

McEnroe hopes to out-think Becker

MELBOURNE, Jan 15: Defending champion Boris Becker fought off chops, slices and hooks Wednesday to beat Gianluca Pozzi in straight sets and advance to a third-round Australian Open meeting with John McEnroe, reports AP.

The third-seeded German, without a Grand Slam title for 12 months, defeated Pozzi 7-5, 7-5, 6-2 only after coming to terms with the Italian's left-handed, off-speed style.

McEnroe, a 32-year-old veteran, defeated Andrei Cherkasov of Russia 7-5, 3-6, 6-4, 6-3 in a marathon three-hour contest.

Stefan Edberg and Monica Seles, meanwhile, continued their campaigns for successive Grand Slam titles with straight-set second-round victories.

Becker, who pounded 25 aces in his first-round match but only eight here, narrowly missed the lines with his serve and was thrown off balance by Pozzi's bag of tricks. The match took hours and 17 minutes.

"You can't serve 25 aces every day," Becker noted.

McEnroe looked forward to facing Becker.

"It's not going to mean a whole lot unless I beat him," McEnroe said. "It's possible to out-think him. It's very difficult, but that's what I have to do."

Edberg, the US Open champion from Sweden, beat Claudio Mezzadri 6-1, 6-2, 6-1 with a commanding perfor-

mance that combined poise and power.

Edberg had a much easier time, as his Swiss opponent



JOHN McENROE

struggled to find rhythm and range. Mezzadri, ranked 128th in the world, sprayed balls wildly, often into the net.

Moving smoothly, Edberg showed no signs of the injuries that have plagued him over the past two months, but he was not completely satisfied.

"Obviously I can improve my serve," Edberg said. "I still have some way to go to play really good tennis but I'm playing well enough to win matches."

Becker was unsettled by Pozzi's unusual style — which includes a racket strung at the lowest tension on the men's tour — and the intimacy of an outside court.

"For the first 25 minutes it was tough to get going," he said. "My game is usually the

power game. His is waiting to attack."

Karel Novacek of Czechoslovakia, ranked No. 8, was his



BORIS BECKER

highest seed to fall, ousted by Wayne Ferreira of South Africa 3-6, 6-3, 7-6 (8-6), 7-6 (9-7).

The groups of Swedish fans, many with their faces painted with the national colours of blue and yellow, had plenty to cheer about on the third day of the tournament.

In addition to Edberg's win, unheralded qualifier Lars Wahlgren upset No. 12 seed Derrick Rostagno of the United States 6-1, 7-5, 7-6 (7-3), matching his career-best performance in a Grand Slam tournament.

Wahlgren, a 25-year-old baseliner ranked 256th in the world, scored his second successive upset. He defeated 20th-ranked American Brad Gilbert in the first round Monday.

Wahlgren said he had not beaten a player ranked in the top 100 for a year.

"These are the two best successive matches I've played," Wahlgren said. "Today was the right day for me to beat Rostagno. He looked a little slow, but it's not often you get the chance to beat the top guys."

Nicklas Kulti of Sweden came close, but he squandered three match points at 6-5 in the final set and was beaten 6-3, 5-7, 6-4, 2-6, 8-6 by 15th seeded David Wheaton of the United States.

Wheaton, who won \$1.2 million for his victory in the Grand Slam Cup last month, took four hours and 20 minutes to beat the Swede.

"It is all kind of mental when you are down match points," Wheaton said. "It comes down to keeping your mind where it's supposed to be."

Mark Woodforde of Australia also saved three match points before defeating Francisco Clavet of Spain 6-7 (5-7), 6-4, 6-1, 3-6, 7-5.

Ivan Lendl, like Edberg a two-time winner of the Australian Open title, cruised into the third round with a 6-3, 6-2, 6-3 win over Australian wild card Roger Rasheed.

Patrick McEnroe of the United States, a semifinalist last year, beat fellow American Jeff Tarango 6-1, 4-6, 6-4, 6-3 in a match punctuated by outbursts from Tarango.

Edberg now faces Australian John Fitzgerald, who is ranked No. 1 in the world in doubles and 167th in singles.

Magic says he'll play in Barcelona

WASHINGTON, Jan 15: Magic Johnson, who quit professional basketball after testing positive for the virus that causes AIDS, said on Monday he intends to play for the US Olympic team at the Barcelona Games this summer, reports Reuter.

Johnson, speaking to a group of high school students about safe sex said: "I will play in the Olympics. Despite the virus, I can still play," the New York Times reported in its Tuesday edition.

Johnson, who has become a spokesman for safe sex since revealing his diagnosis, would not discuss the current state of his health nor would he say whether he had received clearance from his doctor to play.

Johnson, a former superstar for the Los Angeles Lakers in the National Basketball Association, had been picked for the US Olympic team before he disclosed last November that he had tested positive for HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

A USA spokesman, Craig Miller, said from Colorado Springs that Johnson is "still a member of the team and if he feels he's able to compete, he will, provided he's healthy, of course."

Johnson was in Washington for a meeting of the President's AIDS Commission.

Services b'ball

The Inter-Services basketball championship begins today at the BNS Issa Khan playground, said an ISPR release.



President Bush talks with Earvin 'Magic' Johnson who resigned from the LA Lakers basketball team in 1991 after revealing that he had contacted the HIV. The two met in White House Oval office after Johnson participated in a meeting of the National Commission on AIDS. —AFP photo

Wiranata, Susanti top seeds

TOKYO, Jan 15: All-England winners Ardy Wiranata and Susi Susanti launch their campaigns here Tuesday for an Indonesian sweep of the singles titles at the 110,000-dollar Japan Open badminton championships, reports AFP.

Defending champion Wiranata, who collected four trophies in the Grand Prix series as well as the World Cup last season, faces challenges

from the Chinese, Malaysians and Danes while Susanti is up against the top Chinese and Europeans.

China's Zhao Jianhua, who beat Wiranata to win the World Championship, is seeded top and opens his campaign Tuesday against Thaweesak Koetsirphan of Thailand in the first round.

He is in the same quarter with Indonesia's Joko Suprianto and Fung Permadi. Steve Butler of England and joint fifth seed Foo Kok Keong of Malaysia.

Also in the upper half are Wimbledon, Dutch and German

Open winner Poul-Erik Hoyer-Larsen of Denmark, the fourth seed, who is expected to meet fifth-seeded Kusuma in the quarter-finals.

Top-seeded Susanti, who crashed to a humiliating 4-11, 1-11 defeat to Tang Juhong in the World Championships semifinals in Brondby, Denmark, shares her quarter of the women's draw with England champion Julie Bradbury, Scottish Open winner Lim Xiao Qiang of Sweden and Wimbledon champion Elena Rybkina of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

Determined Date extends Seles

MELBOURNE, Jan 15: Japan's Kimiko Date defied one world number one Monica Seles for an hour and 29 minutes on Centre Court here Wednesday, coming back from 2-5 down in the second set before losing 2-6, 5-7 in the second round of the Australian Open, reports AFP.

Date, ranked 32 in the world, saved match point at 3-5, then broke serve in the same game when Seles double-faulted.

"She's a tough fighter," Seles said at the post-match press conference. "I knew that if I'm not going to play well it's going to be a tough match."

Date admitted that she felt "tense and nervous" at the start of the first set, when Seles raced to a 4-0 lead.

"I couldn't move well," she said. But Date refused to give up, breaking Seles in the fifth, then holding serve for 2-4, before bowing 2-6 in the eighth game.

"I wish I could have started the match at the second set," Date said. "I finished playing better than in the final of the

Virginia Slims championship in Los Angeles last year."

Seles won that match — their only previous encounter — 6-3, 6-1.

At 1.63 metres and 51 kilos, the woman from Kyodo is 14 centimetres shorter and eight kilos lighter than her opponent. Yet it was she who packed the more powerful and more accurate serve here on Wednesday.

She sent down two aces to none from Seles, and had 70 per cent of her first serves good to only 52 per cent for the defending champion.

Seles had to fight for every point as Date moved confidently to the net.

"I told myself to keep cool, win the key points," Seles said. "I knew she would be a tough opponent."

Seles, who defeated another Japanese, Akiko Kijimuta, 6-2, 6-0 in the first round, next plays Indonesian Yayuk Basuki, who came back from a set down to beat local player Louise Field 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 6-4 Wednesday.

Seles refused to speculate about the outcome of her third round match, insisting that a

realist must "take each match as it comes."

"When you get into a Grand Slam you never know what's going to happen," she said. "Even the lower ranked players are better prepared for a Grand Slam."

In other matches, Yayuk Basuki downed Australian Louise Field 6-7 (5/7), 6-3, 6-4 to earn a third-round meeting with top-seeded Seles.

Basuki was the fastest-rising player in women's tennis last year, moving from 266th to 35th.

Aranxa Sanchez Vicario of Spain, the No. 4 seed, advanced with an efficient, speedy 6-1, 6-1 triumph over Sandrine Testud of France, while No. 6 Jana Novotna defeated Canadian Rene Altier 6-3, 6-2.

Ninth-seeded Manuela Maleeva-Fragniere of Switzerland also progressed to the third round with a 6-3, 6-3 win over Karina Habudova of Czechoslovakia, as did No. 12 Anke Huber of Germany, a 6-0, 6-1 winner over Australian Michelle Jaggard.

Lela Meshki of Georgia, seeded 13, ousted American Nicole Arendt 6-1, 6-2.

1994 mascot unveiled: They say it's a dog

NEW YORK, Jan 15: World Cup USA 1994 on Tuesday unveiled the official mascot for soccer's next international extravaganza — a loveable cartoon animal

officials hope will help generate about half a billion dollars worth of revenue, reports Reuter.

But suspense lingered through the laser show presentation that had soccer legend Pele and US women's star Shannon Higgins flanking the big, brown beast within a cone of light.

Undeniably cute it was, dressed up in a red, white and blue soccer uniform. But what



in fact, was it? "It's a dog," said World Cup USA 1994 chairman Alan Rothenberg, clearing up the confusion in the packed news conference.

The announcement was made jointly by Rothenberg and Time Warner Sports Merchandising, a unit of Time Warner, Inc. which will license and merchandise the mascot and 1994 World Cup logo through an agreement with World Cup USA 1994.

The mascot, as yet unnamed, was developed by Warner Brothers animation studios for the tournament that will be contested from June 17 to July 17 in 1994 in 12 cities across the United States.

Wearing USA '94 across the uniform chest, the mascot, looked something like a moose since its ears stuck straight out like a pair of short antlers and it stood well over seven feet (2.13 m) tall.

But in profile and in drawings the mascot looked the part of an appealing canine with a brown nose and large black eyes.

AUSSIE OPEN NOTEBOOK

MELBOURNE, Jan 15: Not long ago there was a rumour that Monica Seles and Jimmy Connors would slug it out on court, a sort of 1990s version of Billie Jean King-Bobby Riggs. The match hasn't happened, but Seles thinks it could be fun, reports AP.

"I would love to play because it would be a fun match — we both grunt," Seles said. "It would be a very high level, sound match. I don't know the outcome. I would go into it giving my best. He is still playing at a great level. It would be a very tough match."

"Physically, guys are much stronger than women — they have a much faster serve. I think in any sport you can't compare men to women unless something radical happens in women to make them very strong."

But Seles is very curious about the outcome, so maybe Connors should give her a call.

"Four years ago they were saying that so many top women couldn't even get a game or get close to a top male player," Seles said. "I would like to see for myself."

Boris Becker, the third-seeded player in the men's competition, isn't waiting for a Seles-Connors match. When asked whether he would watch the two play each other, he adamantly replied, "No way, it doesn't interest me. I prefer real matches."

Stefan Edberg, the No. 1 men's player, is often asked questions about being one of the few serve-and-volley specialists with exquisite touch shots. Many of his contemporaries, like Boris Becker and Jim Courier, are powerhouses on court without similarly deft drop shots or lobs.

Nevertheless, facing an opponent packing power doesn't put Edberg off at all.

"If I'm in shape it doesn't really bother me," Edberg said. "In the contest it really is who moves to the ball better. If you can't get to the ball first, you're not going to win it."

Edberg isn't about to consider using one of the newer wide body rackets to increase his power.

"It remains hopeless," said Edberg, of the times he tried a wide body racket. "I like the racket I have. I had no control over the ball (with the wide body). I can hit a ball hard enough without a wide body racket."

Is it possible for any male player to win a Grand Slam — the Australian Open, French Open, Wimbledon and the US Open — in one year? John McEnroe wouldn't put his money on it happening.

"I'd say it's a very, very, very big long shot," McEnroe said. "The odds are so slim the London bookmakers would be a cinch to win."

Quote of the Day — "It's hard to smell the roses when you're No. 1. You're always looking over your shoulder. . . . The key for me is to enjoy this year. If I can enjoy one out of 15 years I'll be happy." — John McEnroe.

Is it possible for a guy over 30 to win a Grand Slam tournament? That's the question posed to 24-year-old Boris Becker after he won his second-round match over Gianluca Pozzi 7-5, 7-5, 6-2.

"Jimmy did it (at 31 in 1983) and Ivan is making the finals often," said the third-seeded Becker. "Let's say, with the power games and the young players coming up so early, it's not that easy for the older guys. But it's still possible."

The fifth-seeded Lendl, 31, doesn't see age as a factor.

Part-timers poised for Big League debut

HANOI, Jan 15: Vietnam's part-time footballers, so poor they can barely afford boots, are competing in the World Cup for the first time, reports Reuter.

Their far-off goal is a place in the 1994 finals in the United States, which fought and lost a brutal, bloody war in Vietnam two decades ago.

Vietnam has not entered the World Cup before because the war and its messy political aftermath had made it difficult to field a strong enough squad, national team official Tran Bay said. He said it was pure coincidence that Vietnam's first World Cup should also be the first to be held in the United States.

"It's an accident, but an interesting accident," he said. The communist government in Vietnam has given

more encouragement to international competition in sports like soccer since it began opening up the country and adopting free market reforms in the late 1980s, he said.

Football is Vietnam's most popular sport and matches between leading international teams draw big television audiences.

National coach Tran Duy Long admits the World Cup will be tough for his squad of railway workers, soldiers and policemen who have to try to fit football in with their regular jobs.

"I think it will be very difficult for us to get to the final stages, but whatever happens we can learn a lot from taking part in the regional competition," he said.

Vietnam are drawn with Indonesia, North Korea, Singapore and Qatar in Asian group qualifiers which start later this year. Only two of 29 teams from Asia will reach the finals.

But soccer can be a game of fairy tales and unfancied Asian teams can look back at how North Korea caused a major stir when they beat Italy in the 1966 World Cup in England.

"We always dream of winning, but as you know it is only our first time in such a big competition," said Vietnam's captain Le Khac Chinh, a 36-year-old railwayman from the northern port city of Haiphong.

"It would be the most incredible luck for us if we could get to the United States and play the Americans."

"It's nothing political but we would be happy to play them — in the spirit of sport, because sport plays a role in reconciliation. It's a chance for two nations to understand each other," he said.

Nearly 17 years after the Vietnam war ended, Washington has yet to restore diplomatic ties with Hanoi and

continues to maintain a punitive trade embargo that has had a dire effect on the Vietnamese economy.

The restrictions would not, however, prevent the Vietnamese taking part in the finals if they were to qualify, a US embassy spokesman in Bangkok said.

There are signs that Hanoi and Washington are at last on the road towards normal relations and that this could be achieved before 1994.

Today, though, the government still had too little money to support the national side and players have to fork out of their meagre salaries for buses like kit, Chinh said.

"We're only amateurs. We can only play part of the year, the rest we have to work," he said.

Starting at around 250,000 dong (22 dollars), soccer boots were very expensive, he said. "I earn only 80,000 a month."

Japan grapples with sumo crisis

TOKYO, Jan 15: Take the baseball hall of fame, a Superbowl victor's ring and a couple of Stanley Cups, put them all together and you still probably wouldn't have the kind of prestige a sumo grand champion gets in Japan, reports AP.

Or used to get, that is. The once mighty and revered ranks of the "yokozuna," the ultimate symbol of Japanese manliness, have been depleted by injuries and age, and demoralized by scandal and defeat.

And that's not all. The next grand champion may very well not even be Japanese.

Aside from baseball, sumo is Japan's most popular spectator sport. Its six annual tournaments are televised live to millions of fans and is considered special because of its Japanese origins and centuries-long history.

But over the past year the sport has been suffering an embarrassing vacuum at the top that to many has taken on the elements of a full-blown

social issue.

"The yokozuna these days have no pride," wrote 85-year-old former Koyoshi Kato in a letter to a major newspaper.

"Hard-working foreigners may be our national sport's only hope."

"Whatever happened to the authority of the grand champions?" Asked a commentator in a popular weekly magazine, the Shukan Bunshun. "The fans are being made fools of."

On the front pages of all of Japan's top newspapers Wednesday were reports of the sudden retirement of grand champion Aashifuji, a 31-year-old powerhouse plagued by pancreatitis. Front-page treatment is rare for a sports story in Japan.

Aashifuji decided to retire after losing three straight matches in the current tournament — a 15-day affair in which each wrestler has one match a day, the winner being the one with the fewest losses.

"I have reached the limit of my physical abilities," he told reporters after the match

against a much younger opponent.

Aashifuji, who lasted only nine tournaments at the top, had one of the shortest-ever careers as a yokozuna.

Newspapers were quick to

grand champion to retire in less than a year. Before that, grand champion Futahaguro quit sumo after a much publicised dispute with his stablemaster, or trainer, to become pro wrestler "Killer Kitao."

One wrestler who has been doing his part to uphold the reputation of the top ranks is Hawaii's Sulevava Atsanoe, better known here as champion Konishiki.

Konishiki, at 254 kilograms (559 pounds) the heaviest wrestler in sumo, won the last tournament and had a 3-1 record as of Wednesday. If he wins another tournament, he would be in good position for a shot at promotion, which would make him the first foreign yokozuna ever.

Many Japanese seem to share the opinion that foreign competition is giving sumo a much-needed spark, though there is still resistance to the idea of a foreigner breaking the Japanese monopoly on grand champion titles.

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