

Saga of a true champion

NEW YORK, Sept 14: There was never any doubt about Stefan Edberg's natural talent but in successfully defending his US Open title the softspoken Swede demonstrated the mental toughness of a true champion, reports Reuter.

The only similarity between Edberg's 1991 US Open win and his arduous road to the title this year is that both took seven victories.

Last year, Edberg was pure perfection. He played admittedly the best tennis of his life from the fourth round on and no one had a chance against him as he rolled through four dazzling straight set wins.

This time Edberg had to claw and scratch out victories when his serve was off and his volleys were missing.

Just to earn a chance to battle Pete Sampras in the final, Edberg had to win three successive five-set wars, miraculously coming back from down a break in the fifth set each time.

"I really earned it this year, I think, because I've worked very hard and I've had some unbelievably tough matches," he said after his 3-6, 6-4, 7-6, 6-2 victory over Sampras.

No match was tougher than the semifinal win over Michael Chang in which Edberg twice fought back from down a break in the fifth and with a strong finish won the marathon in a US Open record five hours 26 minutes.

That match followed an emotionally draining fifth-set tiebreak victory over Ivan Lendl in the quarters and a fourth-round, five-set, come-from-behind win over big-serving Dutchman Richard Krajicek.

This was possibly one of the finest tournaments a pro-tennis player has ever played in a Grand Slam. The way he did it was unbelievable," said Tony Pickard, the 26-year-old Swede's coach and the British Davis Cup captain.

This from a player who once had a reputation for banging his head and giving up the fight after falling behind in big matches.

"He could have gone home in three matches. Five years ago he would have gone home. He showed qualities that people didn't think he possessed," added Pickard.



Stefan Edberg of Sweden kisses the much coveted US Open trophy after retaining the singles title defeating American Pete Sampras in the final on Sunday at Flushing Meadow, New York. The victory also gave Edberg the number one spot on the ATP computer, ahead of deposed world number one Jim Courier of the United States. —AFP photo

Double delight for gritty Edberg

NEW YORK, Sept 14: Quick at the net, slick with his volleys, Stefan Edberg captured his second straight US Open and regained the No 1 ranking Sunday with a lot of help from a weak and uninspired Pete Sampras, report agencies.

Edberg's end to his arduous route to the title was a 3-6, 6-4, 7-6(7-5), 6-2, a mere 2-hour, 51-minute victory after three straight five-setters that took a total of 13 hours, 43 minutes.

Sampras, the youngest Open champion when he won at 19 in 1990 but looking much older and worn out after a night of sickness, accommodated Edberg by blowing several big opportunities.

"Play like you want it, Pete," a fan yelled out to him between serves in the first game of the fourth set. Sampras looked annoyed, promptly lost the next point and eventually the game, but it was a remark that reflected Sampras' lackluster effort.

The victory was worth \$500,000 to Edberg, who climbed past American Jim Courier in the rankings with his triumph.

Sampras received 250,000 dollars.

When Edberg blasted in a service winner to end the match, he leaped over the net to shake Sampras' hand and ran over to a court-side hug his coach Tony Pickard and kiss his wife, Annette.

"It's been a great week for me. I played some great tennis. I had some tough matches and came through at the end," said Edberg after being presented with a silver trophy. "I'm very happy."

The victory gave Edberg a second Open crown to go along with matching pairs of Australian and Wimbledon titles.

Sampras hurt his own cause with some erratic serving. He committed 11 double faults, three of which led directly to his downfall.

"I just didn't have enough today," said Sampras, who had rushed off court after his semifinal victory on Saturday over Courier with a bad case of stomach cramps.

"Last night I had a stomach virus," Sampras said. "I left here around 12:30. I had a massage and went to sleep at 3:30. I got up at 8 this morning. I had stomach cramps. I'm not giving an excuse."

"As the match wore on, especially in the fourth set, I was out of gas. I'm mentally and physically very exhausted. I

had a long night last night." Sampras also said he was bothered by pain in his shins during the match, but that hardly accounted for his double-faults and first-serve somnolence 30 mph slower than his normal 120 mph shots. "Edberg became the first

his backhand sailed wide after a typical Edberg serve-and-volley point to drop the decider 7-5.

Edberg, now sensing the kill, turned up the pressure on Sampras, continually coming to net after returning the American's second serve to

Sampras stated the obvious. "It was not a good serving day at all. I was pressing too much. The serve let me down."

Sampras had needed inter-venous fluids to relieve his dehydration after his victory against Courier but the would not blame his defeat on his condition.

"It was a long night," Sampras said about recovering from the cramps and diarrhoea. "Not too much sleep, but I'm not giving excuses."

Edberg, who once dreaded playing in the hurly-burly atmosphere of New York, now is fond of the concrete complex at Flushing Meadow and will return to his London home with an unexpected prize.

"I came here to defend my title," said Edberg, who fell out of the top ranking last March. "Becoming number one again is a nice present."

Close call for Azad Boys

Sports Reporter

Fancied Azad Boys Club staged a magnificent fightback in the second half to edge past Gregs Club 74-71 in yesterday's Partex First Division basketball league match which had its spectators tensed and transfixed till the very end at the Outer Stadium, trailing 34-37 in the first half, gave their hearts out in the second session to stay on course for title on their debut.

Thanks to the joint efforts of Asgar (30) and national star Zahir who weighed in with 26 points, Azad Boys came through unscathed on the day. Shahed and Khaled scored 21 and 17 points respectively for the Gregs but their efforts fell just three points short.

The second match of the day was a drab affair in comparison to the first as Angels Club made it look like a cakewalk against Panthers Club.

The Angels basketballers, who won the match 87-54, played through out the match with a consistent rhythm that was a bit too much for the Panthers players to cope with.

Led by the joint offensive of Siddique (22) and Janu (14) the victors danced away to a winning half-time lead of 45-25.

Naim with 20 and Helal with 10 troubled the Angels' defence at times but never became a vital factor as far as the result was concerned.

TODAY'S MATCHES

Dhuketu Club vs Hornets SC (4 pm)

Eagles Club vs Azad Boys (5:30 pm)

DCPA repeats its demands

Sports Reporter

The cricketers of the Dhaka leagues might go for agitation if their demand regarding the so-called players' pool is not met before the start of the inter-club player's transfers.

Talking to the press at the National Sports Council conference room yesterday, general secretary of the Dhaka Cricket Players' Association (DCPA) Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu also called upon the Bangladesh Cricket Control Board (BCCB) to defer the transfers dates till the last week of this month for a better review of the situation created by the proposed pool.

According to the BCCB schedule, the clearance for inter-club transfer will begin from September 18.

The BCCB, in a bid to make local cricket more competitive, had revised the constitution of the pool with 17 players last month and decreed that no team would be allowed to sign up more than three players from the pool.

Originally, 22 players were included in the pool announced by the Board in July last. But the DCPA demanded that the quota of pool players per club be raised to four instead of three.

Although the DCPA hinted at going for action, former national skipper Lipu did not elaborate, maintaining "We still believe that an amicable solution is possible."

Lipu said that the restrictions on the pool players will give rise to frustration among the national cricketers who will be deprived of choosing their teams. Players like Golam Nawsher Prince and wicket keeper Nasir Ahmed Nasu have not yet received any offers from the bigger clubs, Lipu said to illustrate his point.

The DCPA also put forth some suggestions for improving the standard of cricket in the country. These suggestions include launching of an office cricket league, participation of the national team in more national and international tournaments, holding of junior division cricket on turf wickets and to train the national and youth teams under efficient foreign coaches.

DCPA vice president Jahangir Shah Badshah, national skipper Minhazul Abedin Nannu and Jogesh Chandra Ghosh—the two joint secretaries—and executive committee member Golam Nawsher Prince also attended the conference. A large number of cricketers were also present.

Meanwhile, Reza-e-Karim, the BCCB treasurer, yesterday told some newsmen that the inter-club transfers could be rescheduled for the benefit of the cricketers. The BCCB also plans to introduce an office league and will write to the various office teams in this connection, he said.

Indian Armed Forces booters lose 0-1

The Bangladesh Armed Forces team defeated the visiting Indian Armed Forces team by a solitary goal in a friendly football match at the Bangladesh Army Stadium, Banani yesterday afternoon.

The Indian Armed Forces team arrived in Dhaka on September 12 last on a goodwill tour of Bangladesh.

The match winner was scored by Musicien M Hossain in the 25th minute of the first half.

The Indian team tried hard to equalise but all their attempts went in vain.

Asstt Chief of Naval Staff Commodore Fakhruddin Ahmed witnessed the match as chief guest and distributed souvenirs among the players. Earlier he was introduced to the players of the two teams.

The match was also witnessed by senior armed forces officers including PSOs and a large number of armed forces personnel.

Some Indian High Commission officials and Indian nationals in Dhaka were also present.

The Indian Armed Forces team will meet the Bangladesh Navy team on September 17 at Chittagong, the Bangladesh Army team on September 20 at Dhaka and the Bangladesh Air Force team on September 22, also at Dhaka.

Khoka visits BSJA

Sports Reporter

State Minister for Youth and Sports Sadek Hossain Khoka paid a courtesy visit to the Bangladesh Sports Journalists' Association's BSJA office near the Dhaka Stadium swimming pool yesterday.

He exchanged views with the journalists regarding the various problems existing in the sporting arena of the country.



The Dhaka Cricket Players' Association held a press conference yesterday at the NSC. Former national skipper Gazi Ashraf Hossain Lipu (R) talks to the pressmen as Minhazul Abedin Nannu (L) listens. —Star photo

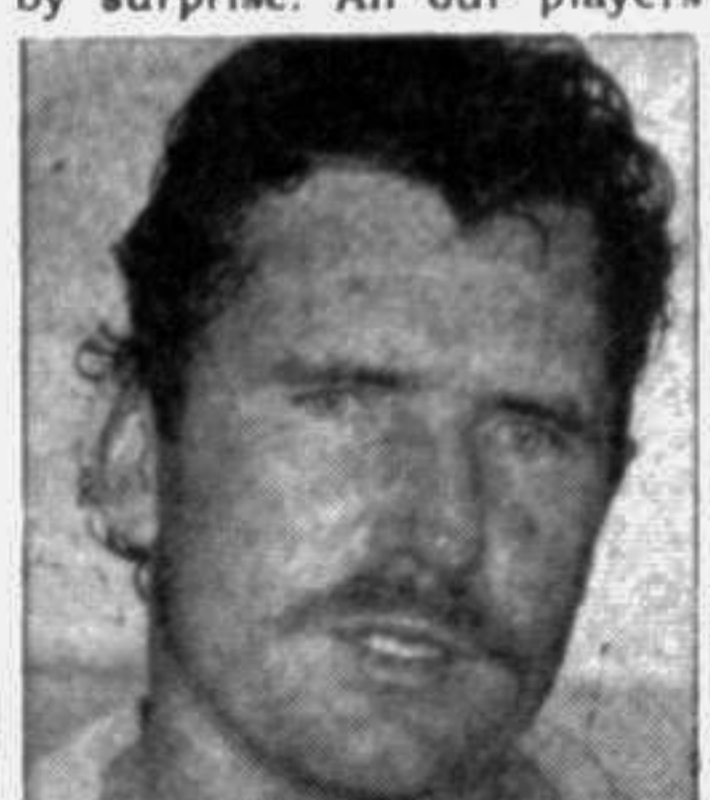
Border lauds Lankan spirit



COLOMBO, Sept 14: The 13-member Australian squad left here today for home with a warning from skipper Allan Border that Sri Lanka were going to be a force in world cricket and that right now the islanders were better than India, reports AFP.

Border said that Sri Lanka played a superb three-Test series and were "a very competitive side" throughout.

"I think they caught all of us by surprise. All our players



ALLAN BORDER

were very impressed with the new attitude that the Sri Lankan side had. With a little bit more hard work, they are going to be a real force in world cricket," he said.

The third Test was drawn Sunday after rain robbed about nine hours of play. Australia took the series 1-0 by virtue of their win in the first Test. The second test was also drawn. Sri Lanka, however, won the one-day series, 2-1.

"I thought the Sri Lankans played superbly. I think once they learn how to finish off teams when they get into strong positions, they are going to be a real force to be reckoned with," said Border after his 70th Test as captain.

"I really rate the Sri Lankans high. I think they've got a very competent side... I would go as far as to say they are a better Test match side

than India," said the veteran of 133 Tests.

Sri Lanka led by Arjuna Ranatunga had the Australians in a tight corner in all three Tests but poor fielding and the visitors' strong middle-order batting line-up prevented the home side from running out winners.

Border considered that Australia were fortunate to have won the first Test by a sensational 16 runs after Sri Lanka had dominated right up to the beginning of the final session on the last day.

"The Sri Lankans outplayed us but we snatched an incredible victory. That's not going to happen all the time. That is one of those lucky things that happens occasionally in Test cricket," he said.

Border, who said the two drawn Tests could have gone either way if not for the weather began the tour badly but ended his third outing to Sri Lanka with a century and 78 in the third Test.

At crucial stages Australia and Sri Lanka were let down by their top-order and middle-order batsmen respectively.

Although Australia ran out favourites at the beginning of the tour their performance was of underdog status.

While crediting Sri Lanka's quick bowlers for maintaining immense pressure on the Australian batsmen, Border hoped his top run-getters would click in time for the series against the West Indies later this year.

"Well, obviously the top order is a bit of a concern. We never really got anything going at all. We've got to make sure that we turn around the top-order batting against the West Indies otherwise we are going to struggle," he said.

"We have to work really hard because against the West Indies poses we are going to have problems if we don't get off to better starts than what we have shown here."

Ranatunga blamed bad bat-

ting and bad weather for Sri Lanka's unsuccessful Test series. Clearly, the lack of experience and the professionalism that comes with it was also responsible for their inability to emerge winners.

He said Sri Lanka's suspect lower order batsmen would have to work hard to give a better performance against New Zealand in November.

Australian all-rounder Greg Matthews had a fine Test series, scoring 329 runs that included five consecutive half-centuries with a top-score of



ARJUNA RANATUNGA

96 in the third Test.

But Border said that Matthews' role was that of an off-spin bowler and his batting was "a bonus". However, Matthews shone as a bowler only in the first Test with seven wickets.

"But he'll come under the hammer if he goes back to Australia and does not take wickets. It's as simple as that. We want him to be a bowler rather than a batsman," said Border.

Border also said Sri Lanka's umpires lacked "a bit of experience" which resulted in 16 leg-before decisions against Australia, and only four against Sri Lanka. "Apart from that they did a competent job."

The Australian side return home after breaking a 23-year hoodoo of not winning a Test series in the Indian sub-continent since they last beat India in 1969.

Kent stake claim for 2nd spot



LONDON, Sept 14: Kent made 603 for eight declared, their highest score since 1934, then set course for an innings victory with three wickets in 22 balls by Alan Igglesden at Edgbaston on Sunday, reports Reuter.

Warwickshire were in desperate trouble at five for three as Kent staked a claim on the 23,000 pounds sterling (44,000 US dollar) prize for the English county championship runners-up.

Igglesden (five for 34) took two wickets in successive balls in his early burst and came back to bowl Dominic Ostler(40) and Dermott Reeve(51) after a stand of 96.

At the close of the second day, Warwickshire were 121 for five, still 482 behind.

Kent began the second day at 487 for three and Carl Hooper became their third century maker, reaching 102 before being caught behind. Graham Cowdrey hit 88 to go with centuries on Saturday for Trevor Ward (153) and Mark Benson (122).

Graham Gooch, who handed over the Essex captaincy to Paul Prichard against Gloucestershire, still found himself heavily involved — as a bowler.

Gooch gained only one success, but his accuracy was right for the Bristol pitch and just 27 were taken off his 20 overs as Gloucestershire made 326 for a first innings lead of

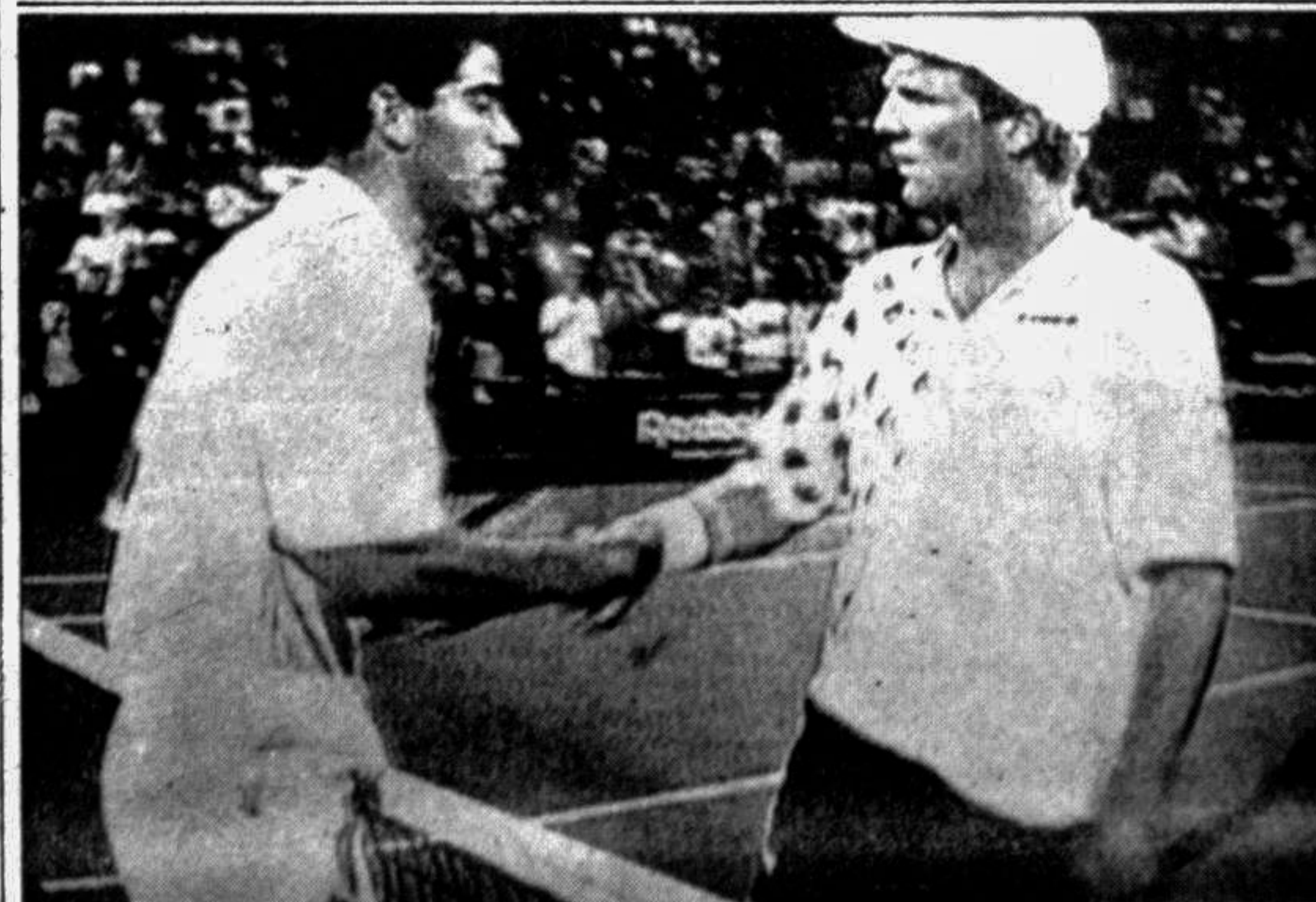
198. At the close, the champions were 24 without loss.

Openers Neil Lenham (135) and Jamie Hall(90) broke a 41-year-old record as Sussex turned the screws on Yorkshire.

Yorkshire's attack, led by England's surprise tour selection Paul Jarvis, looked impotent. The pair put on 224 for Sussex's highest first wicket partnership against the Yorkshiremen.

Leg spinner Ian Salisbury's performance for Sussex on the first day career-best seven for 54 made it hard to fathom why he was left out of England's 16 for the India tour.

When rain stopped play, Sussex were 282 for two, 50 ahead.



Pete Sampras (L) of the United States shakes hands with compatriot Jim Courier after winning the semifinal of the US Open on Saturday. —Star TV photo