

## The Greatest Ritual of Sports



## 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 Ogebebo 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 Ogebebo's 74.20 and Kuo's 74.52. That meant the Nigerian took silver and the Taiwanese had to settle for bronze.

— AFP photo

Both Indian players were upbeat about their chances of beating the Australians, as they did in their last encounter, in the world doubles championships last year.

"We have no pressure at all," said Paes. "We know that we are still coming back into form. We know that we are playing the next match in front of a big home crowd."

"And we are just going out there with no expectations. We are going to work bloody hard to go out there and do anything that we can do, to play the best tennis that we can."

"We know that if we do play our best tennis we can get them."

Bhupathi also revealed that the pair were committed to playing together at least until the end of next year.

"We've resolved our differences and we are on our second honeymoon," said Paes.

Paes, who has had a long spell out of the game with a wrist injury and tendinitis, said he was not overly disappointed with his singles defeat.

"This is the first match I've played in four months and it is very difficult to come out and play very sharp singles. I'm a bit rusty as far as that goes but things are looking up day-by-day."

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

— AFP photo



BLOCK THAT! South Korea's Park Mee-Kyung (L) trying to stop a fierce spike from Cuba's Yumika Ruiz during their Olympic women's volleyball fixture yesterday. World and Olympic champions Cuba won in straight sets.

— AFP photo

## SYDNEY SIDELINES

SYDNEY, Sept 20 (AFP): Opening Ceremony organiser Ric Birch was not amused by the antics of a fitter and masseuse 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.

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.

Boozing 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.

### ROMAIN DUMPED

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



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

— AFP photo

## Greene 'fastcast'

### ATHLETICS

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

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 report 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,

"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."

"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 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."

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