 26: The chairman of the Kenya Football Federation (KFF) Maina Karuki Tuesday announced the disbanding of the country's national team and the sacking of coach Christian Chukwu, reports AFP.

The move followed Kenya's defeat by Malawi in a 2002 World Cup qualifier here at the weekend.

The two-year contract of the Nigerian-born Chukwu was due to expire in November.

A team of four Kenyan coaches will start scouting for fresh players to form a new Harambee Stars in the next one month.

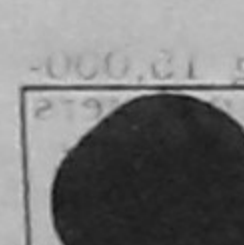
The referee in the World Cup qualifier between Kenya and Malawi on Saturday stopped the match a minute before the final whistle when Kenyan fans, disappointed at their team's poor finishing, started throwing stones and bottles onto the pitch.

The World Cup African zone preliminary-round, second-leg match looked set to end on a 0-0 draw.

The Kenyan fans were angered by the failure of their side to utilize numerous scoring chances. Their fury was also directed at Nigerian coach Christian Chukwu whom they accused of failing to deliver during the two years he has been with the team.

Karuki told a news conference here that a new coach would be named after the selection of 30 new players.

Hungary lift eves' title



BREMEN, Germany, Apr 26: Hungary collected the first gold of the European Table Tennis Championships on Tuesday in a thrilling 4-2 final victory which denied Germany a third successive title in the women's team competition, reports Reuters.

In the men's semifinals, newly-crowned team world champions Sweden struggled before beating Poland 4-3 to set up a final on Wednesday with Germany, 4-1 winners over Denmark.

In the women's final Hungarian veteran Csilla Batorfi, the 1986 European singles champion, delivered some of her best performances ever and had little trouble winning both her singles matches as well as the doubles with Krisztina Toth.

It was the eighth women's title for Hungary since they hosted the first European Championships in Budapest in 1958. They last won it in 1990 in Gothenburg, Sweden.

"Batorfi played unbelievably well," said Hungarian coach Istvan Fulop. "We are very happy. Our whole team performed incredibly well against the strongest German side."

The German women were almost in tears during the medal ceremony. Germany previously won the title in 1962, 1968, 1996 and 1998. Doubles player Elke Schall said: "We won the last two titles. Of course we are not satisfied with silver. Hungry deserved the title today."

German coach Martin Adomeit said his team had lost because Hungary had managed to peak on the day of the final while they had not. "This is what we should be thinking about," he said.

Hungary went 2-0 up when Batorfi beat Chinese-born Qianhong Gotsch 21-15, 24-22 and Toth beat Jie Schoepf 9-21, 21-19, 21-16.

It was the first time Schoepf, winner of the European Top 12 competition in 1994, had lost a match to Toth, the Hungarian number one.

Germany's Romanian-born Olga Nemes won her singles against Hungarian teenager Maria Fazekas 24-22, 21-16 before Batorfi and Toth beat Nicole Struse and Schall 21-16, 21-14.

Europe's number one Gotsch reduced the arrears by beating Toth 21-18, 21-10 but Batorfi completed Hungary's 4-2 win by sweeping past Nemes 21-10, 21-17.

Bronze medals went both to Croatia and Russia although a match for third and fourth places was played and won 4-0 by Croatia on Sunday.

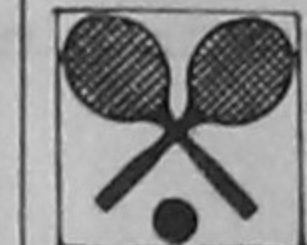
Poland's men went 2-0 up against Sweden when Lucjan Blaszczak beat Peter Karlsson 21-18, 22-24, 21-18 and Marcin Kusinski defeated the sport's most successful player, Jan-Ove Waldner, 21-18, 21-19.

Sweden, European team gold medalists, a record 12 times, rallied with wins by 1991 singles world champion Joergen Persson and Waldner in singles and in doubles.



German Qianhong Gotsch in action during the European Table Tennis Championships team event final against Hungary in Bremen on April 25. Hungary won 4-2. —AFP photo

Navratilova to enter Wimbledon doubles



NEW YORK, Apr 26: Retired tennis star Martina Navratilova will enter the women's doubles event at Wimbledon, trying to win a record-matching 20th crown overall at the Grand Slam grass-court event, reports AFP.

"It's gonna be the first time I go back as a player since 1995," Navratilova said. "It's gonna be fantastic and I'm looking forward to it. I will have lots of fun and enjoy myself. I still can hit the ball you know."

The 43-year-old American has won seven Wimbledon women's doubles titles and her total of 19 Wimbledon crowns overall in singles, doubles and mixed doubles is one shy of Billie Jean King's all-time record.

Navratilova's most recent Wimbledon title came in mixed doubles in 1995. She now plays in the United States' Team Tennis league.

"It's not something I had planned at the beginning of the year," Navratilova said. "I just thought that because I will be playing Team Tennis in July that I needed matches. What better way to get ready than to play at Wimbledon?"

Navratilova, who retired in November of 1994, will also play doubles at Eastbourne, one week before Wimbledon, with de Swardt as a wild card entry.

While excited about her return to Wimbledon, Navratilova stressed she is content away from the game. She recently filmed her first commercial endorsement, for a car company.

"I don't miss professional tennis," she said. "I have a great life now. My goal is to improve as a human being."

Lewis-Grant title bout April 29

Experience vs pressure



NEW YORK, Apr 26: The arguments offered for picking the winner of Saturday's heavyweight title fight basically come down to two words according to the respective fight camps and ringsiders — experience and pressure, reports Reuters.

There's no question that the 34-year-old Lennox Lewis, the owner of a 35-1-1 record, the International Boxing Federation and World Boxing Council titles and, but for a court decision, the World Boxing Association crown, has the distinct advantage in experience over challenger Michael Grant.

Lewis and his corner take great confidence from his time on the world stage, from his Olympic triumphs, his demolition of Canadian Donovan "Razor" Ruddock, his slugfest with Ray Mercer and first-round destruction of Andrew Golota to his two fights with Evander Holyfield which brought him a highly-controversial draw in the first and a unanimous decision in the second in November for the undisputed heavyweight championship.

"I've been up against European fighters, American fighters, Cuban fighters," Lewis said. "He's been up against B-class opponents, now he's up against an 'A' fighter."

It's that experience, coupled with tremendous, if often unrealized, talent, that the Lewis camp is touting as simply too much for the 27-year-old Grant, who by his own admission is still learning his craft.

"I've never seen Lennox so determined and he's even talking about a knockout," says his trainer, Emanuel Steward, who has been dreaming for years that his big heavyweight would score an impressive knockout victory in a big fight and win the hearts of boxing fans.

"I don't believe the fight will go the distance. I feel very confident within myself," said a remarkably relaxed Lewis earlier this week.

In the Grant camp, trainer Don Turner, who worked Holyfield's corner against Lewis, says his man has operated at only about 80 per cent of his natural talents, which at an athletic 6-7 (2.01 m) and 250 pounds (113 kg) would be "truly scary" if he were to use all of his ability.

Both fighters weigh about 250 pounds and the American is two inches (5 cm) taller than Lewis.

The key to the fight according to Grant (31-0) is that "this guy don't like pressure at all," he said after a brief workout in Madison Square Garden Tuesday.

"He tends to slow up in the later rounds and gets lackadaisical. I pick up speed in the later rounds. My job is to impose my will on him and expose him," said Grant, sitting on the edge of the ring apron and wearing a Philadelphia 76ers shirt and a baseball-style cap, its bill carefully rounded beneath the words "Chicago".

"You have to jump on him, you have to make him fight, you have to make this guy fight," said Grant, who refused to be said how he would win, but said "the 10th round has been very good to me."

That was a reference to his 10th-round stoppage of Andrew Golota last November. Grant, carrying his hands low, had been knocked down twice in the first round and was woefully behind on points after nine. But he knocked down Golota in the 10th and although the inscrutable Pole did not appear to be injured and likely would have won if he had stayed away from Grant for the rest of the fight, he quickly got up and then quit.

At the press conference Tuesday Grant was asked to hold the microphone up, with one reporter shouting, "yeah, keep your hands up."

Grant smiled and raised the mike. "Hal I learned my lesson, man."

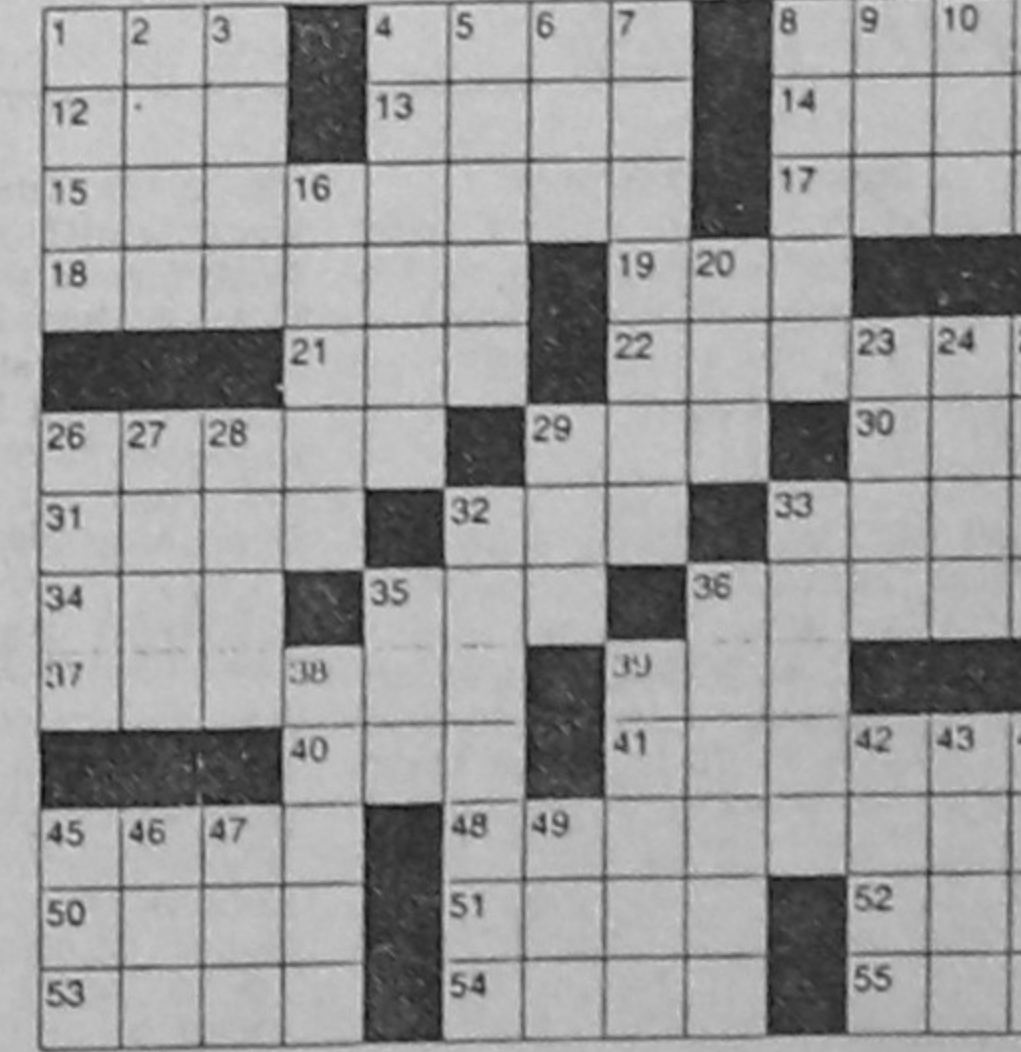
Grant acknowledges his relative inexperience, but counters with "before experience I had patience. When I started out I was not thinking about the championship. I was learning about the sport. It's time to prevail."

Steward maintains that when the going gets tough against Lewis, Grant does not have the experience to instinctively fall back on and will essentially panic. But Grant says "I rely on my instincts, my reactions. The key is don't focus on my thinking, because that will slow him down."

Another important aspect of Saturday's fight, both corners say, is for Grant to get inside on Lewis and Lewis to stay on the outside. For a big man Grant is a good fighter, better than Lewis, who has shown a propensity for tying up his opponent rather than fight inside.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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