

Thanou could be made 2000 Olympics 100m champion

PARIS (AFP) — Greek sprinter Ekaterini Thanou, involved in a doping controversy ahead of the 2004 Olympics, could retrospectively take the 100m gold medal for the Sydney 2000 Olympics after the winner, American sprinter Marion Jones, admitted to doping.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) said Monday it is awaiting the decision of the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) before deciding on whether to strip Jones of her five Sydney 2000 Olympic medals.

"If the disciplinary body of the IAAF finds that she was not eligible for Sydney then the disciplinary commission of the IOC will take up the case," said an IOC spokesman, adding the American could lose her gold medals for the 100m, 200m and 4x400m and bronze in both the 4x100m and the long jump.

If Jones is stripped of her 100m gold medal then logically the runner up Thanou should take the medal.

However Thanou and her compatriot sprinter Kostas Kenteris were at the centre of doping controversy just before the Athens Olympics which resulted in a two-year suspension after they missed three doping tests.

A Greek court on September 24 deferred until next June the perjury trial of Thanou and Kenteris over the mysterious motorcycle accident which led them to miss doping tests.

On Friday after months of denials, Jones pleaded guilty in court to lying to a federal agent about her use of banned steroids between September 2000 and July 2001. The Sydney Olympics were held on September 15.

U.S. Olympic Committee chairman Peter Ueberroth on Friday welcomed Jones's "overdue" confession, and called on her to return her Olympic medals without waiting for sports officials to take them away.

Jones also faces being stripped by IAAF of her world championship medals comprising the 200m gold and the 100m silver in 2001. For this last event it is again Thanou who will benefit.

The anti-doping regulations prescribe an eight-year limit after an offense for disciplinary proceeding to be launched which would be September 2008 for the Sydney Olympics.

Williams ready for the Bangkok tournament

BANGKOK (AFP) — Reigning Wimbledon champion Venus Williams was upbeat as the 200,000-dollar Bangkok Open kicked off here on Monday, after her shock defeat in Japan.

Williams, who last week went out in the final of the Japan Open in Tokyo to France's Virginie Razzano, said she expected a great week here in the tournament.

"I feel great and I'm looking forward to a great week here," she said before her first round match with world number 64 from Denmark, Caroline Wozniacki on Wednesday.

Tournament eight seed Ioana Raluca Olaru of Romania became the first seed to exit the tournament early when Canadian Aleksandra Wozniak defeated her in straight sets in a one hour, fifty minute match.

Wozniak broke Olaru's service game to win the first set as well as the match.

In another first-round match, Australian Casey Dellacqua defeated world number 78 Severine Bremond from France 6-2, 6-4 behind a steady string of forceful groundstrokes.

Owen's return perfectly timed for McClaren



Newcastle's Michael Owen celebrates his goal during their English Premier League soccer match at St. James' Park, Newcastle, England, Oct. 7, 2007.

(AP/Scott Heppell)

LONDON (AFP) — Michael Owen gave England coach Steve McClaren a much-needed boost as he marked his return from surgery with a goal in Newcastle's 3-2 win over Everton.

Owen made an instant impact when he came on for the last 16 minutes at St. James Park on Sunday just nine days after a double operation to cure hernia and groin problems.

His 90th minute strike will have brought a smile to McClaren's face ahead of his country's crucial Euro 2008 qualifiers against Estonia on

Saturday and Russia the following Wednesday.

But the coach saw his attacking options dwindle after Everton manager David Moyes confirmed frontman Andrew Johnson will miss the qualifiers to have an ankle operation.

"Andy's got an ankle operation, he's got a groin strain, so he's going to miss the next three or four weeks," Moyes said.

McClaren is already without Emile Heskey and is waiting for the results of scans on Dean Ashton, who looks likely to miss out as well after suffering a knee injury in West Ham's defeat at

Gordon sweeps Talladega

TALLADEGA, Ala. (AP) — With a last lap pass of his teammate at Talladega Superspeedway, Jeff Gordon became NASCAR's all-time victory leader on restrictor-plate tracks.

His 12th win on Sunday moved him past the late Dale Earnhardt, but Gordon wasn't comfortable claiming the title as the best plate racer in NASCAR history.

"I'm blown away by that, to me (Earnhardt) was the man on restrictor plates," Gordon said. "I watched him do things and I knew they were cheating or something in his carburetor, and then I maybe pulled a couple of those moves throughout the years and I was like 'Ahh, now I know what he was doing.'"

"I was fortunate that my very first plate race, I was racing Dale in the Daytona 500. Even though I didn't have a chance to win it, I was there in the battle watching. The education started very early for me."

And he used it to win his fifth race of the season and move back on top of the points standings. He leads Johnson by nine points with six races remaining in the Chase for the championship.

Still, it was a bizarre way to do it by Gordon's standards.

Fears over the Car of Tomorrow's plate debut and former Formula One champion Jacques Villeneuve's first Nextel Cup event had the entire field concerned the race would be one big demolition derby.

So Gordon decided to avoid the mess by staying in the back, and found himself yawning in his race car for the first time in his career.

It was difficult for him to do. After all, you don't win four championships running parade laps at the back of the pack.

"It was the hardest race I've ever had to be in. I've never had that type of mind-set before," Gordon said. "It was tough because I don't like just going out there and riding in the back. I want to be out there battling for the lead and leading laps."

Gordon had a horrible qualifying

effort — he started 34th — and it put him at the back, where he stayed. He then suffered a late-race setback when he pulled out of his pit with a hose hanging from his car, earning a pass-through penalty that seemed to take him out of contention.

Still, he sat back, resisting the urge to charge to the front.

"It was terrible, I am telling you that was the hardest thing I've ever had to do in a race car," Gordon said. "I like to think that I have pretty good patience, but that's beyond patience."

"There's just nothing fun about that, but I knew it was the smart thing."

A master at working the draft, Gordon eventually marched toward

him, two-time series champion Tony Stewart slid onto Gordon's bumper and gave him a huge push into the lead. Gordon led just one lap — the last one — to complete a season sweep at Talladega.

"I wasn't happy with getting passed, but that would have been the situation with anybody," said Johnson, who finished second. "To get that close and not win is a let-down. There must have been stuff going on behind me that I couldn't see, but Jeff could in his mirror, and he pulled up and got in front of the 20 (Stewart) and was able to take advantage of that push."

Dave Blaney was third in the best finish this year for a Toyota driver. Title contender Denny Hamlin was fourth and was followed by Ryan

and everyone else is more than 200 behind.

The entire industry was tense about this race leading up to the green flag because of a combination of the CoT and Villeneuve, who was widely criticized for picking Talladega for his first start.

But Villeneuve, who qualified sixth, dropped to the very back of the pack at the start and stayed out of everyone's way as he quietly finished 21st.

"I'm glad that I didn't create any problems with the drivers," he said. "The finger was being pointed before the race, and that was understandable. The goal was to stay out of trouble and not make enemies."

The garage-wide fear of multiple wrecks because of dangerous driving conditions everyone

expected from the CoT didn't materialize until the first big accident with 44 laps to go. And that was more a fluke than a product of Talladega's treacherous racing — Bobby Labonte had some sort of mechanical failure that caused his car to squirt down the track and into Chase driver Kyle Busch.

The contact started an 11-car accident that also collected title contenders Matt Kenseth and Hamlin, although Hamlin suffered only cosmetic damage.

But it destroyed Busch and Kenseth's cars, and marked the second consecutive week that title favorite Busch found himself in the wrong place. He was wrecked last week by Dale Earnhardt Jr., and has gone from 10 points out of the lead two weeks ago to seventh in the standings, 260 points out.

"It's unfortunate for our Chase chances, but we knew that Talladega was going to be our mulligan, we circled it on the calendar that this was going to be the one we were going to wreck in," Busch said.

"The team, of course, wants to be optimistic, and they want me to be optimistic, but I'm sorry, it's the realism that sets in that you are so far back that it's going to take a lot to get back in this deal."

Ten Cate heads for Chelsea as Ajax agree release

AMSTERDAM (AFP) — Dutch club Ajax announced on Monday that they have reached agreement with Chelsea to release coach Henk ten Cate.



The Ajax coach has been linked with a role on Chelsea manager Avram Grant's coaching staff, as the Premier League side look to rebuild following the departure of former boss Jose Mourinho.

In a statement on their official website, Ajax said: "In talks with Chelsea, Ajax have reached agreement with the English club about the immediate transfer of Henk ten Cate to the London-based side."

"After being approached by Chelsea, Henk ten Cate asked the Ajax management last week permission to start negotiations with the Premier-League side. After internal deliberations, Ajax granted permission."

"It is now up to Chelsea and Henk ten Cate to finalize the deal together. Ajax do not expect this to take much time."

Ten Cate is expected to sign a three-year deal worth nine-million-euros (12.6m dollars), according to Dutch media.

A former assistant of Frank Rijkaard at Barcelona and regarded as an astute tactician, the 52-year-old had been under contract with Ajax until the end of the season.

After helping the Catalan club win the Champions League and Spanish title in 2006 he led Ajax to joint-top of the Dutch league last season but they lost out on the title by goal difference.

His position with the former European champions had however become very uncomfortable following Ajax's elimination last Thursday from the UEFA Cup after a first round loss to Dinamo Zagreb.