

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 AFP.

New South Wales state premier Bob Carr, whose government bankrolled 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 would not want the taxpayers to have to foot the bill for the Australian dollars 1 million (570,000 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.

Spaniard 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 Pitkowsky in the opening round of the Tasmanian international women's tennis tournament here Monday, reports AFP.

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

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

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

Altered itinerary annoys Aussies

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

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 Australian 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 AFP.

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

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 up 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).

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 Sultanahmet Izbagimov. 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 Lazlo 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.

Savon calls it quits

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

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 Sultanahmet Izbagimov. 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 Lazlo 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 AFP.

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.

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 ecstatic 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."

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."

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."

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."

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."

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."

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."

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."

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."

He added that he was glad he was able