

McNeil magic at Madison Square Garden

NEW YORK, Nov 18: Lori McNeil, the lowest-ranked player in the field, shocked second-seeded Steffi Graf in the opening round of the Virginia Slims Championships Tuesday night, ousting the former two-time champion 7-6 (7-1), 6-4, reports AP.

It was the biggest victory of McNeil's nine-year career and her first over Graf, who had ruled women's tennis with an iron hand only three years ago. Playing in her fifth Virginia Slims Championships, it is the first time that McNeil, one of the few black players on the tour, had won a match on the carpet in Madison Square Garden. And it was the first time in the eight years she has played in the season-ending tournament.

Graf had come into the Slims Championships on a roll, having won her last four tournaments since being ousted in the quarterfinals of the US Open in September. Among the victims in her 20-match win streak were seven of the 16 players in this elite field, including McNeil.

But not this time. Known for how quickly her matches are over, Graf appeared headed for yet another early tripback to her hotel room. By the time most of the fans got to their seats, Graf led 5-1 and McNeil had yet to hold her serve. Graf could make no mistakes; McNeil appeared nervous.

"I think in the first set, up until 5-1, I was attacking and serving well. I was playing, great tennis," Graf said. "Then, suddenly that disappeared."

In the seventh game, McNeil broke Graf for the second time in the match, beginning a four-game stretch that saw her pull even. That woke up the crowd.

The volume level rose considerably when the two held serve to go to a first-set tiebreak. That was when McNeil turned up the pressure and produced some of her finest tennis. That, combined with Graf's errors, gave her 6-1 lead. And when Graf double-faulted on the eighth point of the tiebreak, McNeil had

Women's ice hockey will be medal event at '98 Winter Games

TOKYO, Nov 18: Organisers of the 1998 Winter Olympics agreed Tuesday to include women's ice hockey and curling as official medal events Olympic officials said, reports AP.

The decision came in a meeting between the organising committee and members of the International Olympic Committee Coordination Commission led by chairman Marc Hodler in Nagano, site of the 1998 Winter Games, said Nagano Olympic committee spokesman Ikuo Harada.

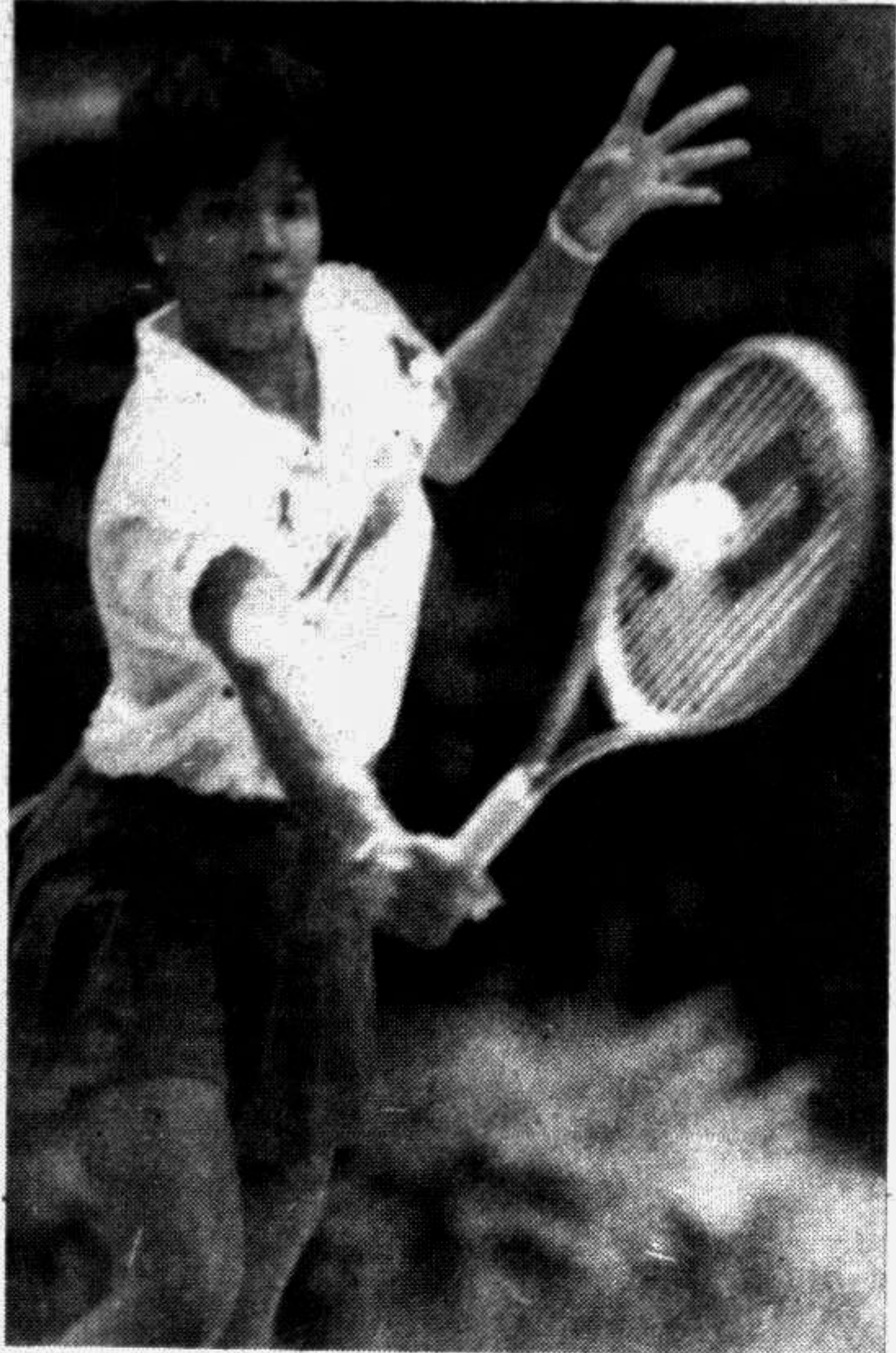
The decision still must be ratified by the IOC Executive Board.

The number of women's hockey teams will be limited to six, and no additional facilities would be built for the sport.

Curling, with eight teams, may be held in Karuzawa, about 60 kilometers (38 miles) southeast of Nagano. Nagano is 180 kilometers (112 miles) northwest of Tokyo.

drawn first blood. Still, there were few in the audience who thought McNeil would win. After all, she had

folded against Graf at the US Open in 1987 when she had a chance to pull off an upset. Most thought Graf would just



Lori McNeil hits a return against Steffi Graf in their first round match of Virginia Slims Championships in New York on Tuesday. McNeil upset the fancied world number two 7-6, 6-4. — AFP photo

The night when McNeil could beat Jesus Christ

NEW YORK, Nov 18: It's a tennis loss-up whenever Lori McNeil takes the court. She can be very good or very, very bad, reports Reuters.

On Tuesday she provided a thrilling glimpse of the tennis she is capable of when she volleyed her way to a stunning straight-set victory over world number two Steffi Graf at the Virginia Slims Championships. "Lori can play to extremes; one day she'll beat Jesus Christ, the next day she'll lose to the devil," said her longtime coach John Wilkerson.

McNeil had won a total of five games from Graf in two defeats to her this year and had been beaten by the German eight times without a victory.

That all changed on the blue carpet at Madison Square Garden when McNeil dominated a stunned Graf with a dazzling display of volley virtuosity that helped her erase a 0-4 deficit in the first set and a 2-4 disadvantage in the second of her way to a 7-6, 6-4 triumph.

"I never underestimate her (McNeil) because she's tough to play against, the way she comes in and attacks," said Graf, who entered this 3 million dollar season-ending with four successive tournament titles. "But I didn't expect her to be that consistent." A lack of consistency has

haunted the Houston professional, who climbed as high as number nine in 1988 before stumbling to a recent low of 52 two years ago.

The 28-year-old McNeil is currently ranked 18th. "There is no secret, Lori's biggest weakness is her inability to focus in all the way through a match," Wilkerson said.

"The game is concentration and focus. That is the name of the game. Tonight she focused in. She knew what she had to do."

McNeil has put it all together before, most notably at the 1987 US Open when her three-set victory over Chris Evert lifted her into the semifinals.

But the major triumphs have been few. Her Slims programme bio listed wins over Barbara Potter and Claudia Pokrik as among her career highlights.

Wilkerson believes McNeil can still climb the heights. McNeil's coach since her schoolgirl days in Houston, Wilkerson has rejoined forces with his protegee after a two-year split that began in 1988.

"I told her she has got to want the match. She has got to fight, don't let anyone go out there and roll over you," Wilkerson said. "And if Lori fights she is hard to beat."

"It's not a fluke. Lori can play with the best."

turn up her game a notch and win the next two sets.

Graf, who won this tournament in 1987 and 1989, appeared to have her game back in sync, breaking McNeil to begin the second set, then holding for a 2-0 lead. But McNeil had trailed before.

"She got tentative and started rushing a little bit," McNeil said of Graf.

"Steffi is a great player. She just got a little tentative today," And McNeil took advantage of it.

"She played very well when it got to the important points," Graf said of her opponent. "She really deserved to win."

"She played good tennis, she hit lots of low, deep approaches. There was nothing I could do. I didn't play well enough in either set when it was important."

McNeil, ranked 18th in the world, won the third and fourth games to pull even at 2, then promptly lost her serve at 30 to fall behind again. But she held at 15 in the seventh game to trail 4-3, then broke Graf at 15 with a backhand cross-court chip that Graf could only net.

After pulling ahead by holding again at 15, McNeil closed out the shocker by breaking Graf again, this time from deuce with three gorgeous final points.

She pulled to deuce after a fantastic rally with McNeil at the net. Four times she hit a strong volley. Three times Graf was able to return the ball. But not the fourth time.

On the next point, Graf caught McNeil at the net and sent a lob that hit the baseline. McNeil raced back and her defensive backhand lob hit Graf's baseline. The eventual winner followed her lob to the net and moved to match point with a sharply angled forehand volley.

She won when her forehand hit the net and plopped on Graf's side. Graf tried but couldn't reach it.

"I'm sure I'll be eager for next year," Graf said. "I'm looking forward to it. It is disappointing to end the year with a match like that, especially after winning the last four tournaments."

British beach v'ball duo in hot water Down Under

PERTH, Australia, Nov 18: Two of England's top beach volleyball women have landed themselves in hot water here with Australian authorities, reports AP.

The Australian Immigration Department said on Wednesday that Denise Tuohy, 24, from Devon, and Amanda Glover, 22, of Birmingham, had been warned they would be breaching the law if they played in the Western Australian summer series without obtaining an appropriate visa.

Department spokesman Malcolm Richardson said the tourist visas granted before they left England did not entitle them to compete in professional sporting events.

"They had to have temporary residence visas," he said.

Richardson said the women had contacted him and had explained they were unaware of the need for the residence visa.

Muslim women to play soccer in 'Islamic shorts'

LONDON, Nov 18: Muslim women will play soccer in knee-long "Islamic shorts" at the first sports championships for women from Muslim states in February, reports Reuters.

The Iranian News Agency (IRNA) said the nine-day event would start in Tehran on February 11.

A similar dress code of "Islamic uniform", including an "Islamic swimsuit", will apply for almost all sports which include athletics, volleyball, basketball, handball, swimming, table tennis, shooting and badminton.

IRNA did not say how many Muslim states would be taking part or if Olympic 1,500 metres champion Hassiba Boulmerka would appear.

Boulmerka has been the target of criticism from Muslim fundamentalists in her native Algeria for her running costumes.

Iran, Paraguay win

HONG KONG, Nov 18: Iran beat Italy 7-5 and Paraguay defeated the Netherlands 3-1 Wednesday in preliminary group matches in the FIFA Five-a-Side Indoor Soccer World Championship, reports AP.

Saeid Rajabi Shirazi scored four goals for Iran, which led 4-1 at halftime.

Andrea Rubel scored three for Italy. The other Italian goals were netted by Andrea Fama and Giuseppe Milella.

In the other Group B match, Paraguay led 2-0 at halftime on goals from Carlos Peralta and Tomas Bobadilla. The other Paraguayan goal was struck by Juan Coronel.

Hjalmar Hoekema was the sole scorer for the Netherlands, which finished second in the first indoor soccer championship in the Netherlands in 1989.

The Netherlands beat Iran 2-1 and Italy defeated Paraguay 7-5 in their opening matches on Monday.

Argentina and Poland are the only teams that have advanced to the quarterfinals so far. Both teams have two victories in Group A, which also includes Nigeria and Hong Kong.

On Thursday, Spain met the United States and China play Russia in Group D. The Americans trounced Russia 8-3 and Spain whipped China 6-2 in their opening matches on Tuesday.

In other matches Thursday, Australia play Belgium and defending champion Brazil face Costa Rica in Group C. Brazil and Belgium lead the group with the victory each.

The two top teams in each group advance to the quarterfinals. The tournament run through Nov 28.

Napoli players incur fans' wrath

NAPLES, Italy, Nov 18: Fans armed with clubs attacked footballers from Napoli who are suffering an alarming slump in form in Italy.

The 20 masked fans climbed over fences surrounding the Cmapo Paradiso training pitch before setting on the players, police said.

All the players were slightly hurt. But none needed hospital treatment. Roberto Polcano, Giancarlo Corradini and Massimo Filardi ran for cover in the dressing rooms.

Four quarters in soccer, no way

RIO DE JANEIRO, Nov 18: The controversial plan to split soccer matches into four quarters was dead and buried, FIFA president Joao Havelange said on Tuesday, reports Reuters.

FIFA's head also declared the new back pass rule a success, promised a crackdown on misbehaviour at the 1994 World Cup finals and said Japan and South Africa were leading candidates to host the 2002 and 2006 World Cups respectively.

He announced that the American television networks ABC and ESPN would transmit 1994 World Cup matches live without breaking transmissions for commercials.

Asked if FIFA was still contemplating ending the traditional format of two 45-minute halves, Havelange replied "No way."

"Everybody was against the idea. The system we have used for the last 100 years has served us perfectly," he said.

Havelange said the fans had been the winners of the ban on goalkeepers from handling a ball passed to them by a teammate.

"Before (the new rule), the ball was out of play for 20 minutes during a match. That's a sizeable percentage of the time wasted. Today we only lose around 14 per cent. I think the change was good for the spectators."

The much-criticised penalty shootout would continue but he said FIFA plan to experiment with a new idea at



JOAO HAVELANGE

next year's under-20 World Championship in Australia.

He said if matches were level at 90 minutes, play would continue until somebody scored and that team would win.

But if nobody had scored after 30 minutes of extra time, the penalty shootout would take place as usual.

Havelange agreed that on-pitch behaviour had deteriorated, with players faking fouls, arguing with referees, time wasting and committing vicious fouls.

He said it was up to referees to enforce the laws of the

game. "There will be a special course for referees and linesmen before the next World Cup and we hope this sort of thing will not happen," he said.

He said soccer would continue as an Olympic sport, although he admitted there had been problems at the Barcelona Games.

"The matches were played at the wrong times, two of the stadiums were 300 kilometres from Barcelona and the tickets were too expensive," he said.

Japan had already presented a detailed study of their plans for hosting the 2002 World Cup which Havelange described as "perfect."

Referring to 2006, he said: "We could have an excellent World Cup in South Africa. There's a movement there to present the country as a candidate and we are delighted at the thought."

'Geordie' Jack irks Billy

BELFAST, Nov 18: Northern Ireland manager Billy Bingham is furious that his team's chances of reaching the World Cup finals have been written off by his Irish Republic counterpart Jack Charlton, reports AP.

Northern Ireland and the Republic are in Group Three and Charlton, preparing for Eire's match with Spain, was quoted as saying: "We are certainties to go to the States, the only question is which team comes with us, Denmark or Spain."

Bingham replied: "When Jack's nervous he always seems to have a go. Maybe he's a little bit worried that we are challenging his supremacy."

"It's not my style to go around saying this and that because I know that football can kick you in the teeth."

"Of course he's entitled to his opinion, but I don't share it and it's too premature to talk about anyone being certainties, or anyone being out of the running, especially with this group developing so closely."

"After all, in the matches the Republic have played they have only had one good result. They were expected to beat Albania and Latvia in Dublin, but drawing in Denmark was a good result."

"Jack needs a couple more results like that before he can start chirping from his perch." Bingham said he wants to see both Irish sides make it to the United States in 1994. But he added: "Jack doesn't think that way. After all he isn't Irish. In fact, he's not even English — he's a Geordie!"

"He may have a little farm in Ireland, but that doesn't make him Irish."

While Charlton's Republic tackle Spain, Northern Ireland face European champions Denmark before an 11,000 capacity crowd at Windsor Park.

"If the Republic lose to Spain that's a setback for them, while if we can beat Denmark it is a big boost for us. And we are certainly looking for victory," said Bingham.

Belgium beat Wales

BRUSSELS, Nov 18: Belgium beat Wales 3-1 (halftime 2-1) in a European under-21 soccer championship Group Four qualifier on Tuesday, reports Reuters.

Belgium-Bertrand Crasson (26th), Michael Goossens (28th), Johan Walem (81st), Wales-Lee Jones (21st).

Sampras staves off boom-boom Becker

FRANKFURT, Nov 18: Pete Sampras survived 15 aces and saved a set point to beat Boris Becker 7-

match, storming into a 3-0 lead.

The Swede took advantage of being one break up, although his serve began to falter late in the set.

47 minutes.

A relieved Edberg said later: "I made a very good start and then messed it up a bit."

Edberg now holds a 2-1 career edge over Korda.



PETE SAMPRAS



BORIS BECKER

He fought off four break points, including one that would have given Korda the ninth game. Edberg clinched the set with a service winner.

Korda, No. 6 in the world, committed his fourth double-fault of the match to fall behind 6-5 and give Edberg the chance to wrap up the match.

But the Swede suffered his only break of the match and Korda forced the match into a tiebreak.

After a close battle, Edberg finally prevailed, 11-9, converting his third match point to win the match in one hour,

The ATP World Championship pits the top eight players in the world. They are split into two round-robin groups, with the top two in each advancing to the semifinals.

Courier, Ivanisevic, Chang and Richard Krajacek are in the Rod Laver Group, while Edberg, Sampras, Korda and Becker are in the Ken Rosewall Group.

COURIER QUIPS

"I am not worried about losing the No. 1. I have nothing to lose or gain. I just have to go

out and play well," the top-ranked Courier said Monday. "But the points system is flawed and the best of 14 tournaments doesn't work."

The year-end championship could leave the game with a new No. 1 in the world. Pete Sampras, the No. 3 and Edberg also have a shot at the top spot.

The players are ranked according to the ATP computer, which awards points for every tournament. Only a player's best 14 tournaments count for a ranking at the end of the year.

"Every tournament should count. You should play your best at every tournament if you are a professional. And Grand Slams should count much more," Courier said. "Now you can have guys losing in the first round of every Grand Slam and still be ranked very high."

Mendy outpoints his challenger

PARIS, Nov 18: European lightweight Champion Jean-Baptiste Mendy of France captured a comfortable points win over Paul Burke of Britain on Tuesday, reports Reuters.

The Frenchman's superior power and technique carried him to a unanimous decision against the challenger who was barely able to land a telling blow in the entire fight.

The judges gave the fight to Mendy by 120-112, 119-109 and 118-113.

But he kept gamely in the fight, despite being in terrible trouble in the final round when he was barely able to stay on his feet.

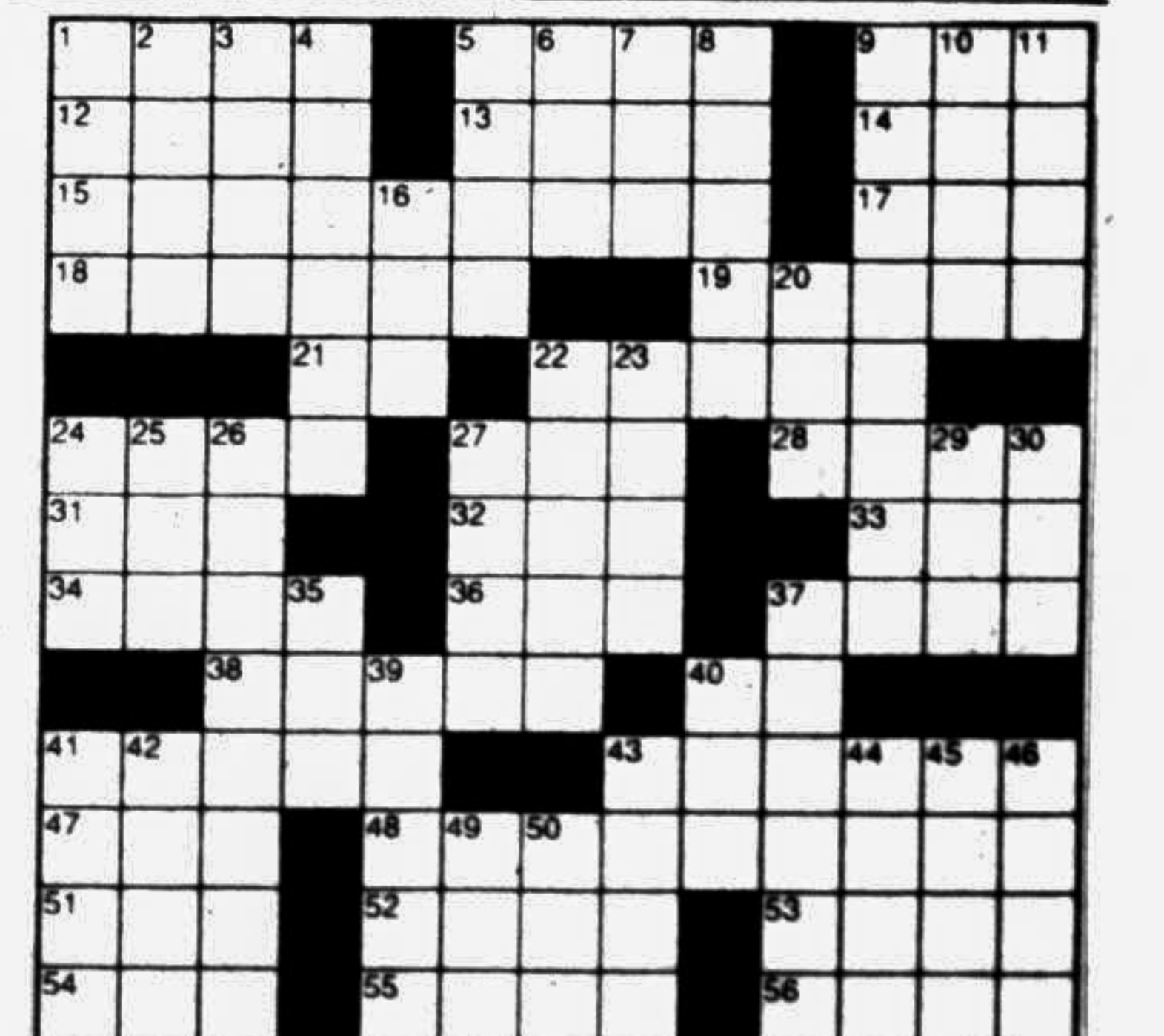
CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS
 1 Furniture for the flock
 5 Act the stevedore
 9 Bankroll
 12 Rue the run
 13 Dis-mounted
 14 Pierre's pal
 15 Shut-out: colloq.
 17 Diary
 18 Kram-den's pal
 19 They're encased in white
 21 Print measure
 22 Phone-call opener
 24 Saga-cious
 27 Carton
 28 Cupola
 31 Expert
 32 Blackbird of puzzle-dom
 33 Zero
 34 Calendar quota
 36 On pension: abbr.
 37 Answers on

DOWN
 2 Canyon phenomenon
 3 Sound of spinning
 4 Small sofa
 5 Suburban vista
 6 Dixie: abbr.
 7 Prefix for band or bar
 8 Antiknock fluid
 9 French-speaking Belgians
 10 Crazed
 11 "Pad"
 16 Lunch ending
 20 Due for replace-ment
 22 Sweet-heart
 23 Door to 'daylight
 24 System
 25 "Rocks"
 26 Erns, terms, etc.
 27 Insult
 29 "Ferd-nand"
 30 Mono-rails, maybe
 35 Filch
 37 With hands on hips
 39 Authorita-tive text
 40 Former acorn
 41 Strong as —
 42 New Jersey city
 43 Operation reminder
 44 Appre-hend
 45 Heyer-dah's "Kon-"
 46 Runners in white?
 48 Melvin Bell's field
 50 "Hall"

Solution time: 22 mins.

LEDA PAD SMEE
IRON ANU TAMS
MANDARIN UNIT
ASSERT CUDDLE
SIN EMIR
BAM DEN PEACE
ADAM RES SKAT
TENOR TAB EWE
ODOR TIA
OFFICE INTERS
ROWS MANDOLIN
BRAT ULE MINE
SERE SIT SAGE



CRYPTOQUIP

RMNYJXR CN SRS WYJQZMG S
 UZM FJQWIZRXN FUZISYGX
 NUG QJJX

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: AT OUR WEIGHT-LOSS CLUB, MOST OF OUR BEST DISCUSSIONS COME RIGHT OUT OF THIN AIR.

Today's Cryptoquip clue: F equals C

The Cryptoquip is a substitution cipher in which one letter stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Single letters, short words and words using an apostrophe give you clues to locating vowels. Solution is by trial and error.