

Indian duo ready for Woodies

TENNIS

SYDNEY, Sept 20: Leander Paes and Mahesh Bhupathi kept India's hopes of an Olympic tennis medal alive on Wednesday as they advanced to a mouth-watering second round clash with Australia's all-conquering Woodies, reports AFP.

The Indian pair, back together after splitting at the height of their success last year, had a trouble overcoming the Romanian team of Andrei Pavel and Gabriel Trifu 6-3, 6-4.

"The stage is set basically," said Paes. "We have got last year's number one doubles pair playing this year's number one playing each other in the second round, which is quite unusual."

"But we are really looking forward to it. We hit the ball well today so we are up and the energy in our group is positive."

The triumph came just hours after Paes, a bronze medal winner in singles at the last Olympics, was beaten in the first round.

Sweden's Mikael Tillstrom wasted little time in disposing of the Indian number one 6-2, 6-4.

Paes, whose bronze was India's only medal at Atlanta, was always struggling against the higher-ranked Swede and never looked like mounting a serious challenge.

The 'Woodies' — Mark Woodforde and Todd Woodbridge — are the defending Olympic champions, the top seeds and the favourites to win gold in their farewell season. Woodforde is due to quit the circuit at the end of the year.

On their day however, the Indian pair are at least a match for them. Paes and Bhupathi had a fantastic 1999, winning the US Open and Wimbledon titles and reaching finals at the French and Australian Opens.

Maiden gold for Colombia

SYDNEY, Sept 20: Colombia won its first ever Olympic gold medal today when weightlifter Maria Isabel Urrutia took the women's 75 kg contest, reports Reuters.

Urrutia, a 35-year-old appearing in her first and probably last Olympic Games, lifted 110 kg in the snatch and 135 kg in the clean-and-jerk.

The top three lifters tied for first place and Urrutia took the gold judged on body weight.

Kuo Yi-Hang of Taiwan and Nigeria's Ruth Ogbefo tried to better her total with their final lifts. But they failed, leaving all three women tied on a total of 245 kg. In such cases the competitor with the lowest body weight from the weigh-in takes gold.

Urrutia had tipped the scales at 73.26 kg to Ogbefo's 74.20 and Kuo's 74.52. That meant the Nigerian took silver and the Taiwanese had to settle for bronze.



LEADER OF THE CHEERLEADERS: A South Korean young lady urging on her team during their women's hockey clash against Great Britain yesterday.

Sino shock for Germans

HOCKEY

SYDNEY, Sept 20: Newcomers China continued their giant-killing feats in the Olympic women's hockey on Wednesday with a 2-1 win over Germany that made them unexpected leaders in Group B, reports AFP.

In the same group, the Netherlands held off a spirited challenge from New Zealand to score a rousing 4-3 victory and throw open the race for the three spots in the medal pool round.

China, with six points from three matches, are followed by the Dutch, Germany and New Zealand on four points each.

Defending champions and hot favourites Australia confirmed their place in the next round from Group A with a 3-1 win over main rivals Argentina.

Australia lead the group with seven points and a match in hand against South Korea. Argentina, who play Spain, have six points.

Great Britain kept their slim hopes alive in the same Group B by coming back from the brink to hold South Korea 2-2, despite the absence of their suspended coach Jon Royce.

Royce, slapped with a one-match ban for abusing a female doping control official on Monday, watched from the stands

as his wards scored twice in the last 13 minutes to force a draw.

The day, however, belonged to the Chinese who scored once in each half to upset Germany, silver-medallists in 1992.

China made their Olympic debut last Sunday with a stunning 2-1 win over Champions Trophy winners the Netherlands, before losing to the Kiwis in their next match.

A draw with South Africa in their last match on Friday will ensure the Chinese a place in the medal pool round.

It was New Zealand's game against the Dutch that provided edge-of-the-seat excitement to a capacity crowd of 15,000 at the State Hockey Centre.

The Kiwi girls, down 1-3, scored twice in a five-minute burst late in the second half to make it 3-3, before Fleur van der Kleef struck the match-winner one minute before the final whistle.

The dramatic game ended with New Zealand just failing to draw level again with a last-second penalty corner.

The Dutch ran up a 2-0 lead by the 18th minute with goals from Macha van der Vaart and Ageeth Boomgaardt, before Anna Lawrence reduced the margin for the Kiwis in the 23rd.

Crossing over 2-1 at the See page 15

Greene 'fastcast'

ATHLETICS

SYDNEY, Sept 20 (AFP): He is big, he is brash and he is ready to "let it hang real fast."

Maurice Greene is already the world's fastest man, but he strutted his stuff confidently here on Wednesday, predicting he could run faster than his own 9.79sec world record in the 100 metres promising "A performance you will never forget."

Greene runs in the 100 metres heats here on Friday morning, in the first session of athletics at the Olympic Games.

Appearing at a press conference organised by his management group, Hudson Smith International, his Los Angeles-based coach, John Smith, predicted that sprinters from his group — Greene, Jon Drummond, Curtis Johnson and the Trinidadian, Ato Boldon — could fill the first four places in the 100m final on Saturday, one of the undoubted highlights of the Olympic Games.

The HSI group made no secret of reports that Greene had run faster than his world record in training in Sydney last week.

"What we run in practice doesn't matter," Greene said. The 26-year-old sprinter rejected a recent scientific paper that suggested that man could not get any faster. "You can't believe everything you read," Greene joked. "I like to prove people wrong."

Greene's bravura performance in front of the world's massed media was a complete contrast to four years ago,

when he openly wept in the stands after he watched the 100m final from the stands in Atlanta, after failing to make that year's United States Olympic team.

"I've always watched the Olympics on TV, and even when I was young, I thought I could beat the other runners," Greene said.



"That's my mentality," Greene admits he gets nervous before big events. "Sure I do, I just don't show it."

"This is the biggest meet of my life. The Olympics is the biggest stage in the world. And the bigger the stage, the better I

perform."

Greene, world champion in 1997 and 1999 at 100m, has been staying in a private house in a plush Sydney suburb in the last week, visiting Bondi Beach, Darling Harbour and other tourist resorts in between training sessions.

"The only problem is that Maurice has the master bedroom," Drummond chipped in, "and Ato has the whirlpool tub."

Apart from the injury to HSI team mate Inger Miller, who confirmed Wednesday that she had withdrawn from the women's 100m through injury, the HSI group says that their training has been going exceptionally well.

"All of us are in better shape and ready to run faster than ever before," Boldon offered. He described the group's ethos as "an atmosphere of winning."

"Whoever wins the HSI race is going to win the Olympics," Boldon said.

Greene was dismissive of most of his likely rivals, except those from his training group. The world champion laughed at suggestions that British sprinters Darren Campbell or Dwain Chambers — who have both beaten him twice this year — might repeat the feat in Sydney.

"Do you really think so?" he asked a reporter. "Anything can happen in this race. I plan to take the first round in as easy as possible, and then in the second, third and fourth rounds, I'll let it hang. And I'll let it hang real fast."

SYDNEY SIDELINES

SYDNEY, Sept 20 (AFP): Opening Ceremony organiser Ric Birch was not amused by the antics of a fitter and machinist at Stadium Australia who gatecrashed the most dramatic moment of the pageant that launched the Sydney Games.

The fitter in question — 31-year-old Darren Grech — had painted his initials on to the rim of the cauldron and as Australian athlete Cathy Freeman lit the flame 3.7 billion TV viewers caught sight of the letters DG, the Sydney Morning Herald reported.

But Birch was not amused, saying "This is typical of people who like to etch their names on national monuments."

"At the end of the Games I will be making sure the letters are removed and then perhaps I will send Grech the bill for it."

GATE CLOSED FOR GATES!

He may be the world's richest man but one door remained closed to Bill Gates — and 30 of his best pals — the door in question belonged to the Olympics' most exclusive night-club.

Sydney tabloid The Daily Telegraph reported Wednesday that a doorman turned back the Microsoft founder at the doors of The Last Lap in the tourist precinct of Darling Harbour earlier this week because he didn't have any tickets.

To Gates' credit, he reportedly didn't greet the rebuff with a "Don't you know who I am?" choosing instead to move on quietly to another venue with his entourage.

Booging the night away inside The Last Lap on Tuesday were several current and past Olympians including Linford Christie and swimmer Matt Biondi.

Gates was present at the Olympics Opening Ceremony and has also watched the beach volleyball competition.

BANDANA BLUES
Australian female hockey player Juliet Haslam has lost her lucky bandana in the Olympic Village laundry service.

Haslam wore the blue bandana during recent triumphs in the World Cup and Champions Trophy and is determined to get it back.

The Hockeyroos has made an appeal to athletes in the village to check their bags and return her lucky charm.

GERMANS SEE THE FUNNY SIDE

Germany's swimming team are having a lacklustre Olympics with only a bronze medal to show for their efforts after the completion of Tuesday night's finals — the halfway point of the swimming programme.

But 4x200m relay swimmer Christian Keller is unfazed by the unsuccessful games for a country traditionally strong in the sport.

"Considering how far behind I am and with the waves produced by the leading swimmers I could have brought along my surfboard," quipped Keller.

Others are already planning for the Athens Games in four years time. "It could all be different in 2004," said Christian Troger — an optimistic statement for a 31-year-old.

CUBANS HAVANA GOOD TIME

Cuban athletes are burning the candle at both ends at the Sydney Olympics, if one Australian Olympic village resident is to be believed.

According to Australian basketball star Michele Timms, the Cubans are going through Olympic condoms "like they're going out of style."

With fun and games expected in the athletes village, organisers thoughtfully arranged a two-week supply of 100,000 and the Cubans are making the most of it.

They even have a favourite type.

"They're really keen on the strawberry flavoured ones," said Timms.

ROMAIN DUMPED
French swimmer Romain Barnier was excluded from his country's 4x100m medley relay

squad following an internal bust-up, the French Swimming Federation announced.

Barnier was expelled because of "irreverent and aggressive behaviour towards France's teams director and in order to preserve the serenity of the team," said a statement.

Frederic Bousquet replaces Barnier.

MUSICAL MARCHING ORDERS

France's Sabryna Richard must have known her number was up in the women's weightlifting when, as she walked towards the stage, the loudspeaker system belted out Moby singing "This is goodbye... this is goodbye."

Seconds later she was out of the competition.

SHE CAN'T PLAY B'BALL

Chelsea Clinton paid a visit to the US men's basketball practice facility Wednesday and earned an autographed team jersey by making a foul shot.

Clinton was all set to walk off with her jersey when US centre Alonzo Mourning suggested that she earn it. He challenged her to make a free throw, and the first daughter hit the shot on her fifth attempt.

Clinton was accompanied by an entourage that included former New Jersey Nets coach Don Casey, a member of the president's council on fitness and sport.

COACH'S COMPLAINT

Canadian women's water polo coach Daniel Berthelette was watching the clock and didn't like what he saw.

Berthelette said maybe part of the reason for Australia's 4-1-0 record and easy medal-round qualification was the water polo schedule, which saw the hometown Aussies play the 1 pm match each day.

Australia defeated Canada 9-4 on Wednesday, about 16 hours after the Canadians lost of the Netherlands.

"Is it fair? I don't think so," Berthelette said. "They should have played the same schedule that everybody had to play here."

Canada couldn't take it

HOCKEY

SYDNEY, Sept 20: Canada's men's hockey coach Shiaz Virjee blasted the umpires after his team crashed to a 5-2 defeat against world champions the Netherlands at the Olympics here on Wednesday, reports AFP.

Malaysia had no such complaints as they scored twice in the last 11 minutes to hold Great Britain to a 2-2 draw in another Group A game.

"There are different rules for different teams," Virjee said after a few decisions went against Canada in the hot-tempered match.

"We were playing against 13 men there today. It seemed the umpires were hell bent on seeing the Dutch win."

"No one is there to explain why umpires take the decisions they do. But it seems to me the balance is tilted in favour of the top sides," Virjee thundered.

He, however, refused to lodge an official complaint, saying: "There is no point protesting, because they throw it out anyway."

Virjee's trade came after the Dutch, restricted to a 2-1 lead at half-time and 3-2 soon after the break, went on a late offensive to win by a convincing margin.

He was particularly annoyed at a penalty corner given to the Dutch at the stroke of half-time which Bram Lomans converted to put his team 2-1 ahead.



SHE'S A STANDOUT: Jenny Thompson, the magnificent US swimmer, seen here during the heats of the ladies' 100 metres freestyle yesterday. Thompson made history by becoming the first woman to earn seven Olympic gold medals after anchoring the US 4x200 freestyle relay team to victory in the event's final.

Thorpe wants more

SWIMMING

SYDNEY, Sept 20 (AP): Ian Thorpe is on standby.

The Australian sensation actually got to spend a night at the pool without donning his neck-to-ankle bodysuit, cheering on teammates like Susie O'Neill. But "Thorpedo" is hoping to swim one more race and add to a medal haul that already includes three golds and a silver.

"I'd like to have another 10 swims in these games," he said Wednesday, undoubtedly causing a Thorpe-crazed nation to nod its collective head in agreement.

He won't get the chance, of course, but the Australians are playing cat-and-mouse with their choices for the 400-metre medley relay, which begins Friday with preliminaries. The Saturday final is the closing event of the swimming competition.

Four swimmers are needed — one for each stroke, freestyle, backstroke, breaststroke and butterfly, for 100 metres apiece. Michael Klim could handle the freestyle leg or shift over to the butterfly to make room for Thorpe.

Klim holds the world record in the 100 butterfly and set a world record — since broken — in the 100 free Saturday. The Aussies also have Geoff Huegill, who won the 100 butterfly at the Australian selection trials in May.

In addition, teams are allowed to swap out two swimmers between the preliminaries and eight-team final. All six get medals if their team cracks the top three.

"Technically, I'm not finished swimming," Thorpe said. "I'm on standby. There's a possibility I'll be on the (400) medley relay, so I'm not finished at the pool yet. I'm trying to stay in contact with the water."

Already, he has become a national hero by winning the 400 freestyle and taking part in victories in the 400 and 800 freestyle relays. The Aussies set world records in all three races.

Thorpe settled for silver in

the 200 free, where he was upset by Peiter van den Hoogenband of the Netherlands. But that didn't lessen the Aussies' appreciation.

On Wednesday, Thorpe accepted the first 15,000 dollar prize from the Australian Olympic Committee under a programme to give financial rewards to medal winners.

He has become a huge celebrity — even in the Athletes Village. A few days ago, athletes from three other countries stood next to him with video cameras, filming away while he ate breakfast.

"I hope I didn't spill something on myself," Thorpe said, grinning. "There was a little bit of pressure there."

As for swimming again in the medley relay, Thorpe said, "It's not incredibly important."

Glamour Games

SYDNEY, Sept 20 (Reuters): Female swimmers climb out of the Olympic pool with seemingly waterproof make-up intact and women beach volleyballers catch the eye with both their play and skinky costumes.

The Sydney Olympics are being dubbed by many as the "Glamour Games."

"There's definitely more glamour so far in this Olympics than any previous ones," said Debbie Simms, who produced a report for the Australian Sports Commission on "sexploitation" of women athletes.

"There's so much pressure on women not only to perform, but to look the part according to perceptions of what is feminine and the ideal body shape," she told the Sydney Morning Herald.

"But whether that's pressure on them to look beautiful from sponsors and marketing, or a range of other issues, I don't know."

Former Australian athletics star Jane Flemming said: "It's a reflection of society too. Young women everywhere are keen to look their best and sportswomen are just the same, except they have so much more media focus on them."