

Luckless

SYDNEY, Jan 8: The army of volunteers that helped make last year's Sydney Olympics so successful will be deprived of the reward they were promised to recognise their 'gold medal' efforts, reports AP.

New South Wales state premier Bob Carr, whose government handed out the September 15-October 1 Sydney Games last year, said no sponsor had come forward to subsidise the medals.

International Olympic Committee president Juan Antonio Samaranch rated the Sydney Olympics as the best Games of the modern era, paying special tribute to the volunteers for their good humor and endurance.

Carr said that bulk of the 47,000 volunteers to have to foot the bill for the Australian dollars 1 million (\$70,000 US) to produce the medallions.

Instead, he said, the government would send out certificates of gratitude to each volunteer.

"The volunteers ... don't want money taken from other essential public purposes. They'll settle for an elegant certificate," Carr said Monday.

"We were disappointed that a private sector sponsor didn't come forward," he added. "We thought they would."

Enqvist unable

MELBOURNE, Jan 8: Sweden's Thomas Enqvist has told Australian Open tennis officials that he will be unable to play in this year's January 15-28 tournament due to surgery on his shoulder and foot, reports AP.

Spauld Alex Costa will also miss the Melbourne event due to a shoulder injury.

Meanwhile, the women's wildcards were announced Monday, giving six Australians a berth in the 128-strong singles draw.

Evie Dominikovic, Bryanne Stewart, Annabel Ellwood, Amanda Grahame, Christina Wheeler and Melissa Dowse were nominated. There will be two more women's wildcards announced in the next several days, one from France and one from Asia, officials said.

The men's wildcards were expected to be announced on Wednesday ahead of Friday's draw.

Tasmanian tennis

HOBART, Jan 8: French qualifier Stephanie Foretz upset her higher-ranked compatriot and eighth seed Sarah Pitkowski in the opening round of the Tasmanian international women's tennis tournament here Monday, reports AP.

Foretz, 19, and ranked 157, dropped the opening set but was too strong for 66th-ranked Pitkowski, winning 4-6, 6-4, 6-2.

Elsewhere, top seeded American Amy Frazier and second seed Elena Likhovtseva of Russia had comfortable passages into the second round.

Frazier beat German Marlene Weingartner 6-3, 6-4 and Likhovtseva dismissed Katalin Marosi-Aracama of Hungary 6-1, 7-5.

Altered itinerary annoys Aussies

NEW DELHI, Jan 8: The newly-arrived cricket tour of India by Steve Waugh's next conquering Australia next month has run into rough weather over a last-minute change in the itinerary, reports AP.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) changed the schedule drawn up six months ago to accommodate a limited-overs tri-series in Sharjah in the first week of April.

India agreed to take part in the Sharjah tournament from April 4 even though the Australian tour was due to end only on April 6 with the fifth one-day international at Bangalore.

Caught in a cleftstick, the BCCI decided to cancel a three-day match ahead of the first Test to ensure the tour ends by April 2.

The move has drawn loud protests from the Australian Cricket Board (ACB).

"After agreeing to the tour six months ago, the Indian Board has changed it unilaterally," the Hindu newspaper quoted ACB chief executive Malcolm Speed as saying.

"It's not acceptable to the Australian Board," Speed said, adding he was willing to fly to India this week to sort the problem.

BCCI secretary Jayawant Lele said a final itinerary will be announced on January 22, just three weeks before the Australians land on February 14.

"There is no problem, everything will be sorted out," Lele said, refusing to concede the BCCI erred in agreeing to play the Sharjah tournament before the Australian tour ended.

BCCI sources said Sharjah organisers may be persuaded to postpone the tri-series against Pakistan and Sri Lanka by a few days if the Australians refused to accept a changed itinerary.

Australia are due to play three Tests and five one-dayers during the Indian tour, which captain Waugh considers "the ultimate test of his world-beating team."

Australia, who have conquered all opposition in the last decade and capped that with a record 15-match winning streak, have not won a Test series in India in 31 years.

34 wickets in 8 Tests



PERTH, Jan 8: Shane Warne, back to his best after two months on the sidelines, has set himself two targets — a bagful of wickets during the India tour starting next month and an aggregate of 400 Test victims by the start of next Australian summer, reports AP.

Recovered from a finger injury, the greatest leg-spinner of all times revealed Monday he aimed to snap up 34 wickets during the three Tests against India and five in England later in the year to add to the 366 (average 25.97) which makes him Australia's biggest wicket-taker.

"My bowling is back to its best," Warne, 31, declared, reflecting on his weekend destruction of the strong Western Australian batting side in a crucial Sheffield Shield match at the usually spinner-hostile WACA Ground.

In a headline-making return to first-class ranks he captured 9-102, kicking Victoria home to an outright win by 77 runs.

"Before I got injured I thought I was bowling as well as I had for a long time," he said.

"In the three one-day

matches against South Africa in Melbourne in August, I bowled as well as I have done for a long, long time. That's why I was so disappointed to get the finger injury."

"My comeback game has been encouraging, and I think



SHANE WARNE

the future is going to hold some good stuff."

"I could say I was very, very happy. I was very encouraged by the way the ball came out, especially in Perth on a pretty grassy, flat wicket which did

not offer too much turn. I ended up getting a few to whizz through, which was good."

"I would like to think I'll get better and better the more games I have."

"I'm on the verge of maybe getting some of the golden years back because I've been working on the basics."

"I felt that by going back to the basics and bowling the way I was, I was getting my drift, turn and bounce."

Warne is yet to be named in the Australian side for India, but this appears no more than a formality.

He can make certain of leaving Australia February 13 with Steve Waugh's all-conquering side by performing well in a triangular one-day series with the West Indies and Zimbabwe starting Thursday.

Only five bowlers have topped 400 Test wickets in the 124 years since Tests began.

West Indies fast-medium veteran Courtney Walsh heads the honour board, with 494 after the just-completed five-match series in Australia.

The 38-year-old is followed by India's Kapil Dev (434), New Zealand's Richard Hadlee (431), Pakistan's Wasim Akram (409) and West Indian Curtly Ambrose (405).

Australia regrouping



MELBOURNE, Jan 8: Australia will begin the task of repairing their recent poor record in one-day cricket

internationally without exciting paceman Brett Lee, reports AP.

While the country's fastest bowler was Monday given the all-clear to resume bowling after six weeks out with a back injury, he was ruled out of Thursday's opening triangular series match against the West Indies at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Lee will aim to return for Australia's second match in the tournament, which also features Zimbabwe, against the West Indies in Brisbane next Sunday.

Lee was jubilant when given

the go-ahead to resume bowling, following another scan on his back.

"It has been a tough six weeks sitting on the sidelines," he said.

Lee will return to the bowling crease at a net session Tuesday but will not play in a practice match against Victoria.

Tuesday's practice match has been organised to ensure Australia quickly slips back into one-day mode, having lost the opening match in the series for the past three years.

The team has only won two of its past eight one-day internationals despite dominating Test cricket with a world record 15 straight wins.

And while the team is odds-on to win the series, experienced batsman Darren Lehmann has warned against

complacency.

"The West Indies are starting to show some form and Zimbabwe are a really good one-day side," he said.

"I think it will be a tough competition and we are going to have to perform at our best."

Lehmann returns to the one-day side for the first time in almost 18 months after being dropped following the Sri Lankan tour in late 1999.

The powerful left-hander has dominated the domestic one-day cup series this season, scoring 405 runs in six matches at 101.25 while his strike rate is 105.5 runs per 100 deliveries.

Lee is keen to return after having not played since the second Test in Perth, after which he was diagnosed as suffering stress in his back.

Savon calls it quits

HAVANA, Jan 8: Three-time heavyweight Olympic champion Felix Savon is retiring from the ring and will become a coach for Cuba's national team, the Cuban Boxing Federation announced Sunday.

The announcement by boxing federation President Jose Barrientos was carried in Sunday's edition of Juventud Rebelde, the Communist youth daily, as well as the official Prensa Latina news agency.

No reason was given for the decision by the 33-year-old fighter. However, international boxing rules stipulate that a fighter cannot compete in the Olympics or world championships after 34.

The 6-foot-6-inch (1.98-meter) fighter has dominated amateur heavyweight boxing for the last decade.

Savon was bleeding badly after his gold-medal victory in Sydney against Russia's Sultanmamed Ibragimov. But the fighter danced in the ring, waving a Cuban flag in victory.

"I dedicate this to the people of Cuba," he said at the time.

Savon won his other gold medals in 1992 and 1996 and is a six-time world amateur champion.

Cuban heavyweight Teofilo Stevenson and Hungary's Lazo Papp have also won three Olympic gold medals in boxing.

Barrientos also announced the retirements of boxers Juan Hernandez Sierra, Enrique Carrion and Hector Vincent, state media reported. All three will train younger Cuban boxers.

Agassi hopes to keep it up

MELBOURNE, Jan 8: Andre Agassi is confident his 2000 finish will carry on into the start of the new season and next week's Australian Open title defence here, reports AP.

Agassi's year finished on an upswing when he reached the final of the 3.7-million US dollar season-ending Masters Cup in Lisbon last month going down to Brazilian Gustavo Kuerten.

Just when Agassi, 30, winner of six Grand Slam titles, was being written off he reproduced his best form when it was all over and says the fires of tennis ambition still burn strongly.

He has put in some hard physical training during the tour's abbreviated off-season.

Agassi has been working out since arriving here at the weekend and will be playing in this week's eight-man Kooyong Classic here along with Pete Sampras, Pat Rafter and Russian world No. 2 Marat Safin.

Agassi's form slide last year coincided with illness in his family after early devastating performances earned him his second Australian Open title.

However, he still managed to fight out a classic Wimbledon semi-final with Rafter in July and reached the final of the Masters Cup in Lisbon.

"I have a lot I want to accomplish," Agassi said Monday.

"Last year was a struggle. I started with a win in Australia and ended the season by getting my game together again."

"I have confidence that I have the platform to take into 2001 and go for it all over again."

Even after more than a decade on the worldwide tennis grind, Agassi maintains his enthusiasm for the sport.

"My goals are on a daily level," he said. "You want to win everything and then you ask how can I be the best I can every day?"

Tabara takes Indian Open

MADRAS, Jan 8: Unseeded Michal Tabara of the Czech Republic beat Russian Andrei Stoliarov to clinch the 400,000-dollar Indian Open here on Sunday, reports AP.

Tabara saw off the challenge from Stoliarov 6-2, 7-6 (7-4) in an hour and 24 minutes to take home the winner's cheque of 54,000 dollars.

In a 29-minute first set, Tabara ran away with the last five games but in the second the Russian looked somewhat more confident and the two traded breaks in the beginning.

The 21-year-old Czech was broken in the second game, but he immediately broke back.

Stoliarov had his chances thereafter, with a break point in the sixth game and a set point when Tabara double-faulted at 0-30, 5-6 down, and then again with a mini-break at 2-1 up on serve in the tie-break, but he failed to convert them all. Tabara was just too solid.

The Czech was static about his first Tour victory.

"When I was younger, I used to dream of winning an ATP Tour event. That has now come true."

He acknowledged though that the flip side of his win would be the additional pressure on his shoulders from his fans back home.

"There has always been pressure ever since I was a junior ... I think it was time that I did it. But the general public is difficult and it is very hard to grow up."

He added that he was glad he was able to finish the match in two sets: "I was tired and if it had gone to three sets, it would have been very tough on me."

Stoliarov also said weariness had made a difference to his game.

"At noon today, during practice, I felt I wouldn't be able to play today. I was so tired. Then I came onto court and played, but there were many times I would have liked to move and I couldn't. My body gave up on me."

Ilie dispatches Chang



SYDNEY, Jan 8: Australian Andre Ilie thrilled home fans with a 6-4, 6-3 first round win over former French Open champion Michael Chang at the Sydney International tennis tournament here Monday, reports AP.

Ilie achieved a decisive break late in the first set and then broke Chang twice in the second to set up a likely second round confrontation with defending champion Lleyton Hewitt, who faces fellow Australian Wayne Arthurs Tuesday.

Ilie took medication prior to the match to prevent cramping, which contributed to his first round exit in Adelaide last week.

"I was very anxious before the match because last week I played a really good match and couldn't finish it off because of cramp," he said.

"I knew the possibility of cramp (again) was very small but it's difficult to know that I played a good match last week but couldn't finish it off."

Ilie's victory was his third in four meetings against Chang.

Meanwhile, Jennifer Capriati, enjoying her best ranking of 14

since her hey-days at No. 5 in 1991-93, won her opening round match Monday, accounting for Russian Tatiana Panova, 6-4, 3-6, 6-1.

The one-time American teen sensation who is approaching 25, reached her first grand slam semi-final in nine years at last year's Australian Open, where she lost to Lindsay Davenport, and now is back again to match it with the best.

The American is finding that she can hit the ball better than most players on the women's tour -- but her problem is getting into position to hit it.

The eighth-seed is travelling with her father, Stefano, as her coach following her split with Harold Solomon last March and believes she is adapting her game to the demands of the circuit.

"The thing for me is to be in immaculate physical condition," said Capriati.

"I know I can hit the ball better than those players, but I just have to get to the ball first. I also have to be aggressive, add variety to my game, be consistent, have a good serve."

Capriati said she had adapted her game to the power game of the Williams sisters, Davenport and Mary Pierce.

"I have always been a power player, but now it's double what it used to be."

"When I was starting out it was playing the top ten that was tough, but once you got past the top ten the depth wasn't as good."

"Now you regularly have tough matches in the first and second rounds of tournaments and you can never know what will happen."

Elsewhere Monday, Australian power server Alicia Molik ousted American Meghann Shaughnessy, 6-1, 7-6 (7/1), American Eric Rippner ended Thailand's Tamarine Tanasugarn's tournament, 6-0, 6-7 (4/7), 6-3 and Austrian Barbara Schett skated past Spain's Gala Leon Garcia 7-2, 6-4.

In the men's draw, French Davis Cup member and sixth seed Sebastien Grosjean took out Australian Richard Fromberg 7-6 (7/3), 6-2.

Compatriot Fabrice Santoro knocked out German David Prinosil, 6-3, 6-3. Germany's Rainer Schuettler was taken to three sets by Slava Dosedel of the Czech Republic, 6-3, 3-6, 6-3 and Italy's Gianluca Pozzi defeated Moroccan eighth seed Younes El Ayanoui 7-5, 6-4.



Andrew Ilie of Australia exults after defeating American Michael Chang at the Sydney International tennis tournament yesterday.

— AFP photo

Rios tastes success



DOHA, Jan 8: Marcelo Rios, the former world number one from Chile whose ambition is to regain

the top spot, has taken one useful step towards that goal by capturing the ATP Champions Race leader's position after the first week of the season, reports AP.

Rios did that by winning the 1,000,000-dollar Qatar Open - the richest of the three

main tour events this week - overcoming Bohdan Ulihrach, the remarkable Czech who was in many ways the player of the tournament, by 6-3, 2-6, 6-3.

Ulihrach, who saved two match points in the final round of the qualifying competition and another match point in the semifinal, was not too far from his fifth comeback in eight matches and 15 hours of tennis before tiredness dragged him down.

Rios nevertheless deserved his

win. His serve was laden with treacherous swerve and swing, his ground strokes, as always, were fluent and well disguised, and to this he added intense concentration and motivation - not always his best qualities.

Perhaps because of this improvement he dedicated the title, the 17th of his career on the world circuit, to his wife of twelve days, Juliana, who was watching. "To get married and win a tournament one week afterwards is pretty nice," he said.

"When we were leaving home to come here she told me I would win this tournament, and now I feel really satisfied. I'm leader of the race, it's a pretty big tournament, it's one of my best titles and it's a great start to the year."

Rios was physically the liveliest of the two in the first set, breaking Ulihrach's serve twice in the first five games, but he appeared to tighten up at the start of the second set, double-faulting to concede his serve in the opening game.

This was a risky invitation to so dangerous a comeback player as Ulihrach, who exploited the unexpected gift to the full, despite having to save three break points at 3-2. It was at this stage of the match that much of the counter-lifting by both players was of the very highest level.

But Ulihrach played a jaded-looking service game himself at the start of the final set, serving two crucial double faults, and an encouraged Rios immediately attacked hard for victory.



Chilean Marcelo Rios responds to crowd's applause after winning the Qatar Open in Doha on January 7. — AFP photo

Rajshahi cricket

From Our Correspondent

RAJSHAH, Jan 8: Friends Sporting Club defeated Baikal Sangha by 18 runs in the Rajshahi Premier Division Cricket League at the AHM Gauruz-zaman Divisional Stadium today.

Friends Sporting batted first and were all out 93 in 37.5 overs. In reply, Baikal Sangha were shot out for 75 in 35.5 overs.

Meanwhile, Shirol Colony Sporting Club defeated Padma Garden Cricket School by four wickets in the Sixth Bir Sreshthiya Shaheed Captain Mohiuddin Jahangir Smriti Gold Cup Cricket Tournament.

Padma Garden Cricket School won the toss and batted first. They made 151 for six in the stipulated 25 overs.

Shirol Colony reached the target in 24.4 overs.

Besides, Alipur Elevers trounced Uttarain Sangskritik Sangha by ten wickets in the Shaheed Fazlul Huque Smriti Gold Cup Cricket Tournament at the Godagari Women's Degree College playground.

Put into bat, Uttarain Sangskritik Sangha were bundled out for 60 in the stipulated 15 overs.

Alipur Elevers raced home in 13 overs.



Czech Republic's Michal Tabara kisses the trophy of the Gold Flake Open after winning the final against Russian Andrei Stoliarov in Madras on January 7. — AFP photo

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

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