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■ Anne Keothavong

Anne makes an early return from France

► Tennis

Anne Keothavong will concentrate on preparing for Wimbledon after failing to get into the main draw of the French Open at Roland Garros, *writes Ziad Chaudry*.

The 29-year-old British No4 from Hackney was resoundingly brushed aside by Czech Republic's Eva Birnerova in the deciding set of her first-round qualifier on the Parisian red clay last Wednesday, eventually losing 3-6 6-3 6-0.

The former Kingsland High School pupil went into the French capital with just one clay court match under her belt – an opening-round defeat to Irina Ramalison in Cagnes-Sur-Mer, France.

Keothavong is now hoping to string together a good run of results in the British grass court season, which kicks off with the AEGON Trophy in Nottingham next week (June 1-9).

At last year's Nottingham event, she beat current British No1 Laura Robson in round two before going out in the semi-finals against the American Coco Vandeweghe.

But Keothavong knows she will have to repeat her 2012 performance in order to go one better as there is a strong field in this year's event including world No29 and 2012 Wimbledon quarter-finalist Tamira Paszek from Austria.

Arnold misses out on the title

► Boxing

St Pancras ABC's Danny Arnold missed out on a junior ABA title when he was outpointed by Calum French in Saturday's final at Mansfield, *writes Ken Sellek*.

Arnold, who returned to the ring after a three-year absence, struggled from the start of his Class 6 under-54kg contest against the Birtley boxer's height advantage and southpaw style.

French restricted the St Pancras fighter to sporadic counter-punches and, although he responded in the last with an aggressive display, it was not enough to prevent his opponent from taking a unanimous decision.

Wanyama can help Wenger to bridge the gap, says Groves

► Arsenal exclusive

by Jem Maidment

Former Arsenal star Perry Groves has joined the growing chorus urging Arsene Wenger to invest heavily this summer – and he believes Celtic's star midfielder Victor Wanyama should be his first transfer target.

Arsenal finished the season on a high by taking fourth place, and denying bitter rivals Tottenham the final Champions League spot – but two-times title winner Groves says his old club must aim higher next term and beyond.

"I honestly believe the second half of the season – losing just one in the last 16 and winning eight in 10 games after losing to Spurs – has been Arsene Wenger's best coaching performance in the eight years since we last won a trophy," Groves told the *Gazette*.

"He was under intense pressure from Tottenham, from the media and from his own fans, so to produce that kind of title-winning form in the latter part of the season – changing things around and making bold decisions – was superb.

"Now we need to look long and hard at this squad and ensure that we look up rather than over our shoulder. No disrespect to Spurs, but we must look at the three sides above and see how we can really make a meaningful challenge for the title next season.

"The two Manchester clubs and Chelsea will all have new managers next season. Arsenal have continuity and a settled squad that is clearly beginning to gel.

"I'm not saying we can buy three or four players and win the title next season – there was still a big gap between us and the champions Manchester United – but with the right reinforcements I believe we can make a real fist of it next year."

And the acquisition of long-term target Wanyama – Scotland's young player of the year – would be a good start, says Groves, who is a cult hero among Gunners fans



■ Steph Houghton (top) celebrates Arsenal's cup triumph with goalkeeper Emma Byrne. Pic: PA



■ Arsenal legend Perry Groves (below right) believes that Celtic midfielder Victor Wanyama (centre) would be a hit at the Emirates. Pics: PA

after a six-year stint at the club between 1986 and 1992.

"We need big players who can step up to the plate and make an impact against the bigger teams, because that is what let us down last year – we had a woeful record against the other teams in the top four," adds Groves.

Experienced

"We need strong mentalities, players who can impose themselves. I would like to see experienced lads who can come straight into the starting XI, not players who take time to gel.

"I really like Wanyama – he is destined for big things. He may be young but he plays for a massive club, has lots of experience for a young player, and he fits the Wenger model – he is hungry, strong and technically very good.

"I think he would offer real pro-

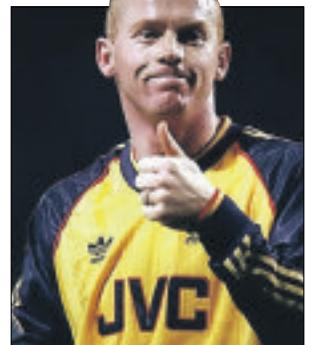
tection for the back four, and a real thrust and drive going forward.

"In addition, we need another striker. I really like Giroud, he has made an impact and is a hard worker. He has also scored goals, but he is not Robin van Persie.

"With our wage structure I suspect we will not bring in an Edison Cavali, but we do need to get in another up front to help out our strikers. I'd also like to see a new right-back in as we don't know what will happen with Sagna."

But one oft-criticised area that Groves would leave well alone is between the sticks.

"I really like Szczesny in goal – I am a big fan of his," said the Arsenal legend. "I know he has his critics and some people say he should keep his mouth shut, but he is confident and will get better.



"I am more than happy with the goalkeeping position. We also have [Lukasz] Fabianski, a very strong goalkeeper who is improving and did very well when he came in."

Impressed

Returning to Wenger, Groves reiterated how the Gunners boss impressed him in the final few months of the season.

"Wenger has been criticised but his hunger and desire has never changed," said Groves, now a respected pundit on Sky Sports and the BBC. "He is desperate for Arsenal to win trophies and has backed that up that desire with big decisions.

"For a start he dropped his captain – and rightly so. It would have been easy to keep Thomas Vermaelen in the team but he took him out of the firing line and it proved the right decision.

"Per Mertesacker and Laurent Koscielny look very good together now and they provide us with a strong base to really kick on in August.

"If Wenger goes out, as expected, and spends wisely, we should be very optimistic about next season."

Arsenal cruise to final victory

Arsenal Ladies stormed to their 12th FA Women's Cup success on Sunday with a 3-0 victory over Bristol Academy.

Steph Houghton gave the Gunners a second minute lead with a powerful header at Doncaster's Keepmoat Stadium, before Jordan Nobbs doubled her side's advantage with a 72nd minute header and Ellen White assured victory with a close-range effort in stoppage time.

"I thought the girls were absolutely magnificent," said manager Shelley Kerr. "In terms of winning the 39th trophy, I think it's so important for this club to continue to win.

"I'm extremely delighted for all the girls and everyone connected with the club."

The result is a return to winning ways and a significant confi-

dence boost after Arsenal were surprised by a 4-0 defeat at home to Liverpool on the opening day of the Super League season.

"We've only played two league games and already people were writing us off," said Kerr.

"I think you have to accept that when you're at a club with the stature that Arsenal has. People have expectations within the club and away from the club.

Relaxed

"We know that and we just have to concentrate on what we do well and that's to play football. You saw that [on Sunday]."

"For me it's all about the players – they have been exceptional. Before the game, I just said to them 'relax'. We have been playing good football and sometimes you just have to be patient."