

# Absolutely Agassi



AFP, Melbourne

Dazzling Andre Agassi took just 88 minutes to sweep to his fourth Australian Open final with a convincing straight sets victory over South African Wayne Ferreira here on Thursday.

The American three-time winner systematically dismantled the game of the unseeded Ferreira to win 6-2, 6-2, 6-3 to make his fourth Open final in seven years.

Agassi will play the winner of Friday's other semi-final between compatriot and ninth seed Andy Roddick and German 31st seed Rainer Schuettler in the final.

The seven-time Grand Slam champion was in immaculate touch on Thursday, breaking 31-year-old Ferreira's service six times and crunching 32 winners to 21. He served at an above-normal 73 percent.

Agassi stretched his record over Ferreira to 11-0 and once again exposed the South African's suspect backhand to set up his comprehensive victory.

The 32-year-old Las Vegas has now won 20 consecutive matches at the Australian Open.

As the two-time defending champion, Agassi withdrew on the opening morning of last year's Open with a wrist injury.

His last defeat on the Melbourne Rebound Ace hardcourts was in four sets to fellow American Vince Spadea in 1999.

Agassi has lost only 43 games on his way to the final and has been on court for a total of 10 hours 35 minutes.

"It's my motivation that I can always improve. That's what I'm fueled by. I'm always striving to improve and hopefully I'm accom-

plishing that," Agassi said. "Things do get more difficult the older you get in many respects. But overall, I do feel like I have gotten stronger and move better on the court."

"This is what you play for. You play to be here for the big occasion. These are the moments you remember the most, so it's very special for me."

Agassi now has two days off on Thursday.

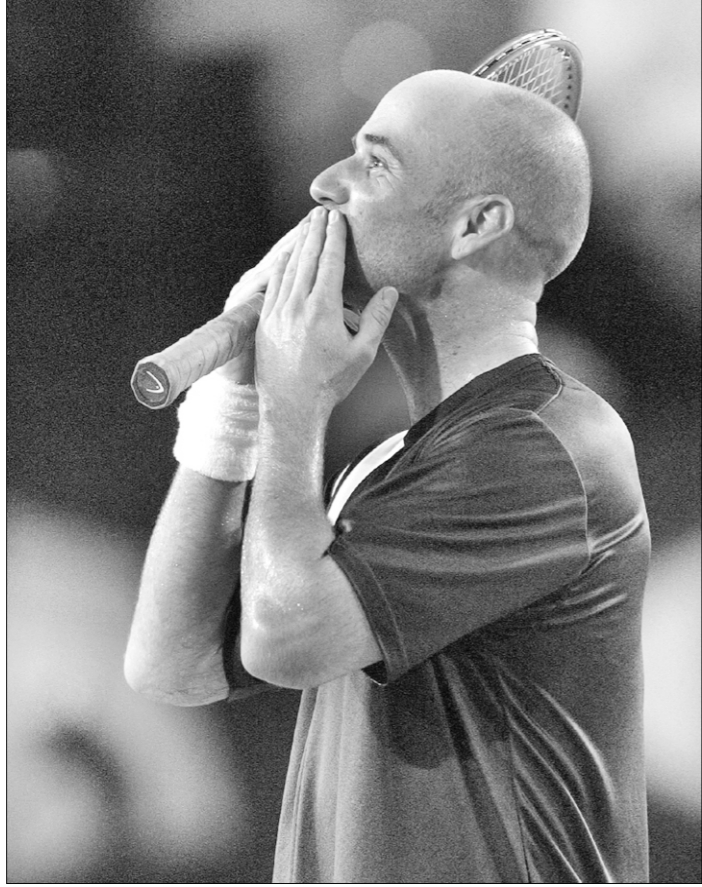


PHOTO: AFP

American Andre Agassi blows kiss to the fans after beating Wayne Ferreira of South Africa yesterday.

leading into the final and said he would consult with his coach Darren Cahill and fitness trainer Gil Reyes to gauge how he should use the extra preparation time.

"You can't help but be anxious and nervous. That's all part of what makes it so challenging."

"I've learned through the course of time that you can't control anything until you get out there, then

you can control it.

"So think about the match as long as you have to think about it to know what it is you've got to do and make sure you're always ready to do that in your own mind."

"I'm going to be practising tomorrow. I'm going to keep my routine going, talk it over with Darren, figure out how hard we're going to go over the next couple of days, talk to Gil and go from there."

Asked by television commentator and former Grand Slam champion John McEnroe how he made playing tennis look so ridiculously easy, Agassi said, "I just work hard to make it look that way."

"I made great starts to each sets tonight and took control of the points," he said. Agassi said that he was playing the best tennis of his career because he was "stronger, faster and had 17 years of experience."

"I'm ready to go on Sunday, my tennis is where it needs to be," he said.

Ferreira said he has been well beaten by Agassi and said the American was in tremendous form ahead of the final.

"It's a little difficult to find rhythm against him. He takes the ball so early."

"He hit his forehand better today than he has done before against me. If I served a little bit better I could have had more of a chance, but he was far too good."

Agassi has spruced up his challenge to become only the fourth man to win four Australian titles by making a bet with his wife and 22 singles Grand Slam champion Steffi Graf to partner her in the mixed doubles at the French Open in June, if he wins the final here.

## CU sports Jan 27

CU CORRESPONDENT

The annual sports competition of Chittagong University will be held at the central playground on January 27. Professor AJM Nooruddin Chowdhury, vice-chancellor of CU, will open the two-day competition as the chief guest.

## Office hockey

UNB, Dhaka

The Office hockey super league begins today at the Maulana Bhasani National Stadium.

Four teams - Bangladesh Army, BKSP, Inter Active Group and Sonali Bank SRC - will take part in the tourney. Bangladesh Army take on Sonali Bank in the opening match at 2:45 pm.

Two top finishers will play in the final to be held on January 30.

## NB volleyball

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh Rifles maintained their all-win record in the National Bank Premier Division Volleyball League beating Titas Club 24-26, 25-16, 25-18, 25-19 yesterday.

Dilkusha Sporting Club defeated Azad Sporting Club 25-17, 25-18, 25-16 in the day's other match.

Bangladesh Police will play Power Development Board at 3pm today.

## Now dispute in Windies

REUTERS, London

Members of the West Indies World Cup squad are trying to reach agreement with their cricket board over sharing team sponsorship revenues at the tournament starting next month in southern Africa.

Roger Braithwaite, the chief executive officer of the West Indies Cricket Board (WICB), met players' representatives Dinanath Ramnarine and Wavell Hinds on Wednesday in Antigua, where the squad is preparing for the World Cup, to try to settle the dispute.

The players are reportedly demanding a majority share of the sponsorship in a situation that revives memories of the West Indies squad's strike at London's Heathrow Airport before their ill-fated tour of South Africa in 1998-99.

## Mark shines in Shield

AFP, Sydney

Former Australian Test star Mark Waugh rediscovered some batting form Thursday as he helped New South Wales to a commanding position on the opening day of a Sheffield Shield clash in Newcastle.

Back to something near his elegant best, Waugh battered an impressive 73 as his side reached 322 for seven wickets by stumps against Western Australia.

Waugh had a lucky escape when he had reached 15 when he was beaten by a delivery from young wrist spinner Beau Casson, but wicketkeeper Ryan Campbell missed the stumping chance.

He was eventually dismissed when he became medium-pace Callum Thorp's initial victim in first-class cricket.

## England blown

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With his bat, the unbeaten Gilchrist decimated the England bowling, reaching his half-century from just 28 balls, including 12 fours, as Australia raced home against the bewildered opposition.

### SCOREBOARD

Scoreboard at end of Australia-England tri-nations series cricket first final Sydney Cricket Ground Thursday:

ENGLAND				
Trescothick c Gilchrist b Lee	0			
Knight c Gilchrist b Lee	5			
Vaughan lbw b Bichel	21			
Hussain b Williams	1			
Stewart c Gilchrist b Williams	12			
Collingwood st Gilchrist b Warne	43			
Blackwell c Ponting b Bichel	0			
Irani c Bichel b Lee	10			
Caddick not out	12			
Anderson c Gilchrist b Bichel	0			
Hoggard c Gilchrist b Bichel	0			
Extras: (lb-7, w-5, nb-1)	13			
Total: (All out in 41 overs)	117			
Fall of wickets: 1-1, 2-11, 3-19, 4-33, 5-45, 6-45, 7-79, 8-115, 9-117				
AUSTRALIA				
Gilchrist not out	69			
Hayden not out	45			
Extras: (lb-2, w-2)	4			
Total: (For no wkt in 12.2 overs)	118			
Did not bat: Ponting, Martyn, Bevan, Symonds, Warne, Hogg, Lee, Bichel, Williams.				
Bowler				
Caddick	3	0	31	0
Anderson	4	0	35	0
Hoggard	3.2	0	36	0
Irani	2	0	14	0

**Result: Australia won by 10 wickets.**

**Man-of-the-match: Brett Lee.**

**Second final: January 25.**

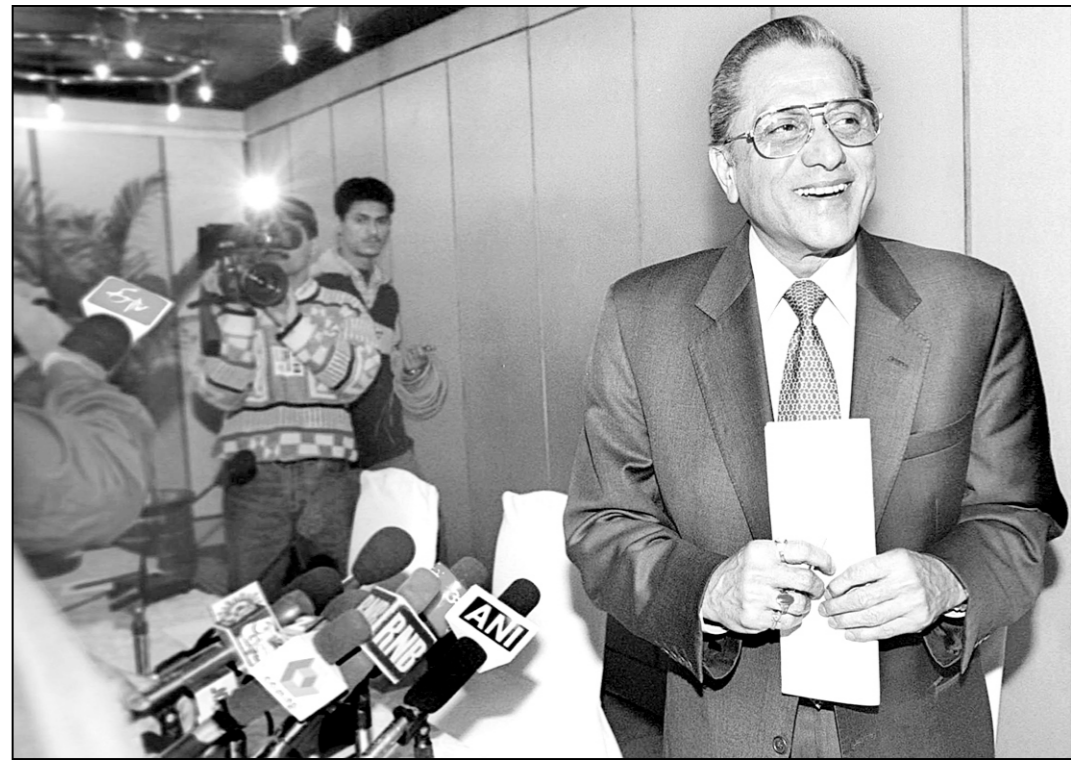


PHOTO: AFP

President of Indian cricket board Jagmohan Dalmiya (R) smiles after a press conference in New Delhi on January 22.

# Indians going



REUTERS, New Delhi

India's top players are likely to play in next month's World Cup despite a long-running unresolved sponsorship dispute, the Indian board said on Wednesday.

"As far as I am concerned the Indian team will play the World Cup and they are already in training," Jagmohan Dalmiya, president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), said on Wednesday.

He said a final decision was expected on Friday during a teleconference with the ICI, the International Cricket Council's (ICC) commercial arm.

The dispute, which has raged for at least six months, arises from the conflicting rights of official World Cup sponsors on the one hand and the Indian players' personal sponsors on the other.

Dalmiya said the ICC, the sport's world governing body, had suggested putting the issue on ice until after the tournament to make sure India took part.

The six-week event starts on February 9.

The ICC demands personal endorsements should be suspended around its tournaments while India's players, some of whom make more from advertisements than from playing, argue their image rights have been signed away without negotiation.

In March the Indian board

accepted the World Cup sponsorship terms without consulting its players who then rebelled, threatening not to play. The board then blamed the ICC terms for being too restrictive.

An ICC source told this news agency on Tuesday that the world governing body was ready to allow the Indian team to take part in the World Cup under amended contracts which would leave them free to continue personal endorsements.

If, however, official sponsors later sued for compensation, citing 'ambush marketing' the ICC would hold the Indian board responsible although it would be willing to go to arbitration to decide who should pay.

## Upbeat Pakistan

FROM PAGE 13

Waqar said.

"The whole team is looking forward to the challenge of the World Cup. It's time that we turn the tables on other teams."

Waqar denied that the team had been side-tracked by reports of his imminent sacking and of rifts within the ranks.

"There is nothing wrong in our preparation for the World Cup and I was never in a worry over my captain's seat but it's the team that is above everything else."

Pakistan's base will be Johannesburg where they will play several warm-up games before taking on defending champions Australia on February 11 in a repeat of the 1999 World Cup final in England.

"It would be like a final before the final and we must beat Australia so that we leave an impact on other teams," he said.

"In fact our games against India and England will also be crucial because every team carries points in the Super Sixes stage and that's crucial."

Pakistan are due to meet India at Cape Town on March 1, a rare and mouth-watering tie between the arch-rivals who have not played each other for the last years amid tensions over the disputed Kashmir region.

"We have a very bad track record against India in the World Cup having lost to them in the last three Cups, so it's time we turn the tables on them."

## What an escape

FROM PAGE 13

"If she plays her best tennis it's very hard to beat her," said Clijsters.

"I could feel that she was really trying to step it up and that she was hitting the balls a lot more aggressively."

"There were almost no unforced errors at the end. That's when you have to say 'Too good.' That's why she's the world number one and why she's won the last three Grand Slams in a row now."

While Serena took the scenic route into Saturday's final, Venus opted for a brisk 6-3, 6-3 defeat of the Justine Henin-Hardenne in her semifinal on the Rod Laver Arena.

Venus improved her record over Henin-Hardenne to 7-1, with her only loss coming in their first meeting on clay in the 2001 German Open, and is now looking ahead to Saturday's final.

"Four in a row is real nice and it's the best opportunity to take the title home," Venus said. "At least I am always in the position to be the victor. Hopefully, this time it will be different than the last three."

Serena reigned supreme in the finals of the French Open, Wimbledon and US Open last year.

Venus wanted down any suggestions of playing to put Henin-Hardenne in her place in Thursday's semi-final.

"More than anything, I wanted to win the match. Whatever her performance, her level of play, it's really up to her."

"She has proved she's a great player, semi-finals, finals at Wimbledon. She definitely has the potential to be a Grand Slam champion. But more than anything I was just out there trying to win my match."

# Broken-hearted Belgian



AFP, Melbourne

Kim Clijsters denied she had choked after her dramatic semifinal collapse against Serena Williams at the Australian Open final here Thursday.

Clijsters led 5-1 in the final set and held two match points at 5-2 only for Williams to launch a remarkable fightback for a 4-6, 6-3, 7-5 win.

"I wasn't nervous at all, actually. Not at all," Clijsters said, when asked if it was a case of her losing the match rather than Williams winning it.

"I think she just started hitting winners and much more than in the beginning of the third set when I was 5-1 up."

The 19-year-old Belgian also missed an opportunity when serving for the match at 5-4. But two consecutive double faults put her 0-30 down and Williams broke before going on to claim victory.

The loss revived memories of Jana Novotna's famous capitulation against Steffi Graf in the 1993

Wimbledon final when she led 4-1 in the final set before losing.

But where Novotna burst into tears after seeing victory wrenched from her grasp, Clijsters put a brave face on her defeat.

"Of course, I'm disappointed because I was close to beating her," Clijsters said. "But on the other



KIM CLIJSTERS

hand, I gave everything I had. I was really close to winning but even on match point she came up with two good shots."

The young right-hander, who had

been beaten by Jennifer Capriati in the semifinals last year, said she was at a loss to explain the two double faults in the 10th game as she served for the match for the second time.

"I was feeling pretty good, even in that game," Clijsters said, adding that she had been unable to respond when Williams went for broke in the decisive set.

"If she plays her best tennis it's very hard to beat her," said Clijsters. "That's what she did towards the end - she just tried to go for everything. She hit everything a little bit harder and closer to the line."

"But I kept fighting. I can't blame myself for anything. I tried to hang in there... it just wasn't good enough in the end," she said.

"I could feel that she was really trying to step it up and that she was hitting the balls a lot more aggressively."

"There were almost no unforced errors from her at the end. That's when you have to say 'Too good.' That's why she's the world number one and why she's won the last three Grand Slams in a row now."

# Ready to roll



AFP, Melbourne

Andy Roddick was on the massage table on Thursday regrouping for his first-ever Grand Slam semifinal with the tennis world still buzzing over his record-breaking five-hour joust to get there.

The 20-year-old American drew on incredible reserves of stamina to see off Younes El Ayanoui 4-6, 7-6 (7/5), 4-6, 6-4, 21-19, but he has to do it all again in his late Friday semifinal with German 31st seed Rainer Schuettler.

Roddick's gripping 40-game 143-minute fifth set was officially confirmed on Thursday as the longest in the amount of games in the Grand Slam history of men's singles.

It eclipsed the previous longest final set at Wimbledon 2000 when Australian Mark Philippoussis' third-round duel with Dutchman Sjeng Schalken ended at 20-18.

The memorable Roddick-El Ayanoui epic was just 11 minutes shy of the longest match in Australian Open history when Boris Becker beat Italian Omar Camporese in 5hr 11min in 1991.

The pair's 83 games were the most in a match at an Australian Open since the introduction of the tiebreak when Frenchman Yannick Noah beat Roger Smith over 73 games in 1988.

Roddick remains on course for a possible dream final with famous compatriot Andre Agassi on Sunday, but first he has to overcome the much fresher Schuettler in Friday's semifinal.

Weary Roddick was planning on spending Thursday and Friday getting massages from his travelling physiotherapist to recover and give himself the best possible chance

against the 26-year-old German.

"I don't want this to be the end of the tournament for me. I played five hours. That being said I have another match to play," Roddick said, adding with a smile, "I don't know if I need more court time."

Roddick has toiled for just under 14 hours on court in his matches at this year's Open compared to Schuettler's total of almost eight hours.

Although Roddick may not have much left in the tank after his quarterfinal exertions, he will be buoyed by his first successful Grand Slam outside his home US Open.

Some believe Roddick, regarded at the vanguard of America's next



ANDY RODDICK

tennis generation behind Agassi and 14-time Grand Slam champion Pete Sampras, has finally arrived in the big-time.

His heroic victory where he made 115 net approaches against El Ayanoui came just two days after he fought back from two sets down in oppressive heat to defeat Russian Mikhail Youzhny and win a five-set fourth round marathon.

"I can honestly say that coming back the other day (against Youzhny) from two sets and a break

down has helped my confidence," Roddick said.

"These are the matches you have to win at a Grand Slam. These are big matches. These are the ones I didn't win last year or even get this match (against El Ayanoui) last year."

Even though the final set ebbed and flowed over 2hr 23min, both Roddick and El Ayanoui are advocates for keeping the status quo and playing out advantage fifth sets at Grand Slams, rather than implementing a tiebreaker as a circuit-breaker.

"I like the variety. After playing in something like that, seeing something like that, I don't know if you'd get that special match out of a tiebreaker," Roddick said.

Loser El Ayanoui agreed: "I think it's better to have these two games difference in the fifth set. Sometimes it can get pretty long, but I think it's more fair. You can really see the difference."

Schuettler's routine five-week off-season preparation has paid rich dividends as he overpowered Argentine 10th seed David Nalbandian on Wednesday to reach his first Grand Slam semi-final.

He swarmed over last year's Wimbledon finalist with his superior court coverage, fitness and groundstrokes to pull off a merited 6-3, 5-7, 6-1, 6-0 win in 2hr 18min.

"Of course, I'm surprised, but I have so far played a pretty good tournament and I deserve to be in the semi-final," Schuettler said.

Schuettler's five weeks slaving away under a Taekwondo fitness coach had him in superb physical condition when he arrived in Australia early in the new year.

He reached the quarterfinals in Madras and semifinals in Sydney before embarking on his unbeaten run to the Open semi-final.